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BRYCS BRIEF

Fall 2011

Giving Young Refugee Children a Head Start

"I feel very happy today because she got a better opportunity in Head Start...In the beginning she didn't speak much, now she speaks English. I'm very sure it's the reason for her improvement." (Refugee parent)

"It's been life changing, not only for the children but for me and the staff...Our political views, spiritual views and religious views were changed by these babies, and everything we thought we knew we had to throw out the window." (Head Start parent advocate).¹

These statements from a Bhutanese refugee parent and a Head Start staff member illustrate just some of the extraordinary benefits that can result when refugee resettlement and Head Start programs work together. Other advantages reported by resettlement agencies include ready access to center-based early childhood development services, enabling refugee parents to go to work more quickly after arrival in the U.S.; comprehensive assessment and services for the whole family, including education, nutrition, and health/mental health care; and even

Head Start has a long history of serving linguistically diverse populations. More than 140 languages are spoken by Head Start children and families. Almost 3 in 10 children entering Head Start speak a home language other than English. Those numbers have been growing in recent years.²

employment of some refugee parents by Head Start agencies. Virtually all refugee parents with children up to five years of age will meet the income-based eligibility requirements for Head Start services when they first arrive in the U.S. Since Head Start programs emphasize responsiveness to the growing culturally and linguistically diverse communities in this country, the benefits of a partnership between refugee resettlement and Head Start agencies are clear.

For this reason, [BRYCS](http://www.brycs.org) (a program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and national technical assistance provider for the Office of Refugee Resettlement) and the [National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, or NCCLR](http://www.nccclr.org) (national technical assistance provider for the Office of Head Start and a program of [Bank Street College of Education](http://www.bankstreet.edu) and [Education Development Center, Inc.](http://www.educationdevelopmentcenter.com)) are working together to improve ready access to Head Start services for newly arrived refugee children and families by promoting collaboration between local refugee resettlement and Head Start programs.

¹ Davis, V. (May 26, 2011). Onward to kindergarten: Refugees from all over the world move on to next step after a Culebra Head Start. *San Antonio Express*. Retrieved from <http://www.mysanantonio.com/community/article/Onward-to-kindergarten-1389280.php#ixzz1WEohzUNK>.

² Early Head Start National Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE (2009). Revisiting and Updating the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five. Washington, D.C.: Office of Head Start. Retrieved from [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/ta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/ecd/culture and diversity/manage_pub_00602a1_092305.html](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/ta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/ecd/culture%20and%20diversity/manage_pub_00602a1_092305.html) (page 8).

About Head Start

[Head Start](#) has served low-income children, ages three to five, since 1965, with the goal of literally giving them a “head start” in school by providing early and comprehensive services, including education, nutrition, and health and mental health care. Early Head Start, established in 1995, serves pregnant women and children up to three years old, so that all low-income children up to five years old are currently covered during these critical developmental years. In addition to serving children, Head Start makes engaging their parents and families a priority. Parents are involved in a variety of roles: in their children’s learning, as program staff, in administering programs, and as volunteers. Head Start also supports parents in pursuing their own educational, literacy, and employment goals. In addition, Early Head Start programs provide parenting education and other self-sufficiency services for families.

Head Start currently funds 1600 local public and private agencies across the U.S. to provide services in ways that reflect the needs of their local communities. Most Head Start programs are located in community-based non-profit organizations; less than one-third are part of local government agencies or school systems, and a few are managed by local for-profit agencies.³

Throughout its history, Head Start has promoted adaptation of local programs to their culturally diverse communities. The Office of Head Start recently updated their original 1991 publication, *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs*. These current principles outline expectations for respecting and valuing each child and family’s unique background and culture; improving outreach and quality of services to diverse communities; promoting the continued development of the first language while supporting English acquisition; hiring staff that reflect and are responsive to the communities they serve; and achieving outcomes in cognitive and social development through services that are culturally and linguistically responsive at all levels. See the [Revisited and Updated Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs](#) for more information.

Connecting the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Service Providers and Head Start Programs

The Federal [Office of Refugee Resettlement](#) (ORR) emphasizes collaboration with other Administration for Children and Families/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ACF/DHHS) agencies that share ORR’s mission:

*Founded on the belief that newly arriving populations have inherent capabilities when given opportunities, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides people in need with critical resources to assist them in becoming integrated members of American society.*⁴

To facilitate coordination with Head Start programs, ORR has developed a [Web page](#) devoted to this effort.

