

**Foster Care at a Cultural Crossroads:
Refugee Children
in the
Public Foster Care System**

Roundtable Report

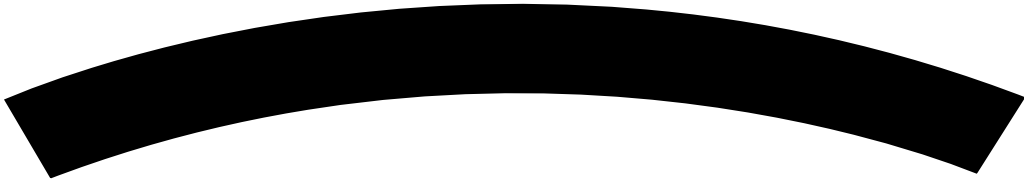
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1. Introduction

Foster care for refugee children who enter the public child welfare system is too often a nightmare of confusion for everyone involved: the child, the birth family, the foster caregiver, and the social service providers who are trying to provide safety in a culturally sensitive manner.

In an effort to develop ideas for supporting refugee children in public foster care, the BRYCS project convened a Roundtable meeting July 20–22, 2003, in Washington, DC. The meeting brought together representatives of refugee communities, refugee-serving agencies, and the foster care system. The first national gathering of its kind, the Roundtable exposed national leaders in child welfare to the concerns of refugee community members and service providers and gave refugee community leaders tools and strategies for working with their local child welfare systems.

The idea for the Roundtable grew out of two BRYCS projects: (1) work in two cities where BRYCS piloted a cross-service training methodology for public child welfare staff and refugee-serving agencies and (2) discussions about promising practices with existing federally funded refugee foster care programs. In addition, BRYCS has conducted an analysis of federal and state laws and regulations, as well as accreditation standards, that are relevant to refugee child welfare. As a result of these projects, BRYCS staff saw the need to bring together ethnic leaders and representatives from public and national child welfare organizations in order to

- educate each other on existing needs and services,
- brainstorm new ways to be of assistance to one another in order to be better resources to refugee children in public foster care, and
- generate future action on the local level.

Roundtable presenters confirmed the interest of federal, state, and county governments in this topic; described the involvement of key national organizations in addressing this issue; and brought forward the critical work of local nonprofit agencies in developing new service delivery methods for refugee children in foster care. A vital element of the meeting was the discussion of promising practices from around the United States, which focused on ways in which ethnic organizations and refugee-serving agencies are currently involved with public child welfare systems. In addition, two public human service agencies introduced participants to innovative state- and county-level efforts that respond to concerns of newcomer constituents.

The Roundtable focused primarily on the needs of refugee children involved with the foster care system. However, foster care is only one aspect of child welfare services with which refugee families may become engaged. Fundamental to the relationship between public child welfare agencies and any newcomer community is the level of trust and communication forged between it and the child welfare system. The better this relationship is, the more likely it is that community members will be willing to assist children in foster care. Addressing community education and prevention methods, while remaining sensitive to diverse local cultures, can improve mutual trust, thereby improving services to refugees and newcomers involved with the child welfare system.

This report compiles participants' collective wisdom and recommendations on serving and supporting refugee children in public foster care. We hope it will inspire readers to approach work with refugee children with new imagination and motivate further attention to these important issues.

2. Keynote

Nguyen Van Hanh, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement
Washington, DC

The following is an abbreviated version of Dr. Hanh's presentation.

Dr. Van Hanh called for greater collaboration between refugee ethnic communities and the public child welfare system in caring for refugee children in foster care. In commending BRYCS' efforts toward this goal, he said that ORR hopes that such collaboration will lead, among other things, to increased recruitment of ethnically diverse foster families.

He acknowledged that many refugee minors have been placed in mainstream foster homes and that by and large, these mainstream families have done outstanding work and have raised their young wards with loving care. "But we always felt that something might be missing—the link of a young person to his native tongue, to his native culture, in effect, to his birthright," he added. Problems in recruiting potential ethnic foster parents have often been related to the professional requirements of the U.S. child welfare system and the fact that these requirements vary from state to state, making it confusing for newcomer refugees. ORR is very supportive of efforts to overcome these barriers and get ethnic communities more involved in the child welfare system.

In urging greater recruitment of ethnically diverse foster homes, Dr. Van Hanh noted that the greatest strength of ethnic communities is their familiarity with the culture of their compatriots. He praised BRYCS's work in training both ethnic communities and state child welfare agencies as a means of achieving more culturally sensitive placements.

Dr. Van Hanh also reflected on two concerns many refugee parents face, which can lead to child welfare intervention: culturally different approaches to child rearing and intergenerational conflict. For example, some cultural practices of discipline in other countries may be considered child abuse in the United States.

Dr. Van Hanh traced the work of Lutheran and Catholic agencies through more than a quarter century of serving Vietnamese, Cambodian, Haitian and African young people and called the program "one of the brightest pages in the record of the American refugee program."

Commenting on the transfer to ORR in 2003 of the unaccompanied alien minor program of the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, he told the audience that it is ORR's intent to incorporate contemporary child welfare practices into that program, making placement decisions based on the best interests of the child and perhaps using more foster care or family reunion.

In conclusion, Dr. Van Hanh called this one of the most important meetings of its kind and encouraged participants to go back to their communities and share their knowledge with colleagues. "The future of the next generation rests with you," he said.

3. Breakout Sessions

Roundtable participants divided into two breakout sessions, one focused on understanding the refugee experience through the eyes of a child, and the other on understanding foster care. This section summarizes the comments of the breakout session facilitators.

Session 1

Julianne Duncan, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Children's Services
USCCB/Migration and Refugee Services
Washington, DC

In this meeting we are thinking about how to assist refugee children who may need to be in foster care. We come from a variety of backgrounds: Some of us are refugees, some of us have worked with refugees for many years, and some of us have worked with foster care but have met few refugees.

In our busy work and home lives, we often do not have time to stop and think about how the world looks to a refugee child. Rather, we have to focus on getting parents employed and assisting adults with achieving self-sufficiency. Often, the children do not ask directly for help, and we have little time to ask them what they need. Therefore, we need to deliberately step out of our usual work or community lives to think about the view from the eyes of a child. If a child or family needs extra help to prevent the need for foster care, we hope that can be provided. But we also want to help the child who is referred for foster care in order to make that child's experience as good as possible while in care.

Some of the problems refugee parents and children face are shared by most immigrants; others are related to the refugee experience. Laws and customs from refugees' country of origin may not work here. Some refugees have lived in more than one country before final resettlement in the United States; thus, their children have absorbed customs from several cultures in addition to the culture of their birth. Families experience role changes that affect the ways children interact with parents. For example, many refugees come from societies in which elders are never challenged or contradicted, but in the United States, children are taught to question and challenge as part of the educational process. This dynamic affects parents' ability to provide guidance and care for their children.

Whatever their migration history, most refugees and immigrants come with strengths but experience differences from their family and society of origin. In many cases, one of their strengths is a strong extended family system in which the children have been well cared for prior to the war or other event that led to migration. Studies have indicated that fewer refugees have chronic mental health problems or such issues as serious drug addiction prior to their arrival in their resettlement country. This strong family background gives some refugees the ability to build new lives in new circumstances. As we assist families whose children are in foster care, we can emphasize their strengths in helping them respond to challenges.

