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**First Edition, October 2010**

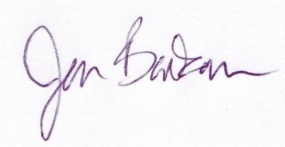
Hello New Mentor,

On behalf of the USCRI staff, we would like to welcome you and thank you for your time.

We all recognize and value the time and effort you will be devoting to your role as a Mentor to a refugee family. Your work in refugees’ homes is more helpful than you realize.

The following manual has been put together in hopes that it will help answer some of the questions you might have regarding resources to help you support our refugee neighbors.

Thank You,



Jen Barkan

Resource Manager, USCRI Albany

[jbarkan@uscri-albany.org](mailto:jbarkan@uscri-albany.org)

518-459-1790 x8015

*PS This is the First Edition, long in the making, of a guide designed to support Refugee Mentors. It is not comprehensive and probably not perfect! Please contact Jen with any suggested revisions or editions to help make this a more useful tool for you, our volunteers!*

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Albany Field Office

991 Broadway, Suite 223

Albany, NY 12204

518.459.1790

[www.RefugeesAlbany.org](http://www.RefugeesAlbany.org)

[www.facebook.com/USCRI.Albany](http://www.facebook.com/USCRI.Albany)

[info@uscri-albany.org](mailto:info@uscri-albany.org)

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We ask that as a mentor you commit to volunteering with your assigned family for at least 2 hours a week for 6 months. As a mentor you will be going to a refugee’s home, helping them learn about and adapt to life in the U.S. While there are many ways to help, please always keep in mind USCRI’s goal of helping refugees build **self sufficiency** – so while you are providing assistance, also help the refugees learn how to do things themselves.

It is very important as a volunteer to **set clear boundaries** with the refugees you’re working with.You are donating your time, and are not expected to address every challenge a refugee family may meet. It will help you *and* the refugees to make clear how much time you are available, when (if it all) it is appropriate to call you on the phone, and to say “no” if you are asked to help with something you are not willing to do. You are welcome to tell the refugee to go to the USCRI office for assistance. Always call the Volunteer Coordinator at USCRI if aren’t sure how to handle a situation.

There is a lot of flexibility in the Refugee Mentor role, but there are a few things we ask for you to focus on. One of the most important roles a mentor can fill is helping your family practice English; USCRI has collected some resources and techniques our volunteers have found useful, and hope that these will help you share English skills with your refugee mentees. Other high priority tasks you can help with include scheduling appointments and helping them understand mail and bills. Below is a guide to important topics to work on with your assigned family.

The Mentor Pairing Process

The first meeting that you have with the family is an exciting moment in your new journey as a Refugee Mentor. It is also an experience that can be a bit overwhelming. There are probably a good amount of questions that begin to swirl in your head. You begin to wonder how you will communicate effectively with the family if you don’t speak the same language. You wonder how it might be uncomfortable to walk into the household of someone you just met. You begin to ask yourself what is it that you can really do to assist this family or where to even begin!

All these questions are normal before and at the initial meeting between a Mentor and Mentee family. USCRI has seen that the urgency of these questions starts to calm down when Mentors learn that, while refugee families have numerous needs, what they need first and foremost is a smile and a friendly face! So our first recommendation is just to trust that you are already helping your refugee family by just being kind, being present, and offering your help.

USCRI staff try our best to address your questions and fears by making the mentor pairing process as smooth as possible. The first meeting with your Mentee family will be hosted at the USCRI office and facilitated by the Volunteer Coordinator. Having this meeting at the USCRI office gives USCRI the opportunity to reassure you in your role as a mentor and it gives you the space to become comfortable with the family. It is important to also remember that the family is just as nervous or even more so to meet you therefore the meeting at USCRI provides a comfortable setting for the family to get to know you a bit.

The main goals of the mentor pairing meeting are:

* You will meet the family you will be helping
* USCRI provides you with basic biographical information on the family
* The Volunteer Coordinator reviews and makes clear your role as a mentor to the family
* We discuss the immediate and long term needs that the family needs assistance with, and
* We set the next time you will meet the family at their home.

After the first meeting is conducted, mentors then have the autonomy to come up with activities and to craft meetings with the family to their liking. After a couple meetings with the family, things will begin to run smoothly. The family will get into the habit of seeing you on a set date and they will begin to look forward to activities with you as their mentor. But it’s important to note that each family is different and each mentoring experience will be different. However, with patience and steady dedication the mentoring experience is both rewarding to you and the family.

