



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

# **Directions in Service Provision**

**Findings From Needs Assessments of  
Refugee Youth, Children,  
and Parents**

**Cuyahoga County, Ohio  
DeKalb County, Georgia  
St. Louis, Missouri**

**July 2003**

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- Michael Hock, Ohio Jobs and Family Services Refugee Services
- Cheryl Lewis, Jewish Family Service Association of Cleveland
- Al Merhi, Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Service (AACCESS-OHIO)
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- Patty Sadallah, Strength in Partners
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Senarath Abeyratne, Ph.D., synthesized the data that provided the basis of the Cuyahoga County findings.

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## **Executive Summary**



## Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

A joint project of



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Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) is a national program of technical assistance addressing challenges that face refugee youth and children.

The purpose of BRYCS is to broaden the scope of information, resources, and collaboration among service providers for refugee youth and children. BRYCS works with various agencies, organizations, and associations in child protection, foster care, juvenile justice, education, refugee resettlement, and refugee community associations.

In assisting refugee youth and children, service providers need access to in-depth information about refugee cultures, trauma, resulting family dynamics, and the special needs of youth. BRYCS assists by providing technical assistance, training, presentations, consultations, a Web-based clearinghouse, and resource development.

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## Background

In the summer of 2001, Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) offered long-term technical assistance to interested sites. Twelve applied and three were selected: Atlanta (DeKalb County), Georgia; Cleveland (Cuyahoga County), Ohio; and St. Louis, Missouri. BRYCS implemented needs assessments (and piloted trainings) based on the requests of each site beginning in November 2001.

This report synthesizes the findings from each site. It is intended to provide a thorough look at the needs of refugee youth, children, and parents. Although many service providers who work with refugee families may be familiar with the themes that emerged, this report goes a step further to document them. BRYCS expects that, on the basis of the findings and recommendations in this report, new initiatives might be undertaken. Many themes emerged from the needs assessments, and we hope the information also can serve as a springboard for further research. Ultimately, the goal is for refugee youth, children, and parents to benefit from what was learned, as demonstrated through enhanced services and increased understanding of their needs.

BRYCS primarily worked from its Baltimore office and convened participants in each city via conference calls and e-mail to discuss developments. It also contracted with local partners for different parts of each needs assessment process.

## Context

Refugees who come to the United States have legal immigration status that is recognized both under U.S. law and under United Nations designations through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Generally, it has been established that it is not safe for them to return to their own country for reasons of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

When refugees arrive in the United States, 10 national resettlement agencies and their affiliate offices provide core resettlement services.\* The agencies are designated by the Department of State as providers of services for the resettlement of refugees. Since September 11, 2001, the number of refugees admitted into the United States has drastically declined. Yet, worldwide, the total number of refugees is estimated at around 14 million. Many families must now wait even longer in refugee camps before they can be resettled into the United States and other countries. When refugees languish in refugee camps for long periods, the intensity of the adjustment challenges families experience upon resettlement is compounded.

The number of refugee arrivals is not always indicative of the actual number of refugees living in a particular area. Refugees might not choose the state where they are initially resettled and therefore may decide after their resettlement to move to another state; such refugees are categorized as *secondary migrants*. For example, in the past 5 years an increasing number of Somali families have been resettled in Columbus, Ohio. One outcome is that other refugee Somali families from other states have moved there, creating a growing Somali community. At the same time, some of the Somali families initially resettled there may have moved away. It is impossible to accurately track the number of secondary migrants in a state, and it is therefore difficult to know the exact number of refugees in a given place at a particular point in time.

Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 provide recent Census data on Cuyahoga County, DeKalb County, and St. Louis. The data are included to give the reader a sense of the demographics within the three areas in which the needs assessments were conducted. The emphasis is on populations for whom English is not the native language.

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\*These agencies are commonly referred to as voluntary agencies, or "volags." It is the volags' affiliate offices throughout the United States that provide direct resettlement services to refugee populations.

**Table 1.1**  
**Selected Census Data, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and United States, 2000**

	<b>Cuyahoga County</b>	<b>Ohio</b>	<b>United States</b>
Population, 2001 estimate	1,380,421	11,373,541	284,796,887
Population change, April 1, 2000, to July 1, 2001	-1.0%	0.2%	1.2%
Population, 2000	1,393,978	11,353,140	281,421,906
Population change, 1990 to 2000	-1.3%	4.7%	13.1%
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White <sup>a</sup>	67.4%	85.0%	75.1%
Black or African American <sup>a</sup>	27.4%	11.5%	12.3%
American Indian or Alaska Native <sup>a</sup>	0.2%	0.2%	0.9%
Asian <sup>a</sup>	1.8%	1.2%	3.6%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander <sup>a</sup>	Z	Z	0.1%
Other race <sup>a</sup>	1.5%	0.8%	5.5%
Two or more races	1.7%	1.4%	2.4%
Hispanic or Latino origin <sup>b</sup>	3.4%	1.9%	12.5%
White, not of Hispanic/Latino origin	65.9%	84.0%	69.1%
<b>Foreign born</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>
<b>Language other than English spoken at home, age 5+</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>17.9%</b>

<sup>a</sup>Includes persons reporting only one race.

<sup>b</sup>Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories.

Z: Value is greater than zero but less than half unit of measure shown.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. Last revised: May 7, 2003. Available at: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>.

## Daily Life for Refugees

Refugee families have experienced tremendous difficulties in making their way to the United States. They have fled their homelands, sought safety in refugee camps in neighboring countries, and may have waited years before being cleared for legal admission into the United States. Refugee families may have been separated in their migration, and some family members may have died, either during conflicts in their homeland or on the way to the United States; those deaths can cause great trauma in the family unit. As a result of these tragic circumstances, children may arrive with an aunt, uncle, cousin, distant relative, or family friend as their primary caretaker, instead of their parents.

Upon arriving in this country, families are confronted with many challenges. Although experiences vary across refugee populations, one consistent factor is that everything that was familiar to them in daily life changes. Transportation, homes, doctors, schools, language, stores, streets, styles of dress, ways of communicating and interacting all are different. For the parent or caretaker, much energy and time must go into deciphering these new systems while trying to keep the family unit functioning.

## Parents' Perspective

Tasks taken for granted, such as preparing meals, doing laundry, taking a bus, sending children off to school, and helping them with homework, are much more complex. Parents who are literate in their native country suddenly are illiterate if they cannot read English. They cannot read a medicine bottle, a street sign, ingredients on a package, a bus timetable, or

**Table 1.2**  
**Selected Census Data, St. Louis, Missouri, and United States, 2000**

	St. Louis	Missouri	United States
Population, 2001 estimate	339,211	5,629,707	284,796,887
Population change, April 1, 2000-July 1, 2001	-2.6%	0.6%	1.2%
Population, 2000	348,189	5,595,211	281,421,906
Population change, 1990 to 2000	-12.2%	9.3%	13.1%
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White <sup>a</sup>	43.8%	84.9%	75.1%
Black or African American <sup>a</sup>	51.2%	11.2%	12.3%
American Indian or Alaska Native <sup>a</sup>	0.3%	0.4%	0.9%
Asian <sup>a</sup>	2.0%	1.1%	3.6%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander <sup>a</sup>	Z	0.1%	0.1%
Other race <sup>a</sup>	0.8%	0.8%	5.5%
Two or more races	1.9%	1.5%	2.4%
Hispanic or Latino origin <sup>b</sup>	2.0%	2.1%	12.5%
White, not of Hispanic/Latino origin	42.9%	83.8%	69.1%
<b>Foreign born</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>
<b>Language other than English spoken at home, age 5+</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>17.9%</b>

<sup>a</sup>Includes persons reporting only one race.

<sup>b</sup>Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories.

Z: Value is greater than zero but less than half unit of measure shown.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. Last revised: May 7, 2003. Available at: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>.

homework directions. Another dramatic change may be the concept of day care, because many women come from parts of the world in which institutionalized day care is nonexistent; it is a mother's duty to care for her children all day.

In the United States, refugee children frequently accompany their parents to doctors' offices, supermarkets, and service agencies and play a lead role in interpreting for their parents. This situation erodes parents' basic self-confidence; they feel unable to respond quickly and effectively in an emergency or unfamiliar situation, and the child may be cognizant of this fact. Parents' competency and ability to guide their children is greatly challenged in such circumstances.

Limited English proficiency makes simple social interactions a source of stress for parents. Refugees find it difficult, if not impossible, to ask for help. In-depth conversations with English speakers always require an interpreter, and the result can be awkward and inhibit communication. Limited English proficiency also creates hurdles that result in parents' remaining in low-paying jobs with no advancement. Often, parents must seek additional employment to make ends meet.

## Children's Perspective

Some refugee children come to the United States with no formal education. Other children's schooling was stalled during the time spent in refugee camps. Consequently, adjustment to a U.S. school is a major challenge. Books, pens, carpets, electricity, and desks may be new to the refugee student. English instruction is usually available, but learning science, math, or history in a foreign language is difficult, particularly during the first year in this country. The first few months of school can be isolating for a student with limited English proficiency; it is difficult to make friends with other students.

**Table 1.3**  
**Selected Census Data, DeKalb County, Georgia, and United States, 2000**

	DeKalb County	Georgia	United States
Population, 2001 estimate	665,133	8,383,915	284,796,887
Population change, April 1, 2000, to July 1, 2001	-0.1%	2.4%	1.2%
Population, 2000	665,865	8,186,453	281,421,906
Population change, 1990 to 2000	21.9%	26.4%	13.1%
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White <sup>a</sup>	35.8%	65.1%	75.1%
Black or African American <sup>a</sup>	54.2%	28.7%	12.3%
American Indian or Alaska Native <sup>a</sup>	0.2%	0.3%	0.9%
Asian <sup>a</sup>	4.0%	2.1%	3.6%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander <sup>a</sup>	Z	0.1%	0.1%
Other race <sup>a</sup>	3.5%	2.4%	5.5%
Two or more races	2.1%	1.4%	2.4%
Hispanic or Latino origin <sup>b</sup>	7.9%	5.3%	12.5%
White, not of Hispanic/Latino origin	32.2%	62.6%	69.1%
<b>Foreign born</b>	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>
<b>Language other than English spoken at home, age 5+</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>17.9%</b>

<sup>a</sup>Includes persons reporting only one race.

<sup>b</sup>Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories.

Z: Value greater than zero but less than half unit of measure shown.

*Source:* U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. Last revised May 7, 2003. Available at: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>.

Refugee children often are ridiculed by other students because of their limited English or their clothing, physical characteristics, and behavior; this interaction, in turn, isolates them even more. Moreover, many refugee children have witnessed violent and traumatic events; if their feelings are not addressed, the emotional scars may impede their ability to experience a positive social and developmental adjustment.

At home, children witness their parents' daily struggle to adjust to a new community. Often children help their parents with their struggles by interpreting the language along with how "systems" operate in the United States. The traditional parent-child roles shift, and children become "parentified" as they teach their parents about the new environment, instead of the parent teaching the child.

## Identity and Parent-Child Relations

Refugee families come into their new communities with cultures and customs central to their identity. As they adjust, some of their traditional behavior may be influenced by American customs. Children's increasing identification with their American counterparts can be a great source of parent-child conflict. The situation can be exacerbated when the child perceives him- or herself straddling a parent-child role in the family. For example, children who do most of the interpreting and translating may believe they are the "spokespersons" for the family and therefore think they can make decisions for themselves without parent approval. Parents are caught in a bind in that they rely on their children to communicate for them, which requires giving up a certain amount of authority, making it difficult to exercise their

parental authority in other situations. Parents feel they are losing their own identities and ability to maintain their own culture with their children. They feel that there is a constant struggle not to lose their children to the U.S. system.

## Refugee Characteristics and Prospects

The refugee populations that participated in the three needs assessments were of varied ethnicities: Afghan, Bosnian, Congolese, Ethiopian, Iraqi, Kosovar Albanian, Kurdish, Liberian, Russian, Sierra Leonean, Somali, and Vietnamese. Although each population and each family's experiences differ, the groups share several characteristics in terms of their prospects in their community of resettlement. One characteristic that surfaces time and again is that most refugees are resilient and have weathered great challenges in coming here. Most groups also see education as a way to achieve success and make it a high priority for their children. Like immigrants, refugees make a city more diverse and bring new perspectives to their communities and their classrooms. In addition, refugees quickly become self-sufficient and help bolster a city's work force.

The primary setback for refugees is English language proficiency, which initially creates barriers to employment advancement and causes difficulty in moving through service systems. Refugees who arrive with advanced degrees may find that they are not transferable. Children who have not had formal education or whose education was interrupted may have additional difficulties in school. Refugees who settle in high-crime areas might find that it is too dangerous to go out to attend social and non-work-related events. Refugees from African and Asian countries may experience racist attitudes for the first time in their lives. Since September 11, 2001, Muslims have been particularly vulnerable to harassment and prejudice; refugees who are Muslims or come from Muslim countries have a tremendous hurdle to overcome.

One area of particular concern is the trauma many refugees experienced in fleeing their countries. Trauma manifests itself in different ways, and family members may not even be aware of its impact on their own family systems and how it may present to others. Another issue for parents is that relatives may still be abroad; they may have great concern for those family members' safety. That concern may stifle a refugee family's ability to move ahead with adapting because they may feel a need to have the other family member(s) with them before they can progress. Some refugee populations, including the Somali and the Sudanese, have not yet developed the strong community representation that has developed among other groups that have been in the United States for decades or longer, such as the Vietnamese. Newer refugee populations may need more initial support until they are able to develop strong community contacts.

## Key Findings

The needs assessments were implemented at each site using different methods and participants. Each assessment's focus was different. In Cuyahoga County, the focus was on services for refugee youth and children; the DeKalb County assessment focused on refugee youth between 13 and 20 years old; and in St. Louis, refugee parents were the main focus. The findings in each of the following needs assessment reports thus reflect the focus. Yet, in many cases, the findings were similar in the three cities.

- **Refugee youth and children's ability to adjust successfully is inextricably linked to their parents' quality of adjustment.** In families in which the parents' adjustment is challenging, particularly in areas related to trauma, employment, and language, children are well aware of their parents' struggle, and this emotional burden filters through their own adjustment experiences. In all three assessments, parents, youth, and service providers spoke of children taking on a parentified role. This manifests itself through children becoming interpreters for their parents; finding jobs to help with monthly bills; or becoming part of major family decisions, such as those

involving health care or finances. These types of responsibilities can lead to truancy because they may require frequent absences from school and disrupt integration into the educational system.

- **Refugee youth are experiencing significant challenges in school that can negatively affect their progress.** To varying degrees, refugee youth are encountering factors that impede their successful adjustment to schools. Those factors include social challenges, such as bullying, teasing, and discrimination; emotional challenges, such as the effects of individual or family trauma on their school experiences; and academic challenges related to English acquisition and inappropriate grade placements. Additionally, refugee youth and parents are dissatisfied with the educational system for several reasons. Depending on individual circumstances, those reasons include lack of discipline and teacher authority, disconnect from teachers and administrative staff, unchallenging curricula, unclear expectations of students and parents, and insufficient time for new refugee students to adjust.
- **Limited English skills isolate and inhibit opportunities for parents and particularly for youth who arrive in the United States as teenagers. Children who frequently interpret for their parents are bearing a heavy burden.** All the assessment participants spoke of the need for more flexibility in and access to English language instruction. English fluency is central to increasing parents' economic opportunities and social integration. Generally, youth and children learn English more quickly than their parents; even so, the first year in school is difficult. As they acquire more skills in English, children may find themselves serving as interpreters for their parents. Youth who arrive in their teens are especially vulnerable because there may be an added expectation for them to take on an adult role and to learn the language quickly. They may struggle with the language, and losing one's capacity to communicate at the critical time of becoming an adult can have severe emotional ramifications. Problems such as dropping out of school, seeking validation of peers, or isolation are common.

## Notable Findings From Individual Assessments

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The needs assessments in Cuyahoga County, DeKalb County, and St. Louis resulted in different findings, given their different emphases. The following notable findings were exceptionally strong in the specific sites. For detailed findings, see the full report on each locale.

- **Cuyahoga County:** Service provision for refugee youth and children is not coordinated among different service areas. Refugee youth and children struggle with balancing their bicultural identities.
- **DeKalb County:** Refugee youth experience significant challenges from bullying and teasing in the school systems.
- **St. Louis:** Barriers to parent participation in programs can be attributed to logistical problems, but they also stem from parent concerns about personal safety as well as mistrust of the agencies that provide services.

## BRYCS Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on BRYCS's analysis of all three needs assessments. Each assessment in this report has separate recommendations. The following list is intended to broadly address the needs identified in all three assessments. It is vital that all service communities nationwide take particular interest in these recommendations because many of the solutions suggested here depend on the capacity of service agencies to initiate programmatic and operational structures on a local, county, and state level.

- **Restrict the use of children as interpreters.** Children are placed in compromising situations when they interpret for their parents; this situation should not be encouraged. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights prohibits discrimination based on national origin and includes the prohibition of discrimination against limited English proficient (LEP) persons. The guidelines clarify that it is the responsibility of health and social service providers that receive funds from HHS to ensure that LEP persons receive language assistance so that they have meaningful access to benefits and services. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act mandates that all agencies receiving federal funds have in place appropriate translation and interpretation services to meet the need of newcomer populations. Unfortunately, enforcement of Title VI is inconsistent, and service gaps exist. Are children filling a service gap? Service providers and agencies need to support efforts that restrict the use of children as interpreters within their service communities.
- **Increase information about refugee cultures within communities and service agencies. Additionally, increase information within refugee communities about service agencies and the local community.** Many of the challenges identified in the needs assessments were connected to misinformation; miscommunication; or lack of information about refugee cultures, service systems, and communities. Refugee parents and youth were not aware of all the services available to them, and service providers were not aware of the specific needs of refugee cultures. This lack of information can greatly inhibit a service system's ability to respond and a refugee parent's ability to act. Sponsoring more local community education forums and onsite training of service providers would help fill the information gap as well as foster relationships among service providers, communities, and refugee populations
- **Develop more programming for refugee youth between ages 15 and 20.** Older refugee youth do not have as much access to programs as children do; this situation can result in a lack of structure for them after school. For youth who also face academic challenges, this lack of structure is especially difficult. Increasing constructive recreational, language, college preparatory, vocational, and social activities for this age group is critical to prevent them from dropping out, seeking employment opportunities prematurely, or becoming involved with peers who may have a negative influence.
- **Connect schools and community-based agencies to bring refugee youth and their parents together and to generate additional programming through such partnerships.** Refugee youth and children spend a great deal of their time in school and with homework. In all the assessments, parents were interested in their children's schooling but felt disconnected from schools and their children. More programming that connects parents to schools would have a positive effect on parents' role in their children's education. Although initiatives are addressing this disconnect, there may be a need to increase capacity. Schools are within relatively close proximity to refugee communities and could play a central role in partnering with other community-based agencies. This approach could help build a model that would provide a continuum of family services to meet the specific needs of refugee youth and their parents.

- **Create more flexible English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for parents and youth. ESL should be considered as critical as other required health and social services.** English-language proficiency is central to the successful integration of refugee parents, youth, and children. Many parents and youth identified limited English proficiency as a barrier to their successful integration into their communities. More funding should be available to allow for flexible programming of ESL classes.
- **Large service agencies should consider partnering with refugee community-based service agencies to meet the specific needs of refugee families.** Because many large service agencies do not work much with refugee communities, their services may not be specifically tailored and their staff may not be trained to meet the needs of refugee families. Mutual assistance associations (MAAs) are community-based ethnic organizations that could help meet this need. They are familiar with the populations they serve and can provide training, interpretation and translation, and other basic services. It would be impossible for all agencies to tailor their services to meet the needs of all refugee families; instead, agencies need to think about partnering with organizations that have developed expertise and trusted relationships with refugee communities.