BRYCS: Building Bridges across Service Systems

Since 2001, BRYCS has emphasized “bridging refugee and children’s services” to promote the well-being and successful integration of refugee children and their families as our newest Americans. For many reasons—including limited funding, different legislative mandates, and cultural and linguistic barriers—refugee resettlement and “mainstream” service systems often work in isolation from each other, resulting in barriers to culturally responsive services for refugees. In past years, BRYCS has addressed these gaps by developing and implementing a collaboration model in a number of communities. The BRYCS publication, [Building Bridges: A Cross-Service Training Guide](#), developed with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, presents this collaboration model with a broad focus on child welfare, including tools and case studies that can be used by communities.⁵ In 2008, BRYCS piloted a [collaboration model](#) for ORR’s Division of Unaccompanied Children’s Services, where residential programs worked together with local Child Protection Services to provide trainings. Through BRYCS’ technical assistance to ORR’s [Refugee School Impact Grant \(RSIG\) program](#), BRYCS has developed an additional [collaboration tool](#) to support refugee resettlement and school systems working together.

This year, BRYCS and the NCCLR will develop materials and other strategies to support collaboration between refugee resettlement and Head Start programs. Look for our Web page this fall that will serve as a “communications center” for this effort, including announcements, a discussion list, and other useful resources. In the meantime, please [contact us](#) with any suggestions!

³ Office of Head Start Web site, “About Head Start”, retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/About%20Head%20Start>.

⁴ Office of Refugee Resettlement Web site, “Mission”, retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/about/mission.htm>.

⁵ For an example of this model in action, see Morland, Duncan, Hoebing, Kirschke, & Schmidt (2005). Bridging refugee youth and children’s services: a case study of cross-service training. *Child Welfare*,84(5):791-812.



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Promising Practices

A Model for Successful Collaboration: Family Services Association (FSA) Head Start Program and Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of San Antonio, Refugee Resettlement Program

Family Services Association (FSA), a multi-service non-profit agency serving the San Antonio, Texas area, began working together with the San Antonio Catholic Charities' refugee resettlement program in 2009 to increase access to FSA-based Head Start services for young refugee children and their families. After enrolling 35 refugee children in Head Start the first year, over 70 refugee children were enrolled in 2010, and this very successful collaboration is still in operation today. Two Head Start parent advocates (one, a special education expert and the other a refugee parent from Iraq) have served as key contacts for Catholic Charities' refugee resettlement program. The refugee resettlement agency provided the Head Start program with the cultural and linguistic resources it needed to serve its increasingly diverse local community. Through Head Start, refugee children and families received additional services, including nutritional support and education, parenting orientation, rent assistance, and health and mental health care, particularly for children with special needs. In addition to boosting employment of newly-arrived refugees by providing home-based or center-based options to these families, the Head Start program also hired seven refugees as interpreters and cultural brokers to assist children and families during their transition to the program. These interpreters accompanied the refugee children by bus to the Head Start program and then supported them throughout the day. These strategies have successfully addressed cultural and linguistic barriers to Head Start services for refugee families, resulting in improved school readiness for young refugee children and increased employment opportunities for their parents. For more details and contact information for this program, please see the [program description](#).

To learn about other innovative ways that refugee resettlement and Head Start programs are working together across the country, see these two newly-updated [Promising Practices](#) from the BRYCS database:

- [Immigration and Refugee Assistance Transitional Childcare, Catholic Charities of Buffalo \(NY\)](#): This resettlement program created within its offices a “transitional childcare” program to help newly-arrived refugee families become comfortable with center-based childcare. While parents attend ESL classes on-site, their children attend the childcare program. Parents can observe their children through a window and share break times with them. Youngsters learn the structure and routines of a childcare center, and parents become familiar with this new childcare method. After 6-8 weeks, children are transitioned into the local Head Start program.
- [Head Start Enrollment, Catholic Social Services of Charlotte \(NC\)](#): Catholic Social Services' refugee resettlement program developed an orientation and referral relationship with a local Head Start program. Refugee families with children ages three and four were given a special orientation to the Head Start program, and transportation to the program, which children attended while their parents were engaged in ESL classes.

See BRYCS' [Highlighted Resources: Giving Young Refugee Children a Head Start](#) for up-to-date resources and research related to this topic.

BRYCS publications on refugee children, youth, and families can be found on our [Publications](#) page. You can also use our Google-type search to find the resources you need in the BRYCS [Clearinghouse](#).

For technical assistance on partnerships between refugee resettlement and Head Start programs, [contact BRYCS](#).