



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

This document is provided by the BRYCS Clearinghouse.

**Foster Care Training
St. Louis, MO Pilot Site**

By
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)
Baltimore, MD
and
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration
and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS)
Washington, DC

BRYCS

March 21, 2002



BRYCS is a joint project of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and
the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS)

888.572.6500

info@brycs.org

www.brycs.org



Training Development and Implementation

In the process of developing the BRYCS pilot site technical assistance plan for St. Louis, it was suggested by the St. Louis child welfare director that before implementing the larger cross-service training, scheduled for July, that we also organize a smaller training focused on foster care in March, 2002. The idea behind this suggestion was the training would help to inform the process of the larger cross-service training and also provide immediate training on refugee issues for the foster care unit. Her suggestion was acted upon and the attached agenda (page 6) was developed. St. Louis was recently selected to be a Casey Family to Family site, so there has been an additional emphasis in the St. Louis foster care unit in improving services.

In conversations with the child welfare director, the following goals were identified for the foster care training:

1. To look at own bias and become more aware of other approaches in working with different ethnic groups;
2. To identify and connect with the various strengths inherent in different cultures;
3. To target potential resources for foster care workers;
4. To understand how structural procedures may create challenges in providing proper foster care placements.

BRYCS asked the child welfare director to invite as many unit supervisors as possible to the training and, as a result, the majority of participants in the morning and afternoon sessions were supervisors. The morning session also included representatives from adoption, child protective services, family courts as well as foster care. The afternoon session was focused completely on foster care issues with about twenty participants.

Training Summary

The morning session included a range of different presentations providing general information and resources to participants on refugee populations, multi-service coordination benefits and challenges, and an overview of refugee foster care "lessons learned". The afternoon session was tailored to allow more detailed discussion of the challenges in foster care with placement, training, recruitment and licensing. Generally, there was a positive response to the information presented by Chak Ng, Lutheran Community Services, both in the morning and afternoon session. Participants mentioned that it was good to hear about the Lutheran Community Services program in Seattle and to realize it was possible to recruit families from different ethnic communities.

The St. Louis foster care agency has noticed in the past two years an increase in foster care placements of children from other countries but it was unclear to them at the time of the training whether there were actual placements of refugee children. Vietnamese, Bosnian, Ethiopian and Sudanese children were mentioned during the course of the training.

The afternoon session brought out particular concerns from the foster care staff in their work with refugee communities and families. Listed below are the topic areas of concern and the questions and comments raised.

Topics of Concern

Recruitment

The current recruitment strategy in the agency includes providing information through television, radio, events calendars, postings in local supermarkets, churches and schools but staff agreed it is not as effective as word of mouth. Over half the current foster care families recruited are the friends and families of foster care parents. The consultant noted that the foster care unit should first decide how many families they need and from which communities they would like to recruit. Is it also key to identify a staff person who has this specific responsibility.

The staff was very aware of the need to develop more connections with the refugee communities. The following issues were raised:

1. Staff was curious to know more about recruitment strategies such as working through local mosques or community centers and what protocol to consider when outreaching this way.
2. Understanding scope and limit of a worker's responsibility when it comes to accommodating for different cultures and religions.
3. Consultant, Chak Ng, stressed two key components to increasing recruitment numbers in refugee communities:
 - a. Work now with building trust and relationships with the leadership in each of your target recruitment communities
 - b. Use a simple message: For example, "We want the Bosnian children in your community to remain in your community and so we need families from your community to become foster care parents."
4. Annie E. Casey's model of neighborhood-based services was discussed. Talked about the resources already existing in the families as well as their strengths.
5. It is very challenging to recruit families for respite care.

Data Tracking

Questions were asked about the potential to collect data within the foster care agency to track refugee cases. The child welfare director said it would be possible to collect this information, it would just be a matter of coordinating it.

Staff Training

1. Staff need specific training on how to interact with foster parents once recruited, especially those from different countries. There is an emphasis in the agency to consider all foster parents as “being part” of the foster care program but this is not always effective and issues of confidentiality come up.
2. There is a great fear in staff of having a “bad case” and this can create some difficulties with working collaboratively with agencies and foster care parents.

Foster Care Parent Training

1. There is not much flexibility to tailor the current curriculum for specific refugee populations. (They use the “STARS” Specialized Training Assessment Resources and Support/Skills training curriculum)

Licensing

One major challenge in this area is the amount of hours required for licensing and the appropriateness of the material used to explain the licensing requirements and the training mandates to refugee families.

1. Challenge of meeting cultural needs of the different refugee families and explaining requirements/information in a cross-culturally appropriate way.
2. Discussed building parent support to address the particular concerns of refugee foster care parents.

Smaller Caseloads of Refugee Families

During the course of the day there a few questions about the need to improve foster care services for African-American children and their families. This is certainly an important concern also in view of the fact that the caseloads of refugee families are much smaller. The refugee families, though fewer, may be more complex in terms of language and cultural barriers and also in the range of traumatic experiences families may have suffered. In meeting the needs of all families, it is important to draw on the lessons learned in working with all populations and learn from the experiences of caseworkers and families.

Feedback from St. Louis Child Welfare Director and Training Consultant

Tena Thompson
Children Services Director
St. Louis City Missouri Division of Family Services

“I was very pleased with the training on March 18th. Although, I had to do some running in and out during the morning session, when I was able to attend, I found the information very well received and the content was great. Staff seemed very interested and we had what I thought were very good questions at the end of the morning session. The questions indicated to me that the individuals were engaged in the training. I also believe that it was enough of a "taste of information" that staff will be interested in going to the next training in June. I had one SSS-I who only attended the morning session express great interest in working on protocols for staff when working with refugee families.