## Research Questions

BRYCS's work in administering the three needs assessments highlighted many of the needs of refugee youth, children, parents, and service providers. The process raised interesting questions that could not necessarily be answered here but are worthwhile to explore within the context of this report. The following questions are intended to elicit further exploration and, perhaps, action that will result in local and national solutions.

- **In cases in which there was not strong agreement between refugee youth, refugee parents, and service providers, what challenges prevent such agreement?** For example, some service providers noted there might be a substance abuse problem among refugee youth, yet parents did not mention it. Some parents said schools are not challenging enough, yet teachers did not note this. Parents and service providers are worried about gang influence, but youth did not mention any involvement or concern about it. Various factors, such as the research questions, dynamics in the focus groups, trust of the facilitator, and familiarity with the online assessment instrument, could have contributed to this disparity. How is it that each group has a different view of the challenges? How are we measuring the severity of the challenges?
- **Does our service provision “language” fragment our thinking about the needs of refugee families?** Within service agencies, the needs of youth and parents often were described in the language of the service providers. People from mental health agencies spoke of the mental health needs of refugees, those from schools spoke about the educational needs, and those from health care agencies spoke about health. This occurrence is natural because each provider is steeped in the perspective of his or her agency. But what does this say about the ability to accurately understand the “big picture”? Who is responsible for “translating” the needs across service systems? How does it affect service capacity to know only one part of the need? What mechanisms work for different communities and how will they be achieved?
- **To what extent does the Western concept of service delivery influence how we work with refugee communities?** In each assessment, responses from service providers generally were centered on services they provided and why refugee youth or parents participated (or



did not participate) in them. Little was mentioned about how the refugee communities could play a vital role in reshaping program design in agencies.

- **Are refugee youth and children accurately assessed in terms of their learning abilities?** Parents did raise some concerns about placement by age versus placement by ability, and some of the youth felt they were in classes that were too difficult or too easy. Data from the needs assessments are not sufficient to substantiate those claims, but the issue does lead to more questions about the assessment of refugee and newcomer youth. Does the inability to speak English influence how teachers view the intellectual abilities of their students? Do schools know how to accurately identify a refugee child with developmental disabilities who also has limited English proficiency? Are there ways to accurately identify when a refugee child is traumatized?





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**Cuyahoga County, Ohio**



## Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

A joint project of



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Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) is a national program of technical assistance addressing challenges that face refugee youth and children.

The purpose of BRYCS is to broaden the scope of information, resources, and collaboration among service providers for refugee youth and children. BRYCS works with various agencies, organizations, and associations in child protection, foster care, juvenile justice, education, refugee resettlement, and refugee community associations.

In assisting refugee youth and children, service providers need access to in-depth information about refugee cultures, trauma, resulting family dynamics, and the special needs of youth. BRYCS assists by providing technical assistance, training, presentations, consultations, a Web-based clearinghouse, and resource development.

BRYCS is a joint effort of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) and is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, under contract no. 90 RB 0009.

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# Methods

## Project Initiation

The pilot site application from Ohio Job and Family Services Refugee Services (OJFSRS) stated that the agency was interested in assessing the needs of refugee youth and children in Cuyahoga County, which includes the City of Cleveland. An initial meeting of service providers took place in November 2001 to discuss priorities and recommendations; participants agreed to focus the pilot site project on a needs assessment of refugee youth and children. The following organizations participated:

- Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Services (AACCESS-Ohio)
- Bay Presbyterian Church
- Catholic Charities
- Cleveland Municipal Schools
- Department of Family and Children’s Services
- Family and Children First Council
- International Services Center
- Jewish Family Services Association of Cleveland
- Lakewood City Schools
- Mayfield City Schools
- Neighborhood Community Association
- North Coast Health Ministry
- Ohio Job and Family Services, Refugee Services
- Parma City Schools
- Strength in Partners

Next, BRYCS conducted outreach to service providers to enlist their participation in a steering committee for the needs assessment process. Representatives of OJFSRS, Catholic Charities/Migration and Refugee Services, Parma City Schools, Family and Children First Council, Lakewood City Schools, Mayfield City Schools, Jewish Family Services Association of Cleveland, AACCESS-Ohio, the Ohio Department of Children and Family Services, and Strength in Partners participated in the steering committee to various degrees and provided invaluable insight, expertise, and suggestions that informed the needs assessment process. BRYCS developed the needs assessment plan and convened participants via conference call to discuss developments in the assessment process.

The steering committee decided to concentrate the assessment in East Cleveland, Lakewood, Mayfield, and Parma, all of which are part of Cuyahoga County and have high concentrations of refugees. The main goal was to assess the service needs of refugee youth and children.

Data were gathered from discussions with key decision makers and in focus groups with refugee parents and youth. Service providers also were asked to complete an online assessment tool.

## Discussions With Decision Makers

The steering committee helped identify people considered to be decision makers in the area of human services within Cuyahoga County. Steering committee members assisted in creating discussion questions and facilitating the discussions. Staff from BRYCS, OJFSRS, Catholic Charities, and the Ohio Department of Family and Children’s Services conducted the discussions. Most participants were human services policy makers and administrators. The goal of the discussions was to elicit information from the participants about existing services for refugee youth and children.

## Focus Groups

BRYCS contracted with Strength in Partners and Catholic Charities/Migration and Refugee Services to organize and facilitate focus groups in several neighborhoods. Refugee parents and youth were invited to share their perceptions of specific challenges. The focus groups consisted of either parents or children of a single ethnic group; participants from the Afghan, Bosnian, Kosovar–Albanian, Liberian, and Russian communities participated. Steering committee members suggested focus group questions and provided advice on the outreach protocol. All groups were asked the same questions; the goal was to gather information about participants’ experiences with service systems, particularly those designed for refugee youth and children.

## Online Assessment Tool

A Web-based assessment tool was developed and distributed via e-mail to 260 service providers in a variety of areas, including public child welfare, county juvenile justice, community-based, and resettlement agencies; schools; and health care providers. Steering committee members suggested assessment questions and helped test the instrument. The goal of the assessment tool was to identify gaps and challenges in serving refugee youth and children.

## Community Forum

After the needs assessment was completed, BRYCS invited agency and community representatives to a forum to discuss the findings. The goal was to obtain feedback and recommendations from participants for incorporation into this report.

## Methodologic Issues

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- **Focus Groups.** Recruitment for the focus groups was particularly challenging. Some parents questioned whether the focus group would help them and said participation would not offer a tangible result. Other parents were hesitant to express their opinions in a group and preferred not to participate. As a result, the focus group with Bosnian parents did not take place, and the total number of focus groups was reduced from 16 to 10.
- **Online Assessment Tool.** About 260 service providers received the assessment tool, and 71 responded, for a 27 percent response rate. Because the assessment data are based on a nonrandom, self-selected group of participants, they provide only broad-brush information about the needs of refugees in Cuyahoga County and must be interpreted with caution. Some agencies provided multiple participants; others were represented by a single respondent. Nevertheless, the findings reinforce information gleaned from the focus groups and discussions.

It is unclear why participation was so low. It is possible that some staff had limited access to computer terminals or were unfamiliar with how to respond to Web-based assessments.

## Context

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Three resettlement agencies operate in Cuyahoga County: Catholic Charities/Migration and Refugee Services, the International Services Center, and the Jewish Family Services Association of Cleveland. They provide core services to refugee families in their first 3 to 6 months, including housing, employment, education, medical care, and assistance with meeting other basic needs of the family. Other providers of services for refugee and immigrant communities include AACCESS-Ohio, Bridgeway, El Barrio, and Esperanza. A variety of state and community-based agencies provide additional services to individual families.

Recent Census data on Cuyahoga County are shown in table 2.1. The data are provided to give the reader a sense of the demographics within Cuyahoga County; the emphasis is on populations for whom English is not the native language.

Until September 2001, Cuyahoga County's refugee population was increasing; the highest numbers of refugees settled in East Cleveland, Lakewood, Mayfield, and Parma. Most refugees in the area are from Bosnia, Croatia, Russia, and Ukraine; the number of Sudanese refugees increased sharply in 2001, and the number arriving from Afghanistan grew in 2002 (table 2.2).

Refugee youth and children face many challenges and new cultural realities in adjusting to life in Cuyahoga County, particularly within school systems. The educational system may be quite different from what they expect. Discipline is often more lax than in their home countries, and other students may tease them about their accents and other differences. This is the first school experience for some refugee children: Many schools were closed for years in Kosovo, and many young Afghan girls have never attended school. Sometimes the accompanying difficulty in school adjustment prompts families to request home schooling. According to service providers, most refugee youth perform comparably to their native-born counterparts in areas of academics and social skills, although it is not uncommon to find providers who see refugee youth and children as faring worse, particularly academically.

Language is less of a barrier for refugee children than for adults. The school systems provide ESL programs; even so, it may be difficult for youth to understand their teachers in the first few months. As they become more skilled in English, refugee youth and children may take on the role of interpreter for their parents.

**Table 2.1**  
**Selected Census Data, Cuyahoga County and Ohio, 2000**

	Cuyahoga County		Ohio	
	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total population</b>	<b>1,393,978</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>11,353,140</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>SEX</b>				
Male	658,481	47.2	5,512,262	48.6
Female	735,497	52.8	5,840,878	51.4
<b>RACE</b>				
One race	1,370,571	98.3	11,195,255	98.6
White	938,863	67.4	9,645,453	85.0
Black or African American	382,634	27.4	1,301,307	11.5
American Indian and Alaska Native	2,529	0.2	24,486	0.2
Asian	25,245	1.8	132,633	1.2
Asian Indian	8,640	0.6	38,752	0.3
Chinese	6,447	0.5	30,425	0.3
Filipino	2,704	0.2	12,393	0.1
Japanese	1,198	0.1	10,732	0.1
Korean	2,016	0.1	13,376	0.1
Vietnamese	1,790	0.1	9,812	0.1
Other Asian <sup>a</sup>	2,450	0.2	17,143	0.2
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	338	0.0	2,749	0.0
Other race	20,962	1.5	88,627	0.8
Two or more races	23,407	1.7	157,885	1.4
<b>HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE</b>				
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	47,078	3.4	217,123	1.9
Mexican	5,961	0.4	90,663	0.8
Puerto Rican	30,147	2.2	66,269	0.6
Cuban	1,016	0.1	5,152	0.0
Other Hispanic or Latino	9,954	0.7	55,039	0.5
<b>NATIVITY AND PLACE OF BIRTH</b>				
Native	1,305,217	93.6	11,013,861	97.0
Born in United States	1,286,999	92.3	10,940,441	96.4
Foreign born	88,761	6.4	339,279	3.0
Entered 1990 to March 2000	33,018	2.4	143,035	1.3
Naturalized citizen	50,362	3.6	169,295	1.5
Not a citizen	38,399	2.8	169,984	1.5
<b>REGION OF BIRTH OF FOREIGN BORN</b>				
Total foreign born (excluding born at sea)	88,761	100.0	339,267	100.0
Europe	47,715	53.8	131,683	38.8
Asia	25,860	29.1	120,213	35.4
Africa	3,370	3.8	22,034	6.5
Oceania	327	0.4	1,632	0.5
Latin America	8,640	9.7	47,124	13.9
Northern America	2,849	3.2	16,581	4.9
<b>LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME</b>				
Population age 5 and older	1,303,066	100.0	10,599,968	100.0
English only	1,158,729	88.9	9,951,475	93.9
Language other than English	144,337	11.1	648,493	6.1
Speak English less than "very well"	55,918	4.3	234,459	2.2
Spanish	41,288	3.2	213,147	2.0
Speak English less than "very well"	15,780	1.2	77,394	0.7

<sup>a</sup> Other Asian alone, or two or more Asian categories.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.  
 Available at: <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

**Table 2.2**  
**Refugee Arrivals, Cuyahoga County, 1998–2002**

Country	Fiscal Year (October 1 to September 30)				Total
	1998–1999	1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	
Afghanistan	0	0	0	14	14
Azerbaijan	4	2	6	2	14
Belarus	15	15	16	8	54
Bosnia	187	202	70	6	465
Croatia	35	73	27	8	143
Cuba	0	6	0	0	6
Ethiopia	0	3	2	0	5
Georgia	5	0	0	0	5
Germany	2	0	0	0	2
Iran	4	1	3	1	9
Iraq	0	10	5	0	15
Italy	1	0	0	0	1
Liberia	15	0	7	0	22
Macedonia	3	0	1	0	4
Moldova	14	13	11	0	38
Russia	24	39	59	22	144
Rwanda	0	1	0	0	1
Serbia	4	3	0	0	7
Somalia	0	13	0	0	13
Sudan	0	4	39	0	43
Ukraine	177	133	130	111	551
USSR	8	0	2	0	10
Uzbekistan	11	7	10	0	28
Vietnam	19	4	9	6	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>1,632</b>

*Note:* The data do not include secondary migrants.

*Source:* Ohio Job and Family Services Refugee Services.

## Service Challenges

The proposal submitted by OJFSRS emphasized the need to build coalitions among providers in refugee-serving agencies and those in human services, schools, and community-based agencies. When BRYCS met with service providers, their concerns centered on the lack of coordinated services and the need to know more about the availability of services for refugee youth and children.

## Summary of Needs Assessment Findings

The sections below provide specific findings and recommendations on how services provided in Cuyahoga County can better meet the needs of refugee youth and children and their families.

- Finding: A variety of services are available in Cuyahoga County; however, they often do not coordinate with one another, particularly in serving refugee youth and children.** State agencies, school systems, nongovernmental organizations, and community-based agencies provide a variety of social service programs in Cuyahoga County. Many of those organizations, however, have no regular contact with refugees or refugee service providers. Generally, services to refugees are neighborhood based, function in isolation, and are scattered throughout the county. Services available include Head Start programs, domestic violence intervention programs, parenting classes, alcohol and drug prevention, pregnancy prevention, youth mentoring, tutoring, foster care and adoption programs, ESL, after-school programs, academic enrichment programs, cultural diversity training, educational programs for adults and parents, job training, crime



prevention, anger management, alternatives to street crime, victim services, health programs, and mental health programs. Adults receive proportionately more services than do refugee youth or children.

Refugee youth and children primarily receive education, medical, interpretation and translation, substance abuse counseling, and mental health services. Many services are offered within school systems, particularly in the area of substance abuse. ESL, counseling to stay in school, GED preparation, tutoring, recreational programs, diversion, vocational training, employment training, and after-school programs also are widely available.

Few organizations are confident that they have the expertise and competency to effectively help refugees. Most organizations do not provide specific training in how to work with refugee populations.

**Recommendation: Repair the disconnect among agencies.** State and county agencies, nongovernmental agencies, refugee-serving agencies, and community-based agencies should seek ways to partner and collaborate, particularly with regard to services for refugee youth and children. Cuyahoga County has several established committees and working groups on families and children. It would be mutually beneficial to broaden their agendas to include newcomer family issues.

- Finding: Needs of refugee parents, youth, and children are somewhat different from those of other populations, creating a variety of challenges for service providers.** Refugees may be reluctant to trust a culturally different system and its representative service providers. In addition, refugees may not understand the need for service providers to follow certain procedures. The underlying assumptions on the part of line staff and refugees may lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. Reaching refugees is further complicated by the fact that refugees themselves are a diverse group who come to the United States under many different circumstances. The lack of language skills, cultural training, and outreach about available programs are significant challenges for service organizations. Language barriers impede agencies' efficiency in providing appropriate services for refugee populations: Service providers have difficulty understanding the needs of refugees, and refugees may be unable to request necessary services or ask appropriate questions.

**Recommendations:**

- Fill the information and relationship gap.** Develop an outreach and community education model that provides information to refugee communities about local services and addresses their specific concerns. Such a network also would be useful to service providers because refugees who require services would have a better understanding of how the service system operates. Likewise, it would be important for refugee communities to educate service providers and provide information about their culture and the refugee experience. An infrastructure for outreach already exists through the county social services and school systems; agencies could build on that infrastructure.
- Improve utilization of schools and refugee- and immigrant-serving agencies.** School systems in East Cleveland, Lakewood, Mayfield, and Parma provide a vital link to youth and the community. Schools are a natural place for activities. Bringing services for parents and children in close proximity to or within schools would localize and centralize services and improve access considerably. Refugee-serving agencies could play a key role in school-based

service through training, service provision, and outreach. Connecting services to schools might reduce barriers caused by inadequate transportation and unfamiliarity with the service area. Other programs that need training and resources related to refugee youth and children would know where to access them.

- **Finding: Children are too frequently used as interpreters for their parents. However, almost half of the service providers who responded to the online assessment do not consider the practice a problem.** When parents' ability to communicate is limited, their children can feel pressured to act as interpreters. Most refugee youth and children interpret in a wide variety of circumstances, including those related to medical issues, family issues, education, cultural issues, legal issues, mental health, employment, domestic violence, and substance abuse. By U.S. standards, it is inappropriate for children to interpret in such situations.

**Recommendation: Increase efforts to remove language barriers.** An issue that was highlighted repeatedly was the wide-ranging impact of limited English proficiency and the lack of translators and interpreters. Clear communication would help resolve many problems facing refugees, including their mistrust of service providers, poor communication with teachers, and reliance on children to interpret. Improved access to ESL classes is vital, as is wider availability of translators and interpreters for a variety of situations.

Although refugee youth and children may learn English quickly, they are not appropriate interpreters for their parents, particularly in sensitive situations, such as legal, medical, and social service interventions. To allay such situations, a countywide strengthening of interpreter and translator services is required that prohibits use of children as interpreters. Existing resources cannot meet the current demand. Refugee-serving agencies have the most contact with communities, and they can help encourage people to take part in interpreter trainings and help service providers locate interpreters to meet specific needs. The question is, Who will provide funds not only for the training but also for services rendered?

- **Finding: Participation of refugee youth and children in youth-oriented programs is generally low.** Unfortunately, most youth do not participate in programs outside of school. Language barriers prevent some from participating; others need more information or encouragement to participate. Some older refugee youth work to supplement family income and do not have an opportunity to participate. Youth who do participate in programs generally are encouraged by their parents to participate or, when cost is involved, have the financial resources to enroll.

**Recommendation: Enhance programming to encourage participation of refugee youth and children.** Services are available to refugee youth and children, as they are to all youth, but little specific programming is available for refugee youth and children. As with most youth programs, including refugee youth in the design and development of new programs or in restructuring existing programs would help increase interest and, potentially, participation. In addition, older refugee youth face a lack of programming; more programs focused on employment training or helping youth gain acceptance to college might increase refugee youth participation.

- **Finding: Refugee youth face great challenges in developing a bicultural identity.** Acculturation is a challenge for the entire family. Families may have been socialized into a culture radically different from that found in the United States. Refugee youth and children may be pulled

between their parents’ culture and their new culture, a situation that can be confusing and frustrating, particularly for older youth.

