

## Chapter Five: Recommendations

While accessing child care resources can be challenging, there are many opportunities to increase capacity in meeting this need. Refugee service agencies have a range of options to effect change, ranging from advocating with mainstream providers, to helping refugee communities organize their own resources or adding child care programs to their services. Below are some recommendations in developing responses.

### **1. Conduct aggressive outreach to educate refugee parents about their choices.**

Several states demonstrated that more deliberate outreach can be effective in engaging refugee communities on child care issues. For example, the New York Consortium of Child Care Providers uses several non-traditional outreach methods to increase knowledge about their services. Their methods include van trips into immigrant communities with peer educators, advertising in ethnic newspapers and radio stations, and enlisting the help of community hairdressers to distribute brochures. Refugee service agencies can work with CCR&Rs to make information about child care available to their clients. Employment specialists can ensure that child care issues are included in the employment planning process.

### **2. Enhance collaboration between resettlement agencies and mainstream child care providers.**

To ensure successful long term collaborations between mainstream agencies and refugee service providers, we recommend the following steps: (1) establish regular meetings between resettlement staff and mainstream child care agencies; (2) host cross-service trainings between resettlement staff and mainstream child care agencies to address topics such as who is a refugee, the effects of trauma, childrearing practices in refugee-sending countries, cultural competence, the child care subsidy process, etc. (Review BRYCS publication [Building Bridges: A Cross-Service Training Guide](#)) and (3) widen the network used by the referral agencies to include unregulated providers within refugee communities. Resettlement staff, acting as cultural brokers, can encourage local child care agencies to use ethnic community members and resettlement staff as resources in improving their programs to serve ethnically diverse clients. By advocating and linking with a local CCR&R, resettlement agencies can improve service delivery to their clients.

### **3. Streamline the child care subsidy process.**

Connecting refugees with financial assistance for child care is paramount in securing child care. Refugee service workers should assist refugees in applying for state child care subsidies by building this step into case management and allowing time for the process. Clients may need help with filling out paperwork, transportation to appointments, finding an approved provider, etc. Service providers can avail themselves of the expertise within their local CCR&R. Additionally, developing a relationship with a designated person at the local child care subsidy agency can help to ease the process.

### **4. Increase community capacity to access close and flexible child care.**

In response to a limited amount of existing infrastructure, partners can take many steps to create viable solutions by leveraging existing mainstream services and adding to them. Listed below are strategies other states have used:

- Seek discretionary funds from government sources such as ORR and private grants to underwrite on-site child care.
- Network with community groups, such as Girl Scouts of America and local colleges, to build a volunteer base to offer on-site child care.

- Negotiate with child care drop-off centers to donate slots for refugee clients.
- Build strong relationships with providers within the neighborhoods where refugees live. This can help to increase successful placements (providing technical assistance with filling out forms and payment methods), the availability of placements (such as informing each other when spots are opening or refugee children will be arriving), and lessen transportation issues.
- Collaborate with CCR&Rs to offer trainings to mainstream providers. CCR&Rs are responsible for training and providing technical assistance to their network of providers. Assist CCR&R staff in developing and delivering refugee specific training to this network to increase cultural accommodation of mainstream providers. Review BRYCS publication [Building Bridges: A Cross-Service Training Guide](#).

