

St. Vincent Catholic Charities (STVCC); Lansing, Michigan

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In Lansing, Michigan, refugee-focused organizations are working with a wide range of community-based programs to ensure that refugees receive quality services and are integrated into the community. By initiating dialogue with workforce development organizations, law enforcement, schools, and medical providers, and others, these organizations are ensuring that refugees have a voice.

Background

St. Vincent Catholic Charities (STVCC) does the initial resettlement for refugees arriving in Lansing, Michigan. STVCC provides a variety of services, including finding housing for refugees, picking them up from the airport, bringing them to their new apartment, and conducting a brief orientation. They make an appointment to take them to the Department for Human Services so they can apply for cash assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, and other services for which they are eligible. STVCC also provides cultural orientation, including outlining the basic roles and responsibilities of STVCC and the refugees, discussing travel loan issues, reviewing public benefits, and differentiating between Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) and Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA). In this orientation, STVCC promotes the goal of self-sufficiency through employment. Cultural issues are also discussed, including medical issues, mental health issues, and U.S. laws.

Innovations

Forming the WORLD (Welcoming of Refugees for Lansing's Development) Coalition. With support and leadership by STVCC, seven Lansing-based ethnically-based community organizations (ECBOs) have formed a coalition around coordinated action on refugee community integration and self-sufficiency. By initiating dialogue with workforce development organizations, law enforcement, schools, and medical providers, and others, the WORLD Coalition is ensuring that refugees have a voice in how these vital services are provided to refugees. The Coalition recently applied for an ethnic community self-help grant to provide health information to pregnant women and provide disaster preparedness information from the Red Cross.

The coalition is a 501(c)(3) organization and is refugee-run and led. Each ECBO is represented in the board. The coalition contains both established and newer refugee communities, including: Burmese, Burundian, Hmong, Iraqi, pan-African, Somali, and Somali Bantu.

Supporting the Cultural Competency of Workforce Development Organizations. Beginning in 2012, Michigan Works assumed responsibility for employment services for all Michigan residents, including refugees. STVCC



assists Michigan Works in developing culturally-appropriate services. Further, STVCC works to ensure that the information that it provides to refugees about TANF and self-sufficiency is consistent with Michigan Work's emphasis on employment outcomes.

Impact

The WORLD Coalition is bringing disparate refugee communities together to discuss many topics, like homeownership, business ownership, and more. Through this coalition, STVCC now has a channel to provide important information to members of the refugee community, even beyond their resettlement periods. STVCC meets with the leaders of the community and with the Coalition to help them get organized and build capacity.