If we step outside our adult work and community lives and look at the migration experience from the eyes of a child, we can become sensitive to the fact that some children need help to make sense of their lives. Adults may have horrible experiences during flight from war or other disasters, but they know what is happening and why they are running. Children often only know that they are running away from all that is familiar. Parents may not have the luxury of explaining the situation because of their focus on survival. Thus, children may have difficulty making sense of the disaster that has struck their world.

In current war situations, many refugees are outside their place of origin for many years, either as internally displaced persons or as refugees in countries of first asylum while awaiting a resettlement opportunity. Thus, adults have memories of their family and culture of origin, but children may have only memories of refugee camps. When families reach a place of safety, parents hope to recreate the families they idealize from their prewar experience, but their perspective of their culture may be very different from their children's view.

During refugee movements, it is common for children to be separated from parents and other family members. Sometimes this separation is permanent—the parent dies or is never found. But even in cases in which the separation is as little as 24 hours, the child has lost the stability and safety that parents and families typically provide. All parents hope to provide a safe and stable environment for their children; during war and refugee flight, parents are not always able to reach that ideal. No matter what the parents' intentions may be, the child has lost at least a little bit of trust in the safety of his or her family and therefore no longer has total trust in the family. In the United States, the child may further be separated from the parents while the adults go to work. Combine refugee children's insecurity and lack of trust with the U.S. educational system's message to question and challenge, and it is no surprise that refugee parents say that their children do not respect and listen to them.

If children must experience further separation by being placed in foster care, they develop greater insecurity. Those of us at this meeting have a challenging but important job: to assist the children who have experienced the tragedy of separation from their families. Even perfect parents and foster parents cannot completely heal the bad things that have happened to the children in their care. But we all have a responsibility to help as much as we can.

Session 2

Millicent Williams
Director, Foster Care Services
Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
Washington, DC

CWLA is a membership organization of agencies that provide a range of services including family foster care. It develops standards of practice and practice guidelines and conducts policy work and research. CWLA has not recently taken on the issue of refugee foster children. Some years ago, the League worked in collaboration with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and a group of nonprofit organizations, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Council of La Raza, and Children's Defense Fund to develop standards for unaccompanied minor children in detention centers. The draft standards were made available to the INS and colleague organizations advocating for improved treatment of unaccompanied minors in detention. CWLA plans to revise the CWLA Standards of Excellence for Family Foster Care Services next year. Issues relating to refugee children and unaccompanied minors may be addressed in that volume or in a separate document. Practice guidelines for workers could follow the development of standards.

- **It is important not to assume that the child welfare arena has gotten it right for native U.S. minorities**—African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans. It is not a child-friendly system. It also has trouble recruiting families. A hugely disproportionate rate of children in the system are black or Hispanic, depending on the part of the country. Nationally, the system is in need of assistance.

- **All children in the child welfare system have different needs.** We need to talk about children who are refugee/immigrant children in totality, then we have to look at their unique needs.
- **The federal government and other funders look at data.** Refugee-serving organizations have to know who is coming into the system, their country of origin, and other demographic information.
- **Decisions made about children in foster care are rooted in federal and state laws.** The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines abuse. Most children come in because of neglect. Physical abuse and sexual abuse constitute a smaller percentage. With the passage of The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the focus is on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.
- **Workers often confuse poverty and cultural differences with neglect.**

Refugee-serving organizations should consider the following points in dealing with the child welfare system:

- **Definitions: know what the definitions of abuse and neglect in your state are.** It is a matter of public record. There are subtle differences in each state and among communities.
- **The courts play a major role in what happens to children.** Workers can decide to remove children, but the court has to sanction that. We often target the worker, but the court plays a role. If you are working with families and don't get satisfaction from the social worker, it is best to know the agency chain of command. Get to know the agency before the need to approach on behalf of a family in your community arises.
- There comes a point in time during which workers need to do an abuse/neglect investigation. The need for protocol and training is certainly there. **Build on existing trainings to teach agency workers about refugee communities.** Workers are overloaded and don't have the time to go to an additional training, but they'll go to an existing one. Find out who does the training and talk to them about the curriculum.
- If the child cannot be maintained safely at home, the first order of business is to **look for relatives.** The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) is guiding everything now. It emphasizes safety, permanency, and well-being. If a child can't be safe in his or her birth home, agencies must first look for placement options with relatives (i.e. "kinship care"), and then look for non-relative foster care if extended family is not willing or able to provide care. Kinship care can mean either formal foster care placements with government oversight, or informal care of a relative's child.
- Courts are involved. **Child welfare has to provide family-focused services.** The goal is for children to return to their families. ASFA discusses that. Services need to be there for the family; parenting classes are not the answer for everyone. Workers are open to hearing ideas. Anything that you as a community can do to help facilitate the process is welcome.

Concerning recruitment, consider the following points:

- **Agencies need data prior to recruitment.** Once the community knows what the problem is, the more likely community members are to get involved. Many do not know that their children are in the system. Get information to them through your groups. The solution is in the community, not child welfare. The community should talk about what it can do for its adolescent population.
- **Have a clear message.** Many agencies create fliers. Pictures need to look like the children who need homes. Tailor the fliers to the community.

- **Think about nuances of wording.** Direct translation often doesn't work; what are the terms in your community?
- **When people respond to an ad, agencies have to have people who can respond to them.** Agencies need to provide someone who speaks the language, not an answering machine.
- **Information sessions need to take place in communities.** Where do people feel safe? Some families might not want to go to a school. Provide food and child care. Little things help people feel comfortable.
- **Clearly explain the process.** Put it in language people understand. Avoid jargon. Know and carefully choose the right messenger. Who in the community is the best person to deliver the message? Not the CPS worker; maybe a foster parent who's been there, done that.

Finally, recruitment is only part of it: **It's the support afterwards that is critical.** It is the only way to keep foster parents in the system.

Foster Care Placements and the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEAP, also known as Section 1808)

At the Roundtable, Patsy Buida of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, noted that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act state that public child welfare agencies cannot discriminate against families or children on the basis of race, color, or national origin when making foster care or adoption placement decisions. Because of these laws, agencies are not allowed to make foster care or adoptive placement decisions on the basis of the child or the prospective family's race, color, or national origin. Instead, they must assess the individualized needs of each child, then figure out the best placement to meet those needs. Culture, language, life experience, and religion are all factors that may be considered, but the assessment must be done in a nondiscriminatory manner that is consistent with the strict scrutiny standard of judicial review.

In addition, MEPA and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act require child welfare agencies to make an effort to recruit families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in the State for whom foster care or adoptive homes are needed. In making diligent recruitment efforts, agencies may not exclude prospective families on the basis of their race, color, national origin, or ethnicity. Ultimately, each agency's recruitment process should focus on developing a pool of potential foster and adoptive parents that are willing and able to foster or adopt the children needing placement. Agencies may work with communities to develop a pool of resources to accomplish the diligent recruitment requirement. As a result, it is important for agencies to determine what proportion of children in care are of a certain ethnic or racial background; such statistics can push the recruitment effort and help the agency reach out to those families.

At the federal level, there is no requirement that foster parents be U.S. citizens, although some states and counties may require it.

For more information, go to www.hhs.gov/ocr/mepa/. See also www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs/otherpubs/majorfedlegis.cfm.