***Your First Home Visit***

*This section forthcoming! If you have suggestions for how new volunteers can prepare for their first home visit, and how you connected with your mentees, please email Francheska.****Refugee Mentor Activity Guide***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Practice English** | |  |
| * Everyday, practical conversation * Label things in the house (Door, Chair, Table) | | * Encourage your refugee family to attend ESOL classes. USCRI can provide you with a current schedule. * ESOL resources are available at <https://sites.google.com/site/albanyesol/home> |
| **Household Tasks** |  | |
| * **Grocery shopping**: finding the closest stores, learning to navigate them, choosing healthy food * How and where to do **laundry** * **Cleaning Supplies**-what products are available and how to use them in bathroom, kitchen, etc. | * **Garbage & recycling** Days to take out and where to put it * How to use **appliances** at home * **Heating & Cooling** the home: keeping thermostat below 70, cost of heat, other ways to regulate temperature | |
| **Resources for Emergencies and General Info** | | |
| * Who to call in case of emergencies:**911** * Poison control:1-800-222-1222 * Nearest **police** station | * How to use the **phone** book and make calls * How to use the internet * Nearest public **library** | |
| **Financial Literacy** |  | |
| * **US Currency,** learning to count bills & coins * The importance of **paying bills** *on time* | * How to open a checking or **saving account** andwhat a bank is * How to use debit or **credit card** | |
| **Culture** |  | |
| * Dressing for the **seasons;** winter, fall, autumn and spring might all be new | * Teaching importance of **appointments** and schedules and how to keep them. * Teach the family to use a calendar * Buying a watch and how to use it | |
| **Transport** |  | |
| * Using the **bus**: bus numbers, bus stops, bus schedules * How to use a **map** | * **Driving** lessons if applicable * Use of **baby strollers** * Using **baby seats** in the car | |
| Childcare Issues |  | |
| * **Watching Children** Must learn that children can’t be left alone or social services will take them * Plan for who to call in a childcare emergency, i.e. a relative, a friend ,etc | * Use of **diapers** and how to dispose * **Baby food**: where to get, how to prepare * Men must learn to be responsible for childcare as well as women | |
| **Fun Activities!** |  | |
| * **Outdoors**  Going to the park, walking through the neighborhood, touring the city by foot, car, or bus * Playing board games | * Go to a movie, a local festival, or other community event * Invite them to your house for dinner | |

*\*\* Anything you can do to help get the family out of the house*

*and getting to know the city is great \*\**

Guide to USCRI Albany

Agency Overview

USCRI Mission Statement:

To address the needs and rights of persons in forced or voluntary migration worldwide by advancing fair and humane public policy, facilitating and providing direct professional services, and promoting the full participation of migrants in community life.

What does USCRI do?

Every year, the United States offers safety and opportunity to people who have fled their homes in fear of persecution and have been admitted to the U.S. as refugees.  USCRI Albany welcomes and assists these families and individuals as they arrive and resettle in the Capital Region. With support from federal and New York State agencies; local businesses, individuals, and community based organizations; and our network of generous, dedicated volunteers; USCRI Albany provides newly arrived refugees with the essential services and support they need to begin to rebuild their lives and take steps towards becoming U.S. citizens and engaged members of our community.

With every refugee family, USCRI Albany works toward achieving 3 core goals:

* Essential Needs – *food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education*
* Self-Sufficiency – *jobs, job skills, English proficiency*
* Community Integration – *feeling at home in the community,*

*able to access resources and build a fulfilling life*

USCRI Albany Office Hours & Contact Information

Phone: (518) 459-1790 Fax: (518) 459-1876

Hours: Monday-Thursday 9:00-5:00

**By Appointment Only** – Please call in advance to schedule a time to meet with staff.

*Note: Staff work on Fridays, but use that time to catch up on administrative tasks; client appointments are not available.*

**Staff Contact Info:**

Volunteers should generally contact the Volunteer Coordinator or Resource Manager to address any questions. You will be referred to other staff members when appropriate; this list is for your convenience, but please note that the Volunteer Coordinator and Resource Manager are your primary contacts at USCRI Albany, and can be relied upon to quickly respond to your concerns.

| Title | Name | Phone Number | Email Address |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Resource Manager | Jen Barkan | 459-1790 \*8015 | [jbarkan@uscri-albany.org](mailto:jbarkan@uscri-albany.org) |
| Office Manager | Yvonne Sargent | 459-1790 \*8011 | [ysargent@uscri-albany.org](mailto:ysargent@uscri-albany.org) |
| Case Manager  Reception and Placement | Zaw Min | 459-1790 \*8018 | [zmin@uscri-albany.org](mailto:zmin@uscri-albany.org) |
| Case Manager  Reception and Placement | Salih Ahmed | 459-1790 \*8019 | Sahmed@uscri-albany.org |
| Case Manager  Reception and Placement | Ashley Cutonilli | 459-1790\*8017 | Acutonilli@uscri-albany.org |
| Case Manager  Reception and Placement | Tha Wah | 459-1790\*8020 | Twah@uscri-albany.org |
| Job Developer  Matching Grant | Ruslan Maksutov | 459-1790 \*8022 | Rmaksutov@uscri-albany.org |
| BRIA Program Manager | Yaser Al Mahdawi | 459-1790 \*8014 | [yalmahdawi@uscri-albany.org](mailto:yalmahdawi@uscri-albany.org) |
| BRIA Program Manager | Bakary Janneh | 459-1790 \*8013 | [bjanneh@uscri-albany.org](mailto:bjanneh@uscri-albany.org) |
| Finance & Family Support Services Coordinator | Raid Bader | 459-1790 \*8016 | rbader@uscri-albany.org |
| Immigration Counselor | Nicole Comstock | 459-1790 \*8012 | ncomstock@uscri-albany.org |
| Director,  Albany Field Office | Jill Peckenpaugh | 459-1790 \*8010 | [jpeckenpaugh@uscri-albany.org](mailto:jpeckenpaugh@uscri-albany.org) |

Overview of Core Programs

Reception and Placement (R&P)

The R&P Case Managers are:

