

Blueprint for Refugee Integration

A Focus on Women and Youth



**Community Collaboratives for
Refugee Women and Youth**

International Rescue Committee

122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168
www.theirc.org/community



Blueprint for Refugee Integration

A Focus on Women and Youth

The *Blueprint for Refugee Integration* is a guide explaining what elements should be in place in a community for the successful integration of refugee women and youth. The Blueprint is one outcome of a series of needs assessments conducted by IRC Technical Advisors in six sites across the country: Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Phoenix, Raleigh and Salt Lake City. The needs assessments were conducted in an effort to ascertain the needs of refugee women and youth across five sectors: health, education, employment, community participation and site environment. All six needs assessment reports can be found at www.theirc.org/community. From the data collected in the needs assessments, the Technical Advisors distilled the aspects in the sites which contributed to high refugee integration as well as those aspects which would have encouraged integration had they been present, in order to develop the Blueprint. In each section of the Blueprint, examples from site visits are given.

The Blueprint will be most useful to refugee service providers, community service providers and any other individuals and institutions working with refugees. It will assist program planners from various agencies in designing and implementing services for refugee women and youth. Finally, for policy-makers and funders, it offers a solution-oriented presentation of the needs of refugee women and youth.

Health of Refugee Women and Children

Refugee women and children are knowledgeable of and appropriately referred to mental health services

Mental health services, both chronic and acute, if left untreated will affect not only the well-being of the individual on a short- or long-term basis, but will also affect their family members. For less severe but very common mental illness among refugees, such as PTSD and depression, support groups and community support are important for long-term success. Often, the isolation that single or homebound mothers experience can trigger such disorders.

If mainstream mental health agencies or services are to appropriately assist and counsel refugee clients, particularly African and Middle Eastern women and children, the agency must adjust their strategies and activities to reflect cultural attitudes and norms. Receiving culturally appropriate mental health services is fundamental to effective participation.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Raleigh, as there is a lack of culturally appropriate mental health counseling services, there were incidents of refugees being taken into custody and placed in psychiatric institutions for treatment; if appropriate services had existed perhaps the treatment would not have needed to be so severe.*
- ◆ *In Minneapolis/St. Paul, women's sharing circles have had much success in enabling women to discuss their experiences and histories and find support from their peers.*

Women and children can seek and receive domestic violence help and services that are respectful of language and culture

Effective orientation for newly-arrived refugees regarding domestic violence and child abuse laws can help prevent these occurrences, as well as appropriately inform batterers of the repercussions of their actions. Women who have more access to information regarding services for domestic violence tend to utilize those services more often. The role that ethnic organizations play in responding to domestic violence impacts the reporting and resolution of incidents. The process of reporting domestic violence and the removal of women and children from their families and communities can increase their isolation and alienation from their communities but it can also empower the individual and her family. Mainstream domestic violence agencies and shelters can prove effective service partners, given they make cultural adjustments and train their staff appropriately.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Salt Lake City, a domestic violence provider said that when she made a presentation to a refugee ESL class on domestic violence, referrals increased dramatically the next week.*
- ◆ *In Phoenix, the lack of culturally appropriate services and lack of linkages between domestic violence providers and refugee service providers is resulting in very few refugees accessing mainstream domestic violence services.*
- ◆ *In Chicago and in Minneapolis/St. Paul, some ethnic community leaders have taken responsibility for resolving family conflicts rather than referring women to mainstream services.*

Women and children are being properly treated for medical problems through culturally and linguistically appropriate services

When refugee women and youth have serious or debilitating health conditions that restrict their participation in activities, they need to have intensive case management that assists them in learning the expectations and methods of participation in this culture, given their physical limitations. Increased medical and counseling services for those who fall between able and disabled can help those individuals to engage in their new lives. Also, caseworkers need to have the time and capacity to properly coordinate and translate for their client's appointments, as well as engage them in treatment.