4. Promising Practices

Chak Ng
Coordinator, Trafficked Children Initiative
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Baltimore, MD
Former Director, Minority Recruitment Program
Lutheran Community Services Northwest
Seattle, WA

Model: Private child welfare agency that developed specialized programming to recruit newcomers as foster families

In trying to recruit refugee and immigrant foster families, it makes sense for a public foster care agency to contract with a private foster care or community-based agency experienced in working with refugees. Accordingly, the Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCS/NW) office in Seattle developed the Minority Recruitment Program, the goal of which was to recruit and license 20 minority families over an 11-month period. The program was funded by two state contracts and some LCS/NW funds. Outcomes from the project after 10 months included the following:

- Fifteen families were licensed (14 Latino families and one Vietnamese family).
- The cost of recruiting one family was between \$5,000 and \$6,000 (although the state paid only \$3,000 per family licensed).
- Of slightly more than 100 inquiries received, 70 were screened out during the first two contacts, primarily due to lack of valid immigration documents or homes that did not meet licensing requirements.
- The length of time between initial contact and licensure was 3 to 5 months.
- Referrals came primarily through advertising in a Spanish-language newspaper and recommendations from existing foster families.

In reviewing this experience, agencies planning a minority recruitment program should consider the following five ideas:

1. **Effective recruitment requires long-term investment and patience.** LCS/NW was able to license 15 families because the agency had been recruiting for many years and had many contacts. Agencies should build relationships one at a time on an individual basis. It is impossible to know what relationship will yield a foster home. Eventually the agency will create a network of relationships in the community.
2. **Effective practice is built on valid and accurate data.** For example, most inquiries came from the Spanish-language newspaper *El Mundo*, so LCS/NW put all of its advertising dollars into *El Mundo*.
3. **Effective recruitment is consistent.** Working conditions must provide stability for the work force and minimize turnover. Every change in an agency's staffing is a setback. Agencies must have an effective representative to relate to the target community. Many refugees do not relate well to a bureaucracy, but they can relate to a real-life representative of the agency.
4. **Effective recruitment must be focused.** Agencies must set clear goals, and resources must be directed toward meeting those goals.

5. **It is important to track the costs of recruitment.** Agencies must track the cost of recruitment and look at outcomes in relation to costs. Such information must be used to educate funders about the true cost of recruiting and licensing newcomer families.

Public-private partnerships can successfully recruit ethnically diverse foster families. Public child welfare agencies considering such partnerships should think about the following areas:

- **Data:** What are the needs? What are the ethnicities and ages of children who need homes? How many families are needed?
- **Commitment:** What is the level of public commitment? How high up in an agency is that commitment? Effective recruitment efforts develop over months and years, so a long-term, multiyear commitment is most effective.
- **Partnerships:** How can culturally competent partnerships be formed with refugee community agencies? Can those agencies be contracted to recruit, and if possible, license families?
- **Outcomes:** If a public child welfare agency needs foster homes, it is important to develop multiyear contracts to create long-term commitments. Contracts with private agencies should include clear outcomes, multiyear commitment, adequate funding, and data collection.

Effective recruitment of refugee and immigrant families requires planning, partnerships with community-based organizations, adequate funding, and a shared conviction that all children deserve the best a community can offer.

Ilze Earner
Project Director
Immigrants and Child Welfare Project
New York, NY

Model: Coalition of immigrant advocacy groups that created a protocol for working with immigrant families in New York City, to be used by New York City's Administration for Children's Services (the city's child welfare system)

One of the primary reasons refugee families come to the attention of child welfare agencies is perceived neglect, including medical and educational neglect. Problems are compounded by language barrier; caseworker unfamiliarity with immigrant families; cultural differences; perceptions about the role of children; and differences in understanding of educational needs, child discipline, and other cultural attitudes. Caseworkers sometimes mandate that parents access services that they can't access or don't feel comfortable accessing. Parents may have no idea what they are supposed to do.

- **It is important to document problems.** Talk to other social workers and accumulate evidence of all kinds, from anecdotal to quantitative. In trying to talk to child welfare authorities in New York City, for example, the Immigrants and Child Welfare Project staff initially encountered much resistance. The standard reply was, "What are the numbers?"
- **Language and lack of cultural understanding are big factors in the problems immigrant families have with the child welfare system.** Caseworkers often lack knowledge of immigration status. Language is the first step in communication, but we need more than that—we need an understanding of what brought a family to this country in the first place.
- **Without an understanding of policy, practice will be flawed.**

- Refugee-serving organizations can take the following steps to encourage changes in how child welfare works with refugee families:
 - **Build coalitions:** Identify agencies and service providers who work with immigrant families and raise the issue with them. Many groups that work with immigrant families do not know much about child welfare either. **A coalition can help build the case that this is an issue and serve as a resource.** Caseworkers need to know where to turn for help.
 - **Educate both sides.** Raise the awareness of child welfare advocacy groups and bring them to the table with child welfare officials to talk about barriers that families face.
 - **Develop an agenda.** The goals of the Immigrants and Child Welfare Project are to raise awareness and address policy and practice issues.
 - **Form an advisory group** that has broad representation of service organizations that work with immigrant families, advocates for immigrants, and child welfare workers in your city. Meet with the child welfare authorities to hammer out policy and practice issues.

Anita Gundanna
Child Welfare Policy and Program Coordinator
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
New York, NY

Model: Coalition of immigrant advocacy groups that has become a formal advisory committee (the Commissioner’s Advisory Board Subcommittee on Immigrant Issues) to the commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children’s Services

It is challenging to deal with the system, to introduce a new idea or concept. It is hard for the bureaucracy to hear that it needs improvement. Be persistent in dealing with the government. Come in with a full arsenal of support and a full proposal when suggesting changes. The system needs to see need, interest, and feasibility. Partner with community-based organizations.

- The coalition has created the following tools to help agencies better serve immigrants:*
 - *A training in how to serve immigrants.* How does a caseworker interact? What are the tools and techniques? What should workers look at in assessment? The training is part of a core curriculum that reaches many Child Protective Service (CPS) investigators.
 - *A protocol for CPS workers on how to interact appropriately with immigrant families.* The protocol will be given to every CPS frontline investigator and caseworker as well as to the legal department of the city’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS). It includes resources for caseworkers, such as legal outlets and other services that families might interact with or have questions about.
 - *Assessments, in partnership with many community-based organizations.* The coalition’s *Crossing the Divide: Asian American Families and the Child Welfare System* has been a

*For more information on publications described by Roundtable presenters, contact the presenter’s organization directly; BRYCS does not have information on those documents. Participant contact information is provided at the end of this report.

great tool: It formalizes the issues involved in what families in New York City are facing and has been well received by policy makers, researchers, and academia.

- *Understanding the Laws on How You Can Discipline Your Children: A Guide for New Immigrant Families about Child Abuse and Neglect in New York*, a brochure translated into multiple Asian languages about understanding the laws on disciplining children. About 12,000 copies have been distributed. This brochure is available at: www.cacf.org
- The coalition has tried to initiate a foster care recruitment campaign with ACS. This effort has faced many challenges:
 - A lack of data to prove the need for such a campaign.
 - Lack of clarity about who takes on what role in such a campaign. What is the role of private agencies? What is the role of the city system as an oversight agency?
 - Interpretation, translation, and producing culturally relevant materials.
 - Barriers within immigrant communities.