There were some interesting statements regarding sensitivity to focus better on recruitment efforts for African American Children. It made me aware, that even though the majority of our children in out of home care are of color and that almost all of our efforts are directed towards African American children there is still some very sensitive feelings that have to be accounted for and addressed.

The afternoon basically helped reinforce that we were doing many of the "right" things. I think that confirmation from Chak was good for staff to hear. The interaction between staff and all three of the TA's for the day was good.

All in all, it was a very positive day. It helped staff begin to think of new ways to work with and engage our refugee communities.”

Chak Ng
Lutheran Community Services
Seattle, WA

“I was surprised and impressed by the energy and enthusiasm of the group in the afternoon session. It was more than I have seen in the state government here in Washington. Seems like they are doing the right things except that I didn't hear what their current goals are. How many families do they want to recruit and license this year? In a process such as recruitment, numerical goals are important because it gives us focus and compels us to be efficient in the use of our time and money. Most of all it gives us a sense of urgency because time can easily slip away from us.

I also sense a desire to reach out to the refugee community. That is half the game. They should just identify someone and begin to reach out. They can learn along the way and should not be afraid of making mistakes. Ask the experts if you have questions. Again, in my own simplistic way, it is just a matter of setting concrete goals, crafting a message, building relationships and spreading the message.”

**Participant evaluations
(24 submitted out of about 60 participants)**

1. What information (from the training) was helpful to you?
 - a. Handouts and local resources
 - b. Learning about different local service agencies for refugees and specific information related to St. Louis refugee populations
 - c. Learning about the difference between immigrants and refugees
 - d. How to incorporate information about refugee populations into daily work in child welfare
 - e. Discussion about foster home recruitment efforts
 - f. Information on collaborating with other agencies
 - g. Methods on how to communicate with refugee populations
 - h. The impact of trauma in refugee populations

2. Will this information be useful to you in your job?
 - a. 17 checked “yes”
 - b. 6 checked “possibly”
 - c. 1 was left unmarked

- 2A. For those who checked “yes”, the following comments described how they thought the information would be useful.
 - a. Provided foundation to start with in working with refugee families and a definite place to start
 - b. Help to identify resources in the community
 - c. Provides resources and also understanding how to best collaborate to serve families
 - d. Techniques to consider in working with refugee families
 - e. Understanding and relating to different cultures
 - f. New connections, such as with International Institute and African Refugee Services
 - g. Recruitment of families for specific populations and how to approach communities
 - h. Listing of resources available in the community
 - i. Thinking about planning ahead

3. What additional information, not covered in this training, would you find useful to you in your work?

- a. More specific information about different cultures
- b. Representatives from refugee communities to tell their stories
- c. Information in working with Latino populations
- d. Any plans to pursue federal/state laws, as was done with the Indian Child Welfare Act that will help these families maintain their identity/cultural/nationality?
- e. Examining everyone's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes
- f. More information regarding how services are provided to families and any bi-lingual staff that may be future resources.
- g. List of local cultural groups in the area
- h. More St. Louis specific resources
- i. On-going training

4. Is there specific feedback you would like to give the presenters?

All the responses were positive and said they thought all the speakers were very informative.

5. Additional comments

- a. This type of dialogue needs to also take place with those who work one-on-one with the refugee families.
- b. More visual aids
- c. Need to deal more with African American populations and their needs since they are the majority of the caseload now.
- d. More critical to have this training as a result of September 11.
- e. Interested in additional trainings.

Materials Distributed to Participants

1. BRYCS Program Description
2. BRYCS Technical Assistance Update (February, 2002)
3. BRYCS Cross-Cultural Resource List
4. BRYCS Parenting Study Summary and Resource List
5. BRYCS Child Welfare Standard Summary and Reference List
6. BRYCS Child Abuse Prevention Month Resource List
7. BRYCS Community Conversations Summary
8. URM/reclassification info and Frequently Asked Questions
9. Draft of "Caring for Muslim Minors: Guidelines for Non-Muslim Families (Developed by Pat Maloof, LIRS)
10. MELD publication-Working with Immigrant and Refugee Families (Permission granted)

11. CWLA “Ten Things Every Child Welfare/Human Service Organization Should do to Promote Cultural Competence”
(Permission granted)
12. Publication information for:
CWLA “ Cultural Competence Agency Self-Assessment Instrument”
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families: “Crossing the Divide: Asian American Families and the Child Welfare System”

Training Agenda

Working with Refugee Populations in Child Welfare

Thursday, March 21st, 2002
Prince Hall Community Center
4411 N. Newstead Avenue
St. Louis, MO

8:30-9:00

Introduction, Expectations, and St. Louis Pilot Site Project

Presenter: Kerry McCarthy, BRYCS, Baltimore, MD

9:00-9:45

"Understanding Refugee Families in St. Louis: What Service Providers Should Know"

Presenters: Suzanne LeLaurin, International Institute

Zed Minale, African Refugee Services

9:45-10:45

"Service Coordination and Utilizing Resources"

Presenter: Patty Sadallah, Strength In Partners, Cleveland, OH

10:45-11:00

BREAK

11:00-12:00

A Foster Care Perspective: Working with the Refugee Community

Presenter: Chak Ng, Lutheran Community Service, Seattle, WA

12:00-1:00

LUNCH

1:00-2:30

Foster Care Roundtable Discussion

Specific dialogue on foster care organizational structure, process and models in working with newcomer and refugee populations.

2:30-2:45

BREAK

2:45-4:00

Foster Care Roundtable Discussion (Cont'd)