



**Catholic  
Charities**  
of the Diocese of  
Galveston-Houston

*providing help.  
creating hope.*

## **Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program**

### **Goals and Objectives**

The goal of the program is *to help refugees develop strong families and marriages, enabling them to better adapt to American culture and become self-reliant.* An additional goal is to empower refugee families to make use of their own indigenous values and strengths as they learn new skills for managing conflict and solving problems.

In achieving these goals we will provide skills and education in areas of family communication, family conflict, conflict resolutions skills, financial management, domestic violence awareness and parenting. We have distributed culturally- and linguistically- appropriate informational materials to help refugee families solve problems and build healthy relationships. Through alliances with other secular and faith-based organizations whose goals are to help refugees obtain self-sufficiency, we organize support groups and offer workshops focusing on issues affecting refugee families. We also provide resources to refugees about marriage and family services, trainings and counseling.

### **Program Description**

The Strengthening Refugees Families and Marriages Program offers skills training to help refugees maintain strong family structures and healthy relationships in the face of ongoing challenges. Refugees face enormous challenges and daily concerns, risking the stability and health of their families. Many refugees endured family upheaval when fleeing their countries of origin. Others faced instability in refugee camps. Arriving in the U.S., they face the difficult task of finding a job and new home and adjusting to American society. Ongoing stressors and a lack of skills to deal with them can cause families to break down. Every culture has its own definition of a healthy relationship and family; there are commonalities that reach across many cultures, such as relying on family members in stressful times, which encompasses the entire resettlement process, and acculturation process.

### **Refugees Served**

Our goal is to work with a diverse group of refugee communities within the Greater Houston area. Currently we are working with refugees from many parts of the globe, such as Afghanistan, Vietnam, Congo, Sudan, Rwanda, Burma and Liberia. All education skill-building training sessions are voluntary. Programs for both adults and youth focus on skill building techniques to help refugees communicate more effectively in an assortment of environments.

### **Training Materials**

Training curriculum was selected from two well-known marriage education curricula, Family Wellness® (George Doub & Ana Morante) and Power of Two® (developed by Dr. Susan Heitler). Both programs incorporate strengths-based materials and concepts and have been used successfully with diverse communities and cultures around the United States. These programs are designed to teach effective relationship skills around communication and problem solving and help reduce potential risk factors within refugee families. Information about healthy conflict resolution, problem solving and other family-related issues will become available in 2005 to those unable to attend trainings.

## **Staff**

The Program coordinator received formal training and certification in the Family Wellness® and Power of Two® curricula. Volunteer trainers with language ability and/or experience in certain refugee communities are facilitating trainings and support groups among the refugees and helping to ensure that the needs of the community are being met by the program. Mentors work with refugee youth and teach them communication and relationship skills that can then be shared within the larger refugee community.

## **Program Outcomes**

The program plans to introduce family communication skills and related topics to at least 150 refugees. The program will be considered successful when refugees report that they feel they are better able to solve marital and family problems, an increase in family functioning, and they are better prepared to face and overcome some of the obstacles to U.S. integration and acculturation. Success also means that refugees have found ways to merge traditional values and customs with American culture. We also seek to increase the number of organizations partnering to strengthen refugee families.

## **Program Dates**

The Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriages Program began operating in February 2004 and continues into 2005.

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