BRYCS
Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

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Refugee Youth Employment

by

RefugeeWorks: The National Center for Refugee Employment and Self-Sufficiency

December 2001

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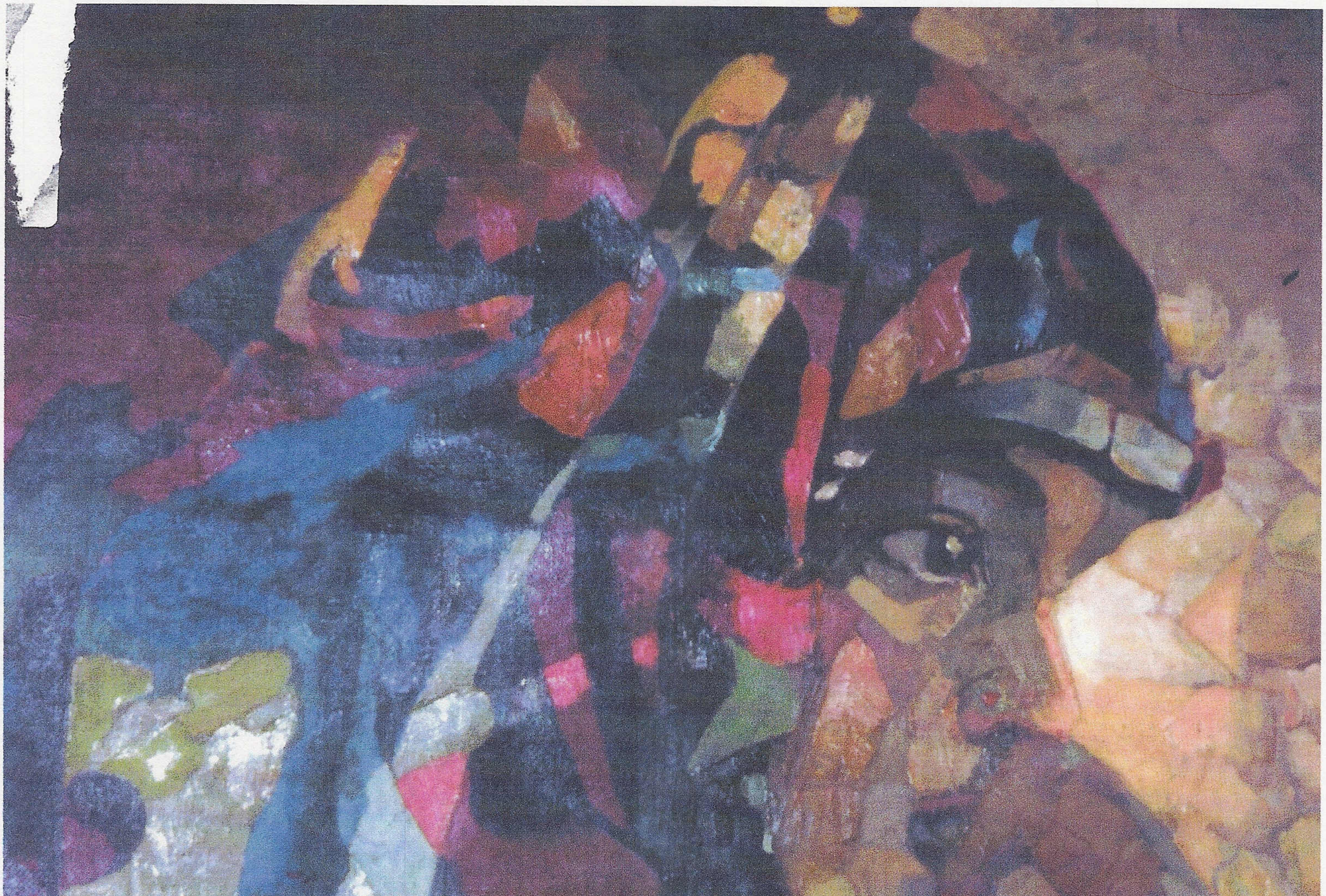