Examples:

- ◆ *Montagnard women in Raleigh were not meeting with friends, neighbors or other community members because they feel they are old and should be home-bound.*
- ◆ *Some refugee women in Chicago with some medical conditions considered themselves disabled, although by the public assistance definition, they are able.*

Women and children are covered by health insurance plans

As an indirect factor, having health insurance makes women and their families more likely to seek medical care. Effective and ongoing outreach and orientation contributes to women properly understanding and enrolling in the most suitable health insurance plan. Outreach by the Children's Health Insurance Program (ChiP) for low-income youth is valuable as it is central to newly-arrived families' awareness of and enrollment in this resource.

Examples:

- ◆ *Women in Dallas and Salt Lake City who did not have insurance had not been to the doctor as recently as those who had.*
- ◆ *Women who did not understand the HMO/insurance system did not seek appropriate doctors and should be walked through the process to identify a doctor, learn how to make a payment, etc.*
- ◆ *In Salt Lake City, an employer said that one employee had been swindled for more money than she actually owed because of confusing language on health bills.*

Refugees are receiving information concerning preventative health care

Also an indirect factor, as preventative health care does not directly contribute to participation, women see preventative health care issues as central aspects of their daily lives. Preventative health care topics that are covered and/or reinforced in a variety of settings, such as ESL classes, after-school programs, women's support groups and staff meetings, can help refugee women absorb and make use of the information.

Examples:

- ◆ *Women who are accessing WIC are receiving a basic level of pre-natal and infant care.*
- ◆ *In Phoenix, lack of preventative health care on nutrition, for example, is contributing to physical illness among new arrivals.*

Employment of Women and Adolescents

Refugee women and adolescents are working in appropriate, stable jobs that pay a livable wage

The employment of women as secondary wage earners increases the ability of a family to achieve self-sufficiency. Single parents, seniors and women with low skills or poor health need creative solutions to employment, such as micro-enterprise, if they are to generate income and become self-sufficient. In typical entry-level jobs for refugee women, the effects of fluctuating hours are considerable and can lead to instability of the family's self-sufficiency, a decrease in benefits, and a reinstatement of cultural barriers to the employment of women.

Examples:

- ◆ *First-time efforts at micro-enterprise have proven successful for Sudanese women in Salt Lake City.*
- ◆ *When hotels reduce available hours in Chicago, refugee housekeepers worry about meeting their expenses; it is especially acute if family members are employed together.*

Refugee Service Providers are helping women and children integrate into their workplace

Refugee service providers can best assist refugee women by helping them to develop long-term comprehensive employment plans that address their barriers to employment. Major barriers include: transportation, childcare, skills training and ESL participation. When service providers can assess new arrivals appropriately and intensify efforts in difficult cases, such as single mothers, chances of long-term self-reliance are greater. When refugee service providers offer flexible and active post-placement follow-up, employers are more likely to feel secure with their choice of employee and utilize available services, such as translation.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Salt Lake City, women would not have been able to access TANF child care subsidies without the assistance of their refugee service provider.*
- ◆ *In Minneapolis, a resettlement agency publishes an employer handbook that describes each refugee population, its characteristics, and the linguistically appropriate resources available. Employers can then call for assistance, or refer their employees, when situations arise.*

Employers are enabling refugees to become successful at their jobs

Employers' flexibility and willingness to adapt the working environment to the needs of refugees is key to a refugee's success at his or her job. When refugee women are able to form at least one strong relationship with a supervisor or co-worker, benefits include the refugee feeling more comfortable in the workplace and colleagues developing greater cultural understanding.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Raleigh, three months after a domestic violence incident caused a Burmese woman to be hospitalized, she was able to return to work. Without a supportive supervisor and*

strong relationships with the staff, she might have lost her job or not had the courage to return.

- ◆ In Phoenix, employers who hired Somali women worked with them to make compromises on dress codes and other cultural requirements.
- ◆ In Raleigh, the willingness of an employer to spend additional time for orientation enabled employees to take advantage of stock options; the same employer adjusted the dress code to accommodate the hijab.

