

 **GREEN LEAF REFUGEE SERVICES PROGRAM** 

ANNUAL REPORT
July 2007

Green Leaf Refugee Services Program Annual Report July 2006

INTRODUCTION

Green Leaf Refugee Services Program continues our commitment to the Austin refugee community by providing stress management, social support and whole health services to refugees, asylees and victims of trafficking.

Professional social work services provided by Green Leaf include:

- Strengths-based in-home counseling and case management to refugee individuals, couples and families
- Mediation for clients with other service providers or the court system
- Clinical consultation with community service providers regarding refugee health
- Information and referral services for diverse client needs
- Health and mental health education for refugees, service providers, sponsoring groups, and community support persons
- Collaborative work with service providers to eliminate barriers to meeting the health and emotional health needs of refugees in resettlement.

Refugees are already in a compromised position to attain employment and subsequent self-sufficiency, given stress, trauma, cultural adjustment, and language barriers. Refugee families' efforts to adjust continue to be impacted by more serious health problems caused by longer stays in refugee camps and emotional stress from trauma and separation from family. By addressing group-specific needs and individual needs, Green Leaf is better able to serve diverse clients and provide individualized case management to ensure that the clients' needs are being met. Green Leaf's efforts to encourage and organize collaboration by service providers have proven successful with the formation of the Taskforce on Refugee and Minor Victims of Trafficking as well as the whole health orientations which are provided at the resettlement agencies' request.

Another interesting highlight that has continued since the 2005-2006 fiscal year is the national and international discussion of immigration and legislative reform. At this time, little has been finalized at the congressional level. However, the discussion itself has significantly impacted the newcomer community and those providing services to newcomers, including refugee, asylees, and victims of trafficking. Among the Green Leaf caseload alone, clients have expressed increased anxiety about their legal immigration status, eligibility for federal benefits, and employment opportunities. There is considerable misunderstanding among the refugee community and the community-at-large about the rights and responsibilities of refugees, as well as how the reforms under discussion may affect refugee families.

The most significant change in Green Leaf's services during this fiscal year is the development of a subcontractor relationship with Refugee Services of Texas, Inc (RST), transitioning the program out of The University of Texas at Austin and into the community. Beginning May 1, 2007, the Austin office of RST hired a full-time LPC to provide comprehensive Green Leaf services.

INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES SERVED

During fiscal year 2006-2007, Green Leaf provided services to 183 individuals. Clients who received services this year represent the following countries:

Afghanistan
Burma
Congo
Croatia
Cuba
Iran
Kosovo
Liberia
Peru
Sierra Leone

Client services are divided in two categories: intensive case management and workshop participants.

Intensive Case Management Clients

While referrals are generally made for an individual family member, Green Leaf recognizes that trauma and acculturation issues affect entire family systems. During fiscal year 2006-2007, Green Leaf provided intensive case management services to 24 families, representing 89 individuals. Approximately fifty percent of the caseload was comprised of minors. All clients, with the exception of one family of asylees, were refugees or Cuban entrants. Attachment A provides a census of intensive case management clients served this year and allows comparison of family size to direct service recipients.

Workshop Participants

In addition to individual and family-oriented services, Green Leaf also provides regular small-group workshops on emotional and social adjustment to clients of Caritas of Austin. During fiscal year 2006-2007, a total of 15 workshops were provided. A majority of the sessions were conducted in Spanish, and the others were in French and Farsi. A total of 94 individuals attended. While Green Leaf services are available to all who attend the workshop, the majority of these families do not become on-going Green Leaf clients. The workshop is intended to alleviate isolation and mitigate the escalation of stress and anxiety by acknowledging and normalizing the emotional and social adjustment of resettling in Austin. During the workshop, participants also explore coping mechanisms and alternative assistance.

CASE MANAGEMENT AND CLIENT ADVOCACY SERVICES

Clients are referred to Green Leaf at different stages of their acculturation and self-sufficiency process. Much of Green Leaf's efforts are aimed at supporting, continuing and enhancing that process. Activities to meet these goals include case management, advocacy and referral for medical, employment, immigration, education, and other public assistance services.