Many children quickly learn the new culture and adapt; parents view this process as “Americanization” and expect their children to follow their native culture. The culture clash between parents and children can be seen in child-rearing practices and attitudes about family roles and family privacy. Parents may not understand why they cannot punish children physically, as may have been the practice in their home country. They may see behavior that is appropriate for U.S. culture as disrespectful and see punishment—sometimes corporal punishment—as a remedy, generating further parent–child conflict. Such situations present a major challenge.

In addition, some refugee children cannot forget the traumatic situations they have experienced; they are depressed and face great difficulties in adjusting to their new society. Current mental health services cannot meet the full range of their emotional needs.

**Recommendation: Help refugee youth and families meet bicultural identity challenges.** The struggles of youth and children in straddling two cultures can be difficult. The following approaches could help them with those struggles:

- To create smoother school transitions, initiate mentoring programs throughout the school systems with older youth and adults who have had similar experiences.
- Although counseling is available in schools, it would be useful if counselors were trained in current practices related to meeting the needs of refugee youth and children.
- Refugee parents feel less connected to their children as they integrate into the school system and become more “Americanized.” Programming to bring together parents and children—particularly adolescents—would help bridge this divide.

## Detailed Findings

The following three sections summarize the findings from the discussions, focus groups, and online assessment tool.

### Discussions With Decision Makers

Staff from BRYCS, OJFSRS, Catholic Charities, and the Ohio Department of Family and Children’s Services spoke to key decision makers from community associations, community planning agencies, county child and family services, juvenile justice, resettlement agencies, schools, and workforce development agencies. Themes from the discussions provide insight as to the perspectives of the participants on service provision to refugee youth and children.

### Profile of Decision Makers

Slightly more women than men participated (56% vs. 44%). Most participants were from public agencies; the remainder represented nongovernmental organizations. Among public employees, the largest group consisted of employees of

<b>Organizational Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Criminal justice	2
Multiservice–family service	1
Refugee service	1
Research	1
School	4
State	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

Cuyahoga County Family and Children Services Department; four participants worked in the public school system, and two worked in the criminal justice system (table 2.3). All participants were at the level of senior management.

## Summary of Discussions

According to participants, several assistance programs are available through state agencies, but they are not designed specifically for refugees. Many nongovernmental agencies, however, offer refugee-specific programs; the programs operate countywide and generally are dispersed throughout different neighborhoods. A disconnect in communication and coordination frequently exists between state agencies and organizations in the provision of services to refugees. However, it also must be recognized that the two types of agencies have different missions: Public agencies serve all populations in the county; refugee agencies serve small, specific groups.

Participants generally were aware of the challenges and stresses that face refugees. One finding of concern, however, was that some participants were unaware that Cuyahoga County has a substantial refugee population. Many participants had little experience with refugee populations. Many believe that school systems have a better understanding of the situation facing refugee youth and children. Some participants suggested that refugees have a negative perception of public agencies' willingness to assist them: The agencies' lack of familiarity with refugee populations can be perceived as a lack of interest.

## Challenges for Service Providers

When asked to identify challenges for service providers working with refugee populations, participants pointed to many problems familiar to those who work with refugee populations, but some unique problems also were identified. They noted that language barriers are formidable: Service providers have difficulty understanding the needs of refugees, and language difficulties prevent refugees from requesting services or asking the right questions. Caseworkers with insufficient training about refugee populations may be ill at ease working with non-English-speaking clients. Under such circumstances, only critical issues make it to the forefront. Cultural misunderstandings, such as divergent expectations of refugee populations and service providers, can lead to conflict. Programs lack sufficient funding for refugee-related programs.

Some participants mentioned the lack of a clearinghouse or network to link refugees with providers. They said that such a network would allow easy access to refugee-related information and services; enhance providers' knowledge of available services; and help eliminate duplication of services, preserving scarce resources for other activities.

Participants were asked to suggest additional programs, services, and resources that are needed to meet the needs of refugee youth and children. They provided several ideas:

- Intensive programs or services are needed to help refugees improve their language skills.
- Programs or services to orient newcomer youth and children to the United States would be helpful.
- Refugee families need more instruction on how to deal with problems discrimination, educational challenges, law enforcement, the legal system, and parent–child relationships. Parents need to be informed of their rights and responsibilities, and they need to learn about American norms and values.
- Community involvement is critical. Educating the community about refugees and their challenges could help reduce prejudice and discrimination.

- Youth in refugee families need programs and services geared toward job training and job placement. Older youth need employment programs, especially if they enter school as teens and have trouble adjusting to academic demands.
- A coordinated delivery system should be created.
- A separate office for newcomer populations in Cuyahoga County should be created.

Participants were also asked to identify which programs, services, and resources for refugee youth and children are most likely to be funded. Many participants suggested that refugee populations are too small for program funding on a massive scale. Several noted that the county budget has suffered severe cuts, so new programs are less likely to be funded. Because the ESL program is part of the school system, it will continue to be funded.

## Focus Groups

Ten focus groups were conducted to obtain the views of refugees themselves (parents and youth). The discussions focused on service needs for refugee youth and children. The focus groups met in East Cleveland, Lakewood, Mayfield, and Parma, which have the highest concentrations of refugees. Each focus group had a facilitator and a note taker and included refugees of a single ethnicity; group size ranged from three to eight people. Twenty-two youth and 13 parents participated. Participants represented Russian, Bosnian, Afghan, Liberian, and Kosovar Albanian refugees. The following sections summarized the major themes from the focus groups.

### Summary of Findings

According to the participants, life is generally much better in the United States than in their home countries. They appreciate the freedom from war, famine, and persecution. Laws appear to be stricter but more equally enforced in the United States. Public amenities, such as parks, lakes, the zoo, electricity, and modern facilities, are accessible to everyone. An excellent medical system keeps the population healthy. Some participants expressed the view that although the entire system of the United States appears to be independent from corruption and interference, everything revolves around money. American people seem friendly and polite.

Houses are bigger and nicer than back home. Many refugees said they had come from countries where people live in apartments or smaller dwellings; suburban life is not part of their societies. However, refugees also said they would like to live in housing that is more suited to their needs, and they expressed frustration with living in transitional housing. They would like instruction on home buying and obtaining loans.

Many refugees noted that in their home countries, extended families provide support during difficult times. Many refugees grew up in cultures that, compared with U.S. society, are homogeneous and slower paced. For a variety of reasons, they may not be accustomed to asking for help. For example, in their home culture, seeking charity may be looked down upon and extended families typically are turned to for assistance. Or they may have been well-off in their home society and never needed public assistance. None of the refugee groups directly identified mental health as a problem or a pressing need.

Many refugees feel that Americans misunderstand them. They tend to form closely knit groups to maintain their national identity; members of the majority population sometimes perceive this tendency as clannish or isolationist.

### Refugee Youth and Children

The foremost challenge for refugee youth and children is the language barrier; most young people have no or a rudimentary knowledge of English when they arrive. ESL classes in the school systems are the main avenue of learning

English, and all the schools where refugees are placed offer this service. Teachers and counselors in school systems help refugee youth and children with the demands of education and adjusting to a new school. Although services are available for refugee youth and children, gaps in services exist. The English classes in schools are not always effective because refugee students may be put into classes that are not necessarily in line with their abilities. Under these circumstances, it is an uphill task for teachers to help a mixed group of students in the same class.

Another difficulty with school adjustment is that American students may tease refugee students because they are different. Some youth said that American children are not as friendly as the children who are from other countries.

Some service providers other than schools help children with translation and interpretation if the need arises, but too often, children are called upon to translate in inappropriate situations. For example, not only do refugee youth and children face difficulties when interpreting in medical situations because medical terminology is difficult to translate, they also may learn details about their parents' mental or physical health that parents would prefer to keep confidential.

Some refugee youth and children have emotional challenges as a result of exposure to terrible incidents in their native lands. Youth counselors, to some degree, can assist youth in developing coping skills, but more assistance is often needed.

Refugee youth and children cannot help but learn the behavior patterns of the mainstream culture, and parents often see this in a negative light as Americanization. Some parents expect refugee youth and children to follow their traditional cultures. As a result, refugee youth and children often must develop bicultural identities.

## Suggestions From Focus Group Participants

Participants made the following suggestions for services that would help support refugee families:

- **Translation and Interpretation.** Medical and mental health translation services are needed. It would be useful to enlist more help from a network of doctors to attend to medical problems that may be specific to refugees. Intensive programs or services are needed to help refugees improve their language skills.
- **Schools.** Children should receive intensive English language instruction from the start. Students should be assessed and placed in appropriate classes. More counseling should be made available to refugee youth. Allow more time and flexibility for new students to adjust to their new environment. More opportunities should be made available for summer school, ESL, and intensive English classes, and parents should be offered more English classes. Youth should be provided with an avenue for speaking the language(s) of their countries of origin so that they will not forget their native language.
- **Transportation.** Refugees need more help with transportation when they first arrive. Parents long for resources that would help them purchase a car and take driving lessons.
- **Acculturation.** Some children played sports in their home countries but are unable to afford to play in the United States. It would be helpful to provide access to free sports activities. It is important to form community ties within refugee populations. Programs or services to orient newcomer youth and children to the United States would be helpful. Refugee families need more instruction on how to deal with problems such as discrimination, educational challenges, the legal system and parent-child conflict. Parents need to be informed of their rights and responsibilities and learn about U.S. norms and values.
- **Family.** Single mothers need more services. Families need more affordable after-school care for children when mothers are at work.

- **Career planning.** Youth in refugee families need programs and services geared toward job training and job placement. Older teenagers need employment programs, especially if they enter the schools as teens and have trouble adjusting to academic demands.
- **Other.**
  - Community involvement is crucial. Educating the community about refugees and their challenges could help reduce prejudice and discrimination.
  - A coordinated delivery system should be created; currently, services are fragmented and scattered throughout the county.
  - A centralized service center should be created for newcomers in Cuyahoga County.

Responses from the focus groups were placed into several categories, as noted in table 2.4. Participants’ responses depended on the question asked and the country of origin.

**Table 2.4**  
**Findings from Refugee Focus Groups, Cuyahoga County**

Topic	Cultural Differences	Cultural Misunderstandings	Youth Challenges	Services for Children and Youth
<p><b>Schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Afghan, Bosnian, and Kosovar Albanian groups said the U.S. school system is better than schools in their home countries.</li> <li>Russian and Liberian youth said school systems in their home countries are better in that U.S. schools lack discipline and are academically easier.</li> <li>Participants noted that the American educational system allows children to express themselves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School is hard initially, and the first year is the most difficult, but refugee youth and children generally catch up quickly.</li> <li>School adjustment is more difficult for older children than younger ones. Successful school adjustment may be strongly influenced by the teacher.</li> <li>Some teachers in local school districts are more considerate than others.</li> <li>Discipline is lax in U.S. schools, and students may get away with picking on refugee youth and children.</li> <li>This is the first school experience for some refugee students. For example, schools were closed for many years in many parts of Kosovo, and young Afghan girls never attended school in Afghanistan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers and counselors in schools help refugee youth and children cope with the many demands of American educational system. Their assistance can be very helpful to refugee youth and children who never have had education in a formalized setting.</li> <li>Summer school helps students catch up in their academic studies. When service providers talk to teachers and tutors directly, it can make the transition easier.</li> <li>Children are not put into age-appropriate grades in their schools.</li> <li>Some groups noted that ESL classes in the school systems are not effective because everyone is put together in the same level, irrespective of their English knowledge and ability.</li> <li>Many parents expressed a desire for religious schools, so that children can learn about their religion. (Particularly in Muslim countries, the schools provide the specific teachings and values of Islam; parents reinforce them at home, but they can't provide the scholarly instruction on the Koran that the teachers can.) A number of parents said they would like for their children to leave the public schools for home schooling or private schools (preferably private religious schools), but they cannot afford the tuition.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Transportation</b></p> <p>Public transportation or walking is the main mode of transportation in their home countries, whereas everyone owns cars and drives in the United States. The lack of a reliable public transportation system in Cleveland is a big difference.</p>	
<p><b>Transportation</b></p> <p>Public transportation or walking is the main mode of transportation in their home countries, whereas everyone owns cars and drives in the United States. The lack of a reliable public transportation system in Cleveland is a big difference.</p>			<p>Because many refugees do not own cars, it is difficult for them to find their way around by buses. Some of their children have asked for bicycles or motorcycles.</p>	



**Table 2.4 (continued)**

**Findings from Refugee Focus Groups, Cuyahoga County**

Topic	Cultural Differences	Cultural Misunderstandings	Youth Challenges	Services for Children and Youth
<p><b>Educational Achievement and Careers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system in the United States does not recognize the educational credentials refugees obtained in their home countries; consequently, they are unable to find employment on par with their education.</li> <li>Refugee parents said that finding employment has been relatively easy and that they currently have jobs. In contrast, the refugees' home countries have high unemployment or a stagnating job market.</li> <li>Older refugee children tend to have jobs in the United States.</li> </ul>	<p>Some refugees possess educational qualifications that are on par with or better than American educational credentials. Russian refugees frequently noted this disparity.</p>		<p>Parents are worried about college costs and are looking for information about scholarships. One of the drawbacks is that some schools provide a less enriching education and the students from such schools cannot compete with the other students coming from better schools.</p>
<p><b>Translation/ Interpretation</b></p>		<p>People ask refugees about their accent or think they are strange because they can't understand English.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English language is the biggest challenge facing refugee youth and children. However, refugee children of elementary and middle-school age are able to learn quickly. Some participants said that ESL classes do not help a great deal.</li> <li>Refugee children try not to forget their native languages, but help with maintaining their language is nonexistent. (Part of the problem is that the children are in an intensive period of learning English so that they can succeed in school, and their native language becomes less of a priority.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some parents and youth said that language lessons for refugee youth and children are useful. It is also helpful when other bilingual refugee youth and children help with interpretation and translation. Service providers may provide or refer people to translation services.</li> <li>Comprehensive English-language programs and translation services, especially for high school students, are not readily available.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.4 (continued)**  
**Findings from Refugee Focus Groups, Cuyahoga County**

Topic	Cultural Differences	Cultural Misunderstandings	Youth Challenges	Services for Children and Youth
<b>Cultural Understanding</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School curricula do not emphasize other countries. Consequently, Americans are not well informed about the rest of the world and may have biased opinions.</li> <li>Afghan groups expressed concern that they were thought to be part of the Taliban.</li> <li>American school kids sometimes think refugees are tribal people like seen in the movies, and the refugees respond by saying "We wore clothes in Africa. We are civilized people. There are some Americans that are aware of this and made us feel welcome."</li> </ul>		
<b>Children and Family</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system of discipline for children is different here. Parents cannot punish kids like they did in their home countries.</li> <li>Refugee parents expressed a need for stricter discipline because some children do not respect adults and teachers.</li> </ul>	<p>Refugee youth and children may work to supplement family income. Conversely, parents may be afraid to allow their children to go out, either to work or for social occasions.</p>	
<b>Acculturation</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making friends is an enormous task in the new environment but some children overcome this difficulty by becoming friends with refugee youth and children from the same ethnic group.</li> <li>Parents are concerned about the influence of American culture on their children and fear they will become "Americanized." It is hard for refugee youth and children to adhere to the traditional cultures preferred by parents. Parents appear to be concerned about this culture clash.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many groups assist newcomers with social adjustment. Former refugees themselves are an immense help.</li> <li>The state social service system and other service providers help with basic necessities (e.g., driving, transportation, housing, and hospital and medical services). Resettlement organizations, community organizations, and religious organizations are of great help.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.4 (continued)  
Findings from Refugee Focus Groups, Cuyahoga County**

Topic	Cultural Differences	Cultural Misunderstandings	Youth Challenges	Services for Children and Youth
<p><b>Health and Mental Health</b></p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical translation, particularly for children who translate on behalf of parents, is a problem due to limited knowledge of English medical terminology. Another major concern is finding a good doctor and health care provider.</li> <li>• Many refugee youth and children cannot forget traumatic incidents experienced in their native countries and may face great difficulties in adjusting to a new society. Youth counselors may help alleviate the problem. In addition, some family members are still in their home countries, which is a constant worry and point of stress for refugees. Many families have lost family members.</li> </ul>	<p>Some area hospitals provide translators in medical situations and emergencies.</p>

## Online Assessment Tool

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To identify challenges and service gaps, a Web-based assessment tool was distributed to service providers from public and nongovernmental organizations, community-based agencies, and refugee-serving agencies. Questions pertained to services extended to refugee populations in general as well as those specifically for refugee youth. The assessment data come from a nonrandom, self-selected group of participants, so the results provide only broad-brush information about the needs of refugees in Cuyahoga County and must be interpreted with caution. In addition, some agencies provided multiple participants; others were represented by a single respondent. Nevertheless, the findings reinforce information gleaned from the focus groups and discussions. This section summarizes the responses to the assessment questions.

Various services are offered in each community, including legal, employment, medical, educational, and welfare assistance and substance abuse treatment. Refugee-specific services available include interpretation and translation (including ESL), cultural adjustment, mental health, and domestic violence counseling. Services are offered in several languages.

Most agencies responding to the online needs assessment provide referrals rather than direct services. The costs of services are borne mostly by the service providers. Adults receive proportionately more services than refugee youth and children do; however, many specific services are offered to all youth and children, such as ESL programs, counseling to stay in school, GED preparation, tutoring, recreational programs, court diversion, vocational training, employment training, and after-school programs. Few refugee-specific services involve sports, camps, mentoring, or youth leadership. Many providers noted that additional support for children is needed in promoting social skills, language skills, academic skills, and motivation.

Many refugees parents and children do not take advantage of available services and programs. Providers thus have little opportunity to serve them or to learn about them. Providers often cited lack of contact with or referrals from refugee populations as a reason for their lack of knowledge about refugee populations.

Most service organizations do not have regular training programs about special populations such as refugees. School systems and agencies that resettle refugees have more training than any other service provider. None of the state agency providers responding to the online needs assessment had received special training related to refugee populations.

One disturbing finding was that 1 in 4 service providers who returned the assessment tool had had children serve as interpreters for their parents in situations involving medical issues, family issues, educational information, mental health issues, employment issues, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Service providers were evenly divided on whether children should interpret for their parents: About half said the practice is helpful, and the other said it is problematic. When asked to elaborate on their responses, providers generally commented that having children interpret for adults can be a double-edged sword. Children provide an effective communication link between parents and providers, but such circumstances put children in awkward positions, compelling them to relate private and sensitive information about their parents or families to outsiders. Also, children can manipulate or misunderstand information, so the accuracy of the interpretation and information is sometimes questionable. The situation creates a power imbalance between parents and children.

Many respondents cited their individual expertise and experience as their biggest strengths in dealing with refugee youth and children. They attributed their competence to sensitivity, linguistic experience, language skills, and subjective understanding of refugee youth and children and their circumstances. Participants who said that their organizations were successful in providing services cited their organization's expertise and experience in providing services, including availability of facilities, bicultural and bilingual specialists, programming for ESL, and programs fully dedicated to refugee services. The barriers cited included the inability to address issues involving groups whose cultural norms and ethics are different.

Challenges for service providers include the lack of trust from refugees, cultural differences, language differences, and lack of funding and resources. Many refugees have had traumatic experiences with corrupt bureaucracies that harassed and repressed them; therefore, it is not surprising that they are reluctant to trust the system or providers in this country, particularly service providers who are culturally different from them.

