

- Identifying personal needs and aspirations
- Developing communications and assertive skills
- Setting goals and making decisions.

Personal counselling is provided throughout this process.

Employment Component

The Employment Preparation provides participants with an opportunity to assess past work experience, skills, education, and English levels.

Sessions prepare women to do job search, to conduct themselves in a job interview, to fill out application forms and employment contracts. Information is also provided on employment standards, labour legislation, employee rights and benefits and pay cheque deductions. They learn of possible entry-level employment opportunities and of their qualification requirements.

The work placement involves on-the-job training in an organization. Work placements are secured with the understanding that the participant will work and receive training for four months and will then be hired as a permanent employee.

The employment component has always faced somewhat of a dilemma. The reality of today's employment market, is that most of the entry level jobs currently available to participants in N.E.W.'s programme are found at the lower ends of traditional female occupations such as clerical work, community work, day care, home service and light manufacturing assembly work. Past experience has been that Latin American refugee women are primarily interested in jobs they can relate to and that have good working conditions and reasonable wages. It is inevitable that the majority of participants will find employment in traditional women's occupations.

Joy Simmonds is the Community Liaison worker at N.E.W.

Service Delivery to Southeast Asian Refugee Women

by John Van Esterik

The delivery of services to refugees in three counties of upstate New York occupied much of my time and attention for almost four years in the early 1980s. As an anthropologist who managed a programme of educational and employment services to refugees, I was interested in applying an anthropological analysis to the delivery of such services.

The refugee population in the three rural counties of upstate New York covered at the time was mainly Southeast Asian. Almost half of the adult population had little or no education, the bulk of these being women.

Women are responsible for household operations in all Southeast Asian groups. Thus, women were particularly affected by the limitations attendant upon large family size and low incomes. Southeast Asian women play important roles in the household, participating in all family decisions and usually handling the family budget and income.

Yet, refugee women are especially disadvantaged in North American society since the majority of the women have much less education than local populations or refugee men. The women are responsible for the care of children in a society where child care is expensive and difficult to obtain. In their own societies, child care was often left to elderly relatives, friends, or neighbours, all of whom lived close by.

The programme of services sought to provide educational and employment placement services to all refugee adults in the three-county area. But it was soon discovered that refugee women faced problems that impeded the delivery of programme services to them.

Education Backgrounds

Many Southeast Asian refugee women were very poorly educated and therefore unprepared for living in the modern, post-industrial society they were entering. Rural Southeast Asians often prefer to have males formally educated than women. Yet, refugee women wanted and expected to work and earn money. It became very apparent that a one entry-level salary family could not afford many consumer goods in the new society they had entered. Refugee women seeking employment had to face the problem of limited educational backgrounds and their continuing responsibilities of homemaking.



A few students in the Beginning Class, St. Paul's Methodist Church, Ithaca, New York.

Day-Care Services

The English as Second Language (ESL) classes were held in space provided by two churches in the largest urban centre (population: 27,000) in the counties. A problem that arose immediately was day-care services. No provision was made for day care.

The programme sought to solve the problem by planning class times so refugee women could trade off babysitting chores. Elderly relatives suffering their own disorientations in a new land were not prepared to care for two or three young children. Besides, refugees did not live all together and were not necessarily neighbours or, for that matter, friends. As a result, some private sponsors paid for professional day care. A classroom space with a day-care facility was donated, and two day-care workers were hired. However, none of these "solutions" was satisfactory.

Travel

Another problem was getting children to the day-care centre, since New York law required infant seats for any young child travelling in a car. Some refugees did not have cars and walking with three or four children through winter snows was not very convenient. This was usually solved by breaking the law and carrying several children in a car owned by one of the refugees.

Child Care in the Home

In Southeast Asian villages, seven, eight, and nine-year-old daughters often take care of younger siblings. Of course, this is done in a context of open dwellings in proximity with the houses of relatives and well known neighbours. In housing projects even in small towns people are not always very friendly or understanding. In one case where both refugee parents worked, a number of complaints was raised against their leaving young children alone at home. At one point the state child abuse agency was called in by a neighbour. State workers seemed receptive to cultural explanations but ultimately the law was obeyed.

Training Courses

Education involved more than English language training. Some special courses

were devised to directly appeal to women's interests and concerns. One of the most successful was a sewing class utilizing resources of the local vocational high school. Using patterns and power sewing machines appealed to many refugee women who in their home country weaved cloth and made their family clothing.



Some refugee women waiting for their sewing class to begin.



Refugee women attending a popular sewing course. This course had to be dropped afterwards because it could not be readily justified for employment purposes.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to justify the course for employment purposes. A cottage industry in sewing could not be supported because it was against the law

to do piecework in the home. This course, however popular and well attended, was therefore dropped. Other courses such as housekeeping, food preparation, and health services, which had specific employment goals, were not as popular, but offered better opportunities for jobs in local restaurants, cleaning jobs, and other service occupations.

On-the-Job Training

With their poor educational background, many refugee women had difficulty learning to read and write. It was soon discovered that even seemingly simple, labour-intensive jobs like cleaning required knowledge that many Southeast Asian refugee women did not have. Cleaning motel rooms, fraternity houses, and private homes demanded a knowledge about a wide range of products, techniques, and equipment these women had no experience with. The programme had to provide on-the-spot tutors and interpreters to lead the refugee woman through the job. Otherwise, even this minimum wage employment could be lost to the family.

Summary

In summary, the programme sought to address refugee women's needs. But there are barriers for women to access these services. These constraints include government and legal restrictions that limited the development of cottage industries, traditional child care and access to day care. The cultural characteristics of refugee women, including their lack of literacy, education and job readiness, posed additional difficulties.

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