Farhiya Mohamed
Bilingual/Bicultural Advocate
Refugee Women’s Alliance
Seattle, WA

Model: Refugee support organization that acts as cultural broker and advisor between CPS and refugee families

- **Cultural differences are a major factor in the interaction between CPS and Somali and Muslim families.** These families face language barriers and a system that is very different from what existed in Somalia. Somali families do not have many resources in communities, and they do not have CPS in Somalia.
- **One important cultural difference is that men are the head of the household in Somalia.** The husband tells his wife to stay home, even if the family needs her to work. Somalis are raised to not make eye contact; if children make eye contact, it is seen as a bad thing.
- **Other cultural issues include language, food, and child rearing practices.** It is hard for teens to get used to the school system, because they often have no basic level of education. If children start missing school, school officials assume that they have problems with their family.

Jeff Chenoweth
Division Director
CLINIC
Washington, DC

Model: Recruitment of Muslim foster families through outreach to local mosques

In recruiting refugee families to serve as foster families, the following barriers exist:

- Mistrust of government entities

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- Attitudes of feeling misunderstood and stereotyped
 - Embarrassment and shame
 - Racial prejudice
 - Cultural barriers. (Placement with a family of the same culture is not always the answer. For example, placing two teenage daughters with a local Imam did not resolve anything, because the daughters wanted to be Americanized. Within weeks, they were placed elsewhere. Everyone thought a culturally matched family would work, but it didn't, because it didn't address the roots of the conflict.)
 - Lack of effective family preservation services, even in communities with many cultural interpreters.

Chia Vang
Social Worker
Ramsey County Community Human Services
St. Paul, MN

Model: County child welfare department that recruits Asian foster families through employment of a bilingual and bicultural social worker and use of focused recruitment strategies

- Children should be placed in homes that best serve their needs; placement with a foster family of the same cultural background often is preferable. Placing Asian children involves many issues, including food, communication, and culture.
- Formal foster care is a new concept for the Hmong and Asian communities. However, Hmong families have informally taken care of each others' children for centuries.
- The communities have limited knowledge about the child welfare system. It is important to take as much time as necessary to educate the community about the system.
- It may be necessary for someone to walk refugee foster families through the application, inspection, and information processes—to serve as a link between the agency and the community.
- Retention is a big issue. Agency staff must be educated in how to work with families and in how to be patient and supportive.

Bauz Nengchu
Ombudsperson for Asian/Pacific Families
State of Minnesota
St. Paul, MN

Model: State-level ombudsman office for families affected by child welfare system, with designated staff liaison for Asian/Pacific Islander population

In 1991, the Minnesota legislature created the Office of Ombudsperson for Families in response to requests from families who had been negatively affected by social service agencies that provide out of home placements for children of color. An ombudsperson is an independent government official responsible for reviewing government and government-related agencies in an effort to ensure that their

practices are fair, reasonable, and appropriate. The Ombudsperson receives complaints, reviews and investigates the complaints and, if appropriate, makes recommendations to remedy the complaints.

- The Office of the Ombudsperson is an independent state agency. Its primary duty is to ensure that all laws governing the protection of children and their families are implemented in a culturally competent manner and that decision-making processes are in compliance with the laws that protect children of color in the state. Additional duties are to ensure that
 - court officials, public policy makers, and service providers are trained in cultural diversity;
 - experts from the appropriate community of color, including tribal advocates, are used as court advocates and are consulted in placement decisions that involve children of color;
 - guardians ad litem and other individuals from communities of color are recruited, trained, and used in court proceedings to advocate on behalf of children of color; and
 - training programs for bilingual workers are provided.
- The ombudsperson helps work out problems in child protection; social service issues, such as delays in service, lack of service, lack of culturally specific services, failure to provide interpretation during social service intake and other meetings; failure to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act or the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act; and unjust treatment and other child protection and social service issues.
- The ombudsman does not give legal advice or investigate court decisions, elected officials, or police. Before taking a complaint, the ombudsman has to make sure that the complainant has gone through the chain of command to resolve the problems first. If an injustice is found, the ombudsperson suggests corrective actions and, if necessary, policy changes.
- The Office of the Ombudsperson has four “ombudspeople”: one who is Hispanic, one who is African American, one who is American Indian, and one who represents Asian/Pacific Islanders. Some of the challenges outlined in the office’s 2001 report are as follows:
 - A shortfall of effective, culturally sensitive, and gender-specific services for young, sexually abused female victims
 - Language barriers for parents, who cannot communicate effectively with law enforcement, child protection staff, and court officials
 - Cultural and language barriers that limit parents’ ability to adapt to Western parenting styles
 - Discrepancies between services stated in the service plan and the actual services being provided
 - The possibility of traumatizing young children who are placed with people who are not from the same ethnic background—who don’t speak the child’s language or eat the same kind of food.
- The new definition of physical abuse pursuant to Minnesota Statute 626.556 2(d) has aided tremendously in clarifying what constitutes physical abuse in our society and in ensuring that cultural differences are taken into account. The new statute says that “abuse does not include

reasonable and moderate physical discipline of a child administered by a parent or legal guardian, which does not result in an injury.”

Erin Ferguson
Family Resource Specialist

Guk Rut
Family Assistance Worker
Southern Sudan Community Association
Omaha, NE

Model: Private refugee serving agency that is subcontracted to provide language and cultural interpretation between refugee families and a publicly contracted child welfare agency

- The Omaha area is home to about 5,000 to 6,000 Sudanese refugees; it may be the largest population in the country. The Southern Sudan Community Association (SSCA) has about 30 employees and is growing.
- SSCA hears about foster care and CPS cases through the community, and SSCA representatives contact CPS or child welfare caseworkers to tell them what the SSCA does. In some cases, the offer of assistance is well received; in others, it is not.
- SSCA would like to have a contract with the state to provide supervised visitation and support services, but first, it has to prove that there is a need. Also, incumbent organizations have an advantage in the contracting process.
- Through providing interpreter services, SSCA sees the need for greater involvement with supervised visitation and support work.
- It is helpful for children to be matched with an African counselor, someone who knows about African culture.
- The Sudanese community’s culture is changing to accommodate the American system. When children are taken away, families have to go to counseling and parenting classes. They are educated on U.S. laws and customs.
- Sudanese adolescents keep running away from group homes and often run home. SSCA tries to make the situation easier by maintaining contact with the child.

5. Roundtable Themes

During the two-day meeting, participants offered many ideas for enhancing the way in which refugee-serving organizations, public child welfare agencies, and government officials work together to meet the needs of refugees in the foster care system. The following material summarizes comments from participants during the course of the Roundtable; it represents individual opinions and does not necessarily reflect the views of BRYCS or ORR.


For Refugee-Serving Organizations

Ideas for Working with Child Welfare Agencies

- Ethnic-based organizations must first understand what it is they want to do, what their assets are, and what strategies they can put in place. An understanding of the foster care system and the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEAP) is critical.
- It is important to establish credibility as an organization. Strengthen service capacity to meet refugee foster care needs and provide training and needs assessment.
- Don't wait for the bureaucracy to act. Agencies and community organizations need to come to bureaucracies with ideas for solutions. Change won't happen on its own.
- The funding issue is "the wall." Funding will come if an organization is able to show need and preparation for funding possibilities.
- A resource Web site to help agencies understand refugee and cultural issues would be helpful [see www.brycs.org].
- Caseworkers are generally young, do not always have a social work background, have to cope with a set of laws they don't understand in a highly regulated system, have less support than their counterparts in any other agency, and deal with a very large caseload. They have good intentions. But if anything happens in that agency, the social worker may be fired. The response can be very punitive.
- Data is a big issue. What can ethnic-based organizations bring together that speaks to the challenges? Having data makes it easier to form partnerships and coalitions and gain political strength. Basic demographic data are helpful. Where are people living? How many children are of a given ethnicity? When a child comes into the system, the system collects data. If you can do an overlay—e.g., by neighborhood—of children coming into care, that is where the agency needs to target its recruitment efforts. School data can be helpful.
- Ethnic organizations may need to educate the courts. Judges don't know everything. Children's attorneys and court-appointed special advocates provide training for members. Those trainings are another vehicle for getting the issues in front of people. For example, court orders prohibiting communication between children and their family of origin can impede reunification.
- Refugee agencies need to collaborate with child welfare on placement using models that currently exist, such as the family team meeting model.
- Talk to the foster care agency and offer to help support a child's connection to his or her culture by providing access to things like soccer games and ethnic food.

