

OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

Divisions - Unaccompanied Children's Services

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On March 1, 2003, the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Section 462, transferred functions under U.S. immigration laws regarding the care and placement of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) from the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to the Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

The Division of Children's Services (DCS) program recognizes the importance of providing a safe and appropriate environment for UAC from the time they are placed into ORR custody and are reunified with family members or sponsors in the U.S. or until they are removed to their country of origin by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) immigration officials. DCS takes into consideration the unique nature of each UAC's situation and incorporates child welfare principles when making placement, clinical, case management, and release decisions that are in the best interest of the child.

DCS RESPONSIBILITIES

- Making and implementing placement decisions for UAC
- Ensuring that the interests of the UAC are considered in decisions related to their care and custody
- Reunifying UAC with qualified sponsors and family members, when appropriate
- Overseeing the infrastructure and personnel of ORR-funded UAC care provider facilities
- Conducting on-site monitoring visits of ORR-funded care provider facilities and ensuring compliance with DUCS national care standards
- Collecting, analyzing, and reporting statistical information on UAC

FACTS ABOUT UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILDREN

UAC leave their country of origin for multiple reasons such as to rejoin family members already in the U.S., to escape abusive family relationships, or to find work to support their families in their country of origin. In fiscal year 2008, the numbers of children in ORR custody and care ranged from approximately 1,050 to 1,400. (Average of 1220) Of those, 77% were male and 23% female; 10% were below the age of 14.

The most common native countries of UAC are El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

SOCIAL SERVICES FACILITIES

The majority of children are cared for through a network of ORR-funded care provider facilities, most of which are located close to areas where immigration officials apprehend large numbers of aliens. There are currently more than 58 ORR-funded care provider facilities in 13 different states.

Care provider facilities are state licensed and must meet ORR requirements to ensure a high level of quality of care. The facilities, which operate under cooperative agreements and contracts, provide children with classroom education, health care, socialization/recreation, vocational training, mental health services, family reunification, access to legal services, and case management. Care provider facilities clinical and case management teams use effective screening tools to assess UAC for indications of mental health and trafficking issues.

- Most UAC are placed in shelters and group homes
- If a UAC requires a higher level of care due to a documented criminal history, secure placement options are available
- For UAC with special needs (13 years old and under, pregnant/parent, acute medical needs, mental health concerns), or who have no viable sponsor to reunite with while going through immigration proceedings, short and long-term foster care is available through ORR's foster care program network
- ORR funds certain special programs to serve UAC with acute medical and mental health needs

PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF SERVICE

- Implementation of an electronic national web-based tracking and management system to streamline operations and case management functions and provide statistically-sound reports and trend analyses
- Implementation of a training initiative for care provider facilities that is focused around developing trauma-based treatment for the UAC in DUCS care.
- Coordination of a pro-bono attorney outreach project to pilot pro-bono capacity building models in major immigration apprehension areas so that more UAC can have access to legal representation

- Coordination of a child protection advocacy pilot project based in Chicago
- Development of uniform national standards of care in partnership with ACF Children's Bureau and child welfare experts
- Development of a comprehensive training program for all ORR-funded facilities and DUCS personnel and partners
- Collaboration and coordination with the ORR Trafficking Team to identify victims of trafficking in the UAC population
- Collaboration with representatives from the DHS, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Patrol (CBO), the Department of Justice (DOJ), Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), and non-profit community-based legal service providers

The Division of Children's Services is also responsible for the **Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program** (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/urm>), which provides for the care of refugee minors admitted to the U.S. unaccompanied by a parent or adult relative. Minors who are identified in countries of first asylum as requiring foster care upon arrival in this country are sponsored through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). The children are placed in licensed child welfare programs operated by their local affiliates. Eligible minors may also enter the program through family (a) breakdown, (b) grant of asylum, or (c) certification as a victim of trafficking. Each minor in the care of this program is eligible for the same range of child welfare benefits as non-refugee children in the State, with additional services for the preservation of the minor's ethnic and religious heritage. When possible, the child is placed in an area with nearby families of the same ethnic background. Depending on their individual needs, the minors are placed in home foster care, group care, independent living, or residential treatment. ORR reimburses costs incurred on behalf of each child until the month after his or her eighteenth birthday or such higher age as is permitted under the State's plan under title IV-B of the Social Security Act.