## Community Forum: Recommendations From Local Agencies

At the community forum on January 22, 2003, participants learned of the preliminary findings from the BRYCS needs assessment and were asked to respond with suggestions and recommendations. The following agencies participated in the forum:

- Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Services in Ohio (ACCESS-Ohio)
- American Red Cross
- Catholic Charities/Migration and Refugee Services
- Citizens of Cuyahoga County
- Cuyahoga Physician Network
- Division of Youth Services/Lakewood
- Employment and Family Services
- Grandparent and Other Kinship, Caregiver Initiative
- Interlink Help Me Grow
- Jewish Family Services Association of Cleveland
- Joseph House—A Home for Refugees
- Learning Earning and Parenting .
- Neighborhood Family Service Center—Westshore
- Ohio Job and Family Services, including Refugee Services
- Parma Schools
- Strength in Partners
- United Church of Christ ICIANS Network

Participants provided oral and written feedback to the initial findings and made recommendations in several areas:

- **Schools**
  - Schools should improve their understanding of bicultural identity challenges and provide more interpreters.
  - An ambassador-type program at schools could connect to new students in school. Refugee resettlement agencies could send representatives to schools to speak about different refugee cultures.
  - ESL programs already have some resources available; other service agencies should make use of them.
  - More in-service training about the needs of refugee families should be provided to school staff.
- **Welcoming Newcomers:** The Welcome Home Project (a governor’s initiative that provides a home visit by a nurse for first-time and teen mothers) would be an interesting model to adapt for orienting new refugee families to communities. It would be a type of “Welcome Wagon” program.
- **County Service Systems**
  - Service providers need to work on creating cost-efficient and coordinated services within the county.

- A local clearinghouse or centralized resource and referral database could help programs coordinate and find help.
- Social services could connect with the Ohio State countywide Family and Children First Council initiative on youth development to explore how needs for newcomer youth ages 13 to 18 can be addressed.
- **Mentoring Programs**
  - Each community could set up a mentoring program for newcomer youth.
  - Refugee youth and children should have the opportunity to meet and socialize with newcomer groups that have integrated into American society.
- **Faith-Based Programs.** Faith-based programs could help form connections between spiritual centers (i.e., churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples) and social service providers.
- **Community-Based Organizations**
  - Small, community-based organizations understand the specific needs of populations. Instead of operating in isolation, large organizations should develop real partnerships with smaller agencies.
  - A strong need exists for ethnic-based organizations that can support newly arrived refugees.
- **Mental Health Services**
  - Increase outreach on adult and children’s mental health.
  - Additional funding is needed to recruit and train mental health clinicians.
  - Children who suffer from trauma need special services that are currently unavailable.
- **Refugee Resettlement Agencies.** Refugee resettlement agencies can serve as a resource to schools and other service agencies for cultural information.
- **Funding**
  - Agencies need to explore different funding options for newcomer youth and children.
  - Agencies and appropriating bodies need to examine the distribution of funding countywide.

A feedback form was distributed at the forum. All participants who completed it indicated that they would be willing to participate in a committee of service providers to coordinate services for refugee and newcomer youth and children.



3

**DeKalb County, Georgia**



## Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

A joint project of



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Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) is a national program of technical assistance addressing challenges that face refugee youth and children.

The purpose of BRYCS is to broaden the scope of information, resources, and collaboration among service providers for refugee youth and children. BRYCS works with various agencies, organizations, and associations in child protection, foster care, juvenile justice, education, refugee resettlement, and refugee community associations.

In assisting refugee youth and children, service providers need access to in-depth information about refugee cultures, trauma, resulting family dynamics, and the special needs of youth. BRYCS assists by providing technical assistance, training, presentations, consultations, a Web-based clearinghouse, and resource development.

BRYCS is a joint effort of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) and is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, under contract no. 90 RB 0009.

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## Methods

### Project Initiation

The Refugee Services Department of the Georgia State Department of Human Resources applied for technical assistance with an interest in understanding more about the challenges that confront refugee youth. In December 2001, BRYCS met with service providers in Atlanta individually and then as a larger group to identify a technical assistance plan for Atlanta. Service providers from a range of agencies participated: community-based family service agencies, juvenile court, public child welfare, refugee resettlement, refugee service providers, and schools. The participants expressed concern about the adaptation of refugee youth to schools and society and wanted to learn more about their particular needs. It was determined that the technical assistance plan\* would focus on a needs assessment of refugee youth in DeKalb County, which has the highest concentration of refugees in metropolitan Atlanta.

The process through which the needs assessment was developed and implemented relied on local efforts, both contracted and in-kind. Data were gathered through focus groups, face-to-face discussions, and an online assessment tool. Service providers from the following agencies participated in the December meeting:

- Catholic Social Services
- Clayton County Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS)
- Cobb County DFCS
- DeKalb County Juvenile Court
- DeKalb County School System, School Social Work Department
- Families First
- Fulton County DFCS
- Georgia Department of Human Resources
- Georgia Mutual Assistance Association Consortium
- Gwinnett County DFCS
- International Rescue Committee
- Lutheran Ministries of Georgia
- Project Aware
- Refugee Family Services, Inc. (formerly Newcomer's Network)
- Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta (formerly Christian Council)
- World Relief

Participants expressed a strong interest in understanding more about the needs of refugee youth, particularly those between ages 13 and 20. A particular area of concern is a subset of this population: older adolescent youth who have dropped out of school. Following the meeting, a local task force was developed to provide suggestions and recommendations as the needs assessment was being implemented. Participating agencies included Refugee Family Services, Inc. (formerly Newcomer's Network), the International Rescue Committee, and the DeKalb County School System, School Social Work Department. Other local service providers participated through an e-mail list.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through focus groups, individual discussions with youth, and an online assessment tool distributed to more than 60 local service agencies. Refugee youth ages 13 to 20, refugee parents, and a variety of service providers

\*The technical assistance plan included development and implementation of cross-service training for representatives from the refugee community and staff of public child welfare agencies, refugee-serving agencies, refugee community representatives, and community-based agencies.

Table 3.1  
Refugee Resettlement in Georgia, 1981–2002

Country of Origin	Year																				TOTAL			
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000		2001	2002	
Afghanistan	0	0	89	39	35	57	52	54	76	67	45	68	73	0	2	0	2	0	0	61	118	129	82	1049
Bosnia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	196	260	404	449	937	1698	1227	914	480	211	6776	
Cambodia	693	251	386	532	472	106	27	40	64	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	7	2	0	0	2581	
Croatia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	80	19	13	131
Cuba	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	199	97	55	35	69	75	77	90	701	
Ethiopia	0	0	92	89	86	23	84	57	109	173	226	229	165	8	15	33	18	238	158	126	61	2005		
Former USSR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	417	565	583	543	464	396	279	204	172	133	103	91	54	13	4017	
Iran	0	0	39	71	36	17	41	27	39	0	8	0	13	23	34	12	12	13	32	119	168	81	785	
Iraq	0	0	2	1	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	65	49	37	242	373	94	127	214	37	40	1287	
Kenya <sup>a</sup>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	40	26	12	0	0	106	
Kosovo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	586	0	0	0	586	
Laos	351	123	185	116	70	217	160	136	90	48	69	0	3	5	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	1583	
Liberia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	4	11	29	96	56	136	62	405	
Nigeria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	44	93	2	9	3	159	
Poland	0	0	25	6	14	17	43	7	20	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	134	
Romania	0	0	4	10	36	24	54	53	35	83	33	0	4	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	341	
Sierra Leone	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	41	49	28	147	
Somalia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	165	400	196	293	679	560	165	627	534	349	41	4011	
Sudan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	27	19	6	47	161	176	247	44	740	
Thailand <sup>b</sup>	0	0	31	67	116	43	35	43	51	26	14	0	6	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43	
Vietnam	863	605	518	571	430	259	326	343	850	1179	1601	2026	2009	2074	2013	907	508	1014	450	274	164	200	19184	
Others <sup>c</sup>	125	93	79	64	50	83	75	78	27	48	7	72	2	85	31	11	21	12	338	349	267	238	2155	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2032</b>	<b>1072</b>	<b>1450</b>	<b>1566</b>	<b>1345</b>	<b>847</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>838</b>	<b>1778</b>	<b>2189</b>	<b>2588</b>	<b>3103</b>	<b>3401</b>	<b>3120</b>	<b>3345</b>	<b>2656</b>	<b>2721</b>	<b>3342</b>	<b>4289</b>	<b>3217</b>	<b>2311</b>	<b>1207</b>	<b>49319</b>	

*Source:* Data compiled by the Georgia Refugee Health Program. Data as of January 7, 2003.

<sup>a</sup>Children from Somalia or Sudan who were born in Kenya refugee camps. 1999 data refer to refugees who were born in Kenya but resettled in hostile area.

<sup>b</sup>Except for 1999, data refer to Southeast Asian children who were born in Thai refugee camps.

<sup>c</sup>Others are small ethnicity groups and asylees (Algeria, Burma, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Montenegro, Rwanda, Serbia, Syria, Togo, Zaire, Zambia, Colombia, Czech Republic, Eritrea, Gambia, Moldova, Myanmar, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Yugoslavia).

participated in the focus groups. The goal was to ascertain the needs of refugee youth and identify service improvements for them as they adjust into their new communities. The questions for the online assessment tool and the focus groups are included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

### Data Analysis

BRYCS contracted with two consultants affiliated with Agnes Scott College and Georgia State University to analyze the data from the focus groups, individual discussions, and online assessment tool. The consultants synthesized the data and provided findings. Their work provided the basis for this report.

### Community Forum

BRYCS convened a community forum in February 2003, inviting agency and community representatives to learn about the findings of the project. The goal of the forum was to get feedback and recommendations from participants and incorporate their responses to the preliminary findings into this final report.

### Context

More than 49,000 refugees have been resettled in the State of Georgia since 1980. During calendar year 2002, 1,207 refugees were resettled in the state (table 3.1). Recent Census data on DeKalb County are provided in table 3.2 to give the reader a sense of the demographics of the area in which the needs assessment was conducted. The emphasis is on populations for whom English is not the native language.

Most refugees who enter Georgia as refugees are resettled in metropolitan Atlanta. In 2002, 1,455 refugees were resettled in DeKalb County (table 3.3). Refugees resettling in DeKalb County are a diverse group and include Afghan, Bosnian, Cambodian, Ethiopian, Iraqi, Laotian, Somali, and Vietnamese individuals and families.

	DeKalb County		Georgia	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total population	665,865	100.0	8,186,453	100.0
<b>SEX</b>				
Male	322,780	48.5	4,027,113	49.2
Female	343,085	51.5	4,159,340	50.8
<b>RACE</b>				
One race	651,744	97.9	8,072,265	98.6
White	238,521	35.8	5,327,281	65.1
Black or African American	361,111	54.2	2,349,542	28.7
American Indian and Alaska Native	1,548	0.2	21,737	0.3
Asian	26,718	4.0	173,170	2.1
Asian Indian	7,593	1.1	46,132	0.6
Chinese	4,688	0.7	27,446	0.3
Filipino	752	0.1	11,036	0.1
Japanese	779	0.1	7,242	0.1
Korean	3,185	0.5	28,745	0.4
Vietnamese	6,251	0.9	29,016	0.4
Other Asian <sup>a</sup>	3,470	0.5	23,553	0.3
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	329	0.0	4,246	0.1
Other race	23,517	3.5	196,289	2.4
Two or more races	14,121	2.1	114,188	1.4
<b>HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE</b>				
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	52,542	7.9	435,227	5.3
Mexican	30,741	4.6	275,288	3.4
Puerto Rican	2,886	0.4	35,532	0.4
Cuban	1,778	0.3	12,536	0.2
Other Hispanic or Latino	17,137	2.6	111,871	1.4
<b>NATIVITY AND PLACE OF BIRTH</b>				
Native	564,545	84.8	7,609,180	92.9
Born in United States	556,093	83.5	7,519,654	91.9
Foreign born	101,320	15.2	577,273	7.1
Entered 1990 to March 2000	65,627	9.9	344,763	4.2
Naturalized citizen	26,531	4.0	169,232	2.1
Not a citizen	74,789	11.2	408,041	5.0
<b>REGION OF BIRTH OF FOREIGN BORN</b>				
Total foreign born (excluding born at sea)	101,320	100.0	577,273	100.0
Europe	10,216	10.1	74,257	12.9
Asia	24,516	24.2	145,696	25.2
Africa	14,117	13.9	40,423	7.0
Oceania	210	0.2	2,021	0.4
Latin America	50,955	50.3	300,357	52.0
Northern America	1,306	1.3	14,519	2.5
<b>LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME</b>				
Population age 5 and older	619,018	100.0	7,594,476	100.0
English only	511,239	82.6	6,843,038	90.1
Language other than English	107,779	17.4	751,438	9.9
Speak English less than "very well"	61,818	10.0	374,251	4.9
Spanish	52,481	8.5	426,115	5.6
Speak English less than "very well"	35,694	5.8	246,269	3.2

<sup>a</sup> Other Asian alone, or two or more Asian categories.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

Available at: <http://factfinder.census.gov>

Seven resettlement agencies operate in Atlanta: the African Community and Refugee Center, Catholic Social Services, the International Rescue Committee, Jewish Family and Career Services, Lutheran Ministries of Georgia, Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta, and World Relief. Together, they are responsible for providing core services to refugee families in their first 3 to 6 months in the United States. Those services consist of housing, employment and education, medical care, and other initial basic needs. Several community-based agencies provide services for refugee and immigrant groups, including the Center for Pan Asian Community Services, the Ethiopian Community Association, the Georgia Mutual Assistance Association Consortium, Good Shepherd Corporation, Refugee Family Services, and Somali Community Development.

A variety of providers in the DeKalb County area have programming geared toward refugee youth and children, particularly after-school programs. Youth in high school and those who have dropped out or are at risk for dropping out are difficult to engage in local programs.

**Service Challenges**

In Atlanta’s pilot site application and in the initial meeting of service providers, various needs of refugee populations—particularly refugee youth—were mentioned. Issues concerning refugee youth, as described by service providers, included the following:

- Burden on children to navigate the new culture for their parents
- Lack of programs to address refugee teenagers who have dropped out of school
- Lack of mental health resources for refugee youth
- Suspected high dropout rate among refugee youth
- Not enough youth programs
- Refugee youth in the juvenile justice system

**Table 3.3  
Refugees Resettled in the Five Counties  
Surrounding Atlanta, 2001**

Country of Origin	County				
	Clayton	Cobb	DeKalb	Fulton	Gwinnett
Afghanistan	0	0	129	0	0
Bosnia	0	16	267	17	157
Burma	1	0	59	3	0
Burundi	3	0	10	0	0
Croatia	0	3	1	10	5
Cuba	3	5	14	8	10
Ethiopia	0	2	91	18	5
Ghana	2	2	2	0	0
Guinea	0	0	1	0	3
Haiti	30	9	0	0	0
Iran	0	15	108	22	20
Iraq	0	4	30	0	3
Lebanon	13	0	0	0	1
Liberia	0	0	75	14	15
Nigeria	0	0	3	0	5
Pakistan	0	0	3	0	0
Russia	0	14	9	10	11
Rwanda	0	0	1	0	0
Serbia	0	0	0	5	4
Sierra Leone	0	0	25	4	6
Somalia	8	0	317	11	20
Sudan	0	0	188	5	0
Syria	0	0	4	0	0
Togo	0	2	18	0	0
Ukraine	0	1	1	4	9
Vietnam	0	7	50	12	27
Zaire	5	0	8	0	0
Unknown*	0	3	41	12	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>1,455</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>323</b>

\*Unknown countries include Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Belize, Bulgaria, Belarus, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Congo, Eritrea, Hungary, Italy (Refugee Camp), Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Montenegro.

Source: Georgia State Refugee Health Program..

- Children mainstreamed too quickly into schools
- Loss of parental control, particularly with their youth
- Isolation of parents from their children's experiences
- High school refugee youth are leaving school for employment.

## Methodologic Issues

Several schools in DeKalb County have high numbers of refugee students, proportionately speaking, and are a rich environment in which to conduct focus groups. Unfortunately, only three schools gave their permission, possibly because of the added time it took for BRYCS to get approval from the DeKalb County School System's Department of Research and Evaluation. By the time approval was received, only 2 months were left in the school year. The end of the year is generally a busy time for all schools.

A total of seven focus groups met within the schools. School staff members screened refugee students for participation according to school-evaluated criteria, which included grade point averages, absenteeism, behavior referrals, and general involvement in studies and activities. The premise was to separate "challenged" students from those who have been fairly successful in school. As a result of timing, the number of students, and logistical barriers, challenged and successful students sometimes were grouped together. The local logistical coordinator played a key role in coordinating the arrangements within a very short time frame.

The online assessment tool did not have significant participation, for reasons that are not clear. Participants may have experienced difficulty accessing the tool from their computers; others simply did not have individual computers. Participants may have been uncomfortable responding to a computer form and may have preferred an in-person discussion. Although the assessment tool requested no identifying information, some participants may have been uncomfortable with divulging information about their programs' strength and challenges. Finally, the assessment tool was sent to the e-mail addresses of key individuals in each agency, and it is possible that it was not forwarded to appropriate members of the agencies' staff.

The assessment data thus are based on responses from a nonrandom, self-selected group of participants. Some agencies provided multiple participants, whereas others were represented by a single respondent. As a result, the data provide only broad-brush information about the needs of refugees in Atlanta and DeKalb County and must be interpreted with caution. Even so, the findings reinforce information gleaned from the focus groups and discussions.

## Key Findings

Refugee youth face serious challenges as they adjust to their new life in DeKalb County. Although youth and parents from different educational, cultural, and social backgrounds participated in the needs assessment, many areas of agreement were revealed, particularly with regard to the difficulties refugee youth confront every day. Refugee youth emphasized issues related to being "different" and their frustration with limited English proficiency. Themes of economic hardship and the importance of having strong peer relationships continually surfaced in the focus groups.

The following findings are based on a synthesis of responses from the focus groups, individual discussions, and online assessment tool.

- **Finding: Limited English proficiency is the leading challenge to achieving success.** Regardless of country of origin, refugee youth identify limited English proficiency as an impediment to success. Most students have not been in the United States long enough to acquire new language

skills. Mastering a new language while learning—and trying to succeed at—challenging subjects such as math and science is extremely difficult. Lack of English proficiency also limits students' ability to socialize comfortably with English-speaking students, at a time when developing strong peer relationships is very important.

**Recommendation:** It is essential to look at alternative programming for language acquisition through schools or community-based programs, particularly for older refugee youth. Limited English proficiency can greatly impede academic and social development. Availability of one-on-one instruction, whether in school or community based, should be increased.

- **Finding: Economic pressures in the family, peer pressure, and inadequate school support challenge students' ability to remain in school.** When asked about factors that might influence a refugee youth's decision to leave school before graduation, most students cited financial difficulties in the family. This pattern appears to be more common in homes in which the father is absent. Older male youth feel responsible for helping to pay rent and contribute economically to the family, which in turn influences their decision to leave school and find employment. Some families are trying to earn extra money to send to their families abroad, which adds a financial burden. Given such circumstances, refugee youth may view leaving school as their only choice. Other pressures (e.g., from peers who have left school) may also have an influence. Refugee youth and parents reported that schools sometimes do not have enough structure or teachers cannot effectively meet students' needs, another factor that influences the decision to drop out.

**Recommendation:** Increase the capacity of school staff to identify high-risk refugee youth and to provide them with or refer them to appropriate one-on-one programming that will help them finish school. The traditional capacities of schools to work with at-risk youth do not fully encompass language and counseling needs of refugee youth at risk. Educators and community-based agencies first must work together to identify youth at greatest risk. School- and community-based programming must be modified to some extent, such as with GED classes, to meet the specific needs of refugee youth.