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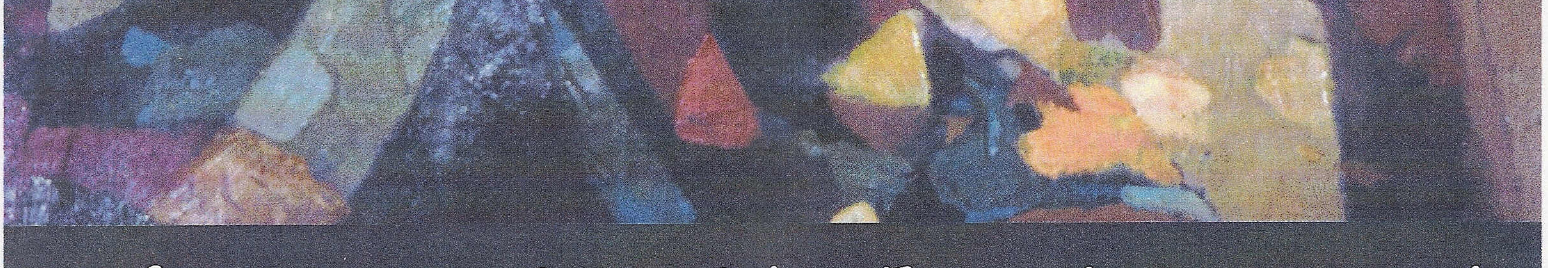

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Refugee Youth Employment

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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR REFUGEE
EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

LIRS
LUTHERAN IMMIGRATION
AND REFUGEE SERVICE

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Table of Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements ... *vii*

Introduction ... *viii*

Section I: Programs Targeting Refugee Youth

Chapter 1: Career Development

- World Club: Empowerment and Leadership Opportunities for Refugee Youth
  Lutheran Family Services and Duke University, Raleigh, N.C. ... 2
- Career Awareness Focus for Teens from Former Soviet Union
  Jewish Vocational Service, Southfield, Mich. ... 4
- Agencies Partner for Somali Youth
  International Rescue Committee, Boston ... 7
- Job Readiness and Career Orientation Program
  Asian Youth Center, San Gabriel, Calif. ... 10

Chapter 2: Summer Employment

- Harvard Students and Southeast Asian Youth Pair for Summer Enrichment
  Phillips Brooks House Association, Cambridge, Mass. ... 12
- Summer Environmental Work Initiative
  Educational Service District 112, Vancouver, Wash. ... 15
- Two Summer Programs Offered to Refugee Youth
  International Institute of Metropolitan St. Louis ... 16

Chapter 3: After School and Out-of-School Job Placement

- Lao American Youth Leadership, Employment and Career Counseling Resources
  Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota, Minneapolis ... 20
- Program Helps Youth Supplement Family Income
  International Refugee Center of Oregon, Portland ... 22
- Linking School to Training and Work
  Arizona Call-a-Teen Youth Resources, Phoenix ... 24
- Center Offers "One Stop" To Self-Sufficiency
  Youth Co-Op, Miami ... 26
- Newly Arrived Youth Served Year-Round
  Work Source—West Vancouver, West Vancouver, Wash. ... 28

Chapter 4: Special At-Risk Populations

- Emergency Rescue Team for Gang-Involved Youth
  Hope Now For Youth, Fresno, Calif. ... 30
- Youth Empowerment for Success
  Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, San Jose, Calif. ... 34
- Short-Term Job Placement Strategy Works for Youth
  Goodwill Industries, Menasha, Wis. ... 36

Chapter 5: Career Pipeline

- United Auto Workers and General Motors Partner for Youth
  Manufacturing Technology Partnership, Flint, Mich. 38
- Explorers Post Leads to Law Enforcement Careers
  Metropolitan Police Department, St. Louis 40

Chapter 6: Entrepreneurial Models

- Dancing Their Way to Business Success
  Asian Youth Services Committee, Oakland, Calif. 44
- Young Entrepreneurs Project Meets with Success
  Tigray Community Association, Seattle 46

Chapter 7: Subsidized Community Service Employment

- YouthCares Pairs Refugee Youth with Elderly
  International Institute, San Francisco 50
- Internship Program Meets Community Needs
  Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell, Lowell, Mass. 52

Chapter 8: Citywide and Statewide Initiatives

- The Youth Loop Drives Collaboration Success
  City of Lowell, Mass. 56
- Statewide Refugee Program Targets Youth
  State of Wisconsin 58
- City's 28 Youth Subcontracts Yield 1,200 Placements
  Department of Human Services, Seattle 60

Section II: Mainstream Youth Program Linkages

Chapter 9: National Networks

- Job Corps 64
- YouthBuild 66
- TeenSupreme - Boys & Girls Clubs of America 70
- Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of the USA 72
- Camp Fire Boys and Girls 74
- Workforce Investment Act Youth Councils 75
- National Youth Employment Coalition's PEPNet 76

Chapter 10: Transferable Models

- Independent Living Skills Program, Kern County Calif. 78
- Little Black Pearl Workshop, Chicago 80

Introduction

> *"As the 21st century begins...more than 1 billion people of the 6 billion in the world are between the ages of 10 and 19. Adolescents have a profound and direct influence on the next generation because of their roles as older siblings, peers, heads of households, parents or future parents, and members of civil society. They are filled with fresh ideas and know how we can best reach them with relevant interventions; they represent one of any society's most underutilized resources. As partners in advancing a global agenda, adolescents are uniquely poised to change the course of human development. We need to reaffirm our commitment to children."*
>
> The State of the World's Children 2000
> UNICEF

As we welcome the 3,600 Sudanese youth now arriving in the United States from the Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya, the time to "reaffirm our commitment" to refugee youth is imminent and our efforts to ease their way to a meaningful future seems particularly crucial and compelling. As stated in the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) State Letter of January 11, 2001, "Resettlement agencies will enroll those refugees eligible for high school and will encourage all over 18 to seek employment as soon as possible. States should arrange intensive employment services, targeted towards early self-sufficiency with a view to job upgrades after initial success at entry-level employment."