Medical Services

Green Leaf staff created opportunities for patient advocacy and education in clients' interaction with Caritas, Refugee Services of Texas (RST), the Refugee Health Screening Clinic, and other public and private medical providers. Activities included:

- Monitoring and facilitating clients' attendance at health appointments, including patient advocacy and development of patient-provider relationships.
- Providing education related to medical protocols and potential side effects of medication.
- Assisting clients with public and private health insurance applications, claims and renewals.

Employment Services

For Green Leaf clients in fiscal year 2006-2007, language, culture, and experience working in the United States continued to present significant barriers to employment. Additionally, rotating or unpredictable work schedules often interfered with refugees' ability to access the area's already fragile childcare and transportation support systems. Green Leaf was involved in the following activities:

- Assisting clients with job applications and preparation for interviews.
- Developing relationships and coordinating with Caritas and RST job development staff.
- Linking clients to the Texas Workforce Commission job search program.
- Identifying and assisting clients in accessing job training programs.

Immigration Services

While Green Leaf clients presented with a variety of immigration needs, family reunification was the most frequent concern for families seeking services. Green Leaf activities included:

- Providing information and education regarding the adjustment of immigration status, case status updates, change of address and replacement of lost documents.
- Providing referrals to the Political Asylum Project of Austin (PAPA), the Catholic Charities Office of Immigrant Concerns, Immigration Counseling and Outreach Services (ICOS), and the University of Texas-Austin immigration law clinic, for legal representation, family reunification and status adjustment.

Education and Training Services

Refugees arrive in the United States with a variety of educational backgrounds, from pre-literate adults and children to adults who have completed secondary or vocational training. Green Leaf educational activities included:

- Linking clients to continuing education opportunities, including GED preparation classes, English-as-a-Second-Language courses, and computer training courses.
- Acting as advocate and mediator between clients and the school system regarding school records, summer school, the appropriateness of standardized testing, and disciplinary procedures.
- Coordinating school-based services with the AISD refugee family specialist.

Public and Financial Assistance

In meeting basic needs, Green Leaf clients interacted with a variety of public social services. Language, culture and unfamiliarity with legal procedures present barriers that may result in harsher treatment and/or penalties from these agencies. Green Leaf provided referrals, linkage and advocacy in clients' interactions with public assistance programs, including:

- Providing referrals and assistance with Medicaid and Food Stamp applications, recertification and status adjustments. Green Leaf continued to provide time-intensive assistance to many families whose Food Stamp and Medicaid applications and renewals were interrupted, lost, or delayed as Travis County struggled to make the transition to the statewide call center.

- Assisting with applications and interviews with the Housing Authority of the City of Austin.
- Assisting clients with applications and appeals for Supplemental Security Income. Those already receiving SSI were counseled about the 7-year limitation on SSI benefits and alternative options.
- Advocating on behalf of clients in interactions with Travis County court and juvenile probation system.
- Advocating on behalf of victims of crimes and family members of incarcerated clients in interactions with the criminal court system.
- Providing assistance and education regarding sorting/prioritizing mail received.
- Assisting clients in creating budgets and organizing finances, including arranging payment plans on outstanding debts.
- Referring clients to available volunteer income tax assistance (VITA) resources.

Child Welfare

During fiscal year 2006-2007, Green Leaf continued to work with families whose children were in the custody of CPS. In response, Green Leaf continued its involvement with the taskforce on refugee children and minor victims of human trafficking, and:

- Developed family-specific, collaborative relationships with agencies involved in child welfare services, including the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, CASA of Travis County, and the Center for Child Protection.
- Coordinated services from families involved in the child welfare system among diverse service providers.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Mental health needs are often overshadowed by refugee basic and case management needs. Through trust building and a holistic approach, Green Leaf helped clients become aware of underlying behavioral and mental health issues. Green Leaf activities included:

- Providing ongoing support for clients dealing with adjustment issues, such as depression, anxiety and PTSD.
- Providing coping skills training, including anger management, stress management, building social support networks, crisis management, and communication skills.
- Assisting families with accessing services through Austin/Travis County MHMR's Children's Services.
- Assisting families with accessing psychiatric services with Medicaid accepting psychiatrists.
- Assisting an incarcerated individual in accessing mental health services available through the criminal justice system.
- Counseling families about current news coverage related to legislative immigration reform and raids. The discussion and anti-immigrant climate caused anxiety in many clients, both refugees and asylees.

