

Working With Immigrant and Refugee Families: A Guide for Child Welfare Agencies

Like other families in the United States, immigrant and refugee families may encounter the child welfare system following reports of child maltreatment. While these families have many of the same needs as other families, they also face unique challenges as they navigate the child welfare system.

Immigration issues in child welfare differ across jurisdictions depending on location (e.g., proximity to border regions) and the concentration of resident immigrants and refugees, and there are certain policies and practices that agencies can implement to best serve these populations. This bulletin describes strategies that child welfare agencies can use at the systems level to improve case outcomes for immigrant and refugee children, youth, and families.

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Terminology

The terminology used to define and describe concepts related to immigration varies throughout child welfare and other fields. For the purposes of this publication, the following terms and definitions are used:

Immigrant: A child or adult living in the United States who was born outside of the country

Refugee: A child or adult who is fleeing persecution and has been admitted to the country due to special humanitarian concerns on the part of the United States

Naturalized citizen: A child or adult born outside the United States who has become a U.S. citizen after fulfilling requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act

Undocumented immigrant: A child or adult living in the United States who was born outside the country and does not have proper authorization to live in the United States

Unaccompanied immigrant child or youth: A child or youth under the age of 18 living in the United States who does not have lawful immigration status and who entered the United States without a parent or guardian

Mixed-status family: A family in which members have different U.S. citizenship and immigration statuses

OVERVIEW

According to the latest data released by the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, in 2019 there were roughly 44.9 million foreign-born people living in the United States (Congressional Research Service, 2021). Research also shows that there are around 18.2 million children living in the country with immigrant families (i.e., with at least one foreign-born parent) (Annie E.

Casey Foundation, 2021). These numbers have been growing over the past several decades (Greenberg et al., 2019), and it is increasingly common for child welfare agencies throughout the country to handle cases involving immigrant and refugee families. For child welfare agencies to deliver effective practice to these families, they should first be aware of common agency issues that can impact service delivery.

Unaccompanied Children and Youth

Many unaccompanied children and youth who are immigrants and refugees come to the United States to escape situations of violence, poverty, and abuse in their home countries. Others may be brought to the United States as victims of human trafficking or labor exploitation. (For more information on human trafficking and child welfare, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's [Human Trafficking and Child Welfare: A Guide for Caseworkers](#).) When these unaccompanied children and youth come to the attention of U.S. immigration enforcement, they are transferred to the custody of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Office of Refugee Resettlement](#) (ORR). While in ORR care, these children and youth live in congregate care settings or foster homes while ORR assesses each individual for release to appropriate sponsors. Sponsors are often parents, other family members, or friends of the family.

Unaccompanied children and youth who have immigrated to the United States may be eligible for immigration benefits and/or the [Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program](#) (see ORR's "[How UC Qualify for URM](#)" for more information). Immigration courts determine whether unaccompanied children and youth will be deported or receive benefits. To learn about finding and providing legal services to unaccompanied children and youth, see the [Legal Services for Unaccompanied Children](#) section of the Vera Institute of Justice website.

CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

There are several common systemic issues that child welfare agencies may face when working with immigrant and refugee families. This section presents some of the more common agency challenges.

Child welfare workers may be unfamiliar with immigration issues and policies.

A lack of insight into the barriers faced by immigrants and refugees can cause professionals to create case plans that are difficult or impossible for families to complete. For example, undocumented parents who have been detained or deported may not be able to complete their case plan's reunification requirements, such as visits with their children or required parenting classes.

A lack of understanding around the reasons parents might be detained or deported (e.g., assumptions of criminal activity versus simple immigration issues) can affect the way child welfare professionals view these parents, which in turn can impact the way cases are treated (Wessler, 2011).

Child welfare agencies may be reluctant to place children in kinship care with undocumented family members. Child welfare agencies and staff may not realize that it is permissible to place children and youth with undocumented relatives and kin. As a result, children are often placed in nonrelative foster care, even when there are family members willing to care for them (Wessler, 2011).

There are no Federal laws prohibiting the placement of children and youth with undocumented relatives and kin. However, there are variations in State laws dictating whether undocumented immigrant relatives can qualify for foster care licensure (American Bar Association, 2017). Depending on the State, undocumented immigrant relatives are either explicitly permitted to apply for and obtain licensure, are permitted under limited circumstances, or are not permitted. In some cases, State policies do not explicitly address the issue, or other barriers could prevent licensure, such as background checks and home study or language requirements (Cooper & Christy, 2017).

