



ROA

THE REFUGEE ORGANIZING IN ACTION NETWORK



Strengthening the Refugee Resettlement Process in Georgia

Report and Recommendations from Communities Starting New Lives in Refugee Status

Report #1: Employment March 2010

Prepared by
The Refugee Organizing in Action (ROA) Network
Leaders from the following communities created this report:

Bhutanese Artists of Georgia
Bhutanese Association of Georgia
Bhutanese Community of Georgia
Burmese Chin Community of Atlanta
Burundi Drummers of Atlanta
Darfur Sudanese Refugee Work Group
Iraqi Refugee Working Group

Karen Community of Georgia
Karenni Burmese Refugee Group
Kurdish Youth Club
Kurdish Cultural Center
Somali Community Radio (QARAN Radio)
Somali Bantu Women's Group
United Zo Organization of Georgia

The Refugee Organizing in Action (ROA) Network, a project housed at Refugee Family Services and supported by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (Atlanta), is a partnership of refugee and immigrant community-based organizations, their leaders and members. The working mission is to create a collaborative network that will increase resources and access to information, build stronger organizations, and advocate for policies that support the successful integration of newcomers and the metro-Atlanta community.

Background

The Refugee Organizing in Action Network held its first formal meeting in October 2009, as a follow-up to the one-day “Strengthening Georgia: 2009 Refugee Policy Initiative” forum held at Agnes Scott College in metro-Atlanta on October 16, 2009. The Network brought together leaders from various ethnic communities, most of whom came to Georgia in refugee status. We began working together to determine how best to help our own communities become self-sufficient. Many initiatives have emerged already through this process, including: quarterly resource days for leaders to learn and share information; energy assistance drives; employment readiness trainings; crime and safety workshops and more.

Together, we decided that we should study the refugee resettlement process, in order to better understand how it works, and to decide how we, and members of our communities, can contribute to moving newcomers to self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. We have participated in a series of Network meetings, beginning in January 2010. Because there are many components to resettlement, we decided that it would be best to begin with one or two important topics, and present our findings. Then we will continue to study the other topics, and keep working to strengthen the refugee resettlement system. We hope that this report will be the first in a series, and that we can begin working closely with the State Refugee Office and others to help newcomers become self-sufficient.

Summary

The leaders of the ROA Network believe that when resettlement works well, the people who come to Georgia as refugees are: self-sufficient; treated with dignity; members of strong communities; and able to participate in society and politics.

In order to achieve the goal of a strong and successful refugee resettlement program, there are multiple areas of focus, including: education; healthcare; adjustment of cultures; employment and finance; political power; crime and safety; respect; housing; community organizations and transportation. This first report addresses concerns and recommendations focused on employment and finance.

This report identifies five goals that will support increased employment and financial self-sufficiency, as well as organizations and individuals and possible actions to support these goals. Additionally, the report identifies four recommendations for action that will increase the ability of refugee newcomers and their community leaders to participate in planning and coordinating employment and financial aspects of refugee resettlement – all with the goal of making it more successful for everyone.

General Findings on Refugee Resettlement

**WHEN RESETTLEMENT WORKS, people who come to Georgia as refugees are:
 SELF SUFFICIENT,
 TREATED WITH DIGNITY,
 HAVE STRONG COMMUNITIES, and
 PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY AND POLITICS.**

PRIORITIES:

<p>Education Affordable, ESL, Adults (professions & skills), accessing credential from education already accomplished, children, special needs, understanding the system, learning about laws and customs.</p>	<p>Health Care Affordable (health insurance?), understanding how to access the system, health trainings, support with language needs and transportation.</p>
<p>Adjustment of Cultures Learning about laws & customs in US., adjusting home cultures, social activities for groups, a directory of our communities groups and organizations, a place to meet</p>	<p>Employment & Finances Getting a job within first two months, learning about enterprise and starting businesses, reaching economic self-sufficiency; understanding banks, checks & loans, saving for emergencies, training.</p>
<p>Political Power Becoming US citizens, voting, having a voice in politics and setting policy</p>	<p>Crime & Safety Community trainings, introduction to police, educating police about cultures, safety plans, ways to work together.</p>
<p>Respect Being treated with respect and without discrimination (racial, ethnic and economic), training refugee-serving staff about how to treat people with respect, training staff on cultures</p>	<p>Housing Affordable, decent & safe, flexibility to move when we need to, trainings in home skills and how to make homes safe.</p>
<p>Community & Faith Organizations Directory of community groups, a place to meet, sports activities, resources to share about life in the US, serve as advisors to organizations & people helping the community.</p>	<p>Transportation Being able to drive, taking the test in our languages, training for the test and help studying, knowing what documents are needed</p>

Goals for Strengthening Employment and Financial Self-Sufficiency

Goal #1: Recognizing the challenges of the current climate, employable refugees will find a job within 60 days of arrival.