Such an effort is unparalleled, as the refugee employment service network has historically focused on adults—more specifically, the primary wage earner, head of household adult. Employment programs that target refugee youth are rare and relatively new as an initiative within the refugee service delivery system.

Under ORR's Formula Social Services and Targeted Assistance Programs, states may provide to refugees who are *16 years of age or older and who are not full-time students in elementary or secondary schools* the employment services listed in §400.154 of the federal ORR regulations. Those services include job orientation, job club, job workshop, job development, referral to job opportunities, job search, job placement, follow-up and assessment. States may provide these services to full-time students in elementary or secondary school *only for the purposes of obtaining part-time or summer employment or for full-time permanent employment upon completion of school.* Services must be targeted to refugees in certain priority categories, notably newly arriving refugees and those who are receiving cash assistance, regardless of their age.

There is, understandably, a deep concern about the impact of work on the academic performance and educational achievement of refugee youth. Education is central to the future success of young people in a rapidly growing and technology-based economy. But according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the school dropout rates reported for ethnic and linguistic minorities are almost triple those of the total student population. In light of these dismal figures, youth employment proponents would argue that work may actually improve academic performance and serve as a deterrent to high-risk behaviors.

It is essential that providers devise ways to, simultaneously, introduce youth to the workforce while emphasizing the importance and necessity of education. Most programs featured in this manual monitor both academic and employment progress for participants who receive job placements. Some programs restrict the number of hours youth may work or tie employment eligibility to academic performance. Almost all stress the responsibility refugee youth must accept for maintaining good academic outcomes when they begin work.

School-to-Work initiatives provide a unique balance for youth by requiring that students complete their high school education while gaining employment skills. Youth in such programs often spend half their day in an academic setting fulfilling requirements for their high school diplomas, and the other half learning trades or other employment skills. They receive payment for the portion of time spent in vocational training and employment.

Refugee youth are poised to excel both academically and in employment settings when they are provided with appropriate resources, close monitoring, and an understanding of the strong link between academic success and future employment potential. Refugee youth should be given the tools to make choices that benefit them and their families as they advance toward self-sufficiency. Employment can become part of a natural continuum of the educational experience of a young person, helping ease the delicate transition from adolescence to adulthood. Together, education and employment appear to improve the chances for refugee youth to reach their full potential in life.

Youth employment first became a recognized, nationally funded service area in the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 marked the initiation of Job Corps. In 1973 the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act introduced funding for training skills and subsidized employment. This was followed in 1982 by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which provided the major source of funding for skills training, summer job placement and out-of-school employment programs. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 connected schools to the workplace and provided in-school youth with opportunities to transition directly into employment. Most recently the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaced JTPA, greatly expanding the range of services that must be provided to young people and promoting year-round comprehensive youth development and employment.

This manual borrows from both the refugee services and the mainstream youth services networks to bring readers the widest array of program models. Together, the programs demonstrate the rich dynamics of working with youth and celebrate the successes achieved by refugee youth participants. Although many of the programs showcased fit into several of the categories presented, we have placed them in the chapter that emphasizes the primary aspects of their employment service.

Section I, **Programs Targeting Refugee Youth,** focuses on programs which serve refugee and immigrant youth either by design or by accommodation to these new populations. The chapters within this section represent a spectrum of employment services, from career exploration and development to summer employment, after-school and out-of-school job placement, self-employment, and subsidized community service employment.

Chapter 1's look at **Career Development** showcases the World Club program in Raleigh, N.C., the Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) in Southfield, Mich., Boston's Somali Youth Program of the International Rescue Committee and the Asian Youth Center in San Gabriel, Calif., which all give youth an opportunity to learn about a variety of careers and professions while emphasizing success in school.

Chapter 2 focuses on **Summer Employment,** which historically has been the most prevalent type of youth employment choice. The International Institute of Metropolitan St. Louis and the Phillips Brooks House in Cambridge, Mass., hire teenagers as summer camp junior counselors. Vancouver's Educational Service District 112 offers its predominantly Russian refugee youth the chance to work on the Chinook Trail as part of environmental teams.

