

Interfaith Refugee Ministry (New Bern, NC) Program Description

The Interfaith Refugee Ministry, Inc. is located in New Bern, NC, the only resettlement agency in the eastern part of the state. The agency (an affiliate of Episcopal Migration Ministries) serves a diverse caseload, consisting of ethnic groups from Burma, Iraqis, and Montagnards from Vietnam. Those from Burma and Iraq often, but not always, have U.S. ties. Almost all Montagnards are family reunification cases. The agency's numbers range around 180 individuals per year.

Cultural orientation is an ongoing learning experience for staff and refugees. Each case has a case worker who does basic orientation as required by the Cooperative Agreement. U.S. ties are usually very helpful with showing newly arrived family or friends around town and helping them find familiar ethnic foods.

The program offers the Matching Grant Program and the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP, administered by the State Refugee Coordinator's office). RAP covers services such as one-on-one case management, employment assistance, transportation, ESL, emergency services, referrals, and translation/interpretation for up to five years after arrival for asylees and refugees. Employment assistance is provided through a team, comprising collaboration on the part of the case worker and employment staff. ESL programs are hosted in-house and at refugee homes. The agency also offers private tutoring through volunteers.

American Life classes are taught by the Mental Health Coordinator and encompass domestic abuse, drinking/smoking age, driving laws and any other topics clients wish to discuss. At these classes, discussions revolve around how to handle certain situations, appropriate parenting methods such as discipline and supervision, and appropriate attire.

The agency offers after-school programs at two elementary schools and one middle school, made possible through a Refugee School Impact Grant. The after-school program offers homework assistance, provides ESL, and encourages and promotes parental involvement with their child's education. Paid teacher(s) from the target school work with students who have been here less than three years. The after-school program coordinator has conducted home visits (with an interpreter) with all parents. She has organized parent information nights and Bingo nights to help parents feel more involved with their children's schooling. She is also currently organizing a parent breakfast and hopes to develop a summer enrichment program in the future.

The agency also offers mental health services (made possible through a Preferred Community Grant), has offered teen summer programs, and collaborates with several churches working with refugee youth in after-school programs to help them maintain their grade levels. The agency works with churches through the co-sponsorship of families.

The NewStart program is focused on new arrivals who receive extra orientation regarding pest control, food storage, and home and personal hygiene. The Refugee Financial Literacy Program Student Manual and accompanying lesson plans were produced with a grant from the United Thank Offering Grant (Episcopal Church). A PDF version is available here:

http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/money/Interfaith-NC_Financial-Literacy_Student-Manual.pdf.

Volunteers utilize the contents of the Student Manual and the lesson plans, and leave a copy with families who attend. Volunteers go on home visits once a week for four to six weeks to assist with home health and hygiene. In addition, the agency has a job readiness class for new arrivals that focuses on types of jobs, work culture, and other employment issues.

Most ethnic groups receive the same orientation. Sometimes Karen, Chin, and other ethnicities attend orientation together; in these cases there will be one or two interpreters in the room.

Language needs are met by ethnic agency staff members (Chin, Burmese, Karen, Russian, Serbo-Croatian) or by on-call interpreters: either paid or volunteer.

The agency has many strong community partnerships, including the Health Department, the Department of Social Services (for immigrant assistance), local schools, Craven Community College, the police department, local hospital staff, and the local Red Cross. Craven Literacy Council is also beginning to work with the agency and the agency is in the planning stages for a fire safety class.

As the only resettlement agency in the area, the agency conducts outreach efforts regularly by way of speaking engagements, local articles and activities (including television and radio interviews with local stations), and the Interfaith Refugee Ministry, Inc. newsletter. They host cultural events and co-host with churches to raise money for the programs. One to highlight is the celebration of World Refugee Day, held at the local farmer's market, which features displays of arts and crafts, music, and food by participating refugee groups. The agency offers a training with PowerPoint slideshow to new volunteers, and offer presentations to community groups on incoming refugees, where they come from, their needs, cultural concerns, etc.

Related links:

- Diocese of East Carolina Interfaith Refugee Ministry, Inc.: <http://www.helpingrefugees.org/>
- Craven Community College: <http://www.cravencc.edu/>

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