- **Finding: Refugee youth are subjected to negative stereotypes that have a powerful influence on their cultural identity and personal development.** Refugee students cited numerous examples suggesting that they are perceived by teachers and students as intellectually, socially, and culturally inferior. Such a pattern of racism and discrimination, as perceived by the students, has severe effects on their adjustment, which is complicated by family pressure and their own desire to gain acceptance in their new country. Refugee boys are particular targets for bullying and teasing. Service providers appear to believe that most refugee youth have the resilience to persevere in such a hostile environment, although there is no indication that their assessment is accurate. Refugee youth noted that harassment is one factor that influences absenteeism and dropping out.

**Recommendation:** Increase conflict resolution, mentoring, and community education programs within schools and communities. Bullying and harassment take a toll on refugee youth and their capacity to confront negative stereotypes. Schools and community-based agencies can provide a strong intermediary role through programs that strengthen and empower youth to handle aggressive situations and build their leadership skills. Community and school programs for staff, students, and residents, facilitated by refugee youth, would serve to increase dialogue and interest and help counteract negative stereotyping.

- Finding: Refugee youth and parents’ major indicator of success is education.**  
 Despite the challenges for refugee youth in adjusting to school, they and their families view education as the key to success in their new country. Parents and youth consistently said that to achieve upward mobility in the United States, one must have at least a high school diploma. Parents described the sacrifices they make to give their children opportunities not afforded to them.
- Finding: Refugee parents feel disconnected from their children’s education.** Parents feel isolated from school systems because of their limited English proficiency and their unfamiliarity with how and when to interact with teachers. Parents are keenly interested in their children’s performance, but they express deep regret at not being able to help them with homework or advise them about high school and college. Parents expressed interest in being more involved, particularly when their children are experiencing academic and social difficulties.

**Recommendation:** Increase school-based outreach programs that educate parents about the school system; introduce parents to teachers, and encourage them to become involved in the schools. Dual programming that brings parents and children together can be very effective. Education is a top priority for most refugee youth and their parents. Ironically, refugee parents often feel they lose their children to the school system as their children spend most of the day there and acquire English. Increasing parents’ understanding of the schools, including expectations and requirements, and helping them get to know their children’s teachers would strengthen their capacity to advise their children about education.

## Focus Groups

The logistical coordinator and service providers from Refugee Family Services facilitated 12 focus groups with refugee youth and parents. Before the focus groups took place, BRYCS held a facilitator training to review focus group protocol and guidelines. A total of 59 middle school and high school students were divided into eight groups; the groups were further divided into students who were doing well academically and those who were having academic difficulties.

Participants were grouped by grade level and academic status, not by ethnicity, which would have been difficult to arrange and could have resulted in fewer participants. Henderson Middle School, Avondale High School, and Tucker High School participated. Two focus groups for middle-school youth were arranged through Refugee Family Services.

Focus groups for refugee parents were defined by ethnicity (table 3.4). Bosnian, Kurdish, Somali, and Vietnamese parents participated. Participants generally were not the parents of the focus group youth, but they all had children between ages 13 and 20.

Initially, the premise for focus groups was to include refugee youth who had dropped out of school as well as those who had gone on to a 2-year or 4-year college. It was extremely difficult to bring together such a group, so the format was changed to provide eight individual discussions. Seven of the participants had left school before completing their studies.

**Table 3.4**  
**Demographics of Parent Focus Groups**

	Ethnicity				Total
	Somalian	Bosnian	Kurdish	Vietnamese	
Male	1	1	1	9	12
Female	7	3	2	9	21
Total	8	4	3	18	33

The data from the parent focus groups are grouped by refugee population because each group took place separately. All parents who participated in the focus groups have one or more children between ages 13 and 20.

## Youth Focus Group Findings

- **School Differences.** Youth focus group participants frequently commented on the lack of discipline and teacher authority in U.S. schools. They are sometimes uncomfortable with their increased freedom and access to resources. Their responses were mixed with regard to communication and relationships with teachers; some were positive, others were negative. Many noted that girls and boys receive the same education here and are subject to the same academic expectations. Boys noted more experiences with bullying and ethnic discrimination, which seem to have increased in the wake of September 11, 2001.

The findings from the individual discussions were similar. Participants noted the range of choices available to students, including the choice to leave school. They, too, noted the lack of discipline in the schools and gave mixed responses on the quality of education; several thought the quality was better in their home countries. Limited English proficiency can create barriers to communication between teachers and students.

- **Reasons for Skipping School or Dropping Out.** Youth noted that students often need to work to help support their families. Limited English proficiency makes schoolwork challenging. Many concurred that the school system lacks structure. Teachers cannot meet student needs; once students fall behind they do not get enough help. Harassment from nonimmigrant students is also a disincentive to attending school.

Participants most often cited limited English proficiency as the reason for dropping out. Having little or no previous formal education and harassment by other students are major contributing factors. In addition, friends' dropping out can influence a student's decision to drop out.

- **Definitions of Success.** Youth in the focus groups and in individual discussions had similar definitions of success, including finishing college, obtaining a postgraduate degree, establishing a good career, being able to care for a family, buying a home, and being more successful than one's parents.
- **Factors Preventing Success.** When asked what prevents refugee youth from being successful, focus group participants said that limited English proficiency is the main factor preventing success. They also identified teasing and bullying, inability to learn the American culture, inappropriate placement in school, and difficulty expressing one's own ethnicity. Girls expressed dismay over not being acknowledged for their success and noted that family hardships can be a barrier.
- **Factors Assisting Adjustment to Life in Atlanta.** Focus group participants said that friends and family, "nice" teachers, and television and radio all helped them adjust to life in Atlanta.

## Parent Focus Group Findings

The parent focus groups discussed their children's adjustment to the United States, particularly in school. Generally, parents expressed concern over their ability to help children with homework and over their own limited English proficiency. Other factors that influence parents' ability to assist their children involve transportation difficulties and heavy work schedules. Parents also seemed to feel unwelcome in their children's schools and wished teachers would be more accessible.

Parents suggested that schools hire interpreters to communicate directly with parents. Kurdish, Somali, and Vietnamese parents expressed concern that teachers lack authority and that American high schools are less challenging than those in their home countries. Table 3.5 summarizes the findings from the parent focus groups.



Table 3.5 Parent Focus Group Findings, DeKalb County				
Topic	Responses to Topic by Focus Group Ethnicity			
	Bosnian	Kurdish	Somali	Vietnamese
Perceptions of how their children are doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of discipline and how it affects family life</li> <li>Concern about their children falling under bad influences of peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty of English, biology, and math</li> <li>Concern that children will lose interest if they do not receive better ESL instruction</li> <li>Lack of English isolates them from "mainstream" youth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern over matching age to grade rather than skill</li> <li>Harassment by other students</li> <li>Boys fighting at bus stops</li> <li>Stigma for parents if youth drop out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too much freedom and lack of respect for authority</li> <li>Concern over matching age to grade</li> <li>Uncertainty about disciplining children, because their children can call 911</li> </ul>
How parents hear about things related to their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From children themselves</li> <li>From family and friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note or phone call from teacher, or children interpret (schoolwork may suffer)</li> <li>Siblings of children</li> <li>School visit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note or phone call from teacher</li> <li>Siblings of children</li> <li>From children themselves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note or phone call from teacher</li> <li>Meeting with teacher</li> </ul>
How parents define success for their children	Bosnian parents were not asked this question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Successful student</li> <li>Good friends</li> <li>Good behavior</li> <li>Close to family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good education</li> <li>Good job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College educated</li> <li>Employed</li> <li>U.S. citizen</li> <li>Law abiding</li> </ul>
What parents think prevents their children from succeeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not enough English classes</li> <li>Not enough quality nonacademic outlets for youth</li> <li>Not enough individual time with teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship with teachers that aren't positive</li> <li>Being from a different culture and speaking another language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents can't help with homework.</li> <li>Parents aren't clear about the requirements to graduate from high school or attend college.</li> <li>Parents can't spend as much time as they would like with their children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth have too much freedom.</li> <li>Parents may have difficulty controlling youth.</li> <li>Dating distracts them from achieving.</li> </ul>
Support services parents would like to see for youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field trips and activities</li> <li>More friends</li> <li>Places to socialize</li> <li>More English classes and tutoring in English and math</li> <li>More opportunities for parent involvement at school</li> <li>Youth need to ask for help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More programs and tutoring</li> <li>More information about living in the United States</li> <li>More educational programs for older youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More after-school and summer school programs</li> <li>More tutoring</li> <li>More English classes for parents</li> <li>Long-term assistance for youth and parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More after-school help for youth and children</li> <li>More activities</li> <li>More help for parents in communicating with schools</li> </ul>

## Online Assessment Tool

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BRYCS developed a Web-based online assessment tool (see Appendix 2) and distributed it to service providers in child welfare, community and ethnic-based, education-based, health care, juvenile justice, law enforcement, prevention, recreation, refugee resettlement, social service, youth leadership, and youth development agencies. BRYCS used a distribution list that focused on agencies that have worked with refugee youth in some capacity. The first few questions were about services extended to refugee populations in general; the next set of questions pertained to refugee youth in particular.

A total of 28 surveys were completed between September and December 2002, for a response rate of about 30 percent. However, for the reasons mentioned earlier, the information from the online assessment must be interpreted with caution.

Most participants indicated affiliation with resettlement agencies and educational institutions; most occupied positions in senior management or were educators. Participants generally reported 3 to 10 years of service in their current fields of employment, and most provide services in DeKalb County.

Although participants did not provide a wide variety of direct services, they appeared to know where to refer refugees. Participants' agencies provide direct services for refugee youth and children including counseling, after-school programs, tutoring, and referrals. Participants as a group provide referrals to numerous state and nongovernmental agencies that provide social services. Referrals for youth are made to youth camps, soccer camps, and in-home counseling. Language barriers and family and personal pressures were most commonly identified as issues facing refugee youth.

## Community Forum: Recommendations From Local Agencies

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BRYCS convened a community forum in February 2003 to present the findings of the needs assessment to local service agencies in Atlanta and to receive recommendations from participants as they learned about the needs assessment findings. The following agencies participated:

- African Community and Refugee Center
- Agnes Scott College
- Catholic Charities
- DeKalb County DFCS
- DeKalb County Education Department
- Emory University
- Ethiopian Community Association
- Friends of International Community School
- Fulton Multi-County Refugee Resettlement Unit
- Georgia Mutual Assistance Association Consortium
- Georgia State Refugee Health Program
- Georgia State University
- Global Health Action
- Good Shepherd Services
- International Rescue Committee
- Jewish Family and Career Services
- Lutheran Ministries of Georgia
- McLendon Elementary
- Refugee Family Services

<b>Table 3.6 Recommendations From Community Forum, Atlanta, February 2003</b>	
<b>Area of Interest</b>	<b>Participant Recommendation for Improving Services</b>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bully and teasing problem needs to be addressed.</li> <li>• Programs of the following types are needed:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Counseling–mental health</li> <li>– Mentoring</li> <li>– Peer support</li> <li>– Alternative programs for older youth (ages 16 to 21)</li> <li>– Conflict resolution programs within schools</li> <li>– After-school programs for new refugee youth that are more nurturing and instructional</li> </ul> </li> <li>• More social structures and outlets for youth need to be developed.</li> <li>• Additional education-based solutions for older refugee youth would be helpful.</li> </ul>
Agency Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an interagency initiative to develop a one-year, intensive ESL program for all refugee families in DeKalb County that includes transportation and child care.</li> <li>• There should be more collaboration with schools.</li> <li>• Think of how we can get parents more involved.</li> <li>• Service providers need to have more contact with each other regarding refugee youth.</li> </ul>
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an understanding of how to destigmatize mental health issues in refugee populations.</li> <li>• Increase outreach to American families about refugee families.</li> <li>• Increase outreach to educators.</li> <li>• Accurately inform parents and youth about the goal of Child Protective Services.</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop initiatives that can expand on existing efforts.</li> <li>• Learn more about how to obtain federal funds.</li> </ul>
Further Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather data comparing immigrant, refugee, and U.S. youth.</li> <li>• Look more closely at the foster care youth who come from refugee populations.</li> </ul>

- Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta
- Somali Community Development
- State Department of Human Resources
- Taskforce for Child Survival and Development World Relief

Participants had many suggestions for improving services to refugee youth and families (table 3.6). They were asked what purpose the needs assessment would serve best; their responses varied, but they generally fell into one of two categories:

1. to continue to explore one of the major themes identified by the needs assessment with a more pointed approach, or
2. to serve as a springboard for expanding funding and new programming possibilities.

Other suggestions were to expand current service capabilities and to combine results with other studies and resources in mapping the needs of refugee youth in metro Atlanta.





4

**St. Louis, Missouri**



## Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

A joint project of



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Immigration &  
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Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) is a national program of technical assistance addressing challenges that face refugee youth and children.

The purpose of BRYCS is to broaden the scope of information, resources, and collaboration among service providers for refugee youth and children. BRYCS works with various agencies, organizations, and associations in child protection, foster care, juvenile justice, education, refugee resettlement, and refugee community associations.

In assisting refugee youth and children, service providers need access to in-depth information about refugee cultures, trauma, resulting family dynamics, and the special needs of youth. BRYCS assists by providing technical assistance, training, presentations, consultations, a Web-based clearinghouse, and resource development.

BRYCS is a joint effort of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) and is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, under contract no. 90 RB 0009.

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## Methods

### Project Initiation

The Refugee Services Program of Missouri applied for technical assistance to strengthen service capacity for refugee youth and children and their families. In November 2001, BRYCS convened individual meetings and a group meeting with service providers from a range of agencies that work to various degrees with newcomer and refugee populations. As a result of these meetings, it was determined that BRYCS would conduct a needs assessment. Participants agreed to focus the assessment on refugee parents, with an emphasis on those living in south St. Louis, where a greater number of refugee populations reside.\* Providers wanted to find out more about the challenges of refugee parents and what might cause their low participation rates in programs and local activities.

The needs assessment was developed and implemented through local efforts, both contracted and in-kind. Data for the needs assessment were collected through focus groups with parents and refugee youth and through responses to an online assessment tool distributed to local service providers.

This needs assessment provides specific findings and recommendations that are meant not only to inform the reader but also to create a catalyst for informed action that will lead to building effective services and collaboration to benefit refugee parents, youth, and children.

BRYCS staff met with service agencies individually and then convened a large meeting to present a synthesis of the individual discussions and brainstorm on the topic of the needs assessment. The following agencies were met with individually, represented at the larger meeting, or both:

- African Refugee Service
- Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital
- Catholic Charities Refugee Services
- Family Care Health Center
- Grace Hill Health Center
- International Institute
- Mesopotamia Center (formerly Iraq House)
- St. Louis City Department of Health
- St. Louis City Department of Mental Health
- St. Louis City Division of Family Services
- St. Louis City Family Violence Council
- St. Louis Neighborhood Network
- St. Louis Public Schools ESOL/Bilingual Program
- Vietnamese Community Center

During the meeting, many needs of refugee parents were identified and discussed, particularly

- lack of information about parental rights and responsibilities;
- uncertainty about the parental role; and
- feelings of disengagement from relationships with children, especially teenagers.

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\*The participants in the meeting also identified the need to strengthen collaboration between public child welfare and refugee-serving agencies. BRYCS implemented two cross-service training sessions in St. Louis as another part of the pilot site project. A third training was added to address the specific needs of St. Louis foster care staff in their work with increasingly diverse populations.

At the end of the meeting, participants agreed to develop and implement a needs assessment focused on refugee families, particularly parents, to understand more about their needs. Service providers thought some parents were isolated; they expressed great interest in increasing parent participation in their programs.

The process of the needs assessment was defined in dialogue with a task force that included representatives from the African Refugee Service, a mutual assistance association; the International Institute, a resettlement agency; and St. John's Mercy Neighborhood Health Center, a community-based center that frequently serves immigrant and refugee populations. Other service providers participated through an e-mail list that enabled sharing of information and feedback about developments in the needs assessment.

## Methods

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The needs assessment consisted of focus groups with refugee parents and youth and an online assessment tool for service providers. Task force members provided valuable input in structuring questions for the focus groups and the online assessment tool. They also helped synthesize the findings and provided suggestions for future activities at a community forum held in January 2003.

### Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with five different refugee populations: Afghan, African, Bosnian, Iraqi, and Vietnamese. Groups were organized by ethnicity, and parent and youth groups were held separately in most cases. The African focus groups contained participants from many countries. Ethiopian, Congolese, and Somali participants met in separate groups. Two groups had mixed populations of participants from Benin, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia. Data pertaining to those refugee populations are categorized broadly as "African."

The focus groups took place primarily in South St. Louis, which has a high concentration of refugee populations. Parents and youth were asked different questions. Youth were asked for their views on the challenges their parents face. The youth who participated in the groups were not necessarily the children of the parents who participated. BRYCS contracted with the International Institute of St. Louis to oversee the logistical and facilitation arrangements for the focus groups. African Refugee Services facilitated all the African groups, the Mesopotamian Center facilitated the Iraqi groups, and the Vietnamese Center facilitated the Vietnamese groups. The International Institute facilitated the Bosnian and Afghan groups. Before the focus groups met, BRYCS held a facilitator training to review protocol and guidelines.

### Online Assessment Tool

BRYCS developed a Web-based online assessment tool (see Appendix 2) and distributed it via e-mail to more than 100 service providers in community-based agencies, ESL and educational programs (including community colleges and universities), health care agencies, mutual assistance associations (MAAs) and ethnic-based organizations, refugee and immigrant-serving agencies, resettlement agencies, schools, social service agencies, and volunteer associations. The objective was to identify service providers' needs and challenges working with refugee parents, and the questions focused on program participation. BRYCS contracted with the International Institute to develop a distribution list that ensured appropriate representation from service providers, family and health care service agencies, and community-based agencies. Task force members and other local providers tested the assessment tool and provided valuable feedback before it was distributed.

### Community Forum

In January 2003, BRYCS convened a meeting to discuss the findings with service providers and community representatives. The goal was to obtain feedback and recommendations from participants about the findings. Their responses are incorporated into this report.



## Data Analysis

All focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed. A researcher affiliated with St. Louis University synthesized the focus group and online data and provided findings.

## Methodologic Issues

The 16 focus groups involved coordinating many logistics. In some cases, recordings were not clearly audible, which made transcription difficult. In the two Iraqi groups, participants wrote down answers to the questions and did not discuss the questions as a group, which may have altered the quality of the responses.

The online assessment tool did not have significant participation. One reason for the low response may be that participants experienced difficulty accessing the tool from their computers. Another reason may have been that participants were uncomfortable responding to a computer program rather than a person or were concerned about maintaining anonymity.

## Context

Recent Census data on St. Louis are provided in table 4.1 to give the reader a sense of the demographics of the area in which the needs assessment was conducted. The emphasis is on populations for whom English is not the native language.

St. Louis has become increasingly diverse over the past two decades. More than 46,000 refugees now live in the St. Louis metropolitan area; more than 80 percent live in the city of St. Louis. The refugee population represents a wide variety of countries of origin; table 4.2 shows the trends over the past 5 years.

