

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



October 9, 2002

REFUGEE COORDINATOR LETTER NO. 02-23

TO: County Refugee Coordinators
Mutual Assistance Associations
Voluntary Agencies
Forum Chairs
Providers of Services to Torture Victims and Trafficking Victims

SUBJECT: REFUGEE YOUTH INITIATIVE

Many refugee youth have been subjected to violence, loss, and displacement at young ages. It is a testament to the determination, discipline, and talent of refugee youth that so many excel and become successful in a variety of professions and careers. We applaud their many achievements and contributions.

However, isolation, involvement in gangs, substance abuse, and suicide are indicators of the vulnerability of youth generally and refugee youth are no exception. Having fled their countries of origin, many refugee youth experience upon resettlement a conflict between a new culture and the one which they were forced to leave behind and which their families may still follow. While participating in school and other activities, a certain amount of assimilation into the American mainstream society occurs. However, issues regarding belonging and identity may surface.

During the Refugee Programs Branch's (RPB) work with RefugeeWorks, a nationally recognized refugee program technical assistance provider to increase the capacity of California's mutual assistance associations, we heard repeatedly from organizations about the needs of their respective communities' youth. These groups asked for help in developing programs to support and assist young people.

We are pleased to announce that we have again contracted with RefugeeWorks to work with the refugee service provider network to develop programs for refugee youth. As an initial step, RefugeeWorks conducted needs assessments for several targeted California communities. Although these sites were selected for this preliminary assessment, the RPB recognizes that there are many communities in need of youth services throughout the state. We will seek resources to continue our initiative to assist refugee youth in the future.

The RPB plans to sponsor, through RefugeeWorks, intensive activity on behalf of refugee youth in selected communities. The process of selecting a limited number of sites was difficult. Considerations were the numbers of youth to be served, community supports and programs already in place, and impact and sustainability of likely program activities.

In these selected sites, RefugeeWorks will work with the refugee service provider network and mainstream agencies to develop program designs to serve young people. RefugeeWorks will also be assisting with grant writing or proposal development to secure resources to fund the programs. The sites selected for intensive activity under the current contract with RefugeeWorks are the Somali Community in San Diego County, the Armenian Iranian Community in Los Angeles County, and the Southeast Asian Community in the Central Valley.

To the extent possible, we will share information from one site to another where the populations and issues appear to be similar. If you have any questions, please contact me at (916) 654-4356, Janet Sandlin at (916) 654-1246, or your county consultant.

Sincerely,

**Original signed by:
Thuan Nguyen 10/09/02**

THUAN NGUYEN, Chief
Refugee Programs Branch