

Central Pennsylvania Region Quarterly Consultation

Location: International Service Center

Date: June 16, 2009

Agencies Attending: International Service Center
Catholic Charities of Harrisburg
Church World Service
Lutheran Refugee Services
Institute for Cultural Partnerships
PA State Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP)

Meeting discussion:

The meeting began with introductions of the representatives from each agency. The following programmatic reports were presented to Charlotte Fry, Program Advisor:

Catholic Charities of Harrisburg (CCHbg)

Reception and Placement Program: For the period January - May

- 100 arrived so far (Burmese, Vietnamese, Iraqis, Cuban) – the original goal is 150 for the fiscal year. With only 60 Match Grant slots, this continues to be a problem. Mira Lukic has assumed responsibility of this program.

Employment Program: For February - May

- 44 enrolled
- 27 placements
- No 90-day retentions due to lay-offs/clients leaving the program
- 15 Refugee Cash Assistance clients
- 9 families on TANF
- No asylees served
- First case of TANF sanction done by Dauphin CAO

ESL Program:

- 44 new clients referred from Reception and Placement Program mostly from Burma, Bhutan, Iraq
- A part-time ESL teacher has been hired and holds classes in clients' apartments

- The program has seen its greatest demand for services since its inception

Challenges:

Illiteracy in refugees' native tongue and the lack of motivation are the biggest issues facing the ESL Program. The Employment Program has suffered in placement and retention numbers due to the economic downturn.

Initiatives:

There continues to be two volunteer attorneys coming into the office on a bi-weekly basis to address asylee cases only. The new Move-Up program is due to begin at OIC for TANF clients.

Lutheran Refugee Services (LRS)

Reception and Placement Program: 55 refugees resettled in February to May

- 45 free cases, 10 family reunification
- 27 Chin Burmese, 9 Bhutanese, 8 Karen Burmese, 7 Iraqis, 4 Somali
- 94 Assured Cases (Chin Burmese, Bhutanese, and Iraqi)
- All assured free cases have been temporarily placed on hold due to capacity issues

Employment Program (RSS): 40 active clients

- 9 placements
- 1 TANF recipient
- 67 percent in jobs (FT) with medical benefits
- Average Wage is \$9.03
- Retention is 100 percent at 90 days
- New employer outreach is being sought to combat the decreasing number of placements among companies that usually hire refugees

Employment Program (TAP): 29 enrolled

- 8 placements
- 3 TANF clients
- Average wage is \$8.35
- There has been a significant increase of clients with case management needs such as housing issues, difficulty accessing welfare benefits and language needs

Match Grant Program:

- There are several available openings

- Clients are leaving MG after the cash assistance ends at the 120-day mark and seeking cash benefits from the local County Assistance Office

Immigration Program:

- Continues to be a busy program and assisting with Green Cards, Travel Documents, replacement I-94s , Family Petitions

Events and New Initiatives:

- Two new staff members have been hired to accommodate the number of arrivals. Andrea Miller is employed as a Case Manager in the R&P and MG Programs. Omar Hassan has been hired on a part-time basis as a case management aid. His time will be split between the R&P, MG, and RSS Programs.
- 6 asylees were served this trimester through the TAP case manager's recruitment efforts.

Challenges:

- Required TANF documentation increasing
- Clients having difficulty finding work and seek cash assistance resulting in low outcomes for the Match Grant program
- Timely medical appointments continue to be an issue
- CareerLink is not very cooperative and does not readily make provisions for refugee clients and the staff that assist them
- Employment is significantly reduced resulting in fewer placements

Church World Service (CWS)

Reception and Placement Program: 175 arrivals to date in the current fiscal year

- Arrivals include primarily Bhutanese, Burmese (Karen and Karenni), Iraqi, Ethiopian, FSU, Cuban, Somali
- Job opportunity – seeking part-time temp position for a Burmese speaker. Work is available until the end of this fiscal year.
- Church sponsorships are down but the number of individual volunteers has risen

Employment Program:

- 49 total clients enrolled in RSS (22 new) for the current fiscal year
- 123 clients enrolled in TAP (Cubans only)
- RSS placement rate is down to 43 percent
- TAP placement rate is at 53 percent
- 7 job upgrades
- 8 TANF clients

- 74 percent job retention in RSS
- Average hourly wage is \$9.19

Cuban/Haitian Program: 32 new arrivals from October to May which are lower than usual numbers

- Courts do not have the jurisdiction to adjudicate Cuban adjustment cases. This means that CWS no longer has to prepare those that cross the border for Philadelphia hearing. Cubans who cross at the border can adjust status through USCIS like other applicants.

