



FACT SHEET



Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs)

What Is an MAA?

A Mutual Assistance Association (MAA) is a non-profit community-based organization whose governing board is comprised of a majority (at least 51%) who are current or former refugees. The purpose of an MAA is to promote successful refugee resettlement by addressing the social service needs of refugees, particularly those who are newly resettled in the United States (U.S.).

Some MAAs are small grassroots organizations based in communities where large numbers of refugees reside. Others are affiliates of larger well-established national networks that provide services to refugees in multiple communities.

Originally, many MAAs were established to serve refugees from a specific ethnic group or region, e.g., Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe or Africa. However, the refugee groups who have resettled in the U.S. have become increasingly diverse. As a result, many MAAs have hired multi-lingual, multi-cultural staff and they now serve refugees from many different ethnic groups and regions.

Services to Refugees

MAAs are based on the principle of mutual aid: refugees helping refugees. Those who were resettled earlier and who have become more established in the mainstream community assist recently arrived refugees to acculturate and start new lives in the U.S. These organizations provide a broad range of services which facilitate the social adjustment and cultural transition of refugees. Services may include:

- Case management
- Translation and interpretation services
- Information and referral
- Employment assistance
- English language training

- Health promotion education
- Emergency assistance
- Youth services, such as tutoring, leadership development, career counseling and recreational activities

Services delivered in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner are often most effective in transitioning refugees to self-sufficiency; therefore, federal, state and county governments often contract with MAAs and refer refugee clients to services provided by these organizations.

In addition to providing services, MAAs serve as an important source of emotional support to refugees by providing a place for them to meet and socialize with others from their home countries. They also provide opportunities for refugees to connect with and preserve their language and culture through activities such as holiday celebrations and religious observances.

Community Building

MAAs contribute to the building of stronger, more diverse communities. They frequently fill gaps in existing community services by providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services. They advocate for the needs of refugees and immigrants and foster an awareness of the presence and contributions of newcomers in the community at large. In addition, MAAs provide refugees and immigrants with citizenship services and educate them about their civic responsibilities. They encourage refugees and immigrants to become active, involved members of their communities.

For a listing of MAAs in California, please visit the Refugee Programs Bureau web site at:

www.cdss.ca.gov/refugeeprogram/PG1528.htm