Refugees are employed in areas that use their skills and offer a future

Refugee women experience great frustration when they are not aware of what their future will hold, and if they will advance or remain at the same job. Refugee women can be empowered by being given the strength to make thoughtful employment decisions that involve the recommendations of their job counselors. Having control, or comfort with and knowledge of, this aspect of their lives can help them advance in other areas. Job upgrade programs also instill a sense of future achievement.

Examples:

- ◆ In Chicago, one woman without an employment plan was frustrated and disappointed in a job in which she felt her skills were not being utilized appropriately.
- ◆ In Dallas, one agency's job upgrade program helps women to think of their long-term plans and realize there is life beyond their current entry-level job.

Refugee women and youth have special programs available to help them become self-sufficient

It is essential that community agencies, both mainstream and refugee-specific, recognize underserved and vulnerable populations and develop appropriate programs to meet their needs. When needs are identified and agencies collaborate to meet the needs, the outcome can be great, and can benefit both the refugee and the community. Communities that ensure that single parents can access TANF support services are providing valuable resources that are crucial to obtaining employment and self-sufficiency. Communities that connect youth with skill-building summer and year-around jobs can improve the immediate and long-term self-sufficiency of the family.

Examples:

- ◆ In Raleigh, although vocational training is a support service which TANF recipients are entitled to, refugee single parents cannot access it because it does not include linguistically appropriate classes.
- ◆ In Salt Lake City, the Youth Employment Services (YES), a federally funded program for low-income youth, has targeted refugee students as a population in need of additional schooling, counseling, and employment. YES adapted their programs to meet the needs of refugee youth; as a result, these youth are participating and benefiting from YES.

Education of Youth, Adolescents and Women

Refugee youth are participating and involved in their education

School attendance indicates the most basic level of students' involvement in their education. In order to accurately assess refugee student involvement however, one must also examine their participation in mainstream activities, their ability to develop friendships with American students, their future educational objectives and their connectedness to their school. When mainstream students participate in in-school, extra-curricular or community activities that encourage diversity, or have an interest in international affairs, refugee students tend to be more at ease in their presence. Where students are more comfortable in their school environments, they tend to participate in more activities and be more involved in their education.

Examples:

- ◆ In Minneapolis/St. Paul, students at the Abraham Lincoln High School eagerly participated in extra-curricular activities and maintained high grades, because they felt comfortable in the school.
- ◆ In Dallas, when teachers gave refugee students special attention, such as in special reading groups or play therapy sessions, students seemed to flourish and become engaged in their education.

Schools are cooperating and adapting to the needs of refugee students

Newcomer schools, or transition centers, can provide space, time and support for refugee students who are adjusting to new lives. In these schools, they have the opportunity to gain self-confidence, study English intensively, make friendships within and across ethnicities and develop relationships with caring teachers before going into larger, less protective public schools. When public school teachers have more cultural understanding of students' backgrounds and family situations, they seem to offer more support to students and their families and form bonds with students more easily. Principals' responses to refugees and immigrants affect how refugee students are perceived and accepted in the school and the level of support they and their teachers are given.

Examples:

- ◆ In Chicago, teachers at Senn High School said that students visibly withdrew when they left the supportive environment of the Newcomer Center to attend lunch, gym and art with mainstream students.
- ◆ In Dallas, the leadership and direction exhibited by the school principal at one elementary school created an environment in which teachers and support staff could develop innovative programs to meet the needs of refugee students.

Parents participate in their children's education

When parents are not able to help their children in general adjustment to school and with homework, after-school activities that close this gap seem important to students and families. When refugee parents are able to voice their opinions or concerns about their children's schooling, the school can adapt the environment to better suit a multi-cultural student body. When parents have assistance in

navigating the school system (through translation, bi-cultural teachers' aides, etc.) then parents can become more involved in their children's education.