**Table 4.2**  
**Selected Census Data, St. Louis and Missouri, 2000**

	St. Louis		Missouri	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total population	348,189	100.0	5,595,211	100.0
<b>SEX</b>				
Male	163,567	47	2,720,177	48.6
Female	184,622	53	2,875,034	51.4
<b>RACE</b>				
One race	341,650	98.1	5,513,150	98.5
White	152,666	43.8	4,748,083	84.9
Black or African American	178,266	51.2	629,391	11.2
American Indian and Alaska Native	950	0.3	25,076	0.4
Asian	6,891	2.0	61,595	1.1
Asian Indian	845	0.2	12,169	0.2
Chinese	1,038	0.3	13,667	0.2
Filipino	454	0.1	7,735	0.1
Japanese	217	0.1	3,337	0.1
Korean	289	0.1	6,767	0.1
Vietnamese	3,319	1.0	10,626	0.2
Other Asian <sup>a</sup>	729	0.2	7,294	0.1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	94	0.0	3,178	0.1
Other race	2,783	0.8	45,827	0.8
Two or more races	6,539	1.9	82,061	1.5
<b>HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE</b>				
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	7,022	2.0	118,592	2.1
Mexican	4,111	1.2	77,887	1.4
Puerto Rican	500	0.1	6,677	0.1
Cuban	373	0.1	3,022	0.1
Other Hispanic or Latino	2,038	0.6	31,006	0.6
<b>NATIVITY AND PLACE OF BIRTH</b>				
Native	328,647	94.4	5,444,015	97.3
Born in United States	327,108	93.9	5,412,743	96.7
Foreign born	19,542	5.6	151,196	2.7
Entered 1990 to March 2000	14,237	4.1	79,223	1.4
Naturalized citizen	5,348	1.5	61,786	1.1
Not a citizen	14,194	4.1	89,410	1.6
<b>REGION OF BIRTH OF FOREIGN BORN</b>				
Total foreign born (excluding born at sea)	19,542	100.0	151,196	100.0
Europe	8,543	43.7	43,101	28.5
Asia	6,425	32.9	52,733	34.9
Africa	1,500	7.7	8,453	5.6
Oceania	113	0.6	1,580	1.0
Latin America	2,748	14.1	39,048	25.8
Northern America	213	1.1	6,280	4.2
<b>LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME</b>				
Population age 5 and older	324,769	100.0	5,226,022	100.0
English only	296,924	91.4	4,961,741	94.9
Language other than English	27,845	8.6	264,281	5.1
Speak English less than "very well"	14,191	4.4	103,019	2.0
Spanish	7,851	2.4	110,752	2.1
Speak English less than "very well"	3,283	1.0	45,990	0.9

<sup>a</sup>Other Asian alone, or two or more Asian categories.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

Available at: <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

Two resettlement agencies in St. Louis—Catholic Charities Refugee Services and the International Institute—are responsible for providing core services to refugee families in the first 3 to 6 months in the United States. Those services

**Table 4.2**  
**Number of Refugees in St. Louis by Ethnicity or Nationality\***

Ethnicity, Region, or Nationality	Total Population	Total Refugee Population Now Adult-Aged (%)	Arrived 1999–2002	Arrived 1997–1999	Arrived Before 1997	Last Year in Which 50+ Refugees Came Directly From Overseas
<b>Near/Middle East</b>						
Afghan	400	32	305	10	85	2000
Iraqi	1,000	42	140	510	350	1994
Kurd	500	44	70	430	0	1996
Other	35	31	9	8	18	Unknown
<b>Eastern Europe/Russia</b>						
Bosnian	30,500	50	19,215	9,150	2,135	2000
Croatian	155	45	100	45	10	2000
Kosovar	160	41	160	0	0	1999
Russian	2,675	95	3	20	2,652	Pre-1990
Serbian	132	27	77	40	15	NA
Ukrainian	680	47	28	125	527	Early 1990s
Other	600	87	11	25	564	Unknown
<b>Far East/South Asia</b>						
Lao	675	100	0	0	675	Mid-1980s
Vietnamese	7,612	63	115	220	7,277	Early 1990s
Other	50	100	0	0	50	Early 1980s
<b>Africa</b>						
Benadir/Brawan	88	32	31	57	0	1996
Congolese	55	16	55	0	0	2000
Ethiopian/Eritrean	600	90	32	20	548	Early 1980s
Liberian	23	22	23	0	0	NA
Nigerian	108	60	82	15	11	NA
Sierra Leonean	45	31	34	0	0	NA
Somali	300	37	80	215	5	1999
Other	20	80	0	5	15	Unknown
<b>Western Hemisphere</b>						
Cuban/Haitian	480	85	12	27	341	No
<b>Totals</b>	<b>46,893</b>		<b>20,582</b>	<b>10,922</b>	<b>15,278</b>	

\* Data do not include U.S.-born children of refugees.

NA = situation has not yet occurred.

Source: Estimates provided by the International Institute of St. Louis. Estimates are based on an analysis of the agency's caseload as well as anecdotal information provided to the institute by community leaders and other officials. Estimates are generally updated annually.

consist of housing, employment, and education; medical care; and assisting the family with meeting initial basic needs. Several mutual assistance associations provide services for refugee and immigrant groups, including the African Refugee Service, the Mesopotamia Center, the Bosnia & Herzegovina Community Center, the Haitian Association of St. Louis, the Eritrean Mutual Aid Association, the Ethiopian Community Association of Missouri, the Lao Mutual Aid Association, and the Vietnam Center for Community Activities. The St. Louis public schools ESOL/Bilingual Program works directly with immigrant and refugee families.

## Service Challenges

The proposal submitted by the Missouri State Refugee Coordinator described a variety of challenges facing refugee families, including identity issues involving cultural and family roles. Family dynamics are altered when parents want the

children to retain their native culture. Most agencies that refugee parents encounter are not designed to meet the specific cultural needs of each refugee population. The parents' roles and their function in society have been drastically altered, presenting challenges not only for the parents and children but also for service systems. Service providers at the initial meeting expressed concerns about possible depression in parents stemming from their isolation and their changed family roles.

Many St. Louis agencies and community groups have the potential to provide services to refugee parents, but funding is limited.

## Findings and Recommendations

The following findings are a synthesis of data from the focus groups and the online assessment tool. They consist of trends identified in the focus groups and in the data from the online assessment. Detailed information on responses from specific refugee groups and service providers follows this section. The recommendations are based on the needs assessment and the feedback received at the community forum.

At the outset of the needs assessment, service providers wanted to know how understanding the needs of refugee families might help strengthen existing programs and increase refugee parent participation. The recommendations suggest changes on the service provision level. Systemic issues, such as rates of unemployment, adequate transportation systems, affordable child care, housing, levels of violence and crime, and racial discrimination, all affect the challenges facing refugee parents; the recommendations must be considered within the context of those and other systemic issues.

- Finding: Length of transition time affects the quality of parents' adaptation.** St. Louis refugee parents feel insecure about their new life in the United States, particularly with regard to coming to terms with such aspects of U.S. culture as freedom, respect, gender roles, safety, and parenting. The first few months of resettlement are intense for parents: They begin working and are overwhelmed with many different transitions converging at once. Service providers and refugee parents agree that more time is necessary for effective adaptation.

**Recommendation:** Broaden parent orientation programs and integrate them more completely with other service systems. Refugee parents receive orientation abroad about the United States and again from resettlement agencies. Tremendous transition is occurring in the families during these orientations, and vital information may not be effectively communicated. Refugee parents and service providers indicated that parents encounter difficulties understanding U.S. society and how it works; this difficulty is intensified by language barriers. A need exists for prolonged orientation in understanding the health care, education, law enforcement, and public child welfare systems and community resources. Involving other refugee parents as mentors might make the orientation programs more effective.

- Finding: Language competency affects family structure.** Refugee parents consistently are confronted with situations in which their limited English skills are on display—on the job, at their children's school, at the hospital or doctor's office, in a grocery store. In such situations parents may use their children as interpreters or need to request an interpreter. Doing so compromises parents' autonomy and creates a dependence on children not only to interpret the language but also to convey how community systems work. The constant need for interpreters may lead to a reduction in parents' incentive to engage in activities and services.

**Recommendation:** Provide more flexibility in time and location of ESL programming. Throughout the needs assessment, refugee parents repeatedly expressed how their limited English skills affect family dynamics. Moreover, because of work schedules, refugee parents have limited time to engage in learning English. Although one suggestion would be to extend the time parents are given to resettle before starting work, it is not reasonable to assume that adjustment time for families could be extended. Therefore, it is better to devise ways to help parents participate in English classes, such as offering them on weekends or at places of employment. In St. Louis, several community college, volunteer, and educational programs could potentially offer some flexibility in providing ESL programs.

- **Finding: Parents are concerned about loss of authority.** Refugee parents expressed concern about losing authority over their children. Acceptable methods for disciplining children here may differ from those in their home countries. As a result, parents may be confused about how to discipline their children. Changes in parenting style, rooted in culture, create dramatic changes in families and in parents' roles. The fact that children often serve as interpreters further limits parental authority by giving more control to the child. Parents are also concerned that they are not the best role models for their own children, particularly in the area of career success.

Refugee parents are deeply concerned about their role changes and loss of authority, particularly with their adolescent children. Confusion about U.S. laws and the changes in their children as they become Americanized create great stress among parents. Their basic identity as parents does not have the same clarity as it did in their home countries. Limited English proficiency exacerbates the situation.

**Recommendation:** Increase refugee parent support groups and programming to bring adolescents together with parents. More local support groups led by refugee parents could provide vital information and valuable lessons learned from other refugee parents. Mental health programs need to be strengthened to accommodate a culturally diverse clientele. In addition, current programs for refugee parents could be adjusted to periodically include adolescent youth. Existing refugee youth programs could develop components that incorporate parent involvement.

- **Finding: Involvement in community programs and activities is related more to transportation, language, time barriers, and safety concerns than to interest level.** Service providers reported low refugee parent participation in their programs. They and refugee parents suggested similar reasons: lack of time, language challenges, and lack of transportation. Parents are concerned about neighborhood safety; this concern decreases mobility and increases isolation not only for themselves but also for their children.

**Recommendation:** Increase neighborhood-based programming for parents, and increase the number of refugee parents who play a role in program conception, development, implementation, and leadership. Many factors influence the level of parental engagement in programs and community activities. Refugee parents mentioned logistical challenges and concerns about safety.

Parents may respond to neighborhood-based programs, which could also involve them in designing the programming. St. Louis has a strong network of service providers, and there may be a way to dovetail with other programming initially. Certainly, there are programs working within neighborhoods that are trusted in their communities; in considering program expansion, collaborating with them would be ideal. In a recent BRYCS project on refugee parent support services, it was clear in discussions with staff from 28 agencies that including parents in program design

strengthens effectiveness and promotes sustainability. It would be important to actively include parents in neighborhood-based programs and build their capacity to lead them.

- **Finding: Generally, refugee parents are dissatisfied and disappointed with the U.S. educational system.** Yet, refugee populations differ in their expectations regarding parents' involvement and the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students. Most of the parents indicated that school curricula were not rigorous enough and lacked an international focus. They expressed explicit concerns about drugs, gang activity, and school violence. Apart from that, refugee parents and youth varied in their expectations regarding schools.

Communicating with teachers appeared to be a significant challenge for most parents. Parents can regard schools as coming between them and their children, particularly if their children are older and are quickly socialized into American culture. Parents with limited English proficiency indicated that they feel intimidated by the school system and by their inability to help their children with homework. Another layer of complexity is that parent expectations regarding schools vary according to refugee population. Finally, parents expressed concern about the extent to which school staff understand their culture. Lack of cultural understanding can create misunderstandings between school staff and parents.

- **Recommendation:** Expand the network of school-based outreach programs to refugee parents and provide more evening and weekend information sessions and useful classes. Increase training for school staff, led by refugee parents. Schools are often the topic of conversation in households that include school-age children, and refugee parents are very aware of their children's school experience. Yet, schools can serve as a great resource and as a consistent link between parent and child and between parent and community. St. Louis public schools already have a network for newcomer populations through bilingual and ESL programs; that network can be expanded. Parent-led staff training would be informative for staff members and could strengthen the relationship between schools and parents.

## Focus Groups

Focus group data reveal many common themes under each domain across the different ethnic groups. Although parent and youth groups agreed on many issues related to barriers and challenges, parents feel a loss of parental authority that can compound their frustration with the experience of transition. The findings below are categorized according to themes. For focus group findings categorized by refugee populations, see tables 4.4–4.8 at the end of this chapter.

- **General Cultural Differences.** All focus groups (except the Bosnian groups) mentioned that they experience more freedom in the United States than in their home countries. There seems to be a major difference between groups from non-Western and Western (Bosnian) countries. To people coming from non-Western countries, the United States is a very progressive country offering more opportunities for education and a better life. However, refugees mentioned that it takes money to enjoy these opportunities.

All the ethnic groups think Americans do not show respect to each other. Students do not respect teachers, and children do not respect parents or the elderly. In their home countries, students never argue with teachers, and children are always obedient to parents. Many participants emphasized the difference between having freedom and showing respect to others. They mentioned that Americans emphasize freedom too much and are losing mutual respect for each other. All but the Bosnian groups

said that Americans respect the law more than people in their home countries do. They mentioned that Americans seem to trust the police and are likely to call police whenever there are small problems, even in the family. Many participants said they were surprised to see so many diverse religious and racial groups in America.

All the groups mentioned that safety is a concern. Parents worry about where their children are all the time because their neighborhoods are not safe. They also worry about children's safety at school because so much violence is reported on TV. Those who live in low-income areas are worried about gang activity and about people using drugs. Groups from Bosnia, Africa, and Vietnam mentioned that back home, they did not have to lock their doors all the time, and children could play outside even late at night. Public transportation is inconvenient and unsafe.

Groups from Afghanistan, Africa, and Iraq mentioned the difference in gender roles between their home countries and U.S. society.

All groups mentioned that parenting is a major challenge in the United States, in part because of the cultural and legal differences between their countries and America. All participants mentioned that parents use corporal punishment to discipline their children and that the law back home does not prevent the parents from doing so. Parents believe they are losing their parental authority because U.S. law interferes with their parenting styles. Children may take advantage of this situation, which makes parenting more difficult.

- **Schools.** Different ethnic groups had divergent experiences with and expectations of school curricula. Iraqi and Bosnian parent groups mentioned that school systems are more uniform in their countries. Many parents think that U.S. education is not as challenging or as good as the education in their home countries. However, many parents believe that the facilities and opportunities are better for children in America. Parental involvement with schools in their home countries varies among ethnic groups. African and Bosnian groups mentioned that parents are more involved with school in their home country, but Afghan, Iraqi, and Vietnamese groups said that parents are not involved with school.

Parents and youth from all ethnic groups have several problems related to schools and education. Children from all ethnic groups face difficulties in the beginning, particularly with regard to English and social studies classes. Language problems occasionally affect other subjects, such as mathematics and science. Because parents do not speak English, they cannot help their children with homework. In addition, teachers sometimes incorrectly label children and parents as being unable to speak English. Language barriers inhibit communication with teachers; parents sometimes use their children as interpreters and are not always sure whether children are translating accurately.

When they have problems in English, youth said they go to see reading teachers, English teachers, and counselors. All ethnic groups except Bosnians said that teachers in their home countries use corporal punishment to discipline students and that students are given too much freedom in this country. A major concern for parents from all ethnic groups is that U.S. students do not respect teachers.

All the parents mentioned the existence of many opportunities for children, but it is expensive to send children to private schools and college. African parents mentioned that it is difficult to find a good school because they have to live in whatever housing is given to them.

Some youth mentioned that making friends is difficult at school. Refugee children, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, tend to become friends with each other. Afghan parents worry about other students beating up their children and calling them names, such as “Osama Bin Laden’s son.” (When this happened, parents said that the school did not take any action.)

- **Language.** All ethnic groups—both parents and youths—mentioned that language is a major barrier to resettlement and that it is frustrating to do everything through interpreters. Parents feel ashamed when they must ask their children to interpret for them. Some parents mentioned that they do not necessarily trust interpreters because they do not know whether interpreters are translating accurately. Others said that interpreters do not translate some information to the third party; instead, they make decisions for refugees. All ethnic groups mentioned that they want to study English, but they do not have time and are too tired after work to go to a language school.
- **Employment.** All ethnic groups mentioned that it is difficult to find jobs that provide adequate income and that their current wages are insufficient. African and Afghan women said that it is difficult to do hard physical work for long hours; they did not engage in such work in their countries. Bosnian parent groups mentioned that some Bosnians have problems with transferring their academic and employment credentials to work in United States.
- **Health Care.** All ethnic groups mentioned that the duration of Medicaid and food stamps is not long enough. In addition, Medicaid does not cover everything. The appointment system is another problem for many people because they do not know when they get sick. Moreover, the waiting time in emergency rooms can be excessive (e.g., 3 to 6 hours). The Iraqi parents group mentioned that small hospitals do not have interpreters; even when they do, the interpreters are not well qualified. Refugees sometimes must make major decisions based on what interpreters say, but interpreters have neither medical knowledge nor understanding of medical terminology.
- **Transportation.** All ethnic groups mentioned that transportation is a major barrier. To buy a car, one must work, but to get a job, a car is necessary. The Iraqi group mentioned that having a car is a refugee’s first goal when arriving in the United States. All ethnic groups have problems with the bus system because they cannot read the schedule. Moreover, buses are unreliable and unsafe.
- **Parenting.** Parents in all ethnic groups cited loss of parental authority as preventing them from parenting. U.S. laws that protect children from parental abuse do not fit their cultural norms. African parent groups said that they cannot find enough time to spend with their children and therefore cannot show them the same amount of love and affection as they did in their home countries.

Focus group participants provided several recommendations for refugees’ successful resettlement:

- Afghan groups said that the duration of support should be extended to 2 years while refugees are still learning English. They also suggested that English teachers pay individual visits to each house.
- The Afghan youth group thought parents need more English competency and less physically demanding jobs. They also want cultural classes so that they do not forget their language.
- African parents suggested that more African organizations and places for African refugees should be established to pool community resources, as Bosnian organizations do. They also requested assistance for family reunification so that they can bring their relatives to the United States.

- Bosnian parents suggested organizing after-school activities for children so that Bosnian children can socialize after school. They also suggested more community resources and services.
- Iraqi groups suggested that teachers should be better informed about cultural differences.

## Online Assessment Tool

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BRYCS developed a Web-based online assessment tool (see Appendix 2) and distributed it to more than 100 service providers in community-based agencies, ESL and educational programs (including community colleges and universities), health care agencies, mutual assistance associations and ethnic-based organizations, refugee and immigrant-serving agencies, resettlement agencies, schools, social service agencies, and volunteer associations. BRYCS used a distribution list that focused on agencies that have worked with refugee youth. The first few questions were about services extended to the refugee population in general; the next set of questions pertained to refugee youth in particular. A total of 28 service providers representing various agencies completed the survey. Although this is not a significant number of participants, it does suggest the range of service providers and service agencies in St. Louis. This section summarizes the responses to the assessment questions.

Of the 28 participants, 6 were from education-related agencies; 5 were from social service agencies; 3 were from health programs; 2 each were from advocacy organizations, resettlement agencies, and faith communities; and 1 was from an employment service agency. Most of the participants serve the city of St. Louis (64.2%) and St. Louis County (53.5%), but several serve Jefferson County, St. Charles County, St. Clair County (Illinois), or Franklin County. Many serve multiple counties. Participants provide services to many ethnic groups; the most commonly mentioned countries of origin were Afghanistan, Bosnia, Croatia, Iraq, and Vietnam. About one-third of participants (36%) reported above-average or high direct engagement with refugee parents.