#### **5. Build capacity within refugee communities to offer quality child care.**

- Assist refugees in becoming licensed child care providers. Local CCR&Rs can guide refugees through this process. Some states offer grants to help with start-up costs. There is also a special food reimbursement program for family child care providers through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, administered through various state and local agencies. Network with community groups and faith organizations to see if they are willing to offer space to a child care center. Review is the resource, *Home-Based Child Care: Assessing the Self-Sufficiency Potential (With special reference to refugees)*, published through the Refugee Welfare and Immigration Reform Project of the Institute for Social and Economic Development.<sup>14</sup>
- Work with your CCR&R to create strong kith and kin networks. Goals could include increasing the safety and quality of informal care and connecting informal refugee child care providers with supports. Review is the resource, *In Our Own Backyards: Local and State Strategies to Improve the Quality of Family Child Care*, published by The Institute for Women's Policy.<sup>15</sup>
- Work with refugees to coordinate a babysitting co-op. Refugee service workers can connect parents who will take turns watching each other's children. Parents can advertise this co-op at the refugee service agency, local MAAs, grocery stores, etc. NOTE: Depending on how many children each parent will be watching at one time, licensing issues may apply. Refer to your state guidelines or your local service agency to determine at what age it is appropriate to leave older children home alone supervising younger children.
- Support refugees in cutting down transportation costs and schedule constraints by linking parents who can car pool or take turns accompanying children on public transportation. Advocate with schools for buses to drop students off at child care programs, not just at their homes.
- To mitigate child care stressors, link refugee families to community supports, such as after school and summer programs.

#### **6. Partner with family-friendly employers.**

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<sup>14</sup> Hein, M., Allen, R., Else, R. (1999). [Home-Based Child Care: Assessing the Self-Sufficiency Potential \(With special reference to refugees\)](#); Refugee Welfare and Immigration Reform Project of the Institute for Social and Economic Development.

<sup>15</sup> Hamm, K., Gault, B., Jones-DeWeever, A. (2005). [In Our Own Backyards: Local and State Strategies to Improve the Quality of Family Child Care](#); The Institute for Women's Policy Research.

- Partner with employers that offer flexible spending accounts. These plans allow employees to deduct the costs of childcare (as much as \$5,000 a year per household) from pre-tax income, thus reducing what employees pay in taxes. NOTE: Once funds are designated they must be used to pay for childcare or be forfeited; the child care provider must be licensed and registered.
- Provide refugees with information about the Childcare Tax Credit, through which workers are eligible for a childcare credit of 20 to 35% (depending on income) on qualifying expenses. In 2005, for one qualifying child, the credit was from \$600 to \$1,050. For two or more qualifying children, the credit was from \$1,200 to \$2,100<sup>16</sup>. Visit the [Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\) Web site](#) for more information. NOTE: Those enrolled in a flexible spending plan are ineligible for the childcare credit.

## 7. Systems advocacy.

- Advocate for employment standards to account for child care constraints. For example, what is the reasonable timeframe that someone should start employment if they also need to arrange childcare?
- Advocate for faster and more streamlined access to child care funds. For example, could the State Refugee Coordinator act as the pass through for childcare monies?

## Summary

While there was slight variation across states regarding the availability of community resources, most respondents identified similar trends. Arranging child care can be an expensive process that may impede a quick turn-around on finding employment. Limited access to child care resources can result in refugees spending a longer time unemployed, missing out on job interviews, or losing employment because they are unable to secure child care. Furthermore, available child care options are commonly viewed as inadequate, not reflecting parental preferences, and culturally inappropriate. Refugee serving agencies do not feel influential in creating large scale changes in their community to improve child care access. However, many refugee serving agencies have experienced success in carrying out grassroots activities to create child care opportunities for refugee families. Through outreach efforts and collaboration between the local CCR&R and the Volags, this barrier can be diminished.

In many states there appear to be missed opportunities for refugee serving agencies and Child Care Resource and Referral networks to work together. CCR&Rs endeavor to meet the needs of all parents; these agencies are likely to be responsive to information about the needs of refugee families. In areas with large numbers of immigrants and refugees, local CCR&R agencies appear to identify these groups as a service priority.

In conclusion, BRYCS and RefugeeWorks commend initiatives by refugee serving agencies to reach out to mainstream providers and improve child care linkages for refugee families. The structure of such programs served to increase access to child care resources and expand capacity within the refugee community to meet its own child care needs. At the same time, we found that it is crucial to develop greater flexibility and cultural competency, and an efficient, streamlined process in this system to meet the needs of refugees and their children.

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<sup>16</sup> Internal Revenue Service (2005). *Publication 503: Child and Dependent Care Expenses*. Retrieved August 2005.