Examples:

- ◆ In Salt Lake City, refugee parents were keeping their children home from school when pork products were on the menu, however once they were able to express this concern, school administrators offered alternative foods.
- ◆ In Phoenix schools, parents are often not participating in teacher conferences, however in the schools in which the refugee social worker is able to arrange translation, they tend to participate more.

After-school programs provide refugee students direction, mentorship and enrichment

Participation in after-school programs helps youth make healthy decisions by providing positive activities during critical hours. Parents and associations that recognize delinquency or a high use of alcohol or drugs among teens and actively respond are greatly serving their youth. Youth in mainstream public schools can form valuable bonds with their ethnic community when they participate in after-school programs run by ethnic associations. Through activities organized by after-school programs, refugee youth contribute to cultural understanding by showcasing their cultural traditions (such as dances) to the general public. Youth need tailored assistance in planning for their future and continuing their education; often, local schools cannot provide this to the extent necessary.

Examples:

- ◆ In Raleigh, the World Club at Sanderson High School gives students opportunities to learn about career choices and links them with university mentors who act as positive role models.
- ◆ In Chicago, elementary school students performed traditional dances for a local community fundraising event and received positive feedback.

Refugee families are placing pre-school children in high-quality child care environments

The lack of childcare prevents women from participating in community activities. The ideal environment in which a child is placed varies according to family opinions; there is no one universally applicable solution. Families, especially single parents, need assistance in understanding their options, choosing a smart solution, and understanding the environment in which they are placing their child. If communities are requesting in-home, ethnic-specific childcare, training in understanding policies and responsibilities and assistance with licensures should be provided.

Examples:

- ◆ In all sites, women said that if they had child care, they would be more likely to participate in ESL, employment or other activities.
- ◆ According to refugee women, their child care preferences varied among day care centers, family child care providers, neighborhood child care providers, ethnic child care providers and pre-schools.

English language training and other education classes address the needs of women

Refugee women identify English language training as vital to their participation in the community. Refugee women who study in classes with more established immigrants have the opportunity to gain connections to a wider community and learn from the experiences of their classmates. Refugee women who study with other refugees have the opportunity to gain on-going cultural orientation. Women-only classes create a forum for discussion of various women's issues. Family literacy programs could encourage strengthening of family through structured learning activities.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Phoenix, a women's ESL class requested speakers on various topics of concern to them; a women-only environment allowed women to ask questions and generate discussions that they could not have otherwise.*
- ◆ *In Raleigh, activities in a mixed refugee-immigrant classroom enabled students to share life stories and other experiences and led some of them to become friends.*

Refugee Women and Children's Participation in Community Life/ Community Receptiveness

Refugees are oriented regarding issues essential to their effective participation in the community

Orientation conducted in accordance with the R&P cooperative agreement is generally insufficient. Refugee women and youth are generally too overwhelmed upon arrival to consider community participation; they are more focused on adjustment and meeting basic needs. Concerted efforts to provide on-going and repeated orientation on all subjects by multiple agencies would contribute to refugees' greater understanding of community life. Orientation topics that are repeated in a variety of activities/environments, such as ESL classes and ethnic community meetings, are more likely to impact the client.

Examples:

- ◆ *Refugees we met with in all sites did not absorb much of the information covered in their new arrival orientation and voiced a need for on-going or repeated orientation.*
- ◆ *An organization in Dallas offers a 12-part orientation program that can be attended by any refugee up to five years after arrival.*

Refugee women and children are participating in refugee groups and ethnic associations, and community leaders are emerging