* Zaw Min
* Salih Ahmed
* Ashley Cutonilli
* Tha Wah

Before refugees first arrive in the US they are assigned to a resettlement agency such as USCRI, and to a specific office. About 400 refugees a year are assigned to USCRI Albany. For the first 3 months after arrival refugees will receive services from the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program. R&P is funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

The focus of the Reception and Placement team is on meeting essential needs of refugees in the weeks immediately before and after arrival. The federal government allots each refugee $900 for the first 3 months. This money is used to pay for rent, security deposit, furniture, household goods, and food for the first week; money that is left after initial services have been provided is given to the family as “pocket money.” During the first 90 days R&P must provide certain Core Services which include:

* Finding appropriate housing (prepared before the refugee arrives)
* Essential furniture
* Food for the first week
* Hot, culturally appropriate meal, upon arrival
* An initial housing orientation where basic safety is explained
* Referral to complete medical screening within the first 30 days
* Other health referrals as needed
* Application for social security cards
* Application for public benefits [see following page for details]
* School enrollment for children
* ESOL referrals for adults
* A cultural orientation, covering:
  + Role of resettlement agency
  + Role of volunteers, mentors, and case managers
  + USCRI’s responsibilities vs. their responsibilities
  + Matching Grant employment program
  + House/cooking safety
  + House cleaning
  + Child safety
  + Personal and public safety
  + Transportation
  + Personal health and hygiene
  + Enrolling children in school

**Benefits available to refugees**

Most benefits are administered by the County Department of Social Services (DSS). USCRI staff and interns are responsible for initial enrollment in these programs. Volunteers can help by alerting USCRI staff about any challenges and sending refugees to the office for assistance with forms.

It is very difficult to understand and navigate these public benefits. USCRI has developed protocol with DSS that need to be followed closely to ensure that refugees receive all the benefits they are due. Clients also have signed a release allowing USCRI staff to represent them at DSS, but DSS cannot allow our volunteers access to the same information.

Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator if you are not sure how to help your refugee family with a challenge related to public benefits.

* Social Security Card
  + Applied for upon arrival and will be mailed to clients within first 4 weeks.
* Food Stamps
  + Food stamps are provided as a federal program to provide adequate nutrition to people with low incomes. Refugees are automatically eligible for food stamps upon arrival; USCRI Case Managers complete initial enrollment forms on refugees’ behalf.
  + Money is automatically credited each month to an EBT card, which is used like a debit card at almost any food store. The EBT card has a 4-digit PIN which the client must remember. The amount of food assistance is based on family size and income (see table below). Food stamps can be used to purchase food items only; non-food items, such as cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, diaper products, or soap cannot be purchased with food stamps.
  + ***Recertification***: ***An individual must reapply to prove eligibility every three months*.** A recertification letter and form will be mailed to the refugee’s home address. Refugees can bring the letter to the USCRI office for assistance with the recertification form.

**Household allotments:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Household size | Maximum monthly allotment |
| 1 | $200 |
| 2 | $367 |
| 3 | $526 |
| 4 | $668 |
| 5 | $793 |
| 6 | $952 |
| 7 | $1,052 |
| 8 | 1,202 |
| For each additional member over 8 | +$150 |

* Medicaid
  + Medicaid is a federal program that pays for medical assistance for certain individuals and families with low incomes and resources. Refugees automatically qualify for Medicaid during the first eight months of their arrival, but must reapply after that time.
  + Services provided vary from state to state, but Federal requirements include coverage of both inpatient and outpatient hospital services, physician services, and nursing home, or Home Health Care for those eligible. In addition to these, New York State provides Medicaid coverage for laboratory/x-ray fees, preventative health and dental care/screening, family planning services, pharmacy prescriptions, clinic services, emergency transportation, and prenatal care, though some of these may be contingent on the individual meeting certain requirements.
  + All refugees attend a mandatory physical exam within 30 days of arrival. NYS Dept. of Health contracts with a clinic to provide this service. Refugees are responsible for any follow-up or additional needs at Whitney Young, St. Peter’s Rensselaer Health Center, or a doctor of their choice.*See additional information in the Health section of this packet.*
  + ***Recertification****:**An individual must reapply to prove eligibility every 6-8 months (****Client will receive a notification in the mail)***
* Temporary assistance
  + Cash assistance for families in need, usually this will just cover rent. In order to qualify for cash assistance the family must meet certain income standards.
  + Refugees are either enrolled in Temporary Assistance or with the Matching Grant Employment Program to cover 2nd month’s rent and other costs.
  + Administration of Temporary Assistance is divided into Family Assistance (TANF) and individual assistance (Safety Net).
  + For refugees on family assistance, DSS will enroll them in employment services after 8 months
  + For refugees on Safety Net(individuals), DSS will immediately enroll them in employment services
  + ***Recertification****:*  must be re-applied for every 6 months
* Women, Infants and Children (WIC)-
  + WIC is available for pregnant women (teens can apply), children up to 5 years old, mother of babies up to 6 months old, and breastfeeding mothers of babies up to 12 months old. WIC provides support based on your income and focuses on providing nutritious foods, milk, juice, and formula.
  + For more information see the website:

http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/nutrition/wic/

* Child Care Subsidy
  + Refugees who are working, going to school or attending English or Job classes full time may be eligible to receive financial assistance through DSS to pay for day care. Refugees must first apply for Family Assistance from DSS and then for the child care subsidy. For more information contact the USCRI office.
* Transportation
  + For the first 6 months clients are give free bus passes each refugee family receives one (1) free bus pass from USCRI. These are provided free from CDTA through a federal grant.