For State-by-State guidance on licensing requirements for undocumented immigrant caregivers, see the American Bar Association's [Immigrant Caregivers: The Implications of Immigration Status on Foster Care Licensure](#).

For recommendations on policies and programs that can help support immigrant kinship families, see Generations United's [Love Without Borders: Grandfamilies and Immigration](#).

Child welfare agencies may not have adequate policies and procedures for reuniting children with deported parents. In the absence of guiding policies, international reunification options are often not considered because of worker and/or agency biases against placing children abroad (Wessler, 2011). This may be especially true for cases of deported parents whose children are U.S. citizens. Agency leadership may not realize that reunification between deported parents

and their children in the United States is possible with the involvement of the foreign country's consulate, and they may cite a lack of supervisory control when reunification efforts and case plans must be carried out from a distance. Even when agencies are able to coordinate case planning for deported parents, they may not have established processes for verifying a parent's participation in mandated services.

Child welfare agencies may struggle to connect immigrant and refugee families with services.

Like many other families, some immigrant and refugee families may need services to address issues around their physical health, behavioral and mental health, education, and other needs. Several Federal laws and State laws are applicable in determining what services are available and required for each family involved with the child welfare system. However, mandating services and ensuring that families receive them can be two different things. Here are some reasons immigrant and refugee families may not access the services they need:

- Eligibility for certain services, such as employment assistance, can vary by jurisdiction, both for documented and undocumented immigrants (Finno-Velasquez, 2014). Services based on Federally defined requirements, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, food stamps, housing assistance, and Medicaid services, are more restrictive and are often not available to families who do not have lawful immigration status (Casey Family Programs, 2020).

- Immigrant families may fear that accessing services will bring them to the attention of immigration enforcement personnel (Finno-Velasquez, 2014) or jeopardize their legal status or a pending citizenship application (Casey Family Programs, 2020).
- Language barriers may make it difficult for immigrants and refugees to access services.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

Federal laws and other policies can significantly affect eligibility and access to public services for immigrant and refugee families. Child welfare agencies should be aware of the potential impact that these laws and policies may have on the families living in their communities. Below are some key legislation, policies, and directives that agency leadership should be familiar with.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (P.L. 105-89). ASFA prioritizes the reunification of families when it is in the best interests of the child and requires that jurisdictions make reasonable efforts to promote reunification. Immigrant and refugee families are entitled to receive reunification services; however, certain provisions of ASFA may create barriers to reunification in cases involving undocumented immigrant families (Wessler, 2011). For example, States are required to initiate termination of parental rights proceedings after a child has been in foster care for 15 of the previous 22 months, with some exceptions. States can begin these proceedings before 15 months if it is determined that a parent is not complying with the family's reunification plan. This can be problematic for some immigrant parents because their situation may make it more difficult to comply with reunification plan

requirements (e.g., parents who have been detained or deported may have difficulty accessing required reunification services under their current living conditions). Learn about the major provision of ASFA on the [Major Federal Legislation Index and Search: Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 P.L. 105-89](#) page of the Information Gateway website.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351). This act requires title IV-E agencies to identify and notify all adult relatives of a child—within 30 days of the child's removal from home—of their options to become a placement resource for the child. This can include adult relatives residing in the United States and in other countries (Park, 2020). Learn more on the [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 \(P.L. 110-351\)](#) page of the Information Gateway website.

The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 (P.L. 103-382). MEPA prohibits States and federally funded entities from delaying, denying, or otherwise discriminating when making a foster care or adoption placement decision based on the parent or child's race, color, or national origin. Learn more on the [Major Federal Legislation Index and Search: Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994](#) page of the Information Gateway website.

The Detention and Removal of Alien Parents or Legal Guardians (Detained Parents Directive). This directive was issued by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in 2017 (replacing the Facilitating Parental Interests in the Course of Civil Immigration Enforcement Activities Directive

[Parental Interests Directive]). The Detained Parents Directive contains provisions ensuring that detained parents can participate in child welfare proceedings, visit with their children, and comply with reunification services, with the ultimate goal of keeping families intact. To learn more about the directive, see the [ICE Detained Parents Directive](#) page of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement website and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center's [The ICE Detained Parents Directive: How Child Welfare Agencies Can Advocate With ICE to Ensure Fair Treatment of Detained or Deported Parents](#).

Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) status. SIJ status is an immigration classification under Federal law that aims to help immigrant children who are abused, abandoned, or neglected by one or both parents stay safely in the United States. To learn about eligibility and stipulations, visit the [Special Immigrant Juveniles](#) page of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website.

Federal Executive Actions on immigration. Immigration legislation has been much debated in recent years, and relevant policies and procedures often change. These changes have recently included several Executive Actions regarding immigration policies and programs, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which allows deferred action from deportation for certain undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children. For more information on recent Executive Actions, see [President Biden's Executive Actions on immigration](#) on the Center for Migration Studies website.

SYSTEMWIDE STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE FAMILIES

To lay the groundwork for effective practice with immigrant and refugee families, child welfare agency leadership should prioritize systems-level change. There are several promising practices for these populations that can be implemented throughout child welfare systems and be applied across multiple stages of the service continuum.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

When responding to cases involving immigrant and refugee children, youth, and families, child welfare agencies may identify a need to collaborate with external entities, such as foreign consulates, case management service providers, cultural brokers, and ICE. These groups can help agencies navigate laws, processes, and cultural norms that may impact child welfare practice.

Refugee resettlement services. Child welfare leaders are increasingly recognizing the value of forming collaborative relationships with refugee services providers to promote cultural responsiveness within their agencies. Refugee services providers can help prepare agency personnel for culturally appropriate interactions with members of refugee communities and can provide knowledge that might help prevent cross-cultural misunderstandings related to parenting norms. These providers can also connect families with Federally funded supports, including financial and medical assistance, job readiness and employment services, language classes, and more.

Partnerships between child welfare agencies and resettlement services providers typically involve a variety of mutually beneficial efforts, such as cross-organizational training and job shadowing, collaborative workgroups, the development of handbooks and training curricula, and joint interagency responses to reports of child maltreatment. To learn more, visit the [Resettlement Services](#) page of the Office of Refugee Resettlement website and the [Refugee Resettlement and Child Welfare: Collaboration for Child Protection](#) page of the Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) website.

Foreign consulates. When taking a foreign national child or a child with a detained, deported, or non-U.S.-based parent into their care, child welfare agencies should notify the consulate of the family's origin country. Consulates can help agencies locate parents living outside the United States, help parents access child welfare and other services in their countries, help coordinate home studies, and more. Child welfare agencies should consider establishing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with consulates whose nationals make up a significant proportion of the agency's service population. To see sample MOUs between U.S. child welfare agencies and foreign consulates as well as other examples of State documents for working with immigrant and transitional families, visit the Center on Immigration and Child Welfare's [State-Specific Resources](#) webpage.

International case management services. Child welfare agencies may wish to partner with organizations that can provide international case management services for cases involving children separated from their families by international borders. These organizations can help agencies navigate

Federal and international laws and policies and connect them with foreign-based services and supports, such as home studies, postplacement reporting, and more.

One organization that provides this type of coordination is International Social Service USA (ISS-USA). ISS-USA uses State, county, and private funding to assist U.S. and foreign child welfare systems in making placement decisions for children in care. In coordination with foreign partners, ISS-USA helps assess national and international placement options and provides information to the relevant court systems to ensure each child is placed in the safest and most beneficial environment, whether it is in the United States or abroad. To learn more, listen to "[Connecting Cross-Border Families](#)" of the *Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast Series* and visit the [ISS-USA](#) website.

Cultural brokers. Cultural brokers are matched with families of similar backgrounds who are at risk for or have experienced child maltreatment, and they can be resources for immigrants and refugees who have contact with the child welfare system. Cultural brokers serve as advocates and work with agencies to ensure that casework practice is culturally specific when addressing the unmet needs of families. They support families throughout their cases, accompanying the responding caseworker on the initial response and assisting with family assessments, safety plan development, and service coordination and delivery. One of their overarching goals is to help enhance family engagement by serving as a cultural guide, thus decreasing the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings between families and caseworkers. For more information, see the [Cultural Brokers](#) website.

ICE. Child welfare agencies should build relationships with the appropriate personnel from their assigned [ICE field office](#) (Center on Immigration and Child Welfare, 2019). This helps facilitate timely and appropriate communications with parents and caregivers in the event of their detention. It also helps agencies monitor ICE compliance with the directive titled "[Detention and Removal of Alien Parents or Legal Guardians](#)" (Detained Parents Directive), which states that detained parents be allowed to participate in child welfare proceedings, visit with their children, and comply with reunification services.