Where there has been customized leadership training for refugee women, women have become empowered and motivated to form women's organizations. Characteristics of strong women's organizations include a multi-ethnic membership and meaningful mentor relationships with community leaders and/or community-based organizations. In African and Middle Eastern ethnic associations, refugee women tend not to occupy leadership positions. While refugee women might benefit from associations' services, they are usually not involved in the formation of and the on-going decision-making of the organization. If associations have more formalized and structured means to include women and youth in association activities and are mindful their barriers, then women and youth would be more likely to participate in association activities. At times, the conflict between and among ethnic associations has tended to slow down community acceptance and integration, as well as participation of women and youth. Where there has been opportunity for youth to develop their leadership skills, they have seized the opportunity and excelled. This applies to informal as well as formal leadership opportunities.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Phoenix, Refugee Women United for Progress (RWUP) is housed within the IRC. RWUP receives informal training and support on financial, administrative, and programmatic matters from IRC leaders.*
- ◆ *In Dallas, Salt Lake City, and Phoenix, community leaders received leadership training through Refugee Women's Network. In two sites, the leaders started successful women's organizations (TRIWA in Dallas and RWUP in Phoenix) and in Salt Lake City, activities are starting to form.*

Communities are giving support and direction to ethnic community participation

Unless civic associations and ethnic organizations encourage refugee participation in civic activities, inter-relationships between the two groups will remain limited. Refugee participation in civic associations is in large part determined by the extent to which the organization shows flexibility (in cultural norms and language) and adjusts its procedures (e.g., time, location) to meet the needs/requirements of refugee participants. When communities validate the importance of ethnic community development, this can positively influence the perception of refugees in the community. As ethnic communities organize, refugee service providers can offer guidance and perspective. Giving responsibility for program management without guidance can set newly-formed associations up for frustration and perhaps ineffectiveness. If local businesses, government and other community associations also lent support, the process would be smoother, the capacity of the ethnic associations would be greater and community support of the initiative would be assured.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Chicago, a community organizing association recognized the strength that refugees could bring in advocating for affordable housing; they solicited the support of the Ethiopian Association that garnered a successful turnout.*
- ◆ *In Dallas, Catholic Charities has provided support and direction as the Sudanese Community Center developed; their involvement helped the Center secure funding and implement needed programs.*

Refugee women and children are participating in civic community activities and developing relationships with community members

New arrival women and youth depend on resettlement agencies and co-sponsors to link them with activities among their own community and the larger American community. The positive relationships that refugee women and youth form with employers, co-workers, teachers and guest speakers in ESL classes and schools tend to strengthen their understanding of Americans and their community. Male family members generally take the responsibility for participating in other civic activities. Once American community members form mutually beneficial relationships with refugees, they are more likely to advocate on behalf of refugees. When religious services are held exclusively for one ethnicity/language group, they contribute to the strengthening of ties in ethnic communities; when refugees attend mainstream services, they make connections with members of the greater American community – a rare opportunity. Refugees who attend religious services by choice tend to feel more comfortable in forming relationships with fellow congregation members than those who are recruited to attend religious services.

Examples:

- ◆ *In all sites and in almost all ethnic-associations, male participation far outweighs female participation.*
- ◆ *In Dallas and other sites, refugee women named their English teachers as their American friends. In Salt Lake City, volunteers were also named as American friends.*

Site Environment

Site allows refugee families to become economically self-sufficient through affordable housing, available jobs, public assistance, public transportation, and suitable cost of living

The ability to achieve self-sufficiency goes beyond obtaining suitable employment; the local context (i.e., housing, suitable job availability, cost of living, public assistance, public transportation) must be taken into consideration. When refugees can balance all elements of self-sufficiency, they have a greater chance of integrating. As refugees tend to stay in their initial housing placement for a substantial period of time, the appropriateness of this placement has a great impact on their self-sufficiency in the long term. If women and children are in uncomfortable housing (i.e., unsafe, cramped, in poor condition, or expensive), this is a foremost concern to them; local agencies, government and refugees need to work together to find solutions to the issue. Whether refugees live in close proximity to other refugees or in American neighborhoods, the main factor influencing their integration is the connection to other residents made on their behalf by resettlement agencies, co-sponsors or community-based associations. Economic self-sufficiency for newly arriving refugees is determined by the combination of wages, public assistance and the cost of living. The weight of each of these factors needs to balance out with the others if a refugee family is to attempt to become self-sufficient. When the factors do not balance, emergency measures should be in place to form a safety net for those who need it. The hours of operation, frequency and geographical scope of public transportation greatly affects refugees' ability to accept employment and participate in other community activities.

