

Grants That Help Resettle Refugees

By Karen Brodsky

Refugees resettled by Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency rely on the agency to support them in the first months after their arrival in Charlotte. Among the most vulnerable residents of Charlotte, the new clients look to CRRA to help them acculturate, get referrals to

English classes, apply for Social Security cards, register their children in school, learn to ride the bus and shop in a grocery store, and, most important, to find employment.

A government grant (Reception and Placement-R&P) from the U.S. Department of State helps

CRRA to take care of its refugee clients for the first three months after arrival in the U.S., which includes an apartment, furniture and housewares for the apartment, visits to the Health Department and Social Security, initial food and personal necessities, and help finding employment. If refugee clients are disabled, too old to work, or of school age, CRRA will help them apply for aid from the Department of Social Services in Charlotte.

Some clients are ready, willing, and able to go to work, and CRRA can usually assure they will help them find employment quickly. To that end, CRRA is fortunate to have help from the U.S. government in the form of Matching Grant from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement. Refugees who are enrolled in the Matching Grant (MG) program typically find work quicker and arrive at self-sufficiency faster than those who are not.

A limited number of refugees whom CRRA resettles can be

enrolled in the MG program. The spaces available in the MG program are determined by the government and by a cash match, which CRRA must raise. If CRRA were to raise more money for the cash match, it could put more people in the MG program and request more spaces for its refugee clients.

What makes the Matching Grant program so special? Why is it successful in helping refugees to reach self-sufficiency faster? MG allows refugee clients to search for work, go on interviews, and benefit from more intense case management, cash assistance, and rent for a longer time than those who are not enrolled in the program.

There are major success stories among refugee clients who have been on Matching Grant. A refugee from Burma began at a job at a very low level. CRRA checked his progress with the employer and was pleased to see that he was promoted several times. He is now in charge of a shift in the factory and helps other Burmese refugees gain employ-

ment there. He can support his family of five on his salary without being a burden on Mecklenburg County.

CRRA has one of the best outcomes of any of the HIAS affiliates who have the Matching Grant. CRRA has consistently employed about 85 percent of the refugee families enrolled in the program. It is hoped that each Matching Grant family will become self-sufficient (as defined by the Office of Refugee Resettlement) when they are collecting a paycheck that pays for rent and utilities and other basic needs on their own. Ultimately, the most successful clients move out of the apartments CRRA initially rented for them to other quarters. They purchase cars and pay their insurance. In addition to the cash match, CRRA must raise in-kind donations, such as—but not limited to—volunteer hours, volunteer miles, student intern hours, and furniture and housewares donations. The cash component of the match must be at least 20% of the equation and the in-kind cannot exceed 80%.

The Charlotte Jewish community has been particularly generous in donating housewares and furniture, both of which are critical components of the R&P grant. CRRA relies on volunteers who donate their time and drive refugees to appointments, all of which count toward the in-kind match for MG. To volunteer for CRRA, call 704-535-8803 or email Dottie Shattuck at dottie.shattuck@carolinarefugee.org.

The cash match is harder to raise than the in-kind match. The more money CRRA raises, the more refugee clients can be enrolled in the MG program. In turn, CRRA can request more availability for its clients. Visit www.carolinarefugee.org to learn more about the agency. Please send checks in care of Ellen Dubin to 5007 Monroe Rd., Charlotte, NC 28205. ☆

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