



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

Local Service Delivery Strategies Report

Portland and Lewiston, Maine

October 10th-12th, 2001

The BRYCS technical assistance intervention in the cities of Portland and Lewiston, ME, highlighted the continuing need for additional information, collaboration, and resource-sharing between child welfare agencies, refugee-serving agencies, and refugee community representatives on issues impacting refugee youth and children. There are certainly such resources, information, and expertise available in these cities, yet there is a significant need to establish a coordinating mechanism to facilitate inter-agency as well as inter-city information-sharing between service providers. Following is a detailed report of BRYCS' technical assistance in Portland and Lewiston and recommendations for enhancing service provision related to refugee youth, children, and their families.

Technical Assistance Request

In early July 2001, Maine's state refugee coordinator, Pierrot Rugaba, requested BRYCS' assistance in providing training on working with refugee populations for the Portland and Lewiston Department of Human Services (DHS), specifically, Child Protective Services (CPS), foster care, and related staff. Both cities have been impacted by an increasing Somali secondary migrant population and the state refugee coordinator indicated there was a need for training service providers on the specific needs, challenges, experiences, and cultures of refugee families. The state refugee coordinator's initial suggestion was for BRYCS to design a technical assistance intervention to address similar issues raised in a BRYCS project called Community Conversations, which focused on parenting and cross-cultural issues. The state refugee coordinator played a significant role in engaging DHS administrators and staff in the training, outreaching to local refugee community representatives, and in being responsive and accessible for questions and advice to BRYCS program staff in the development of the training.

Technical Assistance Training Strategy

BRYCS' strategy was to provide a tailored training relevant to local issues and to incorporate into the DHS training current concerns of the child welfare administrators, the refugee communities, and the refugee service providers. We



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scheduled our meetings with Portland and Lewiston child welfare administrators and the refugee communities prior to each respective training to incorporate the concerns, questions, and suggestions raised during these meetings into the training the following day. One outcome of this approach was to provide the staff at the training with a more realistic sense of the information presented and how it relates to their everyday work scenarios. An important component of BRYCS' technical assistance strategy was to include local expertise in the Portland and Lewiston training in an effort to focus on local and sustainable solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are some recommendations from BRYCS based on our site visit. We are aware that some of these recommendations may already be objectives identified by local agencies and service providers who work with refugees. BRYCS presents them as possibilities for enhancing the quality of service provision to refugee families.

1. Create communication mechanism between DHS and refugee communities

Both in Portland and in Lewiston, the DHS administrators and employees expressed interest in establishing a mechanism for communication with refugee community representatives. Refugee community representatives also expressed interest in establishing consistent communication with child welfare agencies. One way to establish this communication mechanism is through a local agency funded through state refugee social service funds and child welfare prevention funds.

2. Increase resource sharing among service providers in Portland and Lewiston

There are a variety of resources in the Portland community which already enhance the information-base and resources for Portland and Lewiston DHS. Aside from the expertise and resources within Catholic Social Services, the Multilingual and Multicultural Center and Smart Start have established relationships and provided resources for local refugee communities. Service providers in Portland and Lewiston could engage in more active resource-sharing between their communities.

3. Increase child welfare trainings on refugee and immigrant populations for DHS staff

Establish consistency of training on refugee and cross-cultural issues for child welfare providers, utilizing local existing resources. One possible consideration is to require such training for new staff and create a plan for training "refreshers" for all staff.

4. Increase information on developing Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA)

Strengthen information and resources for establishing MAAs. This would be a valuable resource for service providers and would also strengthen refugee communities. Coastal Enterprise Inc.'s program "Start Smart" provides technical assistance on MAA development and a national technical assistance provider, Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED), also assists with MAA development.

5. Increase recruitment for foster care parents from refugee populations

There is an interest within the refugee communities to understand more about the foster care system and how to become a foster care parent. Through collaborations between foster care recruitment agencies, service providers working with refugee populations and refugee

community representatives develop appropriate outreach, resources, and training to engage refugee communities.

6. Increase information-sharing with other states

There is strong potential for Maine to serve as a model for other states that have a similar size and refugee population. It would be interesting to consider possibilities for how to network with other state/local agencies who could benefit from Maine's experiences.

7. Proactively address community inquiries

In meetings held with refugee communities, strong topics of interest were parenting, foster care licensing, and childcare. In looking at such issues, consider using preventative funding dollars to develop initiatives around parenting classes suitable for refugee and newcomer populations, recruiting ethnically diverse foster care families, and increasing daycare licensing for refugee and newcomer communities.

8. Ongoing refugee parent orientation

Parent orientation is a great resource for newly resettled refugees in orienting them to the systems, services, laws, and resources in the state. Such orientation would also be a valuable resource for secondary migrants and those interested in a "refresher" orientation once they are settled. Portland and Lewiston could consider possibilities for service coordination around parent orientation to meet this continual need in their cities.

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BRYCS is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, under contract # 90 RB 0009.