Examples:

- ◆ *In Dallas, the combination of low public assistance and low wages reinforces refugees' comments that they were not self-sufficient, despite employment.*
- ◆ *In Minneapolis, housing was noted as the biggest barrier by nearly everyone interviewed. Often families have to separate, sending children to live with friends, neighbors or relatives; the physical disintegration of the family clearly affects refugee women and youth negatively.*

Suitable services are available for all refugee groups resettling in the community, regardless of age, gender, culture, or country of origin

Particular groups (namely, the elderly, female, those from Africa and the Middle East) face greater barriers to self-sufficiency; their needs should be assessed and special services should be targeted to assist them. Refugee seniors, like American seniors, need to be able to access certain federal programs and social services if they are to remain independent and healthy. Program staff and community members who identify and reach out to vulnerable seniors can give them increased opportunities for social interaction as well as connection with social service programs. When agencies offer individualized services to meet family needs based on a holistic approach that includes intensive employment and life planning, the needs of single parents are more likely to be met. If single parents are able to access all of their TANF benefits, including childcare and vocational training, they are more likely to be self-sufficient in the long term. Refugees should have knowledge about and access to emergency assistance programs that are available to the general public; if they cannot enroll in these programs, particular refugee-specific funds need to be established to prevent situations such as homelessness and intervention by Child Protective Services.

Examples:

- ◆ Salt Lake City's aging services program connects refugees with all services available to mainstream seniors, including Meals on Wheels, public housing and senior center events. Refugee women interviewed were adapting and interacting in their new lives.
- ◆ An ethnic organization in Minneapolis/St. Paul holds a weekly gathering for elderly Somali women who are desperate for inter-personal connections; if not for this gathering, the women would almost never leave their apartments where they are extremely isolated.

Local and state government, refugee service providers, and mainstream service providers, community leaders, churches and other public and private organizations are developing partnerships and strengthening cooperation in service provision

In sites with fewer numbers of refugees resettled, there are likely to be more partnerships among agencies, as they carry out service provision to refugees. If refugee resettlement services are meant to assist the refugee in the short term and connect the refugee to mainstream services in the long term, it is essential that refugee service providers tap into and collaborate with established community programs. Mainstream state and federal programs can offer resources, trainings and funding channels to support emerging programs within refugee services. When there is an emergency (i.e., Kosovo) or special population resettlement (i.e., Kakuma youth), mainstream providers have joined the effort by providing programs, resources and volunteers. This demonstrates the responsiveness and willingness of mainstream providers to become engaged in refugee services once informed of the need.

Examples:

- ◆ In Phoenix, when the public libraries became more aware of refugee needs, they became engaged with refugee service providers in designing refugee-friendly library programs.
- ◆ In Raleigh, a resettlement agency called in all personnel and resources to get the most help possible for the arrival of the Montagnards and Kosovars. Emergency food, housing, and medical agencies all pitched in to help.

Local refugee service providers offer integrated, complimentary, and client oriented services

The state service contracts that providers are awarded from refugee-specific funding can lead to either competitive or complimentary relationships among agencies. If services are clearly defined, agencies can avoid duplication of effort and competition with each other. Where State Coordinators are involved and aware of refugees' needs, they can make better decisions about issuing requests for proposals that respond to those needs. State Coordinators can play a central role in networking refugee providers and advocating for services to refugees in other mainstream and state agencies. When direct service staff and mainstream organizations are included in the regular Director or consortium meetings of refugee service providers, the likelihood of effective collaboration and dissemination of important information and statistics related to refugees increases. As new refugee populations are being resettled new refugee service staff are being hired to service these clients. Due to the volume and crisis-oriented nature of the work, staff does not often receive as much training as would enable them to provide the level of services that are often expected of them. Increased opportunities for training, discussion of current issues and stronger evaluation processes would encourage staff to pro-actively identify and address the continually evolving needs of refugees.