*Employment Services All adult refugees are referred for employment services to either the Matching Grant or BRIA Services program.*

Matching Grant Employment Program

Matching Grant Job Developers:

* Jill Faison
* Ruslan Maksutov

Matching Grant is a federally-funded early employment program for refugees.

Matching Grant staff assesses each newly-arriving refugee adult to see if they are eligible for the program. USCRI Albany currently has funding to enroll about half of our refugee clients in the Matching Grant (MG) Program. Matching Grant accepts refugees who are highly employable, willing to accept entry level positions and will be able to maintain their employment.

The Matching Grant team will work with each enrolled refugee, utilizing the client’s skills and background to find a long-term place of employment. Matching Grant staff, with support from interns and volunteers, actively search for appropriate jobs for refugee clients and build strong relationships with employers. The office will help fill out job applications and take them to interviews at several potential jobs. Job Development interns provide a weekly “Job Club” workshop which is mandatory

Responsibilities of Matching Grant clients:

* Participate in weekly Job Club workshops until they are employed.
* Attend English classes as often as possible.
* Show up on time for interviews and appointments arranged by MG staff.

Benefits provided to Matching Grant clients:

* Rent paid by MG program for 4-6 months
* Cash assistance provided for 4-6 months ($200 per adult and $40 per child).

Clients who need additional employment or social services assistance after the Matching Grant period are referred to the BRIA Services program.

Bureau of Refugee & Immigrant Assistance Programs at USCRI Albany

BRIA Program Managers

* Bakary Janneh
* Yaser Al Mahdawi

The New York State Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (BRIA) funds programs at USCRI Albany to assist refugees and asylees with employment and transitional services for up to 5 years after their arrival in the United States. The main objective of BRIA is to help clients become self-sufficient through employment. BRIA staff provide similar support as Matching Grant staff, in terms of helping with job searches, preparation of resumes, job applications, job development and preparation for interviews.

At USCRI Albany, refugees who are not enrolled in Matching Grant in the month after arrival are referred to BRIA for employment services. After the R&P period (90 days), BRIA staff may also assist refugees with social services, housing and medical issues, and other adjustment needs.

Clients who complete their time on Matching Grant may enroll in BRIA should they need help in the future with employment or social services (Food Stamps, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance).

All clients **must schedule and complete an intake** with BRIA before they can receive services.

*Supporting Programs*

Immigration Services Office

Immigration Services Coordinator: Grier Martin

USCRI Albany hosts a low-cost Immigration Clinic. The Clinic staff are accredited by the Bureau of Immigration Appeals (BIA) to practice certain types of Immigration law. Refugees can receive free assistance with applications for adjustment of status to permanent residency (green card), for which they are eligible after one year in the US. Immigration Services can also help client when the time comes to apply for citizenship, 5 years after arrival. Immigration Services can also help prepare travel documents, and can assist with family reunification.

Non-refugee clients will be assessed a fee for services; please request the Immigration Clinic Fee Schedule for additional information.

Family Support Services Program

Family Support Services Coordinator: Aye Aye Cho

USCRI Family Support Services provides an 8 hour Relationship Enhancement workshop. All clients are strongly recommended to participate in this program, which is offered for different language groups on a rolling basis.

This program uses an adapted version of an internationally recognized Relationship Enhancement Model. These workshops teach 10 skills that mark good relationships in the family, at work and in the community. Refugees discuss how their marriage and families have changed in America. They learn to show understanding through empathy and validation, and skills in expression, discussion and problem solving.

This program also organizes social events for refugee families, including holiday parties, picnics, and trips to the museum.

Community Connections

Resource Manager: Jen Barkan

Refugee resettlement is only successful when the entire community participates. At USCRI Albany, we work to inform and engage community members to donate their time, resources, and skills to help refugee families start a new life.

As a volunteer, you are already aware of our Mentor and ESOL volunteer programs. We also have opportunities to help prepare new homes, participate on a community task force on a particular issue, organize outreach and fundraising events, and

If you have any connections or skills you can share to help refugees succeed in their new community, please contact Jen.

Timeline of Services

**BRIA Programs**

Clients who are not enrolled for Matching Grant (and those that complete MG and still need a job) are referred to the BRIA program for employment assistance. Clients can receive BRIA services (including assistance with housing, medical issues and social services) for up to 5 years after arrival

**Self-Sufficiency**

defined as income greater than expenses

**Immigration Services**

10-12 months after arrival, refugees can begin the process of applying for a Green Card.

Refugees are eligible to apply for Citizenship 5 years after arrival in the U.S.

**Family Support Services**

Offered to all new arrivals and other immigrants in the community

**Matching Grant**

Current funding allows half our clients to enroll in the Matching Grant (MG) Program. Clients who enroll remain in MG for up to 6 months. If they remain unemployed after 6 months they are referred to the BRIAprogram for employment services.