Matching Grant Program:

- CWS has 80 slots for FY 2009. To date, half of the slots have been filled.

Immigration Services:

- This continues to be a very active program
- Beth May on staff at CWS has applied for accreditation. Three staff members are partially accredited and one has full accreditation.

Challenges:

- TANF clients are not completing the required amount of participation hours due to scheduling conflicts (resettlement-related) or noncooperation. The employment rate is lower because of the current economic situation.

International Service Center (ISC)

Citizenship Services: 10 clients were assisted in naturalization applications from February to May

- Countries of origin: 3 Vietnamese, 3 Somalia, 2 Sudan, 1 Iraqi, 1 Ethiopia
- 109 have obtained citizenship since program inception in July 2007

Interpretation and Translation Program: 54 refugees served from October to January

- Countries of Origin: 16 Vietnamese, 6 Burmese, 4 Sudan, 3 Bosnian, 11 Somalian, 1 Sierra Leonean, 1 Cambodian, 2 Cuban, 1 Liberian, 2 Mauritians, 1 from Burkina Faso, 1 Ghanan, 1 Guinean, 1 from Niger, 1 Russian, 1, Thai, and 1 from Uganda
- Services provided have been helping clients to apply for unemployment benefits, cash and medical assistance, food stamps, the Rent rebate Program, and drivers licensing.

Significant Findings:

- Refugees are commenting on the hardships caused by the economic downturn. Companies that traditionally hire and retain refugees have not readily been employing as many and have also laid-off a number of clients.
- The budget reduction to the ISC contract caused the agency to not be able to meet the originally proposed number of interpretation and Consultant Services hours. ISC requests urgent guidance in how this situation may hastily be remedied. Currently, only Vietnamese refugees may be served by the ISC staff.

Activities Planned for the Next Period:

- ISC staff plans to continuing attending USCIS meetings that talk of assisting refugees when applying for citizenship

Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP)

Greater Access to Independence for Newcomers (GAIN) Project
Accomplishments: For the period February - May

- 29 active clients
- 14 enrollments
- 4 placements
- No TANF recipients
- Average Wage is \$10.31
- Medical benefits available to all placements
- 90-day retention rate is 86 percent
- 5 job coaching completion
- 3 OJT completions
- 4 skills training completions
- 4 credentialing completion
- 7 asylees served
- 16 secondary migrants

New Initiatives:

- A CNA VESL class began at HACC in May. Some clients are still awaiting FBI clearances. Clients seem very interested in this class.
- A partnership program has begun with Penn Foster Career School in Scranton – one client is scheduled to take the HVAC program and is expected to complete within 6 months.

Challenges:

- Staff still faces the challenge of achieving follow-up with clients who fail to return phone calls and attend scheduled appointments. The

economy has caused the number of requests for GAIN services to increase

PA State Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP)

- Charlotte thanked everyone for attending the State Consultation held on June 11 and 12 in Lancaster. Attendees found the information helpful and were especially glad to meet Asresu Misikir and Cliff Deardorff, the new State Refugee Health Coordinator and Program Administrator respectively.
- The issues surrounding MG clients leaving that program before the 180-day ending date, has been discussed with the related ORR Technical Assistant to assist with learning best practices in other states.
- Currently, two ORR discretionary grant funds are being sought: micro-enterprise, and Cuban/Haitian social support.
- ORR has appointed a new director, Eskinder Negash
- BETP Director Bryon Noon informed refugee providers that their clients must comply with all TANF requirements.
- Community service at refugee agencies is a good way to help clients meet some participation hours.
- Upcoming trainings/conferences:
 1. LEP Training: October 13 at the PA Farm Show Building, Harrisburg
 2. Central PA Refugee Guidelines: October 14, via conference call 9 a.m. to noon – call-in information to be provided
 3. Time and Attendance (participation mandatory for employment providers): October 27-30 at the South central WIB Offices, Harrisburg

Next Meeting: 2 PM – 4 PM Wednesday, October 14, 2009 hosted by Lutheran Refugee Services of Lancaster (meeting to be held next door at Trinity Lutheran Church).