Confidentiality Considerations for Undocumented Immigrants

It is critical for child welfare agencies to develop confidentiality policies that protect the immigration statuses of the families they serve (Greenberg et al., 2019). While agencies may need to record a family's immigration status for their own case management and data-tracking purposes, there are no Federal laws requiring agencies to share this information. Therefore, agencies should ensure that immigration status is protected at every phase of a case so that families can engage in services without fear they might attract the attention of Federal immigration authorities. All child welfare agency staff and caseworkers should have a thorough understanding of these policies and receive training on how to communicate with families in a language they understand at the front end of a case.

SCREENING FOR IMMIGRATION BENEFITS

Undocumented immigrant children and youth who are taken into care by the child welfare system may be eligible for certain immigration relief, such as naturalization or humanitarian protection (Greenberg et al., 2019). Certain immigration statuses can offer protection from deportation and increase a child's access to services and supports. By helping unauthorized individuals gain access to immigration benefits, child welfare agencies may increase the likelihood of positive case outcomes for children and youth.

Child welfare agencies should be aware of the immigration statuses of the family members they are serving so they can access the appropriate immigration relief resources. It may also be beneficial to screen undocumented children and youth for immigration status eligibility. There are several humanitarian protection classifications that might apply, including SIJ status, the Violence Against Women Act, U visas for crime victims, T visas for trafficking victims, and asylum. Each of these classifications provides a path to legal permanent residency, also known as a "green card." To read about the specific qualifications for each classification, see [Immigrant Families and Child Welfare Systems: Emerging Needs and Promising Practices](#) by the Migration Policy Institute.

Screenings can be conducted by caseworkers at multiple touchpoints along the service continuum, and eligible children and youth can then be referred to external providers (e.g., immigration liaisons or specialists, legal professionals) for additional services. While caseworkers and immigration specialists

cannot directly provide legal assistance to these families, they can support responding attorneys by providing requested documents and attending any hearings or interviews.

While all undocumented children and youth should be screened for immigration benefits eligibility, it is important to keep in mind that each case is unique, and benefits ultimately may not be appropriate for everyone. Decisions around when to pursue immigration benefits should be grounded in determining what the safest placement situation is for each individual child or youth, whether that be in the United States or with family members living abroad.

For a sample immigration benefits screener, see the Immigrant Legal Resource Center's [Screening Questions for Immigrant Youth: Determining Potential Avenues for Legal Status](#).

Example From the Field: Immigration Benefits Unit

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services has a [Special Immigrant Status \(SIS\) unit](#) that provides a range of immigration services, including application processing for immigration benefits (Greenberg et al., 2019).

Unauthorized immigrant minors are screened by caseworkers for potential eligibility and then referred to SIS for further assistance. SIS contracts with locally based immigration attorneys to handle the legal aspects of each eligible case. As of October 2019, SIS has filed more than 3,200 permanent residency applications and has a 95-percent success rate (Casey Family Programs, 2020).

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE

A culturally responsive agency is one that can effectively respond to the needs of all its families, regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, faith, or class. This includes having the capacity to respect the diverse backgrounds of families, value their cultural experiences, and integrate their unique strengths into case plans. Cultural responsiveness is an ongoing, fluid process that can accommodate changes to practice based on knowledge gained during every interaction with a family (Calzada & Suarez-Balcazar, 2014).

For culturally responsive practices and policies to be effective, they must first be implemented and supported at the systems level. There are several ways agencies can promote cultural responsiveness with immigrant and refugee families (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, 2020; Calzada & Suarez-Balcazar, 2014):

- Provide staff with ongoing training on cultural responsiveness and humility.
- Hire and promote staff that are culturally representative of the area's immigrant and refugee communities.
- Collaborate with community-based organizations that represent the various immigrant and refugee cultures in the area.
- Distribute resources and information to staff about the area's immigrant and refugee communities.
- Promote staff discussions about effective practices for working with the area's immigrant and refugee communities.
- Coordinate agency self-assessments around cultural responsiveness and implement systems of accountability for cultural responsiveness standards.

Implementing these strategies can help agency staff stay informed about how large-scale immigration and refugee events may be intersecting with their communities (e.g., changes to the local population) as well as the evolving needs of resident immigrant and refugee groups.

Child welfare agencies that handle a high volume of immigration and refugee cases (e.g., large urban areas or jurisdictions along the southern U.S. border) should consider

hiring specialized staff who can support cases involving immigration issues (Greenberg et al., 2019). These dedicated staff members are typically responsible for staying up to date on changing immigration laws and policies and can lend their expertise and provide resources to caseworkers who have questions related to immigration issues. Some agencies also have access to dedicated immigration units that can provide support relevant to casework (e.g., immigrant monitoring, immigration benefits).

