

ORR PROGRAMS FOR VULNERABLE AND UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Speaker

Elaine M. Kelley

Associate Director for Child Welfare

Office of Refugee Resettlement

Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20447

ORR PROGRAMS FOR VULNERABLE AND UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

In addition to providing Federal assistance to intact refugee families and adults, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Department of Health and Human Services is also responsible for the care of vulnerable and separated minors through the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program and the Division of Unaccompanied Children (DUCS).

UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS (URM) PROGRAM

Background and Population Served: The URM program was originally developed in 1979 to address the needs of thousands of children in Southeast Asia without a parent or guardian to care for them. After identification by the U.S. State Department overseas as minors requiring foster care upon arrival in the U.S., unaccompanied children are resettled through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS). ORR provides grants to fifteen States that have opted to serve refugee populations, and those states contract with private agencies and counties to deliver URM services in nineteen locations.

In addition to refugee children, the URM program also serves unaccompanied children if they have received a final grant of asylum, met criteria as Cuban/Haitian entrants, or been determined a victim of trafficking. Some minors who have been accorded lawful permanent residency through the Special Immigrant Juvenile process, as well as refugee minors who face family breakdown and refugee youth whose age is re-determined below 18 years old after arrival in the U.S., may also enter the program.

Services: The program ensures that all children in the URM program receive the full range of assistance, care, and services which are available to all foster children in the State, including supports for housing, food, clothing, and medical care, with additional services for the preservation of the minor's ethnic and religious heritage. Depending on their individual needs, the minors are placed in family foster homes, group care, independent living, or residential treatment. Reunification of children with their parents or other appropriate adult relatives is encouraged through family tracing and coordination with local refugee resettlement agencies.

Since the program's inception, about 13,000 minors have entered the URM program, which currently cares for approximately 700 children. Through its network, this ORR program helps the URM's develop appropriate skills to enter adulthood and achieve self-sufficiency. For more information visit:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/unaccompanied_refugee_minors.htm

Technical Assistance on Refugee Child Welfare. To strengthen services to refugee youth, children and families, in 2001 ORR supported the creation of a national technical assistance project, Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS). BRYCS is funded, in part, through a grant from ORR, and works with the USCCB/Migration and Refugee Services to broaden the scope of information and collaboration among refugee service providers. See <http://www.brycs.org/>

DIVISION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN'S SERVICES (DUCS)

Background and Population Served: On March 1, 2003, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 transferred functions under U.S. immigration laws regarding the care and placement of apprehended unaccompanied alien children (UAC) from the Immigration and Naturalization Service to the Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The DUCS program provides a safe and appropriate environment for UAC from the time the minor is placed into ORR custody until reunification with family members or sponsors in the U.S., or until the child is removed to his/her home country by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In providing

care for these children, DUCS considers the unique nature of each child's situation and incorporates child welfare principles when making placement, case management and release decisions.

Services and Projects: The majority of children are cared for through a network of more than forty ORR-funded and State-licensed care provider facilities in ten States. Most UAC are placed in shelters and group homes, but if a child requires a higher level of care due to a documented criminal history, secure placement options are available. For children with special needs (young age, pregnant/parent, acute medical needs, mental health concerns), or who have no viable sponsor to reunite with while going through immigration proceedings, long-term foster care is available. The facilities provide children with classroom education, health care, recreation, vocational training, mental health services, family reunification, access to legal services, and case management teams that use effective screening tools to assess children for mental health issues or to identify victims of labor or sex trafficking.

DUCS has developed projects and partnerships to improve quality of service for these vulnerable children, which include: (1) a pilot outreach project to increase *pro bono* attorney capacity for UAC access to legal representation; (2) a child protection advocacy pilot project; (3) child abuse and neglect prevention training, and (4) a trauma-informed services training project. On issues that affect UAC in care, DUCS coordinates activities with representatives from the DHS/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Patrol, and the Department of Justice/Executive Office for Immigration Review.

Approximately 8,000 children receive care in the DUCS program annually, with about 1,500 in care at any one point in time. Most children originate from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, and about 76% are male, 24% female, and 15% below the age of 14. For more information about the program please refer to: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/unaccompanied_alien_children.htm

UNACCOMPANIED MINOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Background and Population Served: Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), as reauthorized, HHS is authorized to issue an Eligibility Letter to non-U.S. citizen, non-Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) minors (under the age of 18) who have been subjected to a severe form of trafficking in persons in the U.S.. The Eligibility Letter allows these child victims to access benefits and services to the same extent as refugees, helping them rebuild their lives. Children are **not** required to assist law enforcement in the investigation or prosecution of a trafficking case to receive an Eligibility Letter, nor are they required to have been granted Continued Presence (CP) or a T Visa before receiving an Eligibility Letter. The TVPA, as reauthorized, requires Federal, State, or local officials who discover a non-U.S. citizen, non-LPR child who may be a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons, to notify HHS not later than 24 hours after discovery to facilitate the provision of assistance. Governmental or nongovernmental organizations providing social or legal services to a non-U.S. citizen, non-LPR child in the U.S. may request, on behalf of the child, an Eligibility Letter when credible information indicates that the child may have been subjected to a severe form of trafficking in persons. To request an Eligibility Letter for a child who may be a victim of trafficking, contact an ORR Child Protection Specialist at Childtrafficking@acf.hhs.gov or 202-205-4582.

Services and Projects: ORR recognizes that migrating children cared for by DUCS are a population highly vulnerable to human trafficking. As identifying child victims of trafficking poses significant challenges, ORR has enhanced its focus on the special needs of exploited children by providing technical assistance directly to DUCS program and field staff. Over this past year, ORR presented eleven Identifying Victims of Child Trafficking workshops, training over 250 participants. The training improved the rate of linking child trafficking victims identified in DUCS to the benefits and services for which they are eligible. A child identified as a victim of trafficking who receives an Eligibility Letter, and who has no parent or legal guardian available to provide care, may be placed in the URM program.

The HHS funded National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) will help you identify and coordinate with local organizations that protect and serve victims of trafficking. Contact the NHTRC at 1.888.3737.888.