



## OCTOBER 2006 SPOTLIGHT ON CHILD CARE:

### Caring about Child Care for Refugee Families

*In Fiscal Year 2005, 35% of all refugees admitted to the United States were below the age of 16—roughly 18,500 children. [1]*

Any parent understands the complexity of finding adequate child care arrangements, and the anxiety of leaving one's child with another caregiver. Refugee parents also face these hurdles, compounded by a lack of familiarity with U.S. child care norms and expectations, language barriers, and limited family and community systems on which to rely for help.

A new BRYCS curriculum, ***Enhancing Child Care for Refugee Self-Sufficiency***, explores the child care issues facing refugee families. The curriculum combines useful descriptive information about the U.S. child care system, feedback from refugee serving agencies, practical recommendations for improving refugee access to child care, promising practice examples, and a sequence of training modules and handouts. Specifically, this resource includes the following sections:

- Executive Summary
- Chapter 1: Understanding the Child Care System
- Chapter 2: Child Care Use among Refugees
- Chapter 3: Child Care and Employment
- Chapter 4: Feedback from the Field
- Chapter 5: Recommendations
- Chapter 6: Promising Practices for Building Refugee Community Capacity
- Training Modules
  - Lesson 1: Opening the Training
    - Child Care 101 “Quiz”
  - Lesson 2: Child Care Use among Refugees
    - Types of Child Care
    - Child Care Options Chart
  - Lesson 3: Child Care Use among Refugees
    - Patterns of Use
  - Lesson 4: Child Care and Employment
    - Child Care Steps in Employment Checklist
    - Back Up Child Care Plan Worksheet
  - Lesson 5: Understanding the Child Care System
    - Who Can Help Me Find Local Child Care Providers?
    - Who Can Help Pay for Child Care?
  - Lesson 6: Recommendations
    - Strategies for Improving Access to Child Care Handout
  - Lesson 7: Wrap Up Activities

In researching this curriculum, BRYCS staff gathered feedback from 12 refugee serving agencies, as well as Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies in seven states. This first-hand information provides a unique perspective on the struggles faced by refugee families seeking child care and the strategies employed to find adequate care.

These interviews documented the following barriers faced by refugees seeking child care.

- Cost: This was the most frequently cited barrier for refugee families.
- Transportation: Both the availability of public transportation, and prohibitive distances between home, work, school and daycare, were problematic.
- Logistics: This was most often a difficulty when siblings are in school, particularly if they are in different schools.
- State subsidies: Respondents noted a lengthy process, unavailable or insufficient funds, or a process too complex for refugees to complete unassisted.
- Family structure: Single parents most need childcare help but may have the hardest time accessing it.
- Catch 22's: Refugees cannot get childcare subsidies until they are employed, but they cannot get employment until they secure childcare.
- Limited spots: Many daycares, especially those which are subsidized, already have waiting lists.
- Employment expectations: ORR and the volags expect all adults to be employed, which discourages parents from staying home with their children.
- Birth certificates: Many refugees lack birth certificates, which can be a requirement for state subsidy applications.
- Experience: Refugees from countries and cultures that use formal child care arrangements (such as Eastern Europe) more easily transition to the use of formal child care in the U.S. Many African refugees, used to more informal means of child care, find U.S. child care systems more complex and rigid.

A key distinction in child care options is whether it is formal and regulated, or informal and without government licensure or oversight. One researcher found that children in immigrant families are less likely to use formal center-based child care than their non-immigrant peers. Similarly, the refugee resettlement agency staff interviewed for this BRYCS curriculum noted that refugee families are more likely to use informal care arrangements for their children, resorting to the following strategies to overcome child care barriers.

- Relative care: Most commonly, a family member will remain at home to care for younger children. Often this is a grandparent. Sometimes an older sibling will care for younger siblings, though this can unintentionally place the older sibling at risk for dropping out of school.
- Alternating shifts: Some parents arrange to work alternate shifts, so that one parent is always in the home. This can cause difficulties if a parent works all night and then must stay awake to care for children during the day.
- Same-culture caretakers: Some families locate babysitters from within their own ethnic community. Often this is informal care rather than care by licensed child care providers.
- Neighbors: Some families turn to neighbors to assist with childcare. This too is often informally arranged.
- Employment care: Parents may take their children to work with them. This is perhaps easiest when working in businesses which are owned by family or friends, or if employers provide on-site childcare.
- Vouchers / scholarships: A number of mainstream childcare providers accept vouchers or provide scholarships to low-income families, for which refugee families may be eligible.
- Refugee service provider care: Refugee resettlement agencies with in-house childcare services may assist refugee families with child care provision, or short-term care for appointments, doctor's visits, English language classes, etc.

Despite some creative responses to childcare challenges, refugee serving agencies report that the need is still greater than the child care available. The BRYCS child care curriculum summarizes their recommendations for improving the childcare situation for refugees.

- Educate refugee families about their child care choices.
- Develop collaborations between states and refugee resettlement agencies so that resettlement agencies can directly administer childcare subsidies to refugees.
- Streamline the child care subsidy process.
- Increase child care spaces in agencies which accept vouchers or state subsidies.
- Assist refugee communities to provide quality child care, such as increasing the number of refugees who are themselves licensed as childcare providers.
- Partner with family-friendly employers, such as those who offer on-site childcare and dependent care flexible spending accounts.
- Engage in systems advocacy, such as: a) adjusting federal employment standards to account for difficulties in arranging childcare; and b) recognizing stay-at-home parenting as an allowable form of "employment" for refugee parents who prefer this to non-parental care.

Appropriate child care arrangements are a critical element in a refugee family's employment stability and peace of mind. Employment may be the priority of government and agency staff helping refugees establish themselves in their new home, but most parents will consider proper care of their children their most important job. For survivors of war, persecution and displacement—as for most families—children typically remain the family's most valued treasure, and refugee serving agencies must recognize and honor that in working with refugee families.

Child care arrangements with which parents are comfortable must be a core part of refugee case management and employment development, not an after-thought. Ultimately federal, state and local service providers must care about refugee child care, because refugee families clearly do.

The **featured search** lists the most up-to-date and useful resources on this topic available for free download.

**FOOTNOTES:**

1 - U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center (RPC), Fiscal Year 2005. "Refugee Arrivals by Relationship to Principal Applicant and Gender, Age, and Marital Status: Fiscal Year 2005." USCIS Statistics Yearbook, available at:

<http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/yearbook/2005/Table15.xls>

2 - Brandon, Peter D. "The Child Care Arrangements of Preschool-Age Children in Immigrant Families in the United States." International Migration, Vol. 42 (1) (2004), p.65.