Ideas for Working with Families

- Introduce family care and foster care by inviting staff from child welfare services, police, and schools to speak to refugees once a month. Visit churches, mosques, etc. to try to recruit families.

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- Something that community groups can do is to help keep lines of communication open between the family and children in foster care. Contact is limited in the system.
 - Children in foster care should be connected to community agencies to help decrease their isolation and create a support system. It is also important to find ways to keep children who have emancipated from foster care from feeling isolated. Such connections can help decrease the additional isolation experienced following emancipation.

For Child Welfare Agencies

Ideas for Working with Refugee-Serving Organizations and Community Groups

- Child welfare agencies need to focus on providing information, education, and guidelines. Ethnic communities need culturally relevant programming about child welfare as well as more information about abuse laws and the social service systems. Community members can play a role in making it relevant. It is important for public child welfare systems to see the value and work of community organizations. It speaks to data needs, too. It is hard to collect data when numbers don't exist, but the experience of community organizations is invaluable.
- Public child welfare is underfunded. As a result, it is important to be creative. What resources are available in communities? Where can in-kind contributions play a role?
- Public child welfare workers need a greater variety of training to meet the needs of diverse populations. Explore how to work with organizations to help them do what they can do to improve the foster care process.
- One way to reach refugee families is to use existing institutions: visit churches, mosques, and other places where community members would congregate, or recruit someone in authority to serve as spokesperson. Identify trusted leaders who can play a key role.
- To recruit people to foster care, it would help to use someone who looks like them; they will trust such a person more. Talk about the pros and cons, and be honest at the beginning. Tell them about your programs. Be ready to support them in every way at the beginning. People are afraid—they are fighting for survival in their own families. The best tool is for providers to recruit new providers. If they have a positive experience, it helps to have them share it.
- Foster care agencies need to provide special training for ethnic communities on how they can become foster parents. Articulate the benefits to communities of being foster parents, coming together to support refugee children.
- Involve the refugee community in services as well as placement.
- People in refugee communities need to be educated to become the service professionals, and the refugee community needs to take more responsibility toward options. Granny House (Atlanta) is a good model. It brings community organizations, women, and public housing together to provide culturally appropriate child care.
- If a community can't provide enough ethnic foster families, community members can serve as mentors or take children to cultural events. A child then knows, "Someone from my country cares about me."
- Children in foster care should be connected to community agencies to help decrease their isolation and create a support system. It is important to find ways to keep children who are emancipated from feeling isolated.

Ideas for Working with Families

- In working with refugee families, one is often dealing with the sociology of community shame and honor, which can impede efforts to license foster families and place children. A foster care or child welfare crisis brings about shame and the dismantling of family and community honor. In talking to refugee communities about foster care, it is best to talk about it before a crisis happens. It is better to have a family licensed before a crisis occurs and have them waiting in the wings than to do nothing and pretend it won't happen.
- A hotline could be helpful for parents to voice complaints about agencies.
- It is important to let children know that they can voice concerns about their placement.
- Provide appropriate foster care simultaneously with reunification efforts.
- Use the family team meeting model; the family can identify members to make decisions.
- Recruitment efforts can bring in families who may not make it to licensure but can serve as mentors for children and assist the agency in orienting their workers. Community members can be both mentors and foster parents. Agencies should identify ways for mentoring programs to get started, such as community meetings, collaboration.
- Families who are licensed and may be waiting for a child can provide respite for other foster families.
- Just because families and foster children are from the same background does not mean that the foster parents are culturally competent. It is important to be able to operationalize what it means to be culturally sensitive. A child might not be in a same-ethnicity family, but the family can be educated as to the needs of child.
- Adults remember their culture and want to preserve it. Children don't remember the "good times." It is important for them to feel that they belong, so they participate in mainstream culture. Americans' ignorance of refugee culture adds to refugee children's stress. We need education for agencies so that they can understand the cultural side of it. We need education on both sides so that children can take pride in their culture.
- Foster parents need education to be able to choose appropriate activities. For example, taking a Sudanese child camping, when she had spent much of her time as a refugee outdoors and associated sleeping outdoors with negative experiences, could be an inappropriate activity.
- It is hard to find foster parents who can understand the trauma. Parents need to have appropriate expectations of rules and boundaries (e.g., many foster parents feel children should be "grateful"). Agencies need to set objectives and guidelines for foster families. Insensitive foster parents just add to a child's trauma.
- Most foster families are trying to do what they think is best. They don't know exactly what the goal is. After living independently, a youth cannot go back to being a child. The reality of foster care is that one often must settle with the families who are available; they are basically volunteers.

For State and Local Authorities

- Police training is an important issue. In many states, police address family issues before they get the attention of social services.
- Some states have comprehensive policies, protocols, and handbooks. Those states could serve as models.

- Schools and other agencies need more information on refugee needs.
- The child welfare field is resistant to shelters for minor children because of the experience with orphanages in this country. However, for some children shelters could provide a nurturing environment. Some children like group homes; it works well for teenagers. Supervised independent living placements for older refugee adolescents often work well.
- All parties need a broader understanding of refugee communities, particularly those coming into the child welfare system for the first time.

For Federal Agencies

- ORR and other parts of HHS could come together to create consistent guidance, as with Indian child welfare, which is the only child welfare system that is consistent across the nation. Something other than the special needs of refugee children is always going to take precedence on the local level. Federal agencies need to provide a package of laws and guidelines. Otherwise, the same issues will recur.
- In developing standards, it is important to be clear about the level to which they pertain: local, state, county, federal.
- Better data on refugee populations are needed.
- Youth need better orientation, including cultural orientation, on arrival. They need to know how to behave with providers and how to follow rules. Children often need therapeutic services.

Next Steps

Participants suggested the following “next steps” that they could take upon returning home from the Roundtable:

- Local ethnic communities should talk about their own culture in locales such as community centers and places of worship in order to raise internal awareness. Cultural information should be available on a Web site so that agency staff, when dealing with an immigrant or refugee family, can learn about the culture and whom to contact in their community to learn about that culture.
- Find out about changing a county rule that foster parents must be citizens.
- Use community radio stations as a forum to discuss the topics raised during the Roundtable.
- Work with the Council on Accreditation to develop standards. Standards for the specialized unaccompanied minor refugee (URM) foster care programs could carry over into general child welfare practices.
- Explore the possibility of doing BRYCS-style needs assessments on a smaller scale in different locations. Needs assessments are a tool to bring a community together and build capacity.
- Representatives of refugee organizations should talk to their state refugee coordinators. State refugee offices and CPS are ultimately part of the same bureaucratic structure. The state refugee office might have the authority to bring CPS and associated agencies to the table.