Actions:

- Resettlement agencies and refugee leaders: Search for available, appropriate jobs and use available employment resources, including coordination with Department of Labor
- Resettlement agencies and refugee leaders: Training to ensure that newcomers are ready for employment and prepared to take available jobs.
- Resettlement agencies and refugee leaders: Organizing transportation systems when needed and develop childcare support strategies.
- Resettlement agencies, other employment service providers, and refugee leaders: Organizing job fairs
- Service agencies and refugee leaders: Providing referrals to culturally competent employment resources
- State Refugee Coordinator, Georgia Refugee Policy Initiative, resettlement and other refugee agencies, and refugee leaders: Addressing barriers with social security, drivers' services (ID), and immigration (EADs)
- State Refugee Coordinator and ROA Network: Ensuring the cultural appropriateness and quality of employment services and trainings.

Goal #2: Refugees will access employment training and English as a Second Language study to increase employability and quality of employment services.

Actions:

- State Refugee Coordinator & Office of Refugee Resettlement: Advocate for additional employment training dollars/programs that can serve refugee newcomers, at the state and federal levels.
- State Refugee Coordinator, ROA Network, employers, and refugee serving agencies: Identifying and coordinating with other non-profits, schools, labor department, and specialty employment programs to increase employment training opportunities.
- Refugee leaders and refugee serving agencies: Refer people to existing and effective employment training programs and support access to those programs.
- State Refugee Coordinator, ROA Network and refugee serving agencies: Advocate for effective, accessible English as a Second Language classes and the removal of access barriers, including location, transportation, childcare, and hours offered.

Goal #3: Refugees will understand and use banks, checking accounts, credit history, credit cards, and loans as appropriate.

Actions:

- Resettlement agencies, other refugee serving agencies, and refugee leaders: Orientations and training on these specific issues
- Other refugee-serving agencies and refugee leaders: Assistance with setting up bank accounts and checking accounts, as well as problem solving
- State Refugee Coordinator and refugee leaders: Ensuring the cultural appropriateness and quality of trainings and services.
- State Refugee Coordinator, ROA Network and refugee serving agencies: Identifying and coordinating with other non-profits who provide finance education & related services.

Goal #4: Refugees will establish their own enterprises and businesses.

Actions:

- State Refugee Coordinator and refugee serving agencies: Advocate for additional funding in Georgia to support these activities.
- Refugee Leaders: Organize trainings and support for community members who wish to start businesses.
- State Refugee Coordinator & ROA Network: Identify and coordinate with other non-profits and programs providing these services to ensure access to programs and information.

Goal # 5: Refugees will establish savings for emergencies, and have access to some emergency funds.

Actions:

- Resettlement agencies, other refugee serving agencies and refugee leaders: provide orientation on financial planning and finances, as well as ongoing financial planning support.
- Refugee serving agencies and ROA Network: Seek emergency funds opportunities, and identify and coordinate with other non-profits to ensure access to emergency funds.
- Refugee leaders: establish community programs to provide a community emergency assistance fund.

Recommendations for Action to Strengthen Employment and Financial Self-Sufficiency

Recommendation #1: The State Refugee Coordinator will lead resettlement agencies and ROA Network to create a standardized employment orientation process and a financial orientation process for all of Georgia's new refugees. Through the ROA Network, refugee leaders will work with resettlement agencies to identify the best local practices for employment and financial orientations, and to ensure that orientations are meeting cultural, education, and language needs of each refugee community. By creating and implementing a standardized, effective process, leaders, community members and service providers will all have the same information, and will be able to work together to ensure that the greatest number of refugees receive the information that they need. Further, a standardized orientation process can be more easily monitored to ensure effectiveness.

Recommendation #2: The State Refugee Coordinator will establish a Refugee Employment Taskforce, made up of resettlement agencies, other employment service agencies and ROA Network's leaders, that will meet quarterly (on Saturdays) during the first year to do joint employment placement and readiness trainings, address transportation and employment barriers, resolve English as a Second Language access issues, share resources, and coordinate access to additional resources beyond those of refugee service providers. The ROA Network has identified a national resource that is interested in coordinating a joint training for refugee employment placement specialists and refugee leaders who also assist in employment placements. Further, we believe that leaders and employment specialists can benefit through cross training, problem solving, and resource development.

Recommendation #3: The State Refugee Coordinator will advocate, at the state and federal level, for additional financial resources to support employment, enterprise, and employment training for refugees, working with ROA Network and refugee serving agencies to document this need.

Recommendation #4: The State Refugee Coordinator will support a pilot program, organized by the ROA Network in collaboration with refugee service agencies, to document, review and report refugee experiences in utilizing refugee resettlement services.