SYSTEMS ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION

Green Leaf is in a unique position to interact and collaborate with a wide variety of traditional and non-traditional refugee service providers. Green Leaf staff worked closely with other service providers to improve the quality of service to refugee individuals and families. This included building collaborations, educating providers, and supervising student interns, in the form of:

Collaboration and Capacity-Building

- θ Participated in quarterly refugee services network meetings of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.
- θ Added to referral base and developed relationships with new providers
- θ Continued participation of the Central Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking (CTCAHT)
- θ Continued ad hoc crisis intervention and follow-up consultation with refugee service providers.
- θ Participated in statewide T-CORP conference calls and meetings, served as steering committee member and secretary.
- θ Collaborated with HHSC/OIRA and DFPS in the Taskforce on Refugee Children and Minor Victims of Trafficking.
- θ Collaborated with the new Refugee Family Specialist in serving families with school-aged children.

Presentations and Conferences

- θ Provided monthly whole health orientation workshops for incoming refugee groups at Caritas of Austin.
- θ Presented to a University of Texas School of Social Work graduate class on serving refugees using a feminist perspective.

Supervision

- θ Continued consultation meetings with Dr. Marilyn Armour at the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin.

FUTURE GOALS

Green Leaf continues to play an important role in the continuum of care for refugees resettling in the Central Texas area. In fiscal year 2007-2008 Green Leaf will continue to provide sensitive and professional social work services to refugee individuals, couples and families focused on education and case management for health and mental health needs. Green Leaf will also continue to build collaborations and lead capacity-building efforts among the community's refugee service providers.

The transition from the university setting to a community-based organization is an exciting one, and it represents a change that will allow Green Leaf to better leverage capacity from within the resettlement field and from the community at large. Staff are currently seeking funding in order to ensure that services continue throughout fiscal year 2007 and beyond.

**Attachment A: Green Leaf Caseload FY 2006-2007
Intensive Case Management Services**

Country of Origin	Direct Service		Family Composition			
	Adults	Children	Adult Male	Adult Female	Minor Male	Minor Female
Afghanistan	1	3	0	1	0	3
Afghanistan	3	1	2	1	1	0
Afghanistan	4	0	2	2	0	0
Burma	2	1	1	1	1	0
Congo	1	0	1	0	0	0
Croatia	2	0	1	1	0	0
Croatia	1	1	0	1	0	1
Cuba	1	0	1	0	0	0
Cuba	2	0	1	1	0	0
Cuba	1	0	0	1	0	0
Cuba	1	0	1	0	0	0
Cuba	2	1	1	1	0	1
Iran	2	0	1	1	0	0
Iran	2	5	1	1	5	0
Iran	2	3	1	1	3	0
Iran	2	2	1	1	0	2
Iran	1	2	0	1	0	2
Kosovo	3	1	2	1	1	0
Liberia	2	7	1	1	5	2
Liberia	1	5	0	1	1	4
Liberia	2	5	1	1	5	0
Liberia	2	3	1	1	0	3
Peru	2	2	1	1	1	1
Sierra Leone	1	4	0	1	2	2
TOTALS						
Number of Families: 24	Adults: 43	Minors: 46	Adult Males: 21	Adult Females: 22	Minor Males: 25	Minor Females: 21
Number of individuals: 89						

*Numbers do not reflect referrals for which Green Leaf did not open cases. For example, Green Leaf occasionally receives referrals for families that do not wish to begin services or for families that are not eligible for services. In these cases, Green Leaf makes every effort to consult with the referring agent in directing the individual or family to alternative resources.