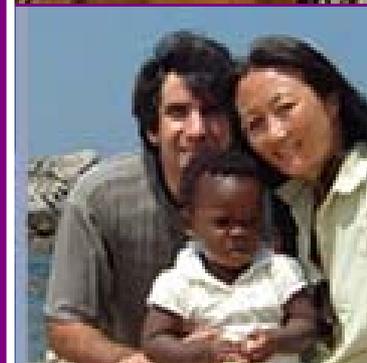




ISS-USA: Who we are

- International Federation founded in the 1920's
- 150 Branches, Bureaus, Correspondents world wide
- Trained social workers address the diverse socio-legal needs of children separated from their families



ASSESSING BEST INTERESTS: HOME STUDIES



- When does a home study need to be done?
- International home studies
- Domestic home studies

REUNIFICATION

- Repatriation
- Reunification
- International Adoption



REPATRIATION

- What is repatriation
- Who is eligible for repatriation
- What is the process
- ISS-USA's role in repatriation



TRACING DOCUMENTS and FINDING FAMILIES

- What kinds of documents are traced
- Domestic versus international tracings
- Finding families across international borders



The Arthur C. Helton Institute
for the Study of
International Social Service



First Annual
**International Social Service
Training Institute:**

September 18th -20th 2008

The University of Maryland
School of Social Work

Baltimore, Maryland

THE ARTHUR C. HELTON INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE (ACH)

- ISS-USA launched ACH in July of 2007
- Mission
 - to develop an intellectual center to provide education and training on issues that affect children who are separated from their parents across international borders.
- Goal
 - create curricula and training materials that will prepare current and future practitioners around the world to be better equipped to attend to the numerous needs of these children and their families.



TRANSNATIONALISM



- 20 million people live in a country other than the one in which they were born
- Many of these individuals do, or will, need the assistance of social and legal providers in either their country of residence or their country of birth.
- Social workers are under increasing pressure to find creative and cooperative solutions to cases that cross international borders

CURRENT AND EMERGING TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE CHALLENGES

- **Domestic:** increasing percentages and mobility of diverse populations (refugees, immigrants, asylees), legal status, immigration enforcement
- **Transnational:** custody and visitation, child welfare, intercountry adoption, repatriation, child support, mandates for international cooperation
- **Abroad:** capacity/infrastructure to provide services, gaps in systems/laws, limited resources to meet basic needs, birth rates, the percentage of children missing one or both parents, conflict/war, natural disaster





Overview of Jane Smith case:

Jane Smith originally resided with both paternal parents in New York until her father was deported to the Dominican Republic after a 4-year incarceration. After her father was deported and her mother was arrested, the child was placed in the temporary custody of the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Jane's mother...

When her mother was released from prison, Jane was returned to her mother's custody. However, she was taken back into custody by DSS when her mother was re-incarcerated for drug charges in the state of New Hampshire.





Placement

Kinship care in the United States was not an option because there were no approved family members available; therefore, the child was placed and currently resides in foster care within the state of New Hampshire.

Jane's father...

Jane and her father have had a long-term physical separation, but they maintained their relationship through telephone and mail contact. The child has expressed desire to live with her father in the Dominican Republic and the child's mother has also expressed wishes for the child to be permitted to live with her father. However, because of his previous deportation, Jane's father was unable to return to the United States to seek custody.



Next...

A home study in the Dominican Republic was ordered by the Court to determine whether the Court would grant the father custody of his daughter.



Child Welfare and Transnational Placement

- Who are the key players in this case?
- Who is in favor of the child leaving the U.S. and who wants the child to stay?
- Who will request the home study?
- Who will pay for it?
- Is paying for the home study a barrier to considering the father (outside the U.S.) as a permanency option?
- Are there funds available to help pay for these types of home studies, if DSS refuses to pay?
- What information should be collected about the father in the DR?
- What resources are available to conduct a home study on the Dad, and relay this information back to the court?
- How do you assess whether the information in the home study was collected by a professional? How long does a home study usually take?
- How will the information be used in court? What standards should be used to evaluate whether the home study is positive or not?
- What information should the Judge use to make a determination as to what's best for this child?
- Are there any international laws/treaties that will provide guidance in this case?

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**Los Angeles County
Department of Children and Family Services
Special Immigrant Status Unit and Interagency
Collaboration
Cecilia Saco, MSW**



Who we are

- Specialized Unit with Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) created in 1991
- Unit of social workers and eligibility workers
- Unit members are bilingual and bicultural
- Centralized program serving 17 regional offices including Adoptions
- Unit has its own budget



Who we are



- DCFS management supportive of SIS Unit goals and mission
- Existing written SIS policy and procedures
- Mandatory training for new social worker on existing SIS policy
- Collaboration among other specialized program within DCFS

What we do



- Filing of lawful permanent resident status (“green card”) through Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) on behalf of qualifying DCFS undocumented immigrant children with USCIS
- Filing of replacement lost or stolen “green cards”
- Filing of US citizenship for qualifying children

What we do



- Training to direct practice social workers about immigrant children, their needs, and services available to them
- Training on cultural competency
- Do own translations/interpretations
- Compiling listings of resources available to immigrant children and their families
- Maintaining a close relationship with government and community agencies serving immigrant/refugee children

What we do

- Working agreements with USCIS officials
- Working agreements with local Consulates
- Working agreements with local agencies serving immigrant children/refugee
- Quarterly Meetings with sister programs in child welfare agencies of Southern California counties serving immigrant children



What we do

- Translating birth certificates
- Filing Delayed Registrations of Birth
- Obtaining Disposition Reports for delinquency arrests
- Preparing children for USCIS interviews
- Arranging transportation of children
- Finding pro bono immigration representation as needed



Scenario

Maria was 5 years old when her mother left her in Mexico with her grandmother to come to the US to work. At age 15 the grandmother dies and Maria's mother is able to bring Maria illegally to the US