



Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis

STRENGTHENING REFUGEE FAMILIES AND MARRIAGE PROGRAM

Administering Organization

The *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program is offered through a collaborative effort between Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis, Seton Family Services and the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota. The program is supported and directed through the efforts of a coalition of social service organizations who are involved with the refugee and immigrant communities in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.

Program Objectives

The *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program aims to promote healthy refugee and immigrant families by enhancing and supporting healthy familial and marital communication, by developing understanding through education, and by encouraging community development by fostering both the independence and the interdependence of families within the immigrant and refugee communities.

Program Description

The *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program provides educational and skills-based workshops based upon the Family Wellness model. Family Wellness has been identified as being one of the most effective models for use with refugee and migrant families, and is easily adaptable for any community. The program helps family members to practice better communication skills while reinforcing the vital role that parents play as the heads of their families. The Family Wellness model assists in conflict management and discipline, as well as the continuation of family values and traditions. The program helps to bring families together at a time when they feel pulled apart by the larger influences of the dominant U.S. culture.

Groups Served by the Program

The *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program serves Somali families, primarily in Minneapolis. Using the Family Wellness model, programs and presentations have been developed for use with families, with men's or women's groups, and with groups of children and teenagers.

Training Model Explanation

Family Wellness is a quickly learned and easily adapted program, which has proven effective in a variety of communities, cultures, and languages. It is currently used for prevention and intervention in the areas of domestic violence, drug, alcohol, and child abuse. The model is based upon the best practices of psycho-educational research and theory, and presents "rules" that inform the roles played by each

member of a healthy family. The program presentation is called “Survival Skills for Healthy Families,” and is a strengths oriented approach that treats each family as a positive entity and builds upon what is good and healthy in those families. The *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program has adapted the standard 6 session program to a 5 session program. The material from the 6th session, regarding drugs, sex and alcohol, was determined to be inappropriate for the Somali community and has been incorporated into the remaining 5 sessions in discussions about passing on family values.

Program Staff

Program staff who are conducting the classes, as well as the program coordinator, have been fully trained in the Family Wellness model. They have received 30 hours of training in the model. Those conducting the classes are members of the immigrant and refugee community in which they are providing the service.

Defining Program Success

The *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program is successful if adults (parents and grandparents) self-report on post-session questionnaires that they continue to implement skills from the Survival Skills series and that those skills have improved familial and marital communication. And, the program is successful if adults report that stressful family issues that predated the Family Wellness sessions have become less stressful or disappeared following participation in the program.

Program Outcomes

- ◆ Program staff will provide outreach and education to the community about the *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program and its efforts to impact families in the Somali community
- ◆ Program staff will work with representatives of other social service agencies to bring the Family Wellness model to a larger audience, including other immigrant and refugee groups
- ◆ By March 2005, 300 refugee participants will receive training in the adapted Family Wellness curriculum

Program Contacts

Katherine Pollock

Program Administrator/Seton Family Services
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
1276 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55104
kpolllock@ccspm.org
651-603-0201

Program Dates

The *Strengthening Refugee Families and Marriage* program in St. Paul began in 2003; it continues to operate.