Examples From the Field: Specialized Immigration Staff

The South Carolina Department of Social Services employs a dedicated immigration advocate who is responsible for building the agency's capacity to handle cases involving undocumented immigrant children and youth (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). The staff member works to ensure agency policies and practices related to immigrant families are up to date and tracks each child's unique cultural and service needs, case progression, and immigration eligibilities. The advocate also provides direct assistance to caseworkers on various case management activities, such as sending notice of the child's custody to the appropriate consulate and locating family members living outside the United States.

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (Texas DFPS) has several dedicated staff members who support caseworkers on citizenship and immigration issues related to foreign-born children in care. Citizenship and immigration specialists can offer subject-matter expertise and help identify and track children in care who have immigration-related needs (Texas DFPS, 2022). The department's border liaisons work with the Mexican Consulate and the Mexican national child and family protection agency (Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia). Caseworkers and border liaisons can work together on case management tasks, such as coordinating home studies and finding services for parents throughout Mexico (Texas DFPS, 2022).

Training and resources. When staff work in an environment that actively fosters cultural humility and responsiveness, they can develop the knowledge and skills to better serve a diverse client base (Calzada & Suarez-Balcazar, 2014). Agency leadership can use the following websites and resources to find training for caseworkers and other child welfare professionals that promotes cultural responsiveness and best practices when working with immigrant and refugee families:

- [Child Welfare](#) (BRYCS)
- [Resources for Social Workers](#) (Center on Immigration and Child Welfare)
- [Culturally Competent Practice With Immigrant & Refugee Families Resource List](#) (Center on Immigration and Child Welfare)
- [Course List](#) (Switchboard [ORR])
- [Resources](#) (Switchboard [ORR])
- [Technical Assistance](#) (Switchboard [ORR])
- [Working With Immigrant and Refugee Families](#) (Information Gateway)
- [Working With Youth Who Are Immigrants and Refugees](#) (Information Gateway)
- [Culturally Effective Organizations](#) (FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention)
- [Cultural Competency and Diversity Publications and Resources](#) (Florida Department of Children and Families)
- [“Implicit Racial Bias 101: Exploring Implicit Bias in Child Protection”](#) (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity)

These resources can provide fundamental knowledge to caseworkers so they are prepared to work with immigrant and

refugee families. Agencies can supplement foundational training and knowledge with jurisdiction-specific training. This training should cover local issues that are relevant to the area's immigrant and refugee families, such as laws and policies, avenues for obtaining immigration status, culturally specific and responsible community-based services, and cultural norms of resident immigrant and refugee groups.

Language and communication

considerations. Language and communication barriers in a child welfare case can also significantly impact an immigrant or refugee family's access to services and the successfulness of the interventions they receive. Parents and families with limited English proficiency can have difficulty communicating with staff that only speak English and vice versa. This can lead to miscommunications between families and service providers, and it can delay court proceedings and impact family dynamics.

Young children generally learn new languages more easily than adults, and immigrant children have access to full English-language immersion in schools. For these reasons, children who live in immigrant families with limited English proficiency tend to acculturate faster than their parents and are often the first in their families to become proficient in English. These children are sometimes put in the position of having to be an interpreter for their parents—a phenomenon known as "language brokering" (Hua & Costigan, 2012). This practice can have unintended psychological effects on the child and on the parent-child relationship. Language brokering can cause a child to feel pressure to correctly

relay information, and it can sometimes upset traditional views of familial hierarchical structures if the child is placed in decision-making positions on behalf of their parents.

The types of issues that lead to family involvement with the child welfare system are often difficult and traumatic. Considering this, children should never be asked to serve as interpreters for their parents in any type of child welfare setting (BRYCS, 2009). Agencies can institute the following practices and policies to ensure that appropriate language and communication services are provided to every family (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, 2020; Calzada & Suarez-Balcazar, 2014):

- Hire bilingual staff that can work directly with families in the community.
- Employ professional and knowledgeable translators in a variety of languages.

- Engage community members in resource development to ensure that communications materials (e.g., website language, brochures, forms) reflect the preferred languages and terms of families living in the area.
- Train bilingual staff and/or translators to communicate the agency's confidentiality policies to families.
- Allow extended family members to attend appointments and other agency events.