6. Resources

BRYCS Publications

Serving Foreign-Born Foster Children: A Resource for Meeting the Special Needs of Refugee Youth and Children

This document addresses the special challenges in serving foreign-born children in U.S. foster care systems. It is intended for administrative and casework staff of child welfare agencies and other public and private organizations that work with refugee children and families. The document draws on the experiences of existing foster care program to suggest practical means of meeting the assessment and placement needs of foreign-born children in foster care. In addition, the paper highlights potential areas for collaboration between public and private entities and identifies the laws, policies, and professional standards relevant to serving refugee and immigrant children. The appendix includes resources on topics such as developing refugee foster families, identifying the particular service needs of refugee children in foster care, and assisting trafficked children.

Building Bridges: A Guide to Planning and Implementing Cross-Service Training

The goal of cross-service training is to bring together service providers from child welfare agencies, refugee-serving agencies, and refugee community organizations to discuss strategies that will strengthen service delivery to refugee families. Based on cross-service trainings BRYCS implemented in Atlanta and St. Louis, this guide is designed to assist local agencies in developing their own cross-service trainings. It takes the reader through a step-by-step process for planning and implementing a cross-service training,

About BRYCS's Cross-Service Training

The BRYCS Community Conversations project involved focus groups in several communities. The groups were asked about the challenges that refugee communities and the public child welfare systems working with them face. The project resulted in two key findings:

1. Many refugee parents think child protective service (CPS) will take their children away, and that fear affects their parenting.
2. CPS and other child welfare workers lack information about refugee communities.

In sum, refugee communities need to know how CPS works, and CPS workers need to know more about refugee communities.

As a result of those findings, BRYCS staff developed a template for cross-service trainings and piloted it in Atlanta, GA, and St. Louis, MO. The cross-service training process brings together people from ethnic-based organizations, resettlement agencies, state agencies, and public child welfare agencies to share information and talk about how to improve the way the different sectors work together. BRYCS served as a catalyst and organizer for the two trainings.

In Atlanta, many positive outcomes resulted from the cross-service training. The relationship between the refugee-serving community and public child welfare has been strengthened, and refugee-serving agencies are conducting trainings for CPS. In St. Louis, dialogue among sectors has increased, and participants have been working to make sure that public child welfare is represented in a local refugee and immigrant consortium. Much of this relationship building happened during the planning process.

BRYCS used the lessons learned from the trainings to create *Building Bridges*, a guide for agencies that want to develop their own cross-service trainings. BRYCS staff are prepared to assist agencies that want to create trainings.

detailing key factors to consider. BRYCS strongly encourages local service communities to use this resource to host their own training. It is available in the BRYCS clearinghouse at www.brycs.org.

In 2004, BRYCS will offer mini-grants for local sites to implement cross-service trainings. The purpose of such trainings is to bring together public child welfare and refugee-serving agencies to increase collaboration and resource sharing. Mini-grant application forms will be posted on the BRYCS Web site, www.brycs.org, at the end of December 2003. For more information, send e-mail to TA@brycs.org.

Strengthening Services for Refugee Parents: Guidelines and Resources

This comprehensive, 192-page manual was developed to assist agencies working with refugee parents. BRYCS interviewed 28 agencies in 13 states to learn more about their strengths, challenges, and promising practices. The manual includes the following components:

- Detailed profiles of each agency interviewed
- A summary report of trends and practices of all agencies
- Program development guidelines
- Evaluation guidelines
- Guidelines for programs for refugee parents of adolescents
- An extensive list of resources.

The manual provides essential instruction in program evaluation and development and identifies promising practices, trends, and resources instructive to organizations working with newcomer families. If you are interested in purchasing a copy of this manual or want more information, send e-mail to TA@brycs.org or call (888) 572-6500 and follow the prompts.

Directions in Service Provision: Findings From Needs Assessments of Refugee Youth, Children, and Parents

This report combines findings and recommendations from needs assessments conducted in Georgia, Missouri, and Ohio. The needs assessments identified critical issues and challenges confronting refugee youth, children, and parents and suggest important recommendations for service provision. Various service agencies and community representatives were involved in implementing each assessment; together, they created a detailed picture of challenges at the local level. BRYCS's intention is to disseminate this report widely to increase awareness of the needs of refugee youth, children, and parents. This report is available in the BRYCS clearinghouse at www.brycs.org. For more information, send e-mail to TA@brycs.org.

Guardianship FAQ

BRYCS has developed a “frequently asked questions” guide for service providers who need to inform refugee caregivers about the process of obtaining legal guardianship for refugee minors in their care. Go to www.brycs.org and click on “publications” in the left menu bar.

Clearinghouse

BRYCS offers a Web-based clearinghouse (a searchable database of available information) on refugee youth and child well-being. Our aim is to collect and share resources, including information on promising programs and practices with refugee youth, children, parents, and families, thereby helping local providers strengthen their services to refugee children and youth. The clearinghouse includes resources relevant to the work of refugee resettlement organizations, refugee community associations, child welfare agencies, and other providers working with refugee families.

If your organization has special resources or programs for refugee youth, children, parents, or families, you can help us share the wealth of knowledge you have gained—and raise your organization’s profile nationwide in the process. Send e-mail to clearinghouse@brycs.org, or call (888) 572-6500, ext. 3, to learn more. Or visit the BRYCS Web site at www.brycs.org.

Web Sites

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect

- www.calib.com/nccanch; click on “links” to go to all Children’s Bureau Resources

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning

- www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Child Welfare Practice

- www.cwresource.org

Child Welfare League of America

- www.cwla.org

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families

- www.cacf.org

Council on Accreditation

Richard Klarberg, President, Council on Accreditation, attended the BRYCS Roundtable. He noted that new organizations have difficulty developing credibility and stature to raise funds. The best way to do that is by creating partnerships with comparable groups and with established groups. It is important to build bridges: Established organizations need to reach out to community-based organizations, and vice versa. Becoming accredited through the Council on Accreditation may be of help to small organizations. The council offers provisional accreditation for small organizations that are not necessarily incorporated or connected to a larger group.

Contact

Council on Accreditation
120 Wall Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10005
(866) 262-8088 or (212) 797-3000
(212) 797-1428 fax

About BRYCS’s Assessment Tool

BRYCS developed an online assessment tool for public child welfare agencies that could be adapted for agencies planning cross-service trainings. The tool was distributed electronically to all 50 states via the state child welfare administrator.

BRYCS received about 145 responses across the country from 16 states and the District of Columbia, resulting in 91 usable surveys. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents mostly worked with newcomer families, most commonly in the areas of interpreting (both working with interpreters and ensuring adequate interpreter services) and foster care. Of those who indicated that foster care was a challenge, 85 percent said that it was difficult to identify appropriate foster families—that is, those from a similar cultural background. In addition, licensing is an issue: Respondents reported that in their experience, only 25 percent of newcomer immigrant and refugee families who are recruited to be foster families end up becoming licensed.

Respondents identified a significant need for additional resources and information on different cultures and how to improve recruitment of foster families. They said that greater cultural knowledge and resources would help them interact better with clients and provide better services. Additional funding, staffing, and resources are continual needs.

To obtain a summary of the online assessment tool results, send an e-mail to TA@brycs.org

Other

A Great Wonder. Video; produced and directed by Kim Shelton. Available through www.mediarights.org. This video follows three young Sudanese orphans who have spent most of their lives either in flight from war or in a refugee camp and have come to America. It highlights the issues they face during their adjustment to life in the United States and illustrates the unique needs of refugee youth.

