

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

**July 22, 2008
1:30 to 3:30**

Present: Jan Slick-chair, Gloria Anderson, Michelle Weber, Cecilia Baricevic, Lily Caceres, Vesna Vila, and Salah Ansary

Absent: Susan Cox, Kirsten Brown, Halima Mohamed, Neeru Kanal, Crystal Riley, and Robert Heiney

Introductions

The meeting began with introductions. We welcomed a new member, Vesna Vila. Vesna is a program manager with SOAR (Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees). SOAR is a member of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, a private, non-profit organization.

New Members

The group discussed new member recruitment.

Jan will contact Neeru to see if she knows of someone from IRCO. Salah suggested someone from their domestic violence program and will follow up with a contact to IRCO.

Lily said that she works with IRCO (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization) for interpretation and translation services. They have been wonderful to work. Lily said she also belongs to Associated Linguistics of Oregon who does work internationally. She suggested inviting someone from those agencies to serve on our Advisory Committee.

2008 Annual Report (for 2007 activities)

Jan gave a brief overview of the 2008 Report, then invited feedback and asked if there is any other information that should be included.

The last three reports are in the same basic format. Initial information about the Advisory Committee is essentially the same. Revised information relates to cases staffed in the previous year, including follow up action that was taken.

Updates on Staffings – Gloria Anderson

June 2007 Somali Staffing

DHS never opened a formal case; it was an assessment only. Staffing this case, with the Refugee Child Welfare Advisory Committee, helped to resolve issues before a case needed to be opened.

Cecelia explained that, because of fraud in Kenya, the United States is now requiring DNA testing to identify relatives. Over half of the refugee cases have shown fraud. The DNA testing is being done in Africa, but Cecilia does not know if it will be implemented in other countries.

Vesna stated that the entire program, of African refugee movement to the United States, was put on hold a couple months ago, as a result of the fraud and subsequent DNA testing. We will probably see less Somalis coming to the U.S. The federal government has not given clear direction about who will be responsible for the cost of the testing.

Cecelia talked about new fees being imposed by airlines for luggage in addition to the first bag. At the present time, IOM (International Office of Migration) is paying these fees; eventually, the refugee will be required to pay them. Because airfare is a loan to the refugee, they sign a promissory note to repay the cost.

July 2007 Somali Staffing

As of July 2008 the case is closed. The children are doing well at school and at home. A safety plan has been developed. The daughter continues to receive services through county Mental Health, but the judge ordered that the case be closed on June 27, 2008. DHS is no longer involved with this case.

Cecelia stated that there are two additional children in the home, now. The mother continues to work on getting other relatives (from Kenya) to the U.S. The mother wants to move which is problematic because she must live in a ground floor home because of her disability.

Review and Approve Minutes of April 22, 2008

Under **Committee Membership**, the following corrections will be made to the Minutes:

- Delete 'Clackamas County'
- Vesna is a program manager with SOAR, not EMO
- SOAR is a member of EMO; EMO is not a member of SOAR

Cecilia made a motion to approve the Minutes with the above corrections, and Gloria seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Schedule 2009 meetings

Jan has a conflict with the second and fourth Tuesday of the month. As a result, we need to change the schedule of our quarterly meetings. We are considering the first Wednesday of the month for our quarterly meetings. The October 28, 2008 meeting will be rescheduled to October 1, 2008. The 2009 dates are:

January 7, 2009

April 1, 2009

July 1, 2009

October 7, 2009

All meetings will continue to be from 1:30 to 4:30, at Lutheran Community Services Northwest.

Feedback — June 27, 2008 Somali / Burundi & DHS Child Welfare Community Forum

A RCWAC subcommittee organized a full-day training for child welfare caseworkers and people who work with African refugees. Twenty child welfare staff (from the Portland area) were expected and about 15 attended. Salah provided the introductory and Jan stated how good his presentation was.

Cecilia attended the morning presentation and thought it was good. She said it would be good to repeat the training and thought it could be opened up to other ethnic groups, because issues pertaining to school, child rearing, etc., are common to many refugee groups.

Jan said we initially focused on Somali and other African refugees because those are the main groups this Advisory Committee is staffing cases from now, but agrees that many issues are universal for all refugees.