Interpretation and translation, along with family services and case management, were the most commonly identified services provided by participants, followed by adult education and parent support programs. ESL, employment, and medical and health classes also were mentioned. However, participants said that refugee parents' participation in their services is very low, even for interpretation and translation. They said that low participation stems from lack of time, language barriers, and lack of transportation, and they suggested that providing interpreter services, individual outreach to parents, and transportation could increase participation. Several participants indicated that flexible scheduling, providing services at low or no cost, offering translated materials, providing services near participants' neighborhoods, and offering child care could also boost refugee parent participation.

When asked to list the major challenges for refugee parents as they arrive in St. Louis, participants most often listed language, lack of knowledge about the U.S. system in general, lack of adequate transportation, the need to work two or more jobs, and refugees' role as parents in a new culture.

Participants mentioned that a lack of parental engagement in service programs negatively affects children and youth. Parents can develop a sense of isolation amid the pressures for acculturation, and they often experience a change in family dynamics and lack of orientation and direction about their lives. The loss of parental authority due to language brokering by children also plays a role.

Participants in the online needs assessment provided several recommendations for services to refugees:

- Organize communities where an individual's own ethnic group can meet, exchange information, and develop community resources.



- Develop individual outreach programs with more translated materials, which will integrate larger numbers of refugee parents.
- Connect school administrators and counselors directly with an area's service programs, to enhance communications and collaborations among schools, service providers, and refugee parents.

## Community Forum: Recommendations From Local Agencies

BRYCS convened a community forum in January 2003 to present the findings of the needs assessment to local service agencies in St. Louis. BRYCS was interested in hearing the feedback and recommendations from participants as they learned about the needs assessment findings. Listed below are the comments and recommendations from forum participants:

### Comments

- St. Louis has a diversity of populations, so it needs a diversity of mental health programs.
- Schools are community based and can provide great linkages to parents.
- Refugee-serving agencies already have frontline staff helping families and can liaison with other agencies.
- Agencies have challenges particularly in meeting the linguistic and cultural needs of their service populations.
- Smaller populations always have additional challenges when it comes to being served by larger agencies, because services are not tailored to their specific needs.
- There is an internalized American approach to services that should be evaluated.
- Many mental health treatment models rely on the client's capacity to speak and write in English. Such models need to be evaluated.

### Suggestions

- Consider more programming initiated by refugees.
- Build the capacity of refugees to meet their own needs. What are the skills that will meet such needs?
- Consider faith-based programs and how to use their resources.

Forum participants also provided written feedback. When asked which findings they were interested in exploring further, they identified the following areas:

- Bridge the gap between refugee families and service providers according to the needs and services identified by the families.
- Promote cultural understanding of new immigrant groups and encourage parent involvement.
- Build ethnic communities and enhance their support systems.
- Understand the nature of transition: How do people get to feel "at home" or not?
- Serve students of various ethnic backgrounds.
- Encourage agency collaboration.
- Identify cultural differences between American child-rearing practices and those of the diverse range of ethnic refugee communities.
- Provide more educational opportunities and involvement in child's education
- Identify economic forces' influence on engagement and disengagement in services.

Forum participants were also asked which areas involving refugee parents they were interested in exploring further. They identified the following areas:

<b>Language</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Cultural Barriers</b>	<b>Other</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreters/translators</li> <li>• Transportation to classes</li> <li>• Language training, including time to attend classes</li> <li>• Improved ESL class availability ("24 hours a day, 7 days a week")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support groups</li> <li>• Community-based support for families</li> <li>• Support for mutual assistance associations</li> <li>• Spiritual support</li> <li>• Support for refugee parents' roles</li> <li>• Support systems</li> <li>• Mental health resources</li> <li>• Help with adjustment issues</li> <li>• Informal support through friendships with cross-culturally sensitive U.S. citizens (culture brokers)</li> <li>• More community-based ethnic organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of relationships between parent leaders and leaders from school systems and other ethnic agencies.</li> <li>• Creation of different PTA subgroups</li> <li>• Orientation to U.S. education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction of gatekeeper barriers</li> <li>• Support with learning the "system," including the health care system</li> <li>• Culturally appropriate venues</li> <li>• Alternative parenting discipline systems</li> <li>• Need to be understood culturally—deeply and qualitatively</li> <li>• Training for service providers to learn to work with other cultures</li> <li>• Encouraging more friendships between refugees and their neighbors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation to events</li> <li>• More community-based programs</li> <li>• Orientation to the city</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Jobs and job training</li> <li>• More sociopolitical engagement to change their conditions; work for economic betterment</li> <li>• Community-based strength building</li> <li>• Additional resettlement time before becoming self-supporting</li> </ul>

- Increasing refugee parents' sense of competency and confidence; addressing their concerns about family dynamics
- Providing more programs and outreach
- Conducting outreach to ethnic cultures to encourage them to verbalize their specific needs
- Examining the effects of economic injustices (low-paying, insecure employment, poor-to-no benefits, lack of transportation, cultural conflicts, dominant Western values) on refugees

As service providers, participants expressed interest in a variety of efforts they could undertake to improve their services to refugee populations:

- Provide free space so that groups can meet and do their own thing.
- Conduct training to address culture-specific services, improve cultural competency.
- Develop a better social service delivery model.
- Explore how the education system serves parents and provides services to various ethnic groups.
- Develop ways to support families and build on family strengths.
- Analyze structural impediments to engagement (e.g., Why are refugee parents not given adequate time to learn English before becoming self-supportive?).

Participants also identified several areas of critical need (Table 4.3).

Most participants suggested that the needs assessment could best be used as a springboard for expanding funding and programming possibilities and in combination with other studies and resources in mapping out the needs of specific ethnic groups. Other ideas were to use the needs assessment to examine the interaction of agency culture and ethnic groups, to stimulate need research on refugee populations and greater cross-cultural advocacy, and to focus on assets and coping strategies of refugees.

Table 4.4 Responses From Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Afghanistan				
Topic	Parents		Youth	
Cultural Differences	<p>Afghanistan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “No rights for women” in Afghanistan after the war</li> <li>• Experienced name calling in Germany</li> <li>• Respect for parents and teachers was higher in Afghanistan</li> <li>• People in urban areas were educated in Afghanistan</li> <li>• Children live with parents for a long time</li> </ul>	<p>United States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The US is a very progressive country</li> <li>• Culturally diverse</li> <li>• No racial and religious discrimination</li> <li>• “Protection from police” in the U.S.</li> <li>• “Gender equality” in the U.S.</li> <li>• Cannot physically punish children</li> <li>• Use “silent treatment” since parents cannot spank children</li> </ul>	<p>Afghanistan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The country was in the war</li> <li>• No access to TV</li> <li>• Men had to have beards and women had to cover themselves</li> <li>• Boys had to shave their heads</li> <li>• Fear of going to military service</li> </ul>	<p>United States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very progressive and standard of living is high</li> <li>• More freedom</li> </ul>
School System	<p>Afghanistan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental involvement with school was limited in Afghanistan</li> <li>• School was better in Afghanistan</li> <li>• Grades were decided by students’ qualification not by age</li> <li>• Physical punishment to students and even parents couldn’t object</li> </ul>	<p>United States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other students hit Afghan kids, but no action taken by school</li> <li>• Students talk back to teachers in the U.S.</li> <li>• Children feel free</li> <li>• There are more activities at school</li> <li>• Language is a problem for some kids but parents cannot help</li> <li>• School is not challenging for kids</li> <li>• Too many films and very few books</li> </ul>	<p>Afghanistan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers do not pay attention to children</li> <li>• Studied on the floor, no light, no window glass</li> <li>• Boys went to work before going to school in the morning</li> <li>• Strict rules at school</li> <li>• Teachers punish students</li> <li>• Grades are decided according to students’ talent</li> <li>• Two major exams a year</li> </ul>	<p>United States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers pay lot of attention to students</li> <li>• Desks and chairs are nice</li> <li>• Students do not have to work</li> <li>• Teachers want parent to get involved</li> <li>• There are weekly tests</li> <li>• More subjects to learn</li> </ul>
Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbors and relatives support each other in Afghanistan; people support each other more, visit each other there</li> <li>• Cannot trust all caseworkers</li> <li>• Caseworkers may not be sympathetic and do not offer support</li> <li>• Neighbors are mostly Afghans here</li> <li>• Neighbors are too busy to make friends</li> <li>• Neighborhood is better in South City than North City</li> <li>• Police are quick, but it is not culturally good to call police</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police come to protect people</li> <li>• Bosnian kids are good friends</li> <li>• Parents use interpreters</li> </ul>	

<b>Table 4.4 (continued)</b>		
<b>Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Afghanistan</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Youth</b>
Barriers and Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult transition; coming from a country with 30 years of war</li> <li>• Education is expensive, so cannot send children to college</li> <li>• Lack of English competency; want to learn English, but do not have time to do so</li> <li>• Supply of Medicaid and food stamp is too short</li> <li>• Job does not provide good pay</li> <li>• The law protects children, and children take advantage of it</li> <li>• Children learn bad things from other American kids</li> <li>• “Poor public transportation” causes tardiness to work</li> <li>• Medicaid does not cover everything (e.g., dental problem)</li> <li>• “Appointment system” does not work in case of an emergency</li> <li>• Having to do a job that they never did before</li> <li>• Suffer from trauma</li> <li>• Difficulty with having to start working immediately, especially for women</li> <li>• Have to do everything through interpreters</li> <li>• Having to take things given to them (job, place to live, interpreters, etc.)</li> <li>• No energy to have one’s own life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to make an appointment to see a doctor when sick</li> <li>• Hospital is expensive</li> <li>• English is a problem</li> <li>• Lower grade might be better for some kids</li> <li>• English and social studies are difficult</li> <li>• Could not go to see a doctor when sick because mother did not have a car and she could not make an appointment in English</li> <li>• Parents cannot speak English</li> <li>• Food Stamps and Medicaid are not enough for parents</li> <li>• Mother has to take a hard job, she stopped working in Afghanistan during Taliban</li> </ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supply of Medicaid and food stamps should be 2 years while learning English</li> <li>• More support in the beginning</li> <li>• English teachers should pay individual visits to parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents need more English lessons</li> <li>• Physically less demanding job</li> <li>• More food stamps and longer Medicaid</li> <li>• Better transportation</li> <li>• Classes so that kids do not forget their own language</li> </ul>

**Table 4.5  
Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Africa\***

Topic	Parents		Youth	
	Africa	United States	Africa	United States
Cultural Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congo is an underdeveloped country</li> <li>• People are morally oriented there</li> <li>• Kids respect their parents</li> <li>• Parents spent more time with kids</li> <li>• Term "family" extends to a "clan"</li> <li>• Religion is almost daily life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Americans have problems because they do not have strong morals, they are lazy because things are easy.</li> <li>• More opportunities</li> <li>• Kids have good education</li> <li>• Surprised to see homeless people</li> <li>• Children and women have too much freedom; kids do not respect parents.</li> <li>• Americans do not have much time to spend with their children</li> <li>• Americans ask rude questions</li> <li>• Homosexuality is accepted</li> <li>• Some Americans are prejudiced against African refugees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers don't work</li> <li>• Children respect parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City is big</li> <li>• Food is different</li> <li>• Children argue with parents Children like to fight</li> <li>• Have to lock the door all the time</li> <li>• Diversity of people</li> <li>• Parents do not strike their children</li> <li>• Early curfew at night</li> <li>• Children have more freedom</li> </ul>
School System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Africa</li> <li>• If students fail the exam, they repeat the same grade in Congo</li> <li>• Kids learn more subjects about world history</li> <li>• Kids respect teachers and other students</li> <li>• Teachers are second parents</li> <li>• People do not respect the law</li> <li>• Parents make sacrifice for children's education</li> <li>• Parents were involved with school in finding books and supplies</li> <li>• The government does not put priority on education</li> <li>• Teachers are not paid so the level was lower</li> <li>• Teachers teach religion</li> <li>• Lack of good facilities and books</li> <li>• Police are not paid well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United States</li> <li>• More opportunities and better facilities</li> <li>• Education does not prepare individuals well; educational system is not uniform. Sending children to school is expensive.</li> <li>• Teachers label refugee children as not being able to speak English</li> <li>• Schools do not teach moral issues; schools give children freedom but not discipline. Children learn problems at school. Teachers do not emphasize religion.</li> <li>• Police are everywhere and people respect them, but some police abuse their power. Some police treat Africans rudely because of their color.</li> <li>• Parents lose their authority because of the law, which protects children. The law interferes in their way of raising and disciplining children.</li> <li>• Good access to tutors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Africa</li> <li>• Teachers strike their students</li> <li>• Parents are not involved with school</li> <li>• Not many schools</li> <li>• Students wear uniforms</li> <li>• People get their legs cut when they steal</li> <li>• Parents don't get involved with school (Ethiopian)</li> <li>• Many people do not have jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United States</li> <li>• School education is good (Congolese) Teachers do not strike students</li> <li>• Students do not respect teachers</li> <li>• English, mathematics, and reading are difficult</li> <li>• Students go to reading teachers and counselors for help</li> <li>• Level of education is lower (Ethiopian)</li> <li>• Law is strict</li> <li>• Making new friends is difficult</li> <li>• Parents have to pay for field trips and lunch</li> <li>• More employment opportunities in general</li> <li>• More crimes</li> </ul>

**Table 4.5 (continued)  
Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Africa\***

Topic	Parents	Youth
Barriers and Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty with finding a good school</li> <li>• Do not have much time to do parenting.</li> <li>• Cannot help children with homework.</li> <li>• Caseworkers were helpful only in the beginning; several months after arrival, they have to be on their own</li> <li>• Making doctors appointments; waiting time in ER is too long</li> <li>• English is a major problem; cannot get their message across through interpreters</li> <li>• Americans do not understand their culture</li> <li>• Americans group African and African Americans as one</li> <li>• Being in a different culture with different language is hard for the elderly</li> <li>• Transportation is a major problem; bus is unsafe.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents have to work hard</li> <li>• Daycare is expensive</li> <li>• Parents cannot speak English (Congolese)</li> <li>• Due to language barriers, parents cannot get a job</li> <li>• Mothers are doing a tough job</li> <li>• Cannot find a baby sitter because it is expensive</li> <li>• Long waiting in an emergency room</li> <li>• Bus schedule is not accurate</li> <li>• Parents have a hard time looking for jobs</li> <li>• Students have difficulties with English</li> <li>• Bus system is difficult to learn</li> <li>• Have to have a car with five children</li> </ul>
Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Congo, community members supported each other</li> <li>• Here people turn to police for help</li> <li>• Do not trust daycare and it is expensive</li> <li>• Refugee-serving agencies were helpful</li> <li>• Provide help to those in Africa by sending money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lend money to each other among African friends</li> <li>• Limited interactions with neighbors</li> <li>• They don't like to live in the low-income housing area</li> <li>• The government has more financial support in the US than in Africa</li> <li>• Obtain support from housing authorities and the church</li> <li>• People show more respect to each other in Africa</li> <li>• They call police only for emergency or something very serious</li> <li>• Good to have parents who speak Ethiopian</li> </ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More organizations for African refugees, which understand their culture</li> <li>• More resources for the community</li> <li>• Assistance for family reunification</li> <li>• Community help especially for the elderly</li> <li>• Give the same job to husband and wife</li> <li>• Need a place where African refugees get together</li> <li>• Teach English slowly</li> </ul>	

\*The African focus groups contained participants from many countries in Africa. Only the Somali participants met in separate groups. Two focus groups had mixed populations of participants from Benin, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. It would have been difficult to separate information according to country responses because individually there was not enough information to make a substantial category, therefore the African focus groups are combined into one table.

Table 4.6 Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Bosnia		
Topic	Parents	Youth
Cultural Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More freedom in Bosnia than in the U.S. before the war</li> <li>• Children live with parents until they get married in Bosnia</li> <li>• It was safe in Bosnia before the war</li> <li>• After the war, economy is heading toward Western privatization</li> <li>• Now, different religious groups are creating mixed companies</li> </ul>	<p>Bosnia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bosnia was a free country</li> <li>• Houses were smaller in Bosnia</li> </ul>
School System	<p>Bosnia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniform system based upon children's age</li> <li>• Everybody knew each other at school</li> <li>• Had one teacher for all the subjects</li> <li>• Parents were able to see the teacher any time</li> <li>• Communities were smaller and tighter</li> <li>• More involvement of parents</li> <li>• Parents become friends</li> <li>• Children hang together after school</li> <li>• Safer places for children to play</li> <li>• Governments paid for all the activities for children at school</li> <li>• Quality of education was higher than in the U.S.</li> </ul>	<p>United States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for more physical education</li> <li>• Have to learn English by oneself</li> <li>• School is good</li> <li>• Difficult to make friends</li> </ul>

**Table 4.6 (continued)  
Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Bosnia**

Topic	Parents	Youth
Barriers and Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Language barrier"</li> <li>• Relying on children as interpreters (dentist, gynecologist, bank etc.)</li> <li>• Lack of good insurance</li> <li>• Afraid of losing Medicaid</li> <li>• Medicaid does not cover all necessary costs</li> <li>• National insurance for everybody in Bosnia</li> <li>• "Appointment system" is not convenient</li> <li>• Lack of "public transportation" (bus system is not good)</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge about the law creates insecurity coupled with language barrier</li> <li>• No time to go to school to study</li> <li>• Problems with transferring driving licenses and credentials</li> <li>• Lack of public transportation, needs for work, and language barrier create a vicious circle</li> <li>• "Having to do the job that one never did before" because of language</li> <li>• Afraid of being laid off</li> <li>• Children are protected by the law (hotline)</li> <li>• Children threaten parents to call police</li> <li>• "The 9-11 incident" made it difficult for immigrants to live here</li> <li>• Difficult place to live for the elderly</li> <li>• Having to "change our mentality to the American way"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents cannot speak English</li> </ul>



Table 4.6 (continued) Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Bosnia		
Topic	Parents	Youth
Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being dependent upon an interpreter makes one “feel disabled”</li> <li>• Using an interpreter is uncomfortable because you never know what is being said (subtle distrust)</li> <li>• Interpreter may misinterpret on purpose</li> <li>• Getting an interpreter is difficult especially at a small clinic</li> <li>• Some medical providers look at them strangely</li> <li>• Neighbors are Bosnians</li> <li>• “Afraid to ask for help”</li> <li>• In Bosnia, people get together more often, eat and talk together</li> <li>• Unable to obtain support from neighbors because they do not want to take responsibilities</li> <li>• If the school does not have an interpreter, they go to the International Institute to get one</li> <li>• Obtain information from the International Institute, from Bosnian radio station, from friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatives lived close and helped each other</li> </ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some after school activities because parents do not have time to look after them</li> <li>• More neighborhood community resources</li> </ul>	