Organizations

Roundtable presenters were affiliated with the following organizations at the time of the meeting:

Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20447
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/>

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
(CLINIC)
McCormick Pavilion
415 Michigan Ave., NE
Washington, DC 20017
Phone: (202) 635-2556
Fax: (202) 635-2649
national@cliniclegal.org
<http://www.cliniclegal.org>

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
440 First Street, NW, 3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20001-2085
Phone: (202) 638-2952
Fax: (202) 638-4004
<http://www.cwla.org/>

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
50 Broad Street, Ste. 1701
New York, NY 10004
Phone: (212) 809-4675
Fax: (212) 785-4601
cacf@cacf.org
<http://www.cacf.org/>

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning
Hunter College School of Social Work
129 E. 79th Street, Room 808
New York, NY 10021
Phone: (212) 452-7435
ilze.earner@hunter.cuny.edu
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/special.html>

Office of Refugee Resettlement
U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20447
Phone: (202) 401-9246
Fax: (202) 401-5487
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/>

Ramsey County Community Human Services
160 Kellogg Blvd. East
St. Paul, MN 55101
Phone: (651) 266-4444
Fax: (651) 266-4436
<http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/hs/index.asp>

Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA)
4008 MLK Way S.
Seattle, WA 98108
Phone: (206) 721-0243
Fax: (206) 721-0282
<http://www.rewa.org>

Southern Sudan Community Association
4819 Dodge Street
Omaha, NE 68132
Phone: (402) 554-0759
Fax: (402) 561-9724
erinssca@hotmail.com
<http://www.sscainternational.org>

State of Minnesota
Office of Ombudsperson for Families
1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 106
St. Paul, MN 55108
Phone: (651) 643-2514
Fax: (651) 643-2539
<http://www.ombudmhm.state.mn.us/contact/ombuds.htm#families>

Trafficked Children Initiative
Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service
700 Light Street
Baltimore, MD 21230
Phone: (410) 230-2758
Fax: (410) 230-2723
lirs@lirs.org
<http://www.lirs.org/What/children/TCI.htm>

USCCB/Migration and Refugee Services
3211 4th Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017
Phone: (202) 541-3352
Fax: (202) 722-8750
mrs@usccb.org
<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/>

Contact BRYCS

By Phone

Toll free: (888) 572-6500

- Press 1 for general information and inquiries about BRYCS.
- Press 2 for technical assistance services.
- Press 3 for clearinghouse information and inquiries.

By E-mail

- info@brycs.org for general information and inquiries about BRYCS
- TA@brycs.org for technical assistance services
- clearinghouse@brycs.org for inquiries, submissions, or suggestions related to the BRYCS Clearinghouse

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Case Studies

Participants divided into several groups. Each group reviewed a case study (two reviewed the same case study) and attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the special needs of refugee youth in foster care?
2. What strategies can public foster care agencies and ethnic organizations use to facilitate increased communication and collaboration to meet the needs of refugee youth in foster care?
3. What opportunities are available for public child welfare and ethnic communities to partner?

Case Study 1

Two Asian sisters were reported to Child Protective Service (CPS) as victims of sexual abuse by their father. The girls were part of a large family that came to the United States as refugees more than 20 years ago.

Kinship care was not viewed as a viable option, since extended family were seen as complicit in the abuse. Due to the number of children, the siblings were split between four different foster homes. The three youngest children were placed with an Asian foster family of different ethnicity. Although there were some similar customs, this placement was ultimately problematic since there was a great deal of mistrust between the children's family and the foster parents.

The two abused girls were then placed together in a culturally matched foster home. This placement allowed for shared culture, language, and customs; however, these same characteristics allowed the birth parents to influence and intimidate the foster parents and to have continued contact with the girls. The girls were blamed by family members for splitting up the family, which led to feelings of guilt.

One of the girls was more introverted and did not talk about her problems and concerns. Ultimately, she was placed in a psychiatric facility due to mental health problems. Her birth parents convinced her to refuse her psychiatric medication.

To minimize the parental pressure on the girls and the foster family, the two sisters were eventually moved to an American therapeutic foster home. The birth parents were then less likely to call the girls by phone, and the daughter with mental health concerns was able to receive more intensive foster care and mental health services.

Questions Specific to This Case

- What were the benefits and drawbacks to using a culturally matched placement in this case? How can you know which type of placement will be best for a child?
- What should be considered in making placements for abuse victims within a small ethnic community?
- What assumptions can occur in placing "Asian" children in "Asian" foster homes or "African" children in "African" foster homes? Are such assumptions problematic, and if so, how can they be minimized or challenged?

Discussion

Special Needs

It was important for children and families to be aware of what constitutes abuse. Sex abuse is pretty well understood across cultures. The children needed to know that wherever they were placed, they would be

safe and protected. It was important for them to maintain contact with other siblings. The girls needed to understand that boys can be victims of sex abuse, too. It would appear that the family may not have acclimated to U.S. culture and tended to keep more separated, even though they had been in the country for 20 years. All the children born here were definitely Americanized and were geared toward American culture.

Strategies

The two entities need to be in good communication with and learn from each other. From a public standpoint, agencies need to reach out to ethnic communities, and ethnic organizations also need to reach out to public systems and try to understand how they work. Perhaps ethnic organizations could do more official contracting with public agencies. It would be good for organizations to be somehow connected with outside bodies that could provide a review of them and their work, so that they could have additional credibility, particularly newer groups. Also, it is important for groups to get more politically connected and make politicians aware of their community.

Opportunities

In seeking funding, organizations should partner with each other and present a package instead of going at it alone. As more states privatize services, it is important for agencies to be better connected with ethnic organizations; it expands their ability to receive funding.

Case Study 2

Shireen, a 10-year-old Muslim girl, was resettled with her parents and older male siblings. Originally from the Middle East, she arrived in the United States in 1996 as a refugee. She had 10 older siblings and 1 younger sibling.

When Shireen was 16, her school called her home to say that Shireen was being suspended from school. Shireen had been accessing inappropriate Internet sites at school in order to communicate romantically with boys. Shireen's mother and brothers came to the school to talk with the school administrators and to pick her up. Because Shireen's mother did not speak much English, the school explained to her brothers why she was being suspended.

When Shireen returned to school on Monday, she had bruises on her arm. She told the school principal that her brother had beaten her up because it was contrary to their culture for her to be dating or communicating with boys on her own. The school reported this to CPS, so that when the family came to pick Shireen up from school in the afternoon, they were told that she was already under the protection of CPS. When the family returned home from the school, CPS investigators were already at the house to interview the family about what had happened.

Shireen was placed with a Christian, American foster family, and the court ordered that the biological family could not have any direct contact with Shireen. After six weeks in foster care, Shireen attempted suicide. In a suicide note, she stated that she did not like living in the foster home because there were too many rules. She apparently expected that she would have more freedom in an American home than in her family's home.

Following her suicide attempt, Shireen was transferred to a group home. She preferred the group home to the foster home because she had more independence. However, she became violent with the group home staff on two occasions. The fights resulted in two short-term stays at a juvenile detention facility.

After seven months in care, supervised meetings were arranged between Shireen and her family. When in the presence of her family, Shireen said repeatedly that she wanted to return home. However, her requests were more conflicted when speaking alone with child welfare staff. A plan to return Shireen

home with her family for a 60-day visit was terminated when Shireen said at the last minute that she did not want to return home.