*Referral for employment services*

Refugee **arrives** in the United States

**Reception and Placement**

All refugee clients receive R&P services for 3 months after arrival

1. Education and Employment for Refugee Adults

ESOL Classes

USCRI’s ESOL Program provides free weekly English classes, English tutors, and referrals to English classes in the surrounding area.  USCRI English classes are open to all refugees and do not require any sort of pre-enrollment.  A select group of people can be paired with an English tutor; however tutors are usually reserved for clients who do not already have mentors.  USCRI can also refer clients to free English classes run by other organizations.  Please note that some of these classes require their students to complete pre and post-tests, so they should notify their teachers when they plan to leave.  If you have any further questions and would like an updated schedule of English classes, please call the office and ask for the ESOL Coordinator.  You can also visit the ESOL wiki page (<https://sites.google.com/site/albanyesol/home>) for more information, worksheets, tips, etc.

It is important to note that clients should also study English independently, outside of a classroom setting.  Mentors can help them do this in a number of ways.

* They can label items in the house so their mentees can learn new vocab.
* They can show them how to use the library so they can borrow books and movies (feel free to make recommendations!)
* Watching soap operas (the more dramatic the better!) is also a terrific way to learn English, especially if mentees can watch them with subtitles.
* Clients can attend town meetings and court cases. This not only introduces them to American culture, it also allows them to hear English without feeling pressured to speak themselves.
* They can volunteer in their child's school.
* If possible, it is also important for mentors to discover their mentees’ personal learning styles to best help them learn English on their own.

**Higher Education**

Refugees who are interested in pursing college are eligible to apply for FAFSA.

For those refugees who are able to go to college, the most practical option for them is usually to go to local community colleges such as Hudson Valley Community College.

Job Club

Job Club is a weekly workshop that teaches refugees about the entire process of seeking and retaining employment. The class teaches them a wide variety of thing pertaining to the workplace from where to look for a job to how to fill out a job application to how to read a paycheck. The class is usually held once a week for about an hour to an hour and a half. Encourage your refugee(s) to attend the class because it’s a beneficial tool towards becoming employed

As of July 2010, the class is held on Tuesdays from 1:30-3:30pm

**Ways Mentors Can Assist With Employment**

* Strongly encourage your mentee to go to Job Club
* Strongly encourage your mentee to go to English classes
* Practice English with them at home; it increases their chances of getting a job.
* Make an appointment with their case manager it shows your mentee to take initiative.
* Look through the newspaper with them and point out job openings that are suitable for them to apply for.
* Point out job openings you see while you are out and encourage them to ask for applications if it is a suitable.
* Make sure they know how to write their name, address and phone number for job applications.

1. Health Issues

Understanding the healthcare system in the United States is difficult even for those of us born here. When you add language and cultural barriers, a history of limited access to health services, and diseases and injuries related to the refugee experience, finding adequate care is even more difficult.

USCRI Albany staff and interns work to ensure that all newly arriving refugees meet their initial health needs. Additional health education and navigation supports are offered when the volunteer help is available.

Health services provided for all new arrivals:

* Enrollment in Medicaid. See details on page 9.
* Appointment scheduled for initial physical exam (Refugee Health Assessment /RHA). Ensure client has transportation to appointment.
  + All adults and children must complete their RHA within 90 days of arrival
  + These appointments are made either at St. Peter’s Health Center in Rensselaer, or Industrial Medical Associates in Albany, who hold contracts to conduct these required refugee physical exams.
  + Refugees should bring to this appointment their I-94, Medicaid card (if they have received it), and any medicines they are taking.
  + At the appointment, refugees will be given a date for a follow-up appointment at the same facility.
* Support for arrivals with serious conditions.
  + If USCRI is made aware prior to a client’s arrival that they have a severe health condition or are pregnant, the initial appointment is made more quickly and additional referrals are made as needed.
* Assistance with backdating any early medical expenses.
  + All refugees are entitled to Medicaid benefits from the day they arrive in the U.S. If they need to use medical services before their Medicaid enrollment is fully processed, they should bring those bills to the USCRI office. Our Office Manager and interns will contact the appropriate agencies to ensure the bill is covered by Medicaid.

Health Education Opportunities

With the help of enthusiastic interns, USCRI is continually developing health education opportunities for refugees. As of fall 2010, programming includes:

* Health Orientation Workshop
  + This presentation is offered for newly arriving refugee adults, when an intern and interpreters are available. It includes information on knowing your rights in a health care setting, what to do if you are sick, how to stay healthy, and how to use Medicaid benefits
* Women’s Health Workshops
  + These workshops are being presented in collaboration with Community Cradle, a local nonprofit organization. Refugee women will be given information specific to reproductive health care and other key topics.

