

**Refugee Child Welfare Advisory Committee
Lutheran Community Services Northwest
605 SE 39th Avenue
Portland OR 97214**

**April 22, 2008
1:30 to 3:00**

Present: Robert Heiney, Gloria Anderson, Salah Ansary, Neeru Kanal (by telephone), Cecilia Baricevic, Lily Caceres, Crystal Riley, Halima Mohamed and Kirsten Brown

Absent: Janvier Slick-Chair and Susan Soonkeum Cox

Minutes of January 22, 2008

With the correction of the spelling of Faridah Haron's name and a couple typos, the January 22, 2008 Minutes were approved unanimously.

Committee Membership

Cecilia said she contacted Vesna Vila, soon after the last RCWAC meeting, and she seemed quite interested in serving. Vesna is a program manager with SOAR (Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees) which is a member of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (private, non-profit).

Debrief Re: National Forum on Immigration and the Implications to Child Welfare

Following are discussion points from the Forum-

- U.S. immigration is minimally addressed by our society, but presents significant issues for our child welfare systems;
- Immigrant children, who are involved in programs that provide child protection and child welfare services must be afforded services that will address their needs for safety, permanency, and well-being;
- Child welfare services should be available to all children, regardless of immigration status;
- Federal, state, and local policies should encourage full integration of immigrant families into U.S. society, through an expanded delivery of child welfare services;

- All child welfare agencies, courts and other professionals need to become better informed about immigration laws and best practices affecting immigrant children and families they are serving;
- Delivering services to migrating children and families should be a focus at major national child welfare conferences, in the work of the federal child welfare resource centers, and in new research and demonstration projects; and-
- The roots and causes of migration issues impacting child welfare cannot begin to be resolved unless collaboration with other countries exists; the issues that impact U.S. systems do not start and stop at our borders, but are the result of larger, more complex problems that need to involve transnational activities and a global approach.

It was reported that as many as 12 million undocumented adults are in the United States and that for every two undocumented adults, it is estimated that there is one U.S. born child. Gloria talked about how these statistics bring to light the impact of workforce raids. Our child welfare systems must be prepared to respond to the needs of these children. Members discussed the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution which guarantees constitutional rights to individuals born in the U.S.A. Please refer to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.amendmentxiv.html>

Salah asked Gloria if our child welfare department has an advisory committee that addresses the needs of these children; for instance, mental health and social issues.

Lily talked about a group that is forming to address the impacts of deportation on the hotel, restaurant, janitorial and other workforces. Refugees need education about what to say and not say in different situations. This includes being given information about their Rights.

Members discussed the issues of individuals, churches and other social service organizations providing assistance to undocumented persons. For example, is it alright to rent to an undocumented person?

Crystal mentioned that refugees are suffering from PTS that our child and family social services systems need to be able to deal with.

The Committee discussed other populations of refugees that will be arriving in Oregon, including Bhutanese. This population is from Nepal, a nation in South Asia.

Crystal talked about the need for child welfare workers to understand what this Committee has to offer and how to utilize available resources. The case that was teleconferenced last year was very helpful. It is apparent how important it is for this Committee to provide support for the case staffings.

There was discussion about how critical it is for our child welfare workers to identify refugee families, early on.

It is important for all of us to stay connected and rely on each other's expertise.

RCWAC Training Subcommittee

Presently, this Subcommittee is developing a training that will focus specifically on refugees from the African countries of Somali and Burundi, and will target the DHS/CAF CPS workers and supervisors from the five Multnomah branches. The training will assist our workers to identify refugee families, up front, to access the RCWAC and be able to effectively provide needed services. The training will also include refugee experts, RCWAC members and representatives from Africa House.

Kirsten Brown will give a presentation on the CPS process. Robert said this training has been scheduled to take place at the Metro Region Training Center at Lloyd Plaza, on Friday, June 27, 2008. Ordinarily, parking is an issue at this training center; but, with Benson High School and the Concord College being on summer break, those locations will have available parking.

Salah commented that the afternoon training sessions that relate to CPS will be especially valuable information for workers and managers.

Halima and Lily talked about the need to provide education about-

- what is child abuse?
- what is child sexual abuse?
- what is sexual harassment?
- What is appropriate discipline for a child?

Halima stressed the importance of refugees being educated about these questions, and our caseworkers being educated about the cultural practices of refugees. Understanding each other's cultural practices makes it easier to identify and address issues. An example was given about misconceptions: In some cultures, mothers are taught not to bond with their babies until they reach a certain age, because of mortality rates. In the U.S. culture, this behavior presents itself as a

possible abuse or neglect issue. It is also important for refugee parents to learn about some of the local laws related to children, such as curfew.

Crystal said that because parents rely on their children to interpret for them (doctor appointments, school personnel, etc) it creates an inappropriate relationship between parent and child, and leads to other problems when a child doesn't provide an accurate interpretation. These situations can cause children to disrespect their parents, and make it difficult to effectively discipline the children. Parents often struggle to provide for their family which is an additional stress between parent and child.

Members also discussed developing a future training for our community partners, such as volunteer agencies, county nurses, etc.

There is a great need for a comprehensive source of refugee experts. One possibility would be to contract with Africa House, in Portland, which is a program within IRCO (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization). See (<http://www.irco.org/services/community/africa.htm>). Africa House is a "one-stop" family-focused service center with the goal of raising the visibility of the African community, highlighting community achievements, and helping the community and families to achieve self-sufficiency and determination.

Lily suggested inviting the Portland Mayor's office to speak at the training, as they have been very supportive around these issues.

Unscheduled Business

We are still working on the Annual Report. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

The members agreed that discussions of immigrant children and families are appropriate for this Committee.

Following is the "Child Welfare and Migration" web address for the American Humane site:

http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pc_initiatives_migration It also notes a correction to an article in the publication titled "The Intersection of Migration and Child Welfare: Emerging Issues and Implications". The article is titled "Latino Children of Immigrants in the Texas Child Welfare System".

Following is the site to download “Migration: A Critical Issue for Child Welfare” in PDF format:

http://www.americanhumane.org/site/DocServer/roundtable_report_Feb07.pdf?docID=4721

Following is the site to download “The Intersection of Immigration and Child Welfare: Emerging Issues and Implications” in PDF format:

<http://www.americanhumane.org/site/DocServer/BROCH2008.pdf?docID=6621>

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00.

Future Meetings: July 22, 2008, October 1, 2008