Several organizations have developed **After-School and Out-of-School Job Placement** options for refugee youth as described in ***Chapter 3.*** Criminal justice studies have shown the hours between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. to be prime time for juvenile crime and risky or delinquent youth behavior. After-school programming offers youth safe activities and opportunities for personal development during these hours. The International Refugee Center of Oregon in Portland, the Lao Assistance Center in Minneapolis and Arizona Call-A-Teen in Phoenix provide job-readiness training, support in maintaining school attendance, referrals to educational institutions for out-of-school youth and job placement. WorkSource in West Vancouver, Wash., provides job counseling, development and placement for in-school and out-of-school youth. Miami's Youth Co-Op is a comprehensive youth employment program funded by the Workforce Investment Board. The Youth Co-Op One-Stop Youth Opportunity Center primarily serves youth from the Cuban refugee community. This effective model offers youth training, mentoring, job placement and long-term follow-up.

Some programs work with such **Special At-Risk Populations** as gang-involved and court-involved refugee youth, as ***Chapter 4*** details. These youth provide unique challenges and need intensive one-on-one attention to change destructive behavior patterns. Hope Now for Youth in Fresno, Calif. conducts street outreach and offers 24-hour staff access. Catholic Charities' Youth Empowerment for Success (YES), San Jose, Calif, is a comprehensive youth program targeting high-risk youth. YES continues to expand with more than 1,000 youth accessing the program throughout the year. Goodwill Industries in Menasha, Wisc., works with refugee youth who are under state custody. Youth are given employment options such as nutritional surveying, entrepreneurial activities and career development. One component of the program's success is the involvement of its youth in developing the program.

Career Pipeline, described in ***Chapter 5,*** focus on professional training of youth for specific careers. The International Explorers Post of Metropolitan St. Louis bursts with energy as 35 refugee youth from diverse communities work together to learn about becoming police officers. In Flint, Michigan, the Manufacturing Technology Partnerships bring the United Auto Workers (UAW) and General Motors (GM) together for a two-year initiative leading to a UAW/GM apprenticeship.

In ***Chapter 6*** we learn how **Entrepreneurial Models** give youth the opportunity to learn key business skills and design creative small businesses. Seattle's Tigray Community Association developed an entrepreneur training program for East African refugee youth. Youth eventually developed their own business plan for a small African gift shop and are currently seeking funds to start this business. The Asian Youth Services Committee in Oakland, Calif., is an initiative whose participants use their entrepreneurial skills to raise funds for the organization and fund a part-time staff and advisor position. They hold traditional and acrobatic dance performances and organize four dance parties each year, raising thousands of dollars at each event.

The **Subsidized Community Service Employment** models presented in ***Chapter 7*** provide youth with job placements that double as community service. The Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell (Mass.) uses an internship model to place youth in paid positions with such organizations as Lowell City Hall, the Census Bureau, health centers and schools. Another subsidized employment model, Youth Cares, a program of the International Institute of San Francisco, strengthens the intergenerational relationship between youth and senior citizens. Through employment, youth learn how to work with seniors, share experiences and promote community development.

We were particularly pleased to discover **Citywide and Statewide Initiatives,** as described in ***Chapter 8.*** The Keeping Education for Youth and Success Program of Wisconsin's Office of Refugee Services contracts with 18 agencies in a statewide initiative to address the needs of refugee youth. This is one of the first statewide programs that targets refugee youth and coordinates the provision of services to these youth. As a citywide initiative, the Seattle Youth Employment Program is a dynamic model of youth employment that focuses on academic success, arts and culture, and youth development for more than 500 of the city's immigrant and refugee youth. In another citywide initiative Lowell, Mass., made significant strides in its efforts to enhance youth service delivery through local coalitions. The Mayor's Joint Youth Commission is one example of the city's commitment to its youth.

In ***Section II,*** **Mainstream Youth Program Linkages,** we look at mainstream youth employment programs. As described in ***Chapter 9,*** **National Networks,** such agencies as YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Camp Fire Boys and Girls, Job Corps and YouthBuild, are among the mainstream agencies which are actively seeking—via outreach efforts and marketing—inclusion of refugee youth populations. In this chapter we also feature national networks offering resources to youth service providers. The Workforce Investment Act and its youth councils provide funding and local coordination of services supporting youth employment. Program development training and shared best practices available through the National Youth Employment Coalition's PEPNet project offer a network of support to both start-up and existing employment initiatives.

Finally, in ***Chapter 10,*** **Transferable Models,** the manual looks at two programs which we believe have applicability potential for refugee youth. The Kern County (California) program for emancipated foster care youth includes a housing component. Little Black Pearl is a Chicago-based youth initiative that ties art to education and business development.