For language and communication tips geared toward caseworkers, see Information Gateway's [Working With Immigrant and Refugee Families: A Guide for Child Welfare Caseworkers](#).

Example From the Field: Language Access Services

New York City's child welfare agency, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), recognizes that language differences can act as a barrier to accessing child welfare services. They instituted the Office of Immigrant Services and Language Affairs in part to ensure that the jurisdiction's families do not encounter obstacles to services that they are eligible for because they do not speak, understand, or read and write English. The division provides a wide range of language access services to families by hiring bilingual staff who are certified to work directly with families in other languages and by contracting with translation and interpretation vendors that can provide on-demand services—either in person or remotely via video or telephonic channels (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). To learn more, visit ACS's [Immigrant Services](#) website.

Culturally specific and responsive services.

When immigrant and refugee families need services, they should be matched with providers that offer culturally specific or responsive approaches when possible. Culturally specific services are developed for members of particular racial and ethnic groups, while culturally responsive services are designed to respond respectfully and effectively to people of various cultures. Referring undocumented children and families for services may require some additional considerations. These families should be able to access services without risking their immigration status (Casey Family Programs, 2020). Therefore, agencies should identify the services in their jurisdictions that are available to people who are not U.S. citizens.

Finding services that can meet the many needs of immigrant and refugee children and families may be challenging. However, agencies can work with existing providers to expand services that are culturally specific and/or responsive and that are safe for immigrants in their communities. Child welfare agencies should first assess the accessibility and availability of their current service offerings to immigrant and refugee families. Where gaps are identified, agencies can pursue solutions, including increasing availability and usage through changes to service locations and hours and removing any attendance obstacles (e.g., lack of transportation and child care). Agencies should also pay special attention to any language barriers between service providers and the population served. When barriers are present, staffing and materials (e.g., brochures, program pamphlets, forms) should be expanded to accommodate the linguistic needs of the community.

In cases where agencies need to increase the types of services available to families, they can approach community and faith-based organizations to discuss the potential expansion of their services to meet family needs. These groups tend to have insights into their community's specific and evolving needs. Services provided by faith-based organizations may be especially effective for groups that tend to turn to the church for support, assistance, and community (Collins & Scott, 2019). For more information on partnering with community- and faith-based groups to increase service provision, visit Information Gateway's [Engaging Communities to Support Families](#) webpage.

Example From the Field: Culturally Specific Parenting Program

Strong Foundations is a community-based program in Marshalltown, IA, that provides comprehensive and culturally specific family support services to diverse populations. Funded by a Children's Bureau discretionary grant, the program helps families build protective factors through classes on parenting and child development as well as concrete supports, including access to a technology center and other resources. To serve the needs of the Marshalltown community, program services are provided in the English, Spanish, Burmese, Karenni, and Karen languages. To learn more, visit the [Tribal and Migrant Grantees](#) page of the FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention website.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Trauma-informed systems and practices focus on strategies that take the impact of trauma on child development into consideration and strive to minimize its effects without causing additional trauma. To help immigrant and refugee families deal with trauma, child welfare professionals working at every stage of the service continuum should familiarize themselves with and implement evidence-based, trauma-informed practices. For example, one evidence-based treatment approach that can be implemented with traumatized immigrant and refugee children and families is Culturally Modified Trauma-Focused Treatment (CM-TFT), a type of cognitive behavioral therapy developed specifically for use with Hispanic and Latino¹ children. (For more information on CM-TFT, see the National Child Traumatic Stress Network factsheet [CM-TFT: Culturally Modified Trauma-Focused Treatment](#).)

For additional resources and tools that can be used in developing trauma-informed casework practice with immigrant and refugee families, see [Trauma in Immigrant & Refugee Populations Resource List](#) by the Center on Immigration and Child Welfare and the [Resources](#) section of the Switchboard website. To learn more about trauma-informed care, see Information Gateway's [The Importance of a Trauma-Informed Child Welfare System](#).

¹ When describing the work of other researchers and organizations, this bulletin uses the terms for racial and ethnic populations used in the original sources.

CONCLUSION

As the national focus on immigration grows, the child welfare field continues to respond to the unique challenges of immigrant and refugee families. Addressing the complex needs of these families requires a multifaceted response from child welfare agencies and their partners. By fostering interagency collaborations, increasing access to immigration benefits for eligible family members, building a culturally responsive workforce, and providing trauma-informed care, child welfare agencies can help ensure that the health and well-being of all children and families remain a priority.

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