Salah suggested including new emerging refugee populations, such as Burmese (Burma is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia), and Iraqis when planning future trainings.

Gloria asked if the child welfare piece was too basic. She and Kirsten struggled with developing the content. They found that the afternoon attendance was mostly child welfare providers. Salah had a commitment in the afternoon and had to leave, but he said the child welfare portion is important. He said if we could make more of an effort to bring community leaders in to speak, it would be good to hear their information.

The group talked about how interesting Nan Waller-Juvenile Court Judge was. She provided a lot of good information. Gloria said the judge was concerned that this has been in place for a long time, but she has only seen one case. The judge is committed to holding child welfare to the Act so we can get children involved in services.

Gloria said that, since the June 27 training, she has received two calls. This is a good indication that people have shared information from the training and it is making an impact on referrals for case staffing.

Jan said we need to repeat the training, in Washington County. It will probably involve some of the same participants with the addition of new ones. This is another county where child welfare is seeing a number of refugees.

Cecelia and Salah added that Clackamas County, along with Washington County, has a number of refugees. Included are refugees from former Soviet Union, Iraq, Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Afghan. Salah said Portland received a large number of Afghan refugees in the 1980s.

Jan said even though we won't begin planning the training until Fall, we should begin talking about the different refugee populations in this area. Salah said even though we will bring in other refugee populations, it is still important to include African refugees.

The June 27 training included presentations from three refugees. Which groups should we focus on, within Washington County? Salah suggested the Somali population and Vesna suggested the Iraqi population. Salah said the Burmese refugees are mostly resettled in the East Portland area. Cecelia said there are at least two Bhutanese families in Washington County.

Gloria asked if we would combine the Washington County and Clackamas County training. Jan said we would probably do separate trainings, beginning with Washington County. It seems to work better when we focus on the issues within a particular county.

Jan asked why the Bhutanese are leaving as refugees? Salah said they are ethnic Nepalese who are in Bhutan, and who are subject to persecution. The U.S. Department of State has identified them as being a future 'at-risk' group and has begun to process them for refugee status; they are similar to the Meskhetian Turks and former Soviet Union people who were identified as a group who were without a State. Salah added that 12,000 were identified during this fiscal year, but it doesn't necessarily mean they will all come to the U.S.

Salah said Michigan has a large concentration of refugees from Middle Eastern and Arabic speaking countries. Iraqis began coming during the first Persian Gulf War. There is a large population of Somalis in Minnesota. Refugees don't usually get to choose where they settle, here in the U.S., unless they are joining relatives already in the U.S.

Gloria said, at the June 27, 2008 training, people asked how everyone could connect each other. We need to follow up on this.

Lily asked if the guest speakers were difficult to understand and whether they were able to understand our child welfare staff, what type of handouts were provided, and who was invited to the training?

Gloria said the training wasn't open to refugee communities; a limited number of refugee leaders were selected to attend and tell their stories. It was a small training. Child welfare staff shared that they found the stories valuable and really had no idea about refugees.

Cecelia said most people do not understand what a refugee program is or what it does.

Jan said there was a little difficulty understanding guest speakers, but overall people could understand them. Jan said she isn't sure about how well the Somali folks understood us, in the afternoon. She said they did lose some of the refugee folks in the afternoon. This was unfortunate because we wanted to share information about child welfare with them.

Gloria thought some of the refugee guests had to leave because of transportation issues. Cecilia said some of them might have had to go to a job. We will try to address this better, in preparation for the next training.

For the next training, some of the areas we need to refine are:

- who is our target population
- what is our purpose
- can the people we present information to take it back to people they work with
- how can we do follow up work with folks who cannot stay the whole day

Cecilia said maybe the agenda could be mixed up a little bit, rather than having the whole morning dedicated to one subject and doing the same in the afternoon. It would break up the agenda items and hopefully foster flexibility for folks' schedules.

Gloria said there were just a few hand outs provided and many of those were left. Maybe, we didn't draw enough attention to them.

Cecelia said the guest speakers are folks who have access to good resources and contacts, and are familiar with how to access them.

Lily said that our service providers, who work with people from other countries, often are not aware of international treaties. Lily said a citizen from another country has the right to contact their Consulate office.