Questions Specific to This Case

- What would be important factors to consider in arranging the best possible placement for a child like Shireen?
- What kind of preventive or preparatory work could be done in this community to prepare for cases like Shireen's in the future?
- How can public child welfare agencies and refugee serving agencies work together to address intergenerational conflict between refugee parents and teens?

Discussion

Special Needs

The entire case needs an interpreter; the issue is with the family, not just the youth. Kinship placement should have been explored. There was not much discussion with the family prior to placement. It was inappropriate to place the children in a Christian foster family. The children needed therapeutic services—counseling that was culturally competent and focused on issues of acculturation, identity, and home. The placement should have fostered a connection to community and family. The youth also needed more peer contact, such as youth and mentoring programs.

Strategies

Ethnic organizations could help explain the system to the family; help with parental education classes, making them culturally relevant; and explain U.S. laws and discipline practices. Community- and ethnic-based organizations could serve as a go-between and a resource for both the foster family and the birth family. They could help integrate the youth back into the community, even if they were in a nonethnic home.

Opportunities

Opportunities for public child welfare and ethnic organizations to partner revolve around prevention of these sorts of bad situations. They can address intergenerational and cultural conflicts when they arise in communities, partner to conduct needs assessments of communities, create educational materials on the child welfare system, educate families, conduct outreach, and work with ethnic media.

The second group that worked on Case Study 1 said that educating the foster parent association could be a good proactive strategy. In a number of cases, contact between the birth family and the child is prevented. We should look at why that happens and the problems it creates, namely, a permanent rift between children and their family. Is that a reaction to a lack of knowledge about particular cultures? Does lack of knowledge make workers fearful of the unknown?

Case Study 3

An East African family came to the United States as refugees in 1995. Since that time, the family has lived in three different states in the Midwest. The family was intact at the time of arrival in the United States, but the father has since been sent to prison for threatening the family with a gun during a parental dispute.

Since becoming a single parent, the mother has been arrested twice for driving while intoxicated. In addition, the mother failed to seek medical attention for one of the children and was charged with neglect. The children were placed in foster care for four months before being returned home to the care of their mother.

Recently, the family was again reported to CPS by a neighbor who was concerned that the children were being neglected. When the CPS worker arrived at the home to investigate the charge, the mother became enraged and threatened to take her own life and the life of her children. At that point, the children were removed from the home and placed in foster care.

There are six children in the family, ranging in age from 4 to 16. All of the children remain in the care of CPS. The five youngest children are split between two foster homes, and the eldest child has run away from both foster care and group home arrangements. The second oldest child, age 14, is beginning to run away as well. The four youngest children appear to be adjusting relatively well to foster care.

Other local refugees from the same ethnic background have been divided in their reaction to this case. Some community members have been critical of CPS and the U.S. child welfare system, while others have begun to view the intervention as a protection for the children.

Questions Specific to This Case

- How might the local East African community be a resource in serving this family?
- What cultural misunderstandings with this family and the wider East African community are likely to arise in the removal and placement of the children? How could these misunderstandings be minimized?
- How can the child welfare agency help ensure that the children are supported in maintaining their original culture and language?

Discussion

Special Needs

The family has special needs in areas of culture, food, clothing, responsibilities, and roles and in terms of religion. Agency staff need to make sure that parents and children understand what is going on. They need support from the local ethnic community and appropriate mental health intervention to understand where children are coming from.

Strategies

Mentors from the East African community would be very helpful. Community collaboration with family assessments; look at family history, get information from other agencies. The East African community can help; their role could be written into memoranda of understanding. Community members could be trained about the foster care and child welfare process, as in a cross-service training. Parents can do the training. Local police need protocols in place so that they take a collaborative approach toward dealing with the refugee community and are supported in that approach. Police need to know whom to call and need to not overreact. They need more education in general about cultures.

Opportunities

Opportunities exist for collaboration and partnership.

Case Study 4

A mother and father from Asia were granted asylum* in the United States. They live with their teenage son, who was born in their country of origin, and a seven-year-old son, who was born in the United States. As is customary in this ethnic community, the younger son was sent to his grandparents in the

**Asylum* is for people who request refugee status after they have entered the United States, whereas *refugee* status is given to people before they enter this country. Once asylum status is granted, asylees are eligible for most of the same public benefits as those who have refugee status.

country of origin from infancy until he was ready to begin school in the United States. This practice is common due to the busy work schedules of most parents in the United States; the practice lets children learn their mother tongue and be cared for by their grandparents.

The mother works during the day, and the father works at night. Thus, when the seven-year-old boy returns from school, the father is at home, but often sleeping. One evening, the father awoke and found the boy missing. After searching for him, the family realized that the boy had been routinely leaving the house without permission while the father was asleep.

The father punished the child by hitting him with a thin bamboo stick, a common discipline technique in his home country, and sent the child to bed without supper. The mother says that she also hit the child, but not hard.

The next day at school, a teacher noticed bruises on the child. The school then contacted CPS to file an abuse charge. The CPS investigator who visited the home was accompanied by a Mandarin interpreter, although the parents' first language is another Asian dialect. The family was assigned a caseworker of Asian descent, although the caseworker is not of the same ethnicity as the family and does not speak the same language as the family. Court proceedings were interpreted into Mandarin; however, the family remained confused because that is not their primary dialect. The child was very confused as well because he primarily speaks the parents' local dialect. The family did not understand what was happening and what the court was deciding about their son, due to the language gap.

Ultimately, the father was charged with neglect and the mother was charged with abuse. A court order was issued barring the mother from visiting the son. The child was placed in a kinship care placement with an aunt, where he remains. The court has recommended parenting classes and mental health counseling for the mother, but culturally appropriate services have not yet been located.

Questions Specific to This Case

- How did the child welfare agency attempt to provide culturally sensitive services? How were they appropriate or inappropriate?
- Looking at the case now, what would you have done similarly or differently to best serve this family?
- What broad cultural or societal pressures are affecting the child-rearing abilities of this family? How can community-based organizations and public child welfare agencies work together to address these issues?

Discussion

Special Needs

The family needs good translation and interpretation services. Children need ongoing contact with their parents.

Strategies and Opportunities

[The group noted that it combined questions 2 and 3.] Outreach on the part of both the community and child welfare is important. The community needs to understand what is happening, understand the rules and regulations. Too much is going on while a family is receiving orientation to the United States; it would be better to have ongoing orientation. Cultural and language needs must be met. Training and information are needed for all involved parties. Recruiting foster families, creating an ombudsman, and teaching appropriate discipline are good strategies.

Child welfare could work with the child on how to be safe. It could provide support to the family in the form of after-school care, ESL classes, and GED for parents. Something as simple as an after-school program could have solved the whole thing.

Summary of Discussion

The facilitator asked the group to think about how resources might be secured. The needs are labor intensive. Participants made the following comments:

- Be wary of using family members as interpreters; they can't do a good job because they are emotionally involved.
- New organizations have difficulty developing credibility and stature to raise funds. The best way to do that is by creating partnerships with comparable groups and with established groups. It is important to build bridges: Established organizations need to reach out to community-based organizations, and vice versa. Those kinds of partnerships will ensure success for all. Becoming accredited through the Council on Accreditation may be of help to small organizations.
- This Roundtable was the beginning of a discussion that should continue over time in order to identify additional resources and strategies.