



**AN ASSESSMENT OF
THE COLORADO REFUGEE SERVICES PROGRAM
WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2005, The Colorado Trust contracted with ISED Solutions to conduct an assessment of the Colorado Refugee Services Program to help inform the State of Colorado on how to best structure its refugee resettlement program.

The purpose of the assessment was to conduct a review of the structure and services of the Colorado Refugee Services Program, including input from staff, other stakeholders, refugees and ethnic community representatives, and to provide recommendations for refugee resettlement in Colorado. Peggy Gilbert, a Senior Consultant with ISED Solutions, served as the project manager and primary consultant.

METHODOLOGY

Document Review

The assessment consisted of a review and summary of documents that detail the requirements of refugee resettlement as mandated by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Specifically, documents related to the Wilson-Fish Program, current documents that provide recent assessments of the Colorado Refugee Services Program, a monitoring report from ORR, numerous documents produced by ISED Solutions in its capacity as a technical assistance provider for ORR and various regulatory documents that describe program elements and design were reviewed.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders including representatives from ORR, Colorado Department of Human Services, The Colorado Trust, local voluntary resettlement agencies and others interested in refugee resettlement. ISED conducted a total of 15 individual face-to-face interviews and an additional 14 individual telephone interviews. Individuals interviewed were not participants in the focus groups.

Focus Groups

A total of three focus groups were held in Denver. The first consisted of a focus group of frontline resettlement staff from voluntary resettlement agencies, a second of refugees themselves and a third of representatives from ethnic community-based organizations.

FINDINGS

Generally, focus group participants and key informants felt that the Colorado Refugee Services Program provides good services that meet the needs of refugees and others eligible for refugee benefits. The ethnic community-based organizations focus group, however, generally believed that the services provided through the program are inadequate. All groups and individuals indicated that the program can be improved.

Among the **strengths** of the program, some participants identified the following:

- Refugee Cash Assistance provided through the resettlement agencies
- Refugee Medical Assistance, which provides up to eight months of medical coverage
- English as a Second Language as implemented by the Emily Griffith Opportunity School
- WorkStyles, a pre-employment training program implemented by the Spring Institute
- The broad, collaborative network of service providers known as the Colorado Refugee Network Council
- Resettlement agencies (Volags) and their staff.

Among the **concerns** expressed were:

- The high cost and limited services of Phase II, which serves eligible refugees and other qualifying individuals who have been in the U.S. for one year, but not longer than five years
- Diminishing Refugee Social Service funds resulting in larger ESL classes, adversely affecting staffing for employment services and resulting in fewer clients served in programs such as mental health and vocational education
- Poor employment outcomes for refugees of 36% ranks Colorado in last place of Wilson-Fish programs
- Case management that sometimes appears to stress employment over good client assessment and care
- The state's current RIMS database provides neither timely nor accurate data for effective program management
- Absence of ethnic community-based organizations as partners and participants in the program
- Perceived intentional exclusion of ethnic community-based organizations by the Colorado Refugee Services Program
- Diminished effectiveness of the Colorado Refugee Network Council resulting in a growing lack of coordination and collaboration among service providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The chart below outlines ISED Solutions recommendations. Each recommendation is sorted by focus area and relates to the listed concerns above:

FOCUS	CONCERNS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Case Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High cost and limited services of Phase II through the Colorado Refugee Services Program ▪ Diminishing Refugee Social Service funds resulting in more unmet client needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eliminate Phase II and provide seamless services through resettlement agencies ▪ Subcontract Wilson-Fish cash assistance to a lead agency
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor employment outcomes of 36% ranks Colorado in last place of Wilson-Fish programs ▪ Emphasis on employment overshadows case management for good client care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a broad employment initiative to produce better employment outcomes ▪ Explore new methods for funding allocation (such as RSS and TAG), possibly based on performance rather than cost reimbursement
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RIMS provides neither timely nor accurate data for effective program management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance state data collection ability or subcontract data collection to a lead agency ▪ Improve or replace the state's current RIMS database
Ethnic Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ethnic associations feel excluded as program participants and service delivery partners ▪ Associations perceive intentional exclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a capacity-building initiative for ethnic associations focused on funding and inclusion ▪ Strengthen the relationship between the Colorado Refugee Service Program and ethnic associations so that it's based on mutual understanding and trust
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diminished effectiveness of the Refugee Network Council resulting in growing lack of coordination and collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refocus the State Refugee Coordinator for strong and comprehensive state leadership ▪ Reorganize the Colorado Refugee Services Program to emphasize these functions: leadership, program management, program monitoring, writing, data collection and analysis, financial management and administrative support ▪ Refocus the Refugee Network Council to provide stronger coordination, partnerships and collaboration ▪ Work with voluntary resettlement agencies (Volags) to assess and plan for current Phase II transfer and future resettlement needs

NEXT STEPS

This assessment is intended to provide a guide for change. It is not intended by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, The Colorado Trust or ISED Solutions to be a mandate for change. Based on the findings and recommendations in the assessment, it is the responsibility of the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Refugee Services Program to decide which recommendations should be implemented, in what manner and at what pace. As a technical assistance provider to ORR, ISED Solutions remains available to discuss how they can provide support for any of the recommendations that are implemented.

For additional information, contact Susan Downs-Karkos, Senior Program Officer, The Colorado Trust, 303-837-1200, susan@coloradotrust.org.

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