Examples:

- ◆ The State Refugee Coordinator in Illinois has successfully recommended that the State Board of Education set aside funding for enrichment programs specifically for refugees.
- ◆ In the Dallas Metroplex refugee service provider meetings, attendees include: resettlement agency directors, the state refugee program coordinator, direct service staff, health departments, police representatives and community citizens. The collaborative environment leads to an impressive amount of information sharing.

Refugees are accessing and receiving appropriate services from community service providers

Given the growing diversity of and increasing numbers of refugees into some sites, the need for culturally competent service provision is acute. There is interest among many mainstream service providers to enhance their cultural competence through training and resources. The federal Limited English Proficiency law has challenged many public institutions to deliver linguistically appropriate services; many of these institutions continue to need guidance if they are to comply with the law.

Growing immigration into sites can influence the quality and delivery of services; the response of mainstream providers depends upon their capacity to adapt services to a multi-cultural clientele. Where police agencies have adapted their services to include refugees or shown particular interest in assisting refugees, the likelihood is greater that the refugees will understand American laws and rules regarding safety and security. Some low-income state and federal programs, particularly health-based initiatives, are widely accessed by refugee women and children (i.e., WIC, CHIP). If other, less-utilized state and federal programs (i.e., SYSEP) were to strengthen and adapt their outreach and referral efforts or partner with refugee service providers, refugees could benefit from the services that they offer.

Examples:

- ◆ In Phoenix, the police department holds regular orientation sessions in refugees' apartment complexes so that new arrival families understand their environment and safety regulations.
- ◆ In Salt Lake City, the limited number of translators has restricted available translation at local hospitals and clinics.

The community is accepting of refugees and assists in their resettlement process

Increasingly, volunteers are being recruited and trained to act as community liaisons, tutors and home visitors through resettlement agencies. Organizations that attract volunteers through service learning programs (VISTA/Americorps and other volunteer service programs) or engage more established ethnic community members have gained valuable resources. Women and youth, particularly single mothers, are often given priority in being matched with community volunteers. When sponsors are properly prepared and used appropriately in resettling refugees, the relationships that refugees form with their sponsors can help them understand their new environment. Additionally, the sponsor(s) become better acquainted with refugees in their community. When local government has met with or is publicly supportive of refugee resettlement into the area, refugees tend to feel a greater sense of connectedness to the community. The media can have a great impact on public awareness and public opinion about refugees nationally and in local communities. If agencies can educate and develop relationships with media staff, they can better ensure that stories about refugee resettlement are reported accurately. Often, community members are unaware that refugees live in their area; if

awareness were increased, they would have more opportunity to welcome and accept refugees into their community.

Examples:

- ◆ In Raleigh, sponsors connect families with neighbors, schools, doctors, after-school programs, and local churches. In doing so, they gain awareness of how diverse their city is becoming.
- ◆ In Salt Lake City, Community Awareness Nights at city and county buildings serve to educate new arrivals to the city about the functions and services of city government.

For more information regarding this Blueprint, as well as other tools for creating programming for refugee women and youth, please contact:

Community Collaboratives for Refugee Women and Youth

International Rescue Committee

122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168
www.theirc.org/community

Andrea Frodema, Project Officer
212.551.2722
andrea@theirc.org

Margaret Weeks, Project Manager
212.551.0994
margaretw@theirc.org

Quoc Nguyen, Program Specialist
212.551.2746
quocn@theirc.org

Meghan O'Connor, Program Specialist
212.551.3142
meghano@theirc.org



With funding provided by the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Community Collaboratives offers training, technical assistance and funding nationwide to raise the level of programming for refugee women and youth. For more information about this program, please visit our website at www.theirc.org/community.