

The Family Investment Administration (FIA), Maryland Department of Human Resources, needs assistance with developing meaningful work-related activities for refugees and immigrants who apply for Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) and who also meet the requirements of the Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

The issue is twofold for Maryland. Besides having the federally funded TCA program, Maryland also has a State-funded program for immigrants who meet all TANF requirements except that they are within the 5-year ineligibility period due to their entrance date into the United States. Immigrants receiving State-funded assistance must meet the same Federal work requirements as federally funded TCA recipients.

The number of immigrants and refugees in Maryland continues to increase. Estimates are that the 2010 census will count nearly 750,000 foreign-born persons in the State. Immigrants are moving out of the metropolitan areas into all parts of the State. Individuals and families are coming from all walks of life and with varying skills. There are doctors and nurses and other professionals who are unable to practice here because they cannot get licensed for a variety of reasons. There are also people at the other extreme who grew up in refugee camps or in poor, isolated rural areas and who are illiterate in their own language. Some immigrants have never used money or public transportation, and some engage in cultural and religious practices that may conflict with program requirements. Many immigrants have seen or experienced horrors that none of us want to imagine and, as a result, are suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other mental health disorders.

The two one-stop refugee resettlement centers (one in Baltimore, Maryland, which serves the Baltimore metropolitan area, and one in Montgomery County, which also serves refugees in Prince George's County) work well with the refugee and asylee population and with local department vendors regarding work activities for the first 8 months that the refugees are in the United States (the duration of federally funded services at the refugee resettlement centers). Once refugees exceed their 8 months, they begin to work with local departments of social services to meet their continuing needs. Immigrants who are not refugees or asylees participate in all work activities at the local departments of social services.

Many local departments report that they have difficulty obtaining services and appropriate work activities for persons who speak little or no English. Additionally, many TANF work activities are time-limited or exclude English-as-a-second-language classes as an acceptable activity, even when the lack of understanding of English is a main barrier to employment. An improvement in immigrants' English skills is the activity that will most dramatically improve their employability and will increase their earning potential.

FIA is interested in how other States:

- Effectively serve their refugee and immigrant populations
- Effectively assist TANF participants with no or limited English proficiency (LEP) in meeting core work activities
- Develop programs that meet the multiple barriers of our LEP population and still meet the Federal TANF requirements.