How Mentors Can Help

* **Advocacy** - If you attend health appointments with your mentee, help them learn how to check in, and ask for interpretation if needed. Any facility that accepts Medicaid (i.e. federal funds) is mandated to provide interpretation at no charge to the patient.
  + USCRI can help arrange cultural competence trainings at healthcare facilities to help their staff better understand refugees. Contact Jen for more information.
* Help refugees choose a managed care provider (Fidelis or CDPHP) and enroll with a **Primary Care Physician** (PCP)
  + Whitney Young, St. Peter’s have primary care facilities. Can also seek out a private practice that accepts Medicaid (managed by Fidelis or CDPHP)
  + Encourage mentees to use PCP for regular check-ups and non-urgent care
* Reinforce what to do in an **emergency / 9-1-1**  and other Health Orientation topics
  + USCRI has resources you can use, including powerpoints, flipcharts, and teachers guides, to provide health information to refugees. Contact Jen for more info.
* **Help women** connect with reproductive health care at PCP or Planned Parenthood.
* **Nutrition**: encourage refugee families to continue to eat food from their culture and also help them seek healthy options that are available in American supermarkets. A good rule of thumb for them is to try shopping more at the *perimeters* of the supermarket; in general, the food in the center aisles contains a lot of refined sugar, artificial, and processed ingredients. Also emphasize drinking lots of water, especially in hot weather.
* **Mental** **Health**: Studies have shown that 80% of refugees have symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), although a much smaller number have severe cases. When volunteers work with USCRI to ease the transition process, stress is eased and more severe mental health challenges can often be avoided.
  + Encourage expression! Find out if your new refugee friends enjoy any specific arts, like music, art, writing, dancing, singing, etc. Drawing with refugees of all ages can be a beautiful way to get to know your mentees and learn about what their lives were like back in their home country. Children especially, caught between two languages, can benefit from drawing to express their feelings. Donations of art supplies and musical instruments are strongly encouraged.
  + Medicaid does cover mental health expenses. If you suspect a refugee you work with may need professional mental health support, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Resource Manager, or the client’s Case Manager. USCRI staff can assist with appropriate referrals.
* **Health Hazards** to be aware of in this area:
  + Ticks & Lyme Disease**.** Make sure you and your refugee are aware of the symptoms of Lyme disease. If the symptoms are overlooked, the disease can be in your system for years before getting treatment. Symptoms include feeling tired, headache, stiff neck, fever, chills, muscle pain, swollen glands.
  + Lead PoisoningIt is very important that refugees know about lead poisoning. Many houses in Albany have contained lead, and USCRI offers lead testing for houses in certain zip codes. One can tell if lead is evident by finding loose paint chips or peeling paint inside or outside of the house. If you see any paint chips, let USCRI know immediately and send everyone who lives in the house to see the primary care physician.

1. Refugee Children & Youth

While refugee children have great needs for assistance, USCRI’s funding to support children and youth is limited. Our agency takes responsibility for enrolling children in public school and for helping working parents find childcare. USCRI staff and interns also work with schools to better prepare refugees and school staff to succeed together.

It is wonderful if Mentors can take a role with supporting refugee children, and helping them connect with after-school programs and other activities.

School Enrollment

USCRI’s primary role is to enroll refugee children in school. Children are entitled to go to school until age 21. Albany High School is legally required to accept students up until this age but students who are 18 or 19 are often encouraged to get their GED instead since they will be unable to complete the credits needed to graduate before they turn 21.

When students are first enrolled in school the office phone number is listed for any contact purposes and their case manager is listed as their primary contact. During the first few months the school might call the office regarding any issues with the child. The office may also be called if a parent forgot to pick a child up or in the event of an early dismissal.

Since one of USCRI’s goals is to help make refugee families self-sufficient, we encourage schools to talk with and contact the parents rather than going through the agency. This can be difficult, especially in the first few months, so staff at USCRI might need to help with translations or understanding materials sent home.

As a mentor you may find it helpful to find out what school the children go to and what grade they are in.

Day Care

There is a DSS subsidy that can help families pay for daycare. Only certain day care facilities accept the DSS subsidy. The list below includes daycare facilities that accept the DSS subsidy, and that have been visited by USCRI interns to ensure they are safe and appropriate.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **12202**   * **DIGI Academy of Learners**   96 Madison Avenue  Phone: (518) 447-2406  Program Type: Group Family Day Care; small facility  Kid’s age: 2-4 years  Hours of Operation: 7-6pm  Contact person: Ms. Lisa R. Epps |  | **12208**   * **Toyland**   2 South Pine Ave  Phone: (518) 482-2301  Program Type: Full Day Care  Kid’s age: 3-5 years  Hours of Operation: 7-5:30pm  Contact person: Stephen P. Rudnick |
| **12206**   * **For The Love of Kidz**   71 Quail St, Apt. 1 · Albany, NY 12206  Phone: (518) 813-4117  Program Type: Group Family Day Care  Kid’s age: all ages  Hours of Operation: 24 hours  Contact Person: Alexander McHugh   * **Shakendreland Child Care** |  | **12210**   * **Boys and Girls Clubs of Albany, Inc.**   21 Delaware Avenue  Phone: (518) 462-5528  Program Type: Day Care Center  Kid’s age: mostly 3-5, and up to 14 years  Hours of Operation: summer: 8-3pm; during school year: 8-6pm  Contact person: Gina |
| 45 Pennsylvania Avenue  Phone: (518) 462-9119  Program Type: Group Family Day Care  Kid’s age: 2 -12 years  Hours of Operation: 6-5pm  Contact Person: Ms. Iona Scarville-Ross |  | **12220**   * **Pierce Hall at the Children's Place, Inc.**   Empire State Plaza  Phone:(518) 473-7112  Fax: 518-473-7867  Program Type: Day Care Center  Kid’s age: 6 weeks – 5 years  Hours of Operation: 7-5.30pm  Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

1. Department Of Social Services (DSS)

The Department of Social Services is organized on a County level, so please refer to the office in the county where the refugee lives.

