



**MAY 2004 SPOTLIGHT:**

**FOREIGN-BORN CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE: HOW TO SERVE THIS SPECIAL POPULATION?**

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The number of foreign-born residents in the U.S. has increased nearly threefold since 1970<sup>1</sup>. This increased diversity of American society impacts all social service sectors, including the U.S. foster care system.

Taking into account a child's culture of origin can greatly enhance the quality and appropriateness of a child's foster care placement. Some specific needs of foreign-born children in foster care include the following:

- Language interpretation
- Immigration legal services
- Cross-cultural adjustment
- Ethnic and religious identity
- Coping with separation and loss (of family, environment, social norms, etc.)
- Familiar food and customs.

In addition, foreign-born children in foster care need culturally competent caseworkers and foster families. While these issues can be daunting for a young person who is simultaneously dealing with the adjustment to foster care, a child's cross-cultural heritage can be an asset by providing two cultures and traditions from which to draw on for strength.

Refugee and immigrant children in foster care can easily be overlooked, since they are usually minority populations in an overburdened system of care. For this reason, BRYCS has focused in a variety of ways on this intersection between immigration issues and child welfare practice.

In July 2003, BRYCS hosted a roundtable meeting in Washington, DC called "Foster Care at a Cultural Crossroads: Refugee Children in the Public Foster Care System." This first national gathering of its kind utilized the [BRYCS cross service training](#) model and brought together representatives from refugee communities, refugee-serving organizations and the foster care system in order to develop strategies for supporting refugee children in the care of local child welfare agencies. One participant described the gathering as a "dramatically important meeting." A compilation of the presentation and discussion notes, resources, case studies and participant information has been published in a [BRYCS report](#), available upon request.

A related BRYCS publication, "[Serving Foreign-Born Foster Children: A Resource for Meeting the Special Needs of Refugee Youth and Children](#)" includes information on:

- Identifying and assessing the needs of children eligible for refugee-oriented services
- Developing refugee foster families and permanency planning for refugee children
- Governmental and professional standards on linguistic and cultural competence
- A multi-service description of the U.S. refugee serving system
- "Lessons learned" from BRYCS' technical assistance and from specialized refugee foster care programs.

This publication also includes information sheets for dissemination on the topics:

- "Developing Refugee Foster Families: A Worthwhile Investment"
- "Serving Refugee Children in Foster Care: Fundamental Considerations"

These information sheets compile promising practices from foster care programs that have specialized in the care of refugee children. BRYCS designed the sheets to be copied and used as training or discussion materials.

The BRYCS Clearinghouse also includes a variety of documents related to foreign-born children and foster care. A recent addition to the Clearinghouse is a New York Times article from March 28, 2004 titled "[Children Alone and](#)

Scared, Fighting Deportation." The article discusses a little-known legal provision called Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS)<sup>2</sup>, which is available to: foreign-born children in need of long-term foster care, who are under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court, and for whom return to their country of origin is not in their best interest. Additional information about SIJS can be located through this Web-based manual <http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=3712>.

Many child welfare agencies seek to expand and diversify their pool of foster parents, while also increasing the cultural competence and sensitivity of existing foster families. Two additional resources in the BRYCS clearinghouse can assist with these worthwhile efforts:

- "Foster Care: A Fact Sheet for Prospective Muslim Families" provides information for Muslim families who are considering becoming foster parents. This downloadable brochure can be used as a recruitment tool.
- "Caring for Muslim Minors: Guidelines for Non-Muslim Families" provides information for non-Muslim foster families who want to provide religiously sensitive care for Muslim children. This downloadable document can be used as a training tool.

We hope that these varied resources will assist child welfare providers and others working with foreign-born children to better serve this vulnerable but growing population.

1 Schmidley, A. Dianne, U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Series P23-206, Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, page 2 (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2001). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-206.pdf>

2 See page 5 of *"Serving Foreign-Born Foster Children: A Resource for Meeting the Special Needs of Refugee Youth and Children."*