



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

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Agenda Date: 5/19/2015

In Control: Quality of Life Committee

DEPARTMENT: Human Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Melody Woosley

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Overview of Refugee Services in San Antonio

SUMMARY:

This item provides a briefing on available services for refugees resettling in San Antonio.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

A refugee is identified as a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or a natural disaster. Since 1975, the United States has welcomed over 3 million refugees from all over the world. Refugees have built new lives, homes and communities in towns and cities across all 50 states. Each fiscal year, the President of the United States establishes an annual refugee admissions ceiling (70,000 for FY 2015), in consultation with Congress and the U.S. Department of State. Of the roughly 15 million refugees worldwide, 80% are women and children. To be admitted to the United States, a refugee must register with the United Nations, and be cleared by the Department of Homeland Security. Refugees are assigned to one of several national voluntary agencies in the United States. In Fiscal Year 2014, San Antonio received a total of 1,164 new refugees through this program.

The U.S. Department of State provides funding and works with Refugee Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) to place refugees throughout the United States. Once a refugee is assigned to a VOLAG and resettled in Texas, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission works with local organizations to provide a variety of services to the refugee depending on his or her individual needs. Catholic Charities Archdiocese of San Antonio serves as the designated refugee voluntary agency in San Antonio. Catholic Charities also receives funding through the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to provide case management beyond the initial six months of services funded through the U.S. State Department. Additional organizations, such as the Center for Refugee Services also provide supplemental support and services to help refugees successfully integrate into the community.

ISSUE:

The purpose of this item is to provide a briefing on services available to refugees arriving and resettling in San Antonio. Catholic Charities' Office of Refugee Services provides housing, employment, language and acculturation assistance to refugees escaping war and persecution who have been resettled in the United States through the U.S. Department of State programs. As the only federally designated refugee resettlement agency in San Antonio, Catholic Charities resettled 1,164 refugees in 2014, providing professional supportive services to help refugees on their path toward self-sufficiency. Reception and job placement services are provided to encourage refugees to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to promote cultural integration.

Catholic Charities offers initial services, including airport reception and arrival preparation (apartment set up, furniture, food, and clothing). These services are followed by an initial orientation to educate the refugee and family members on life in the United States. This includes employment, healthcare, childcare, transportation, American culture and laws, housing and safety. Comprehensive case management removes barriers to employment and encourages self-sufficiency and community integration.

In addition to services offered through Catholic Charities, many community partners also provide support to the refugee population. The Center for Refugee Services (CRS), a non-profit agency, promotes successful community integration of resettled refugees in San Antonio with a focus on health and wellness, educational support and employment. Funding comes from private donations and churches. The CRS is located within walking distance of five apartment complexes in Council District 8 where over 3,500 refugees reside. In 2014, the Center served 600 refugees. Other community partners include Oak Hills Church, University United Methodist Church, Woodland Baptist Church, First Unitarian Universalist Church, St. Francis Episcopal Church, Sheppard of the Hills Lutheran Church, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio School of Nursing and University of Texas at San Antonio's Counseling and Public Administration Departments. Additionally, school districts, VIA, and other community partners offer support services to refugee families which assist in successful integration into the community.

ALTERNATIVES:

This item is for briefing purposes only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This item is for briefing purposes only.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for briefing purposes only.