



OCTOBER 2004 SPOTLIGHT:

Refugee Youth and the Juvenile Justice System

This month's **BRYCS Spotlight** is a collaborative effort between BRYCS and **Outreach to New Americans of the National Crime Prevention Council**. **BRYCS would like to thank Jessica Sandoval, ONA, who authored this spotlight.**

Refugee youth in the United States often find adapting to a new environment, language, and culture can present frustrating obstacles, in addition to the everyday issues of just being a young person. Despite these barriers and frustrations, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of refugee youth do successfully adjust to their new home. The misperception that ethnic youth are more at risk for problem behaviors than other young people, reinforced in public perception by entertainment and other mass media, can have negative consequences for young refugees.

However, refugee youth do come into contact with the juvenile justice system, sometimes due to serious crimes, and it is important to understand why some refugee youth may be more at risk than others.

Risk factors

There are a number of factors that can heighten the risk of any young person coming in contact with the juvenile justice system: poverty, living in a dangerous neighborhood, family breakdowns, among others. Additional risk factors for refugee youth include:

- Refugee youth may be relocating without parental support either because they were separated from their family in the relocation process, or because other family members are dealing with their own resettlement issues.
- Refugees, by definition, have "a well-founded fear of persecution" in their homelands, and many have had profoundly negative experiences with authorities. Consequently, refugees may have a heightened perception of their own risk, and may see little reason to trust authority.
- Refugee youth may not know their civil and legal rights and responsibilities in the United States.

Recommendations and resources

As with any early intervention, prevention is the best option. These prevention strategies should consider factors of trauma, family loss/separation, and cultural differences. Refugee youth especially need meaningful connections with caring adults and peers, school, and community.

Service providers working in the youth services field and refugee resettlement can access more information about the juvenile justice system in this month's Featured Search and through the following web sites:

The Youth as Resources (YAR) program (www.yar.org) provides grants to young people to design and carry out service projects that address a clear community need. Popular issues range from health, housing, education, and the environment to drugs, gangs, illiteracy, and crime. The youth are the key leaders and decision-makers in implementing their idea.

Outreach to New Americans (www.ncpc.org) promotes partnerships between refugee communities and law enforcement agencies to address the problem of crime and crime victimization in refugee

communities. ONA provides training and technical assistance through visits to communities at little or no cost as well as by telephone and mail. ONA also helps develop and strengthen broad-based community coalitions involving refugees and immigrants. ONA is a collaborative project of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC). ONA works in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs (OJP).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) (<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>)

“collaborates with professionals from diverse disciplines to improve juvenile justice policies and practices. OJJDP sponsors research, program, and training initiatives; sets policies to guide federal juvenile justice issues; disseminates information about juvenile justice issues; and awards funds to states to support local programming nationwide.”

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) (www.cwla.org) is the nation’s oldest and largest child welfare organization. In June 2005 CWLA will hold a national symposium, *Joining Forces for Better Outcomes*, in Miami.

“The symposium will focus on integration and coordination of Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare as an important aspect of working to better serve our nation’s children. This national symposium will provide a unique cross-system opportunity for information sharing, networking and collective learning.”

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) (<http://www.cmy.net.au>) is an **Australian** statewide community-based organization that aims to strengthen and build innovative partnerships between young people, support services and the community to enhance life opportunities for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds.

Their Web site features many useful resources at www.cmy.net.au/PublicationsandResources.