<b>Table 4.7 Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Iraq</b>			
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Parents and Youth</b>		
Cultural Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything is big</li> <li>• Gender equality</li> <li>• Disrespect to others</li> <li>• Many diverse cultures in St. Louis</li> <li>• More freedom for children and different options. Parents expect their children to be independent</li> </ul>		
School System	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <p>Iraq</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English system</li> <li>• Boys and girls go to different schools</li> <li>• Uniforms</li> <li>• In the past, school provided lunch</li> <li>• Very few extra curricula activities</li> <li>• School is controlled by the Ministry of Education</li> <li>• More control by the government over school activities</li> <li>• Parents were not encouraged to get involved</li> <li>• People do not trust police</li> </ul> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <p>United States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of curriculum is below what was expected</li> <li>• Students show no respect to teachers Easy passing scores to go to next grade. Cheating is overlooked</li> <li>• Co-education. Girls are ridiculed because of head covers</li> <li>• Children curse at each other</li> <li>• Children are having difficulty with language and the new system</li> <li>• Drug and gang problems</li> <li>• Parents cannot communicate with teachers</li> <li>• Materials in the books are not familiar to their culture</li> <li>• Pork in lunch should be replaced with other meat</li> <li>• Law enforcement is visible. Police officers are more educated; people trust police.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Iraq</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English system</li> <li>• Boys and girls go to different schools</li> <li>• Uniforms</li> <li>• In the past, school provided lunch</li> <li>• Very few extra curricula activities</li> <li>• School is controlled by the Ministry of Education</li> <li>• More control by the government over school activities</li> <li>• Parents were not encouraged to get involved</li> <li>• People do not trust police</li> </ul>	<p>United States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of curriculum is below what was expected</li> <li>• Students show no respect to teachers Easy passing scores to go to next grade. Cheating is overlooked</li> <li>• Co-education. Girls are ridiculed because of head covers</li> <li>• Children curse at each other</li> <li>• Children are having difficulty with language and the new system</li> <li>• Drug and gang problems</li> <li>• Parents cannot communicate with teachers</li> <li>• Materials in the books are not familiar to their culture</li> <li>• Pork in lunch should be replaced with other meat</li> <li>• Law enforcement is visible. Police officers are more educated; people trust police.</li> </ul>
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Barriers and Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents cannot use corporal punishment</li> <li>• Interpreters do not speak good English and they do not know medical terminology</li> <li>• They own a car because the transportation system is not reliable</li> <li>• Have difficulties with making an appointment with doctors</li> <li>• Neighbors are too noisy</li> <li>• Have difficulty with trusting authority due to their history back home</li> </ul>		
Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family members support each other</li> <li>• Ask help from people in the mosque</li> <li>• Do not talk about sensitive issues</li> <li>• They ask assistance from the Institute and the Iraqi House</li> <li>• They sell each others' old cars and other necessities</li> <li>• Very limited interactions with neighbors</li> <li>• They share information regarding services</li> </ul>		
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach interpreters more medical knowledge because their translations are critical for decision making</li> <li>• Need for more qualified interpreters at hospitals</li> <li>• School teachers need to be educated in different cultures</li> </ul>		

Table 4.8 Responses from Parent and Youth Focus Groups: Vietnam			
Topic	Parents and Youth		
Cultural Differences	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>           Vietnam           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No freedom</li> <li>• Parents focus on children's welfare and academic success</li> <li>• Children live with parents till they get married</li> <li>• Government officials arrest people if they want</li> <li>• Children are obligated to follow their parents' will</li> </ul> </td> <td>           United States           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents give their children lots of freedom</li> <li>• More freedom (people can criticize the government)</li> <li>• People observe traffic rules</li> <li>• People obey the law</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table>	Vietnam <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No freedom</li> <li>• Parents focus on children's welfare and academic success</li> <li>• Children live with parents till they get married</li> <li>• Government officials arrest people if they want</li> <li>• Children are obligated to follow their parents' will</li> </ul>	United States <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents give their children lots of freedom</li> <li>• More freedom (people can criticize the government)</li> <li>• People observe traffic rules</li> <li>• People obey the law</li> </ul>
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School System	United States <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good facilities and supplies</li> <li>• School authorities are doing good job</li> <li>• Educational system is good</li> <li>• More freedom for students</li> <li>• More opportunities for education</li> <li>• Schools do not enforce rules</li> </ul>		
Barriers and Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with The U.S. system in general</li> <li>• Speaking in English; having to do everything through interpreters after living here many years</li> <li>• Lack of opportunity for career advancement</li> <li>• Harsh weather</li> <li>• Lack of public transportation</li> <li>• High medical costs; making an appointment to see a doctor</li> <li>• Students need more assistance to go through transition between old and new cultures</li> <li>• Parents high expectation for their children to follow their tradition lead to tragic results (run away, gang activities, suicides)</li> <li>• Children have "feeling of loss", being isolated both from Vietnamese and US cultures</li> <li>• Children feel "generation gap"</li> <li>• Parents want their children to follow their culture</li> <li>• Parents do not have road map for children</li> <li>• Having too much freedom is not good for children</li> <li>• Children are not interested in the struggles that parents went through</li> <li>• Children and parents have totally different lives</li> </ul>		
Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community has not come to grip with the problems that children face</li> </ul>		





**A**

**Appendixes**

# Appendix 1: Focus Group and Discussion Questions

## Cuyahoga County, Ohio

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### Discussion Guidelines for Decision Makers

1. From your agency's perspective, what would you consider the outstanding programs, services, and resources available for families and children in your locality? (Your response should speak to all populations, not just refugee populations.)
2. Of the programs, services and resources mentioned in the previous question, which program(s) target(s) newcomer/refugee populations and how frequently are these populations served?
3. What do you think are the challenges for newcomer/refugee populations?
4. What do you think are the challenges for newcomer/refugee youth and children?
5. What do you think are the challenges for service providers working with newcomer/ refugee populations?
6. In your opinion, what additional programs, services, and resources are needed for newcomer/ refugee youth and children?
7. In your opinion, what programs, services, and resources for newcomer/ refugee youth and children have a higher probability of being funded?

### Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. How have people from your country found the United States to be different than your country?
2. What would you like Americans to understand about people from your country that you think they misunderstand?
3. What have been the greatest challenges for the children and youth from your country?
4. What help have the people from your country been able to get for children and youth?
5. What help have people from your country tried to get for children and youth, but were unable to receive?
6. What specific ideas do you have or services would you suggest that would help to support children and youth from your country?
7. Is there anything else you would like us to know about your country and people that we might not have covered today?

## DeKalb County, Georgia

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### Focus Group Questions for Refugee Youth

1. How are the schools here in Atlanta different from the schools in your home countries?
  - Socially?
  - Behavior/discipline?
  - Teachers?
  - Communication with teachers/school staff?
2. What are some of the reasons you think refugee youth miss school or even leave school early?
3. How do you define success? What does it look like for you?
4. What do you feel gets in the way of youth succeeding?
5. What has helped refugee youth adjust to life in Atlanta?
  - Teachers?

- Organizations?
  - Parents/siblings?
  - Friends?
6. How do refugee youth learn about these services? How helpful do you think these services are?
  7. Is there anything else you would like to say that we didn't cover in our discussion?

### Questions for Refugee Parents

1. How have the schools here in Atlanta been different from the schools in your home countries?
  - Academically?
  - Socially?
  - Behavior/discipline?
  - Communication with teachers/school staff?
2. How do you feel refugee youth are doing in schools here?
  - Academically?
  - Socially?
  - Behavior/discipline?
  - Communication with teachers/school staff?
3. How do you hear about things related to your child?
  - Communication with the school?
  - Through your child?
  - Friends/relatives?
- 3a. Are these communication methods working?
4. How do you define success for your children?
5. What do you think gets in the way of refugee youth achieving success ?
6. What support services would you like to see to help refugee youth to be successful in this country?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say that we didn't cover in our discussion today?

## St. Louis, Missouri

### Focus Group Questions for Youth

1. How have you found the United States to be different from your country?
  - a. What have been some surprises you or your peers faced when you arrived in the U.S.?
  - b. How are schools different here?
  - c. How do American parents seem to raise their children different from parents in your community?
  - d. How is law enforcement different here?
2. What are some of the ways that people from your country of origin support each other?
  - a. If someone needed help, who would they go to?
  - b. When would someone call the police?
  - c. When would someone go to the hospital?
3. Can you talk about how your parents were involved in schools in your country of origin and how they are involved here with the schools?
4. Tell us about your own experiences with schools here in St. Louis.
  - a. What has been difficult?

- b. If you have difficulties in school, who do you talk to?
5. As you see it, what are some of the challenges your parents have in adjusting to their new life in the U.S.? Are there particular challenges you know of in the following categories?
  - a. Working with interpreters?
  - b. Going to the doctor?
  - c. Figuring out the bus system?
  - d. Understanding your neighbors?
  - e. Finding services for you or brothers and sisters?
  - f. Looking for a job?
  - g. Other?
6. What are some ways you think your parents would feel more supported here?
  - a. What would make their daily life easier?
7. Is there anything else you would like us to know that we might not have covered in our discussion today?

### **Focus Group Questions for Parents**

1. How have you found the United States to be different from your country?
  - a. What have been some surprises you or your peers faced when you arrived in the U.S.?
  - b. How are schools different here?
  - c. How do American parents seem to raise their children different from parents in your community?
  - d. How is law enforcement different here?
2. What are some of the ways that people from your country of origin support each other?
  - a. If someone needed help, who would they go to?
  - b. When would someone call the police?
  - c. When would someone go to the hospital?
3. Can we talk about how the schools in your country of origin supported parents?
4. Tell us about your own experiences with schools here in St. Louis.
  - a. What has been difficult?
5. What are some of the challenges you or someone you know has experienced here when:
  - a. Working with interpreters?
  - b. Going to the doctor?
  - c. Figuring out the bus system?
  - d. Understanding your neighbors?
  - e. Finding services for your children?
  - f. Looking for a job?
  - g. Other?
6. What are some ways you think your parents would feel more supported here?
  - a. What would make your life easier?
7. Is there anything else you would like us to know about your community that we might not have covered in our discussion today?



# Appendix 2: Online Assessment Tools

## Cuyahoga County Online Assessment Tool

1. Is your organization currently serving in the communities below? (check all that apply)

- Parma
- Lakewood
- East Cleveland
- Mayfield
- Cleveland

Children (0-11), Youth (12-17), Adults (18+)

Interpretation Translation  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Medical  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

2. Do you currently provide services to any of the following populations? (Yes or No)

- a. Afghans
- b. Bosnians
- c. Cambodians
- d. Croatians
- e. Serbs
- f. Ukrainians
- g. Liberian
- h. Ethiopian
- i. Russian Jews
- j. Iraqi and Arab Communities
- k. Kosovar Albanians
- l. Vietnamese

Legal  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Education  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Mental Health  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Domestic Violence  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Cultural Adjustment  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

3. For each population group you currently DO NOT provide services for, please tell us why:

- lack of funding
- lack of resources
- no contact
- not eligible
- not sure
- other

Substance Abuse  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Family Support  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

4. What types of service(s) does your organization PROVIDE (Provide service directly to client), REFER (call and/or send client to another agency for service), or CONTRACT (have a contractual agreement and/or memorandum of understanding with another agency for service provision)? If you REFER or CONTRACT, Please specify to which organization(s)

Employment  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Recreation  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Court Diversion  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

Other  
 \_ Provide \_ Refer \_ Contract  
 \_ Children \_ Youth \_ Adult

**5. What prevention service/supports are you able to offer to refugee youth? (Check ALL that apply.)**

GED  
 Vocational Training  
 Youth Employment  
 Counseling to Stay in School  
 Diversion  
 Tutoring  
 Recreational Programs  
 Substance Abuse Prevention  
 Mentoring  
 Sports  
 Camps  
 Youth Leadership  
 Bilingual Programs  
 After School Activities  
 Substance Abuse Counseling  
 Workforce Development-Workforce Investment Act Programs  
 English as a Second Language Classes  
 Other

**6. Do refugee youth tend to participate in these programs? Why or why not?**

**7. Does your organization's staff training include topics on refugee populations? If YES, how frequently have you provided training on this subject?**

Once quite a while ago  
 Once per year  
 Several times per year  
 Regularly (If regularly, please define)

**8. Have you had to have children interpret for adults? If YES, for what situations have you had to have children interpret for adults? (Check ALL that apply.)**

Legal  
 Education Information  
 Substance Abuse  
 Family Issues  
 Medical  
 Mental Health  
 Cultural Adjustment  
 Domestic Violence  
 Employment  
 Recreational Activities (i.e., school dances, field trips, events)

**9. As a service provider, what are your greatest strengths when working with refugee youth and children?**

**10. As a service provider, what are your greatest challenges when working with refugee youth and children?**

**11. What are your organization's greatest strengths when working with refugee youth and children?**

**12. What are your organization's greatest barriers to working with refugee youth and children?**

**13. What specific suggestions would you make that would help support refugee youth?**

## DeKalb County Online Assessment Tool

### Organization Info

**1. Type of agency:**

- Advocacy Organization
- Public Child Welfare
- Education Public School
- Employment
- Health Program
- Juvenile Justice
- Law Enforcement
- Mutual Assistance
- Association/Ethnic Organization
- Resettlement Agency
- Youth program
- Other

**2. Position in agency :**

**3. How many years at agency?**

- 0-2 years
- 3-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 20 or more years

**4. How many years in current field of work?**

- 0-2 years
- 3-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 20 or more years

**5. Geographic area(s) your agency serves? (Please select all that apply.)**

- Clayton County
- Cobb County
- DeKalb County
- Fulton County
- Gwinnett County
- Henry County

**6. What services does your agency currently provide for youth and children? (Please select all that apply.)**

- Tutoring
- Education/Classes
- After school program
- Job Placement/Training
- Counseling
- Recreation/Sports (If not after school program)
- Social/Cultural (If not after school program)
- Case Management
- Referrals

**7. Please list below the agencies you are refer youth and children to:**

- Leadership
- Child Care
- Crime Prevention
- Other

**8. Does your agency currently provide services to any of the refugee populations listed below? If yes, please check the appropriate boxes listed next to the respective countries.**

Country	Child (0-12)	Youth (13-18)	How Frequent? (Very Rarely, Rarely, Occasionally, Frequently, Very Frequently)
Afghanistan			
Bosnia			
Burma			
Burundi			
Croatia			
Cuba			
Ethiopia			
Ghana			
Guinea			
Haiti			
Iran			
Iraq			
Lebanon			
Liberia			
Nigeria			
Pakistan			
Russia			
Rwanda			
Serbia			
Sierra			
Leone			
Somalia			
Sudan			
Syria			
Togo			
Ukraine			
Vietnam			
Zaire			

**9. The frequency estimates you selected in question 8 are taken from ... (Please select all that apply.)**

- Data collected at your agency  
 From approximate estimates

**10. What would you identify as the particular challenges of the refugee youth (13–20 years old) you serve? (Please select all that apply.)**

- Particular Challenges  
 Cultural Differences  
 Language Barriers  
 Lack of Resources/Programs  
 Racism/Discrimination  
 Lack of Communication  
 Isolation  
 Disappointment/Disillusionment  
 Other Pressures  
 Medical  
 Other

**11. Of the youth coming from the countries listed in Question 8, what are the particular strengths of the refugee youth (13–20 years old)? (When possible, please list the refugee populations you are referring to.)**

**All Service Providers**

**1. Please rate your ability to adequately meet the service needs of refugee youth and children?**

- Poor  
 Fair  
 Good  
 Very Good  
 Excellent

**2. What would you identify as the particular challenges in providing services for refugee youth? (Please select all that apply.)**

- Lack of expertise within agency to serve refugee youth  
 Lack of funding  
 Lack of information on the particular needs of refugee youth  
 Lack of interest from refugee youth  
 Lack of interest of parents of refugee youth  
 Lack of participation  
 Lack of staff

- Not enough outreach/engagement in refugee youth community  
 Translation/Interpretation  
 Transportation

**3. What would you recommend to strengthen service capacity for refugee youth on an agency level?**

**4. What would your recommend to strengthen service capacity for refugee youth on a community level?**

**5. What is the likelihood of your agency collaborating/partnering with other agencies in this area of services for youth and children?**

- Very Rarely  
 Rarely  
 Occasionally  
 Frequently  
 Very Frequently

**6. What are the barriers in your agency for increasing agency collaboration and partnership? (Please select all that apply.)**

- Transportation  
 Lack of Funding  
 Cultural Differences  
 Difference in Agency Protocol/Policy  
 Other

**7. Are there additional questions/comments you have in the area of serving refugee youth?**

# St. Louis Online Assessment Tool

## Demographic Questions

### 1. Type of Agency:

- Advocacy Organization
- Public Child Welfare Agency
- Education Public School
- Education-Based Program (ESL, life skills, etc.)
- Employment
- Health Program
- Juvenile Justice
- Law Enforcement
- Mutual Assistance Association/Ethnic Organization
- Resettlement Agency
- Social Service Agency/Family Service Agency
- Youth Program
- Other

### 2. What is your title at your agency?

- Director
- Supervisor
- Program Coordinator
- Case Manager
- Teacher
- Other

### 3. How many years have you been working at your agency?

Less than 1, 1-40, 40+

### 4. How many years in current field of work?

Less than 1, 1-40, 40+

### 5. Which geographic area(s) does your agency serve? (Click as many as appropriate)

- Jefferson County
- Franklin County
- St. Charles County
- St. Louis City
- St. Louis County
- St. Claire County (Illinois)
- Other

### 6. Population(s) your agency serves. (Click on all that apply.)

Country	Children (0-11)	Youth (12-18)	Adults
Afghanistan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bosnia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Burma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Burundi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Croatia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cuba	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ethiopia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ghana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guinea	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Haiti	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Iran	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Iraq	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lebanon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Liberia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nigeria	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Russia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rwanda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serbia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sierra Leone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somalia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sudan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Syria	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Togo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ukraine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vietnam	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Zaire	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 7. Rate how much direct engagement you have in your work with refugee parents.

- Very low
- Low
- Average
- Above Average
- High

8. In the following list, check “Yes” if your agency offers the service (check all that apply). Check “No” if your agency does not offer the service in the list (check all that apply). For each service that your agency does offer, please rate refugee parents’ participation at your agency by selecting a choice from the drop-down menu. (Please select very low, low, average, above average, or high.)

Services	Yes	No	Parents’ Participation
Employment			
Education/Adult Education			
Education/ESL Classes			
Family Services/Case Management			
Interpretation/Translation			
Medical/Health			
Legal			
Parent Support Programs			
Respite Program			
Parenting Classes			
Parent Empowerment			
Other			

9. What do you think are the top three factors causing low levels of parent participation? (Please select only three.)

- Transportation
- Time
- Expense
- Childcare
- Uninformed about program
- Language
- Location
- Program doesn’t match refugee parent’s educational level
- Lack of interest
- Other

10. In your opinion, what factors do you think increase refugee parent participation in your program? (Please select three you think are most important.)

- Transportation provided
- Flexible scheduling
- Low/No cost involved
- Childcare provided
- Individual outreach to parents
- Interpreter
- Translated materials
- Incentives for participation
- Bringing children into the program
- Close proximity to one’s neighborhood
- Suitable to educational level
- Mandatory program
- Other

11. In your opinion, what are the top three challenges for refugee parents as they arrive in St. Louis? (Please rank your choices.)

- Language
- Lack of employment
- Working two or more jobs
- Lack of adequate job training
- Understanding transportation system
- Lack of adequate transportation
- Lack of childcare programs
- Lack of affordable childcare programs
- Community orientation
- Isolation
- Mental health
- Their role as parents in new culture
- Lack of knowledge about American system in general
- Other

12. In your opinion, what are the top three challenges for refugee parents after their first year?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

13. What would you consider the impact on youth and children when parents are less engaged?

14. What would you recommend to enhance parent participation?

## Appendix 3: Suggested Readings

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