Vesna said she is glad to serve on this Committee and is interested in learning more which will help her when working her cases. We can learn from each other.

Jan said the purpose of this committee is to look at issues regarding refugee children; however, we are hearing more about immigration issues in the child welfare system. This is going to be a whole new issue.

Salah asked if there are trainings related to child welfare that this committee could benefit from.

Jan said that the CORE training, for new child welfare workers, is so full that it is seldom opened up to others. She said there will be Oregon Safety Model (OSM) training for community partners coming up and she could get information about that.

Salah asked what OSM is.

Jan explained that the OSM is an effort to get child welfare workers to focus on what is going on within a family that causes a child to not be safe, or that is leading to a child being neglected.

Salah said he saw a recent announcement that Mental Health is offering a training that is geared toward Russian speaking people. Gloria said it might be helpful to see if Crystal Riley has information about this, and added that medical information is also helpful to child welfare staff.

Cecelia asked if the intercultural clinic funding, at OHSU, serves people other than refugees? Is there a time limit regarding eligibility for refugees?

Gloria said she has referred child welfare workers, with immigrant issues, to the intercultural clinic at OHSU, but she doesn't think they were refugees.

Gloria suggested asking Crystal Riley, clinical manager at OHSU, for an update of what they have in the way of services and training.

Cecelia handed out a document that was written by BRYCS titled "Liberian Refugees: Cultural Considerations for Social Service Providers". Cecilia read parts of the document that related to discipline.

The group talked about how self sufficiency could be involved in future trainings because they also administer a refugee program. Salah said most of the refugees they provide services for are referred to the local self sufficiency branch. Jan suggested getting input from Neeru.

Jan said something to think about when planning the next refugee training in Washington County is to involve self sufficiency. Jan asked if there is a particular office in Washington County that would be more likely to see refugees? Vesna replied that it would be the office on Jenkins Road.

Portland Case Staffing – Liberian

Cancelled; the caseworker is ill. We will set up another meeting to staff this case.

Portland Case Staffing – Somali

No Show; we will set up a phone conference to staff this case. Gloria said the caseworker was going to contact Africa House.

U.S. Kenya Refugee Program

The U.S. refugee program is on hold, at this time. The U.S. is now requiring DNA testing of family members. Vesna said we will see a lower number of Somali people immigrating into the U.S. The DNA testing has shown that the level of fraud is as high as 65 to 75 per cent. Somali relatives, here in the U.S., might end up being responsible for the cost of DNA testing.

Refugee families are so desperate to get to the U.S. that they aren't always truthful about who their family members are. Once settled in the U.S., some refugees then try to get additional family members here that were never identified in the beginning of the process. Sometimes, a refugee family will arrive in the U.S. only to quickly fall apart and go separate ways because they aren't related, as they initially claimed. At times, a couple will claim to be brother and sister when they are actually husband and wife, which causes problems later on for them. There are cases when refugees will board a plane to the U.S., injured, because they don't want to risk their chance of leaving by going to a doctor. Some refugee men have more than one wife

and somehow manage to get all of them to the U.S.; this causes a variety of issues including the inability to provide for all their wives and children.

Gloria asked Vesna which population she mostly works with.

Vesna said mostly the same, but also the Cubans. The Cuban refugee cases can be complicated because they have common marriage. Usually, parents are separated which results in children from multiple fathers with different last names.

Cecilia said they had a case of a family getting off the plane and immediately saying they didn't want to live together. This creates issues of how they would manage to live here if the family split up.

Washington County Training- November 2008

Jan said, for planning purposes, if we plan to have training in the Fall, this Committee will meet only one more time (October 1, 2008) before that happens. Jan will work through Africa House for a speaker who can present on the Somali people. Salah said he will work on identifying a speaker for Iraqi refugees. Salah and Cecilia said they will work on identifying a Bhutanese speaker.

Salah asked if we should include Russian refugees in the Washington County training. We will explore that.

Jan said she would begin working with Washington County to set a date for the training. Jan and Gloria will work on the agenda.

Clackamas County Training

Jan said we will start planning for the Clackamas training after the first of next year.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm

Future Meetings: October 1, 2008.