Problems with DSS (Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance) are, unfortunately, common. If a refugee you are working with has problems with these services, it is best to contact the USCRI office first before trying to negotiate a challenge on behalf of a refugee. USCRI has certain protocol that has been established in collaboration with DSS that need to be followed to effectively secure services for refugees.

There are many cases where Mentors can be a great help in advocating for services, but please first check with USCRI staff.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Albany County**  Hours: Monday – Friday, 9:00-5:00  Phone Number: (518) 447-7300  Address: 162 Washington Ave, Albany | **Rensselaer County**  Hours: Monday – Friday, 9:00-4:30  Phone Number: (518) 833-6000  Address: 1801 Sixth Avenue, Troy |

1. Cultural Adjustment

Moving to any new culture requires adjustment on many levels. For refugees, many social, health, economic, and legal issues compound this process. Thus, volunteers should consider the adjustment and adaptation process, which includes not only transition issues but also the difficulties of intercultural communication for refugees. By being aware of the challenges that refugees face upon arrival in the United States, volunteers can help refugees through the transition.

**Your main goal of the volunteer in this time of social adjustment is to help the refugee become self-sufficient in his or her new home.** A refugee who feels his or her own efficacy will integrate more rapidly into the U.S. mainstream.

Communicating Across Cultures

Using some simple skills, you can communicate with persons from a different culture, provided you are patient and open-minded.

* **Recognize Your Own Culture:** Try to identify values that you as an American hold dear, such as freedom of speech or individualism. Keep in mind that many cultures do not share these beliefs, nor do we share theirs. Recognizing differences is an important first step in reaching out.
* **Be Complete and Explicit:**  You may need to explain your point in more than one way, as well as why you are making it.
* **Pay Attention:** Concentrate on your listeners’ reaction to your mutual communication. If one of you is confused, you can try again or ask them to rephrase. Learning to read visual cues (especially from someone who uses different ones from those you are used to) reduces miscommunication.
* **Paraphrase:** After someone has spoken, and before you respond, restate what you think the other person said, or what you thought they meant. For example, say, “I think you are saying [*x*]. Is that correct?” Once the other person has assured you that you have the correct meaning, then you can respond.
* **Verify:** Make sure that your listener understands what you said, usually by asking the person to reiterate your words. Do not say, “Do you understand?” as most people will merely state, “Yes.” Instead, say, “I want to make sure I made myself clear. Will you tell me what you understood me to say?”
* **Be Alert for Different Meanings:** We paraphrase and verify our words because often a person will think they understand what the other person is saying, but suddenly will realize they do not. This is especially true when people assign different meanings to words, phrases, or actions. When this happens, stop and clarify the point of misunderstanding.
* **Practice Empathy:** When communicating across cultures, it is best to treat others the way that they, not you, want to be treated. Empathize with the other’s cultural values.

Social Adjustment and Adaptation

Refugees experience many stressors before leaving their homeland, during their flights to “safety,” and after arrival in their new country. Below, we address some refugee adjustment and adaptation issues for adults and children.

Immersion in a different culture can lead to culture shock, discussed in the mental health section below. However, some issues that refugees face include limited English proficiency (LEP), cultural isolation, discrimination, problems understanding the social service system, and protracted dependence. This section will describe each issue, and will list what you as a volunteer can do to help alleviate them.

**Limited English Proficiency (LEP)**

Newly arrived refugees with Limited English Proficiency can feel disoriented, misunderstood, isolated and even depressed. Consequently, USCRI and many other social service agencies use interpreters (usually from the refugee’s homeland) to explain services in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner.

However, not all activities require interpreters, including recreational activities, grocery shopping, using the laundromat, taking the bus, etc. In situations where communication is paramount, as in medical appointments, agencies require an interpreter. To check whether an interpreter is needed for a particular activity or appointment, contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

**Cultural Isolation**

Refugees often arrive in the United States with little previous exposure to Western culture and lifestyle, much of it misinformation from movies. Moreover, a refugee’s homeland may hold values and norms significantly different from those of the United States, which can make them feel different and isolated.

Volunteers can help bridge the cultural gap between refugees and U.S-born individuals by following a few simple principles. Always have the utmost respect for the values and norms of other people, even if they differ greatly from yours. Think of yourself as a cultural interpreter. Explain to a newly arrived refugee, in a polite, undemanding manner that in the United States, people may have different social practices. Remember, the explanation of different social practices is a shared experience that both parties can enjoy equally.

Some volunteers find that researching a refugee’s country of origin, its history, and culture can help. While it might be advisable to understand the conflict a refugee has fled, it is never appropriate to ask uninvited questions about a refugee’s personal experience during conflict. Volunteers must be sensitive to refugees’ need for private recovery.

Acculturation to the United States is a long-term process that involves newcomers maintaining some of their current practices while adopting new ones. Volunteers can encourage this adjustment while understanding that newcomers will set their own pace.

**Protracted Dependence vs Self Sufficiency**

Refugees have come from various situations of forced dependence on aid organizations, militias, and governments. After being forced to rely on others to provide their basic needs, sometimes for over a decade, they often feel helpless and powerless. While refugee service providers are always ready to help them, volunteers should remember that the ultimate goal of any assistance program is refugees’ economic and social self-sufficiency. To meet this goal, you can teach them skills that empower them to take control so they can function fully in this society. For example, you can show a refugee how to use the bus schedule and where to board and disembark the bus for travel to the grocery store, by riding the bus together. Take care not to heighten their dependency by providing daily transportation in your car to and from the store for months. Otherwise, when clients eventually need to do their own groceries, they will not know how to use public transportation to get food. **Showing clients how to do something, rather than doing it for them, will empower them and provide them with the necessary skills to move toward self-sufficiency.**

Also, refugees may have several material needs and desires, just like anyone else. You are not responsible for meeting those needs. If, however, you do wish to donate some items to them, please speak with your USCRI contact.

If you ever have any questions about your role and about how to best serve the refugee you are helping, please contact the refugee’s caseworker.

**Culture Shock**

“Culture shock” is the *natural*, psychological reaction of people in an unfamiliar place. Everyone who has crossed cultures has experienced it to some degree. As a volunteer, you may also experience some culture shock when encountering a refugee from a different culture. While travelers and immigrants experience culture shock voluntarily, refugees do so involuntarily because they were forced to move.

*Culture shock factors* include difficulty with the new language; inapplicability of previously learned behavior; different complex sets of values and rules; and not liking the new culture and people.

*Some signs of culture shock* include homesickness; mood swings; disorientation; anxiety; depression; hypochondria; loss of appetite; frustration; and withdrawal from others.

Remember that people react differently in new cultures, with some choosing to be open and communicative, while others might withdraw. As a volunteer, you should try to help encourage refugees build rapport and understanding.

Encourage your clients to temper culture shock through several ways, including recognizing that their feelings are normal; staying in touch with family and friends; interacting with people from the old culture; retaining certain food habits; getting adequate exercise; and making friends from all cultures (home, host, and other). Most importantly, tell them their adjustment will have a positive end.

**Discrimination**

Unfortunately, refugees, like many different minorities in the United States, may encounter discrimination when trying to find housing or employment, or while accessing a public service. Vigilant volunteers can help by spotting and, if necessary, reporting instances of clear discrimination. Each state has different reporting agencies, so please check with USCRI for the appropriate contact information.

1. Emergencies

If the family you are working with encounters an emergency and asks for your assistance, it is important to let the office know. Other than contacting USCRI the best way to deal with emergencies is the same way a US citizen would.

* For a medical emergency or an emergency that requires police or the fire department: Call 911
* Please contact the USCRI office if the client does not have **food** at home, or doesn’t have money to buy food. There are a few options, depending on the situation. If Food Stamps are not working, USCRI staff can assist with finding out why and solving the problem.
* Mentors can help refugees contact Food Pantries for the Capital District. This is a coalition of 50 food pantries that works together to eliminate hunger in the Capital District. They will provide enough groceries to last 3-5 days. They will tell you which pantry the family can go to, when the family goes they must bring proof of address.
  + Phone: 518-458-1167
  + Email: [benji@foodpantries.net](mailto:benji@foodpantries.net)
  + Website: www.foodpantries.net
  + Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30
* USCRI is sometimes able to provide a grocery store gift card in food emergencies.

By utilizing the cross-cultural communication skills listed above; the resources in this packet; and the support of the Volunteer Coordinator, Resource Manager, and your fellow volunteers; you can help a refugee family move through these cultural adjustment challenges to build a fulfilling new life for themselves and their families.

**Thank you for your generous time and support!**

1. Additional Resources For Information

* **USCRI Albany Website** [**www.RefugeesAlbany.org**](http://www.RefugeesAlbany.org)
  + Info on volunteer orientations, how to donate or give goods
* **USCRI Website** [www.Refugees.org](http://www.Refugees.org)
  + USCRI parent site. Lots of background info on refugees, national and international issues
* ***Capital Region Newcomer Resource List*** (packet)
  + Thorough list of area resources including free clothing, health services and other resources that may be helpful to your family.
* **Volunteer Google Group** Listserv
  + emails received via [uscri-albany-volunteers@googlegroups.com](mailto:uscri-albany-volunteers@googlegroups.com)
  + Make sure you’re getting these emails; they include information about USCRI events and information that pertains to the refugee community.
* **Facebook Page**: [www.facebook.com/USCRI.albany](http://www.facebook.com/USCRI.albany)
  + “Like” our page, event updates, share photos and info with your friends
* **Discussion List for Karenni Mentors** [Karenni-mentors@googlegroups.com](mailto:Karenni-mentors@googlegroups.com)
  + Mentors for Karen and Karenni families are added to this list. Able to post and discuss with other mentors, useful resources. Contacts us if you are not on the list and should be.
* **Other resettlement agencies**
  + International Institute of Akron
    - <http://www.iiakron.org/>
  + International Institute of Buffalo
    - http://www.iibuff.org/
  + Nationalities services center, Philadelphia
    - http://www.nationalitiesservice.org/
* If you are working with a **Bhutanese** family
  + [www.Bhutaneserefugees.com](http://www.Bhutaneserefugees.com)
* If you are working with a **Burmese** family
  + The US campaign for Burma : <http://uscampaignforburma.org/>
  + Online Burma Library: <http://www.burmalibrary.org/>
* Other websites
  + CIA World Factbook

https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

* + Cultural Orientation Resource Center <http://www.cal.org/co/>

Also, see list from Volunteer Orientation packet that includes additional websites plus films and books related to refugees

