

THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS/ MIGRATION & REFUGEE SERVICES (USCCB/MRS) AND THE UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINOR (URM) PROGRAM: A 30-YEAR PARTNERSHIP

Since the Refugee Act of 1980, USCCB/MRS has been closely involved with the administration of the national URM program in a number of ways:

NATIONAL PLACEMENT COORDINATION

Placement coordination involves matching the immediate and long-term needs of a child with individual URM program capacity, a process that begins at time of referral with a team consultation of Master's level USCCB/MRS national staff.

A number of factors are taken into account when matching an individual child with a URM program. These considerations include a child's personal preferences of placements, age, language and ethnicity, assessed level of care, mental health and treatment needs, behavior issues, family reunification options, presence of siblings or other family members in the U.S., trauma experience, religious preferences, educational experience, geographic constraints due to safety, and immigration status and relief options. Other factors considered in national placement coordination include:

- Local URM program capacity including current funding and license constraints
- Local presence of ethnic community
- Adult/minor sibling case capacity
- Staff language and expertise
- Program field expertise (sexual abuse treatment, independent living, etc.)
- Local dependency time frames
- Balancing with other pending placements
- Presence of legal representation
- Foster family composition and availability
- Group home modality and availability

- Other continuum of care availability such as residential treatment programs
- Community resources (i.e., accessibility of ESL in public schools)
- Legal and regulatory constraints within certain programs, and jurisdictions which affect placement

In order to continually coordinate appropriate placements, USCCB/MRS is in frequent contact with URM program directors and other key staff members to learn about the current local placement environment. USCCB/MRS also conducts capacity assessment site visits, which include consultation with the URM programs about the developing needs of children eligible for the URM program.

COORDINATION OF PEER EXCHANGES & NATIONAL INFORMATION EXCHANGE

The URM program network is a unique model of specialized foster care for refugees and other youth seeking refuge in the United States. No other country in the world has such a dedicated national model of care for unaccompanied children and youth. USCCB/MRS finds tremendous value, therefore, in providing opportunities for the on-going sharing of practice experiences among the URM program directors and staff. This sharing occurs through monthly conference calls, monthly URM newsletters, national peer exchange convenings, and subsidized support of URM program director attendance at national child welfare conferences. USCCB/MRS staff also provides on-going case consultation to URM program staff as needed.

USCCB

SYSTEM COORDINATION AND ADVOCACY

Administration of the URM program in the United States is a complex partnership among a number of stakeholders, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Office of Refugee Resettlement and the U.S. Department of State, State Refugee Coordinator Offices, County Child Welfare Administrators, private agency URM programs, and the two national voluntary agencies authorized by the U.S. Department of State to resettle unaccompanied refugee minors- the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS). USCCB/MRS works with the above entities to provide consultation on the needs of URM program development, using its unique knowledge of trends in placement and service delivery nationwide.

Internationally, USCCB/MRS consults with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees about improving the identification, assessment and processing of children in need of the durable solution of resettlement.

As a leader in the field of migration and child welfare, USCCB has also been asked by the U.S. Congress to testify about issues affecting unaccompanied children.

MONITORING

USCCB/MRS monitors the program services and outcomes for unaccompanied alien children (UAC) - children in federal custody and in immigration proceedings – through a Cooperative Agreement with the Office of Refugee Resettlement. In this role, USCCB/MRS provides on-going desk and on-site monitoring for compliance and quality assurance, training about current federal policies and procedures, and evaluation of child and program outcomes.

TRAINING

USCCB/MRS provides on-going training to the URM program staff both on-site and remotely. Training topics are specific to the URM program administration and children's needs. Examples include safety planning for child victims of trafficking, outcome reporting in individual service plans, and working with children with mental health and substance abuse issues.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

USCCB/MRS adds to the national and international knowledge about serving unaccompanied foreign-born children by evaluating outcomes and services provided throughout the network. USCCB/MRS periodically issues reports to stakeholders, capturing the national picture of services, trends and outcomes for the URM population.

CONTACT INFORMATION

NATHALIE LUMMERT
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SERVICES
PHONE: 202-541-3114
EMAIL: NLUMMERT@USCCB.ORG

ANNE MULLOOLY
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, FOSTER CARE
PHONE: 202-541-3091
EMAIL: AMULLOOLY@USCCB.ORG