INTERSECTION BETWEEN TANF AND REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE

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OUTLINE

• Background on Refugees in U.S.
• Findings from Evaluation of Refugee Social Services (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) Programs
  • Conducted by The Lewin Group and the Urban Institute for ACF, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
  • Researchers: Mary Farrell, Sam Elkin, Randy Capps, Bret Barden, Mike Mueller, Nancy Pindus, Everett Henderson
• Introducing New Study: Understanding the Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services
  • Conducted by Abt Associates and MEF Associates for ACF, Office of Planning Research and Evaluation in consultation with ORR
  • Researchers: Robin Koralek (Abt), Mary Farrell (MEF), and Sam Elkin (MEF)
I. BACKGROUND
CHALLENGES TO SERVING REFUGEES

• Little advance notice of arriving refugees
• Diversity of skill levels and work experience
• Limited time before cash assistance runs out
• Mental health issues
• Need for English language training
II. EVALUATION OF RSS/TAG
BACKGROUND ON REFUGEE SOCIAL SERVICES (RSS) AND TARGETED ASSISTANCE FORMULA GRANT (TAG)

- Formula grant funds to states (RSS) and counties (TAG)
- Goal: help refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency and social adjustment
- Eligibility: Up to 5 years after date of entry
- Services include:
  - Case management
  - Employment services (job search, placement, and follow-up)
  - English language training
  - Short-term training and education
  - Day care and transportation
  - Translation or interpretation services
  - OJT and skills recertification
  - Other
- Serves refugees and other related groups (e.g., asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Amerasians, and trafficking victims)
EVALUATION OF RSS/TAG

• Conducted in 2006 and 2007
• Focused on services provided in three communities: Houston, Miami, and Sacramento
• Implementation and Outcome Study
• Data Sources:
  • RSS and TAG program data
  • Administrative data (cash assistance, Food Stamps, UI wage records)
  • Survey: 955 completes
  • Focus groups: 3 groups in each site
  • Field research: 2 visits to each site
PROGRAMS OPERATED UNDER DIVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES

• Houston
  • Most diverse: Over 30 different languages spoken by refugees
  • Notable share with low education (22% never had attended school when they arrived)
  • Primarily served “free cases”

• Miami
  • Most arrivals were Cuban/Haitian entrants
  • 80% had at least 12 years of education, and many had professional degrees
  • Haitians faced more challenges; lack of Spanish a barrier in Miami

• Sacramento
  • Resettled family reunification cases from Eastern Europe and Laos (Hmong)
  • 86% arrived with high school degrees
  • Most had large families; average household size was 4.7 individuals
WELFARE CONTEXT MATTERS

• Houston
  • Low TANF benefit state; focused on rapid employment
  • Public-private partnership: resettlement agencies provided cash and medical assistance and employment services
  • Just 7% received TANF in first year after entry

• Miami
  • Low TANF benefit state; focused on rapid employment
  • State-administered program
  • 25% received TANF in first year after entry

• Sacramento
  • Offers more generous TANF benefits; emphasized ESL
  • County-administered program
  • 62% received TANF in first year after entry
PROGRAMS RELIED ON EXPERIENCED PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Houston
  - Had consortium of five Voluntary resettlement agencies and two education providers
  - Met regularly and coordinated services within community
- Miami
  - Extensive network of services providers administered through workforce agency, community college, and public school district
- Sacramento
  - Well-established network of Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs)
MAJORITY OF REFUGEES FOUND EMPLOYMENT; INCOME WAS MODEST

- From UI wage records, rates of employment were
  - Houston: 75% (year 1); 73% (year 2)
  - Miami: 70% (year 1); 77% (year 2)
  - Sacramento: 37% (year 1); 55% (year 2)
- From survey, annual family income ranged from $21,000 (Houston and Miami) to $25,000 in Sacramento
- Analysis conducted just before great recession
PROMISING STRATEGIES

- Strong coordination between service providers
- Bringing ESL instruction where refugees lived
- Integrating ESL in employment settings
- Certification and career laddering programs
- Cultural competency provided by former refugees
III. NEW STUDY:
UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN TANF AND REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE SERVICES
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What do we know about how different states and localities administer benefits and services?
  • Do certain approaches or services seem most promising in assisting refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency and obtaining stable employment?

• To what extent are states integrating TANF, Refugee Cash Assistance and associated services?
  • How are these programs being integrated?
  • Does the integration of these services show promise for better serving refugee populations?

• What data are currently collected?
OVERVIEW OF APPROACH

• Consultation with Experts
  • State refugee coordinators
  • Voluntary agency staff
  • Researchers
• Consultation with ACF program offices
• Survey of state refugee coordinators
  • Document diversity of state policies and practices
  • Identify promising practices and common challenges
  • Inform site selection
• Site visits to 8 communities
  • TANF staff
  • Local resettlement agencies staff
  • Staff of MAAs and CBOs that serve refugees
  • Focus groups of refugees
STAY TUNED

- Special topic reports
  - Promising strategies
  - Collaborations between state-administered and community organizations
- Final report
- Ongoing dissemination activities
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