

YHO February Newsletter

U N I V E R S I T Y O F M I C H I G A N

YHO UPCOMING EVENTS

- Around the World
- Neutral-Zone: College Life Workshop
- Global Poverty Seminar

ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK 2010

This Issue of YHO Newsletter is an introduction to the YHO Alternative Spring Break 2010. YHO worked with the The International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Atlanta Georgia on a week long volunteer service. IRC opened its regional resettlement office in Atlanta in 1979, when many refugees from southeast Asia were being resettled in the United States following the Vietnam War. Since then, the office has resettled more than 18,000 refugees from over 35 countries. The IRC provides a wide range of services to refugees in all stages of resettlement and seeks to promote each refugee family's journey to self-sufficiency.

A refugee is an individual who has left his or her native country and is unable to return to it because of persecution or fear of persecution because of race, religion, and membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Adjusting to a new environment, finding new homes, safety and shelter and food to eat and water to drink, along with trying to escape ones old like can become a harsh challenge, making the life of a refugees extremely difficult. Refugees in the United States face many social issues that affect the lives and the health status of these vulnerable populations. Some of these issues include: the type of Education, economic issues, Isolation in refugee communities, and discrimination.



LANGUAGE BARRIER

Refugees consider lack of English proficiency a barrier to a better life. It inhibits them from making a vital connection in their communities. They face language barriers when going to public places like a library, to emergency department, children's school, or if involved in an accident they cannot describe their role when investigated. Even daily task such as grocery shopping can be overwhelming. Even though ESL classes are available long work hours and busy lives keep the refugees from participating in the program. They believe that by crossing this language barrier they can get a better job and live a better life.

"Just because I don't know English, I can't handle even the simplest errands." Chinese Immigrant, Orange County,

“[Parents] are not receiving the kind of support that they would like to receive in terms of how to discipline, in terms of how to communicate with the school system, how to follow up, know where the child is, what opportunities are available to the children.”

***Connector,
Minneapolis, Minn.***

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Parents express frustration on the issue of schooling in the United States. They complain that the schools lack bilingual teachers and aids and that prohibits their children from succeeding in school. The language barrier that children face and the inconsistent schooling that some receive prior to coming to America causes children to fall behind in school quickly. Because these children have been exposed to the horrors of war and violence they have been traumatized and need aids, such as a counselor who works with these children in helping them settle. Moreover, because of parents' lack of proficiency in English language they are unable to help their children in homework.

DISCRIMINATION

Many parents report that their children face discrimination and biases due to their different ethnic and cultural background. They frequently deal with harassment and taunting. The children feel that they cannot blend in with the American schools' social cultural and feel like they do not belong there. Some Parents believe that that American school system undermines their child's religions and traditions. Because of the challenges that the Refugee children face, high school becomes very hard for these student and they tend to drop out of school.

LACK OF HEALTH CARE

Most refugees are uninsured. Many of them work for employers who do not offer health insurance. Language barrier is a problem for many refugees since they cannot effectively communicate with the doctor. Experiences with discrimination also affect the willingness of refugees to see provider. As a result, even though these refugees are highly concerned about their health and their children health, these barriers inhibit them from obtaining any. Refugee families are under enormous pressure. Long work hours, worries about the children who are alone after school in cramped housing in unsafe neighborhoods, financial worries, language barriers and other challenges exhaust and discouraged these families. These pressures lead to increased stress and serious health problems for the refugees.

“I came from a war-torn country and I was having anxiety attacks on a daily basis going to graduate school and working. I literally collapsed. I had no idea that I was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome.”

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Many refugees lack safe, affordable housing in their communities. According to Refugee families they usually obtain only low paying jobs. Housing that they can afford is often in unsafe neighborhoods. Thus they live in cramped quarters, which they share with their family and friends. Vandalism and robberies are frequent in these areas as well. Further more, because of easy access to illegal drugs, parents constantly worry about raising their children in these environments. Some people are forced to live in dwelling structures where there are not enough mattresses and one toilet to share among for twelve people. Living in these crowded, un-sanitized areas gives way to the spread of diseases and compromised health.

“After I found a job I felt that I didn’t know enough English. I don’t know the roads. I was afraid I would get lost when traveling on trains and then because I don’t know English I think it was very difficult for me.”
Chinese immigrant, Chicago, Ill.

BHUTAN REFUGEES FIND A TOE HOLD IN THE BRONX

Some of these social issues faced by the refugees are very well reflected by the experiences of Bhutanese refugees, settling in United States in 2008 after being expelled from Nepal.

In the early 1990s, Bhutan expelled 1000s of Nepali Bhutanese from Bhutan on the accusation that they were illegal immigrants. Rejected from Bhutan and unable to attain citizenship in Nepali, this unfortunate group was forced to

settle in refugee camps under bamboo-thatched roofs. In early 2007, the US agreed to resettle 60,000 of the refugees, allowing 160 of them into a single building in Bronx, NY.



While conditions were considered an improvement over their lives in Nepali, the refugees still experience many difficulties in daily life. One of the biggest adaptations they have had to make is the cultural barrier that they have had to bridge with their own culture. Many have never known crazy traffic, spoken English, or dealt with walls other than bamboo.

For most of the occupants in this weed-infested, grimy building, their lives are little more than endless boredom. Children do not receive any sort of education, and the language barrier prevents their parents from finding adequate jobs to support their family lives. They must instead rely entirely on refugee agencies to provide basic needs. In one case, families cannot even eat if they do not receive their food stamps on time.

However, over time the refugees eventually begin to settle. They have learned to become very self-reliant and the new generations of children have learned English, thus granting them the ability to get around more easily. The community-based life has greatly improved the quality of living for these refugees.