

an assessment can help ensure that those who work with immigrant clients have an understanding of the immigrant experience. Diversion programs that emphasize prevention and maximize the use of culturally consistent services should also be developed and supported.

- **Cultural and linguistic competency in working with immigrant families should be operationalized through training, consultation, hiring of staff, and program design.** The internal staff training should also include attorneys, judges, court appointed special advocates (CASA) and other court personnel.

Community Partnerships:

- **Child welfare agencies should develop participatory, collaborative partnerships with community-based agencies, including faith-based groups, to provide critical outreach to the immigrant community to educate them about the child welfare system and vice versa.** Some jurisdictions have developed a “cultural broker” model, hiring brokers who have the same ethnicity as their clients to help caseworkers understand cultural differences.¹⁵
- **Child welfare agencies should consider developing formal partnerships with foreign consulates to provide ongoing technical support and sharing of resources with child welfare agencies.** Mexico has taken a leadership role in many localities where there are large settled populations of Mexican nationals, and several child welfare agencies have established best practice protocols or memorandums of understanding with Mexico.¹⁶ The consulate may help as a broker between the child welfare agency and the immigrant parent/family, finding translators and other resources.
- **Child welfare agencies should connect more closely with immigrant communities to develop the knowledge and skills needed to work with them.** This could include field placement of social work students or targeted recruitment to increase the number of linguistically/culturally appropriate staff and licensed foster care homes, and increased funding to support and develop prevention and intervention services in newer and emerging immigrant communities.

Immigration Relief:

- **Child welfare agencies should screen all children who enter the child welfare system as early on as possible to determine whether they are eligible for a form of immigration relief and document agency efforts to assist eligible children in applying for immigration relief.** Child welfare agencies need to

develop assessments and information collection mechanisms for their immigrant clients and be knowledgeable about the various immigration relief options.

- **Court improvement funds should be used to educate and train judges, lawyers, and case workers on immigration relief options available to foster youth.** In order to prevent the tragedy of children exiting the child welfare system without receiving legal status for which they qualify, it is important for judges, lawyers, and case workers to receive training on immigration relief options so that there are multiple entities ensuring no eligible child falls through the cracks.
- **Child welfare agencies should assist eligible children and parents in obtaining immigration relief by developing partnerships with local immigrant serving legal providers or other community-based organizations.** Due to the complicated nature of immigration law, child welfare agency staff often require the assistance of immigration experts to assist clients with their immigration applications.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Lincroft, Y., Resner, J. (2006). *Undercounted, Underserved: Immigrants and Refugees in the Child Welfare System*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- 2 Mather, M. (2009). *Reports on America: Children in Immigrant Families Chart New Path*, Population Reference Bureau.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Wilmot, L., Gerald, R., Harper, C. J. (2005). *The Influence of Culture and Cultural Competence on Child and Family Well-being*, Denver, CO: American Humane Association.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 "Bridging Refugee Youth and Children Services."(2009). Washington DC: Bridging Refugee Youth & Children Services. www.brycs.org
- 7 Excerpt with permission from Lincroft, Y (June 2009). *A Social Worker's Tool Kit for Working with Immigrant Families: Immigration Status and Relief Options*. Denver, CO: Migration and Child Welfare National Network – American Humane Association.
- 8 INA § 101(a)(15)(U), 8 USC § 1101(a)(15)(U).
- 9 For information on the U visa see www.ilrc.org and www.nationalimmigrationproject.org
- 10 For information on the T visa see www.lafla.org (the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles)
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 *National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (2001)*. Office of Minority Health, office of Public Health and Science, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- 13 Information about implementing language access programs in social services is available at the Migration and Policy Institute website, http://www.migrationinformation.org/integration/language_portal/
- 14 Lincroft, Y. (September/October 2008). Helping Immigrant Families: Interviews with Four California Social Workers. *Children's VOICE – A Publication of Child Welfare League of America*, 19-20.
- 15 ABC/KFSN-TV Fresno (August 14, 2009), *Cultural Brokers*. <http://abclocal.go.com/kfsn/story?section=news/local&id=6966091>
- 16 Borelli, K., Earner, I., Lincroft, Y. (2008). Administrators in Public Child Welfare: Responding to Immigrant Families in Crisis. *Protecting Children – A Professional Publication of American Humane Association*, 22(2), 8-13.

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About First Focus: First Focus is a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Further information can be found at www.firstfocus.net.

About the Migration and Child Welfare National Network (MCWNN): MCWNN is a coalition of leading child welfare organizations interested in the intersection of immigration and child welfare issues. Formed in 2006, the network has four main areas of focus: advocacy and policy, promising practices, research, and transnational relations. Members share knowledge and strategies with colleagues throughout the country to improve services for immigrant families in the child welfare system. MCWNN's fiscal and program agent is the American Humane Association. Salient activities developed by American Humane Association on behalf of the network include three policy roundtables, two journals, several research projects, numerous state and national technical assistance and dissemination efforts, and specialized toolkits. Further information can be found at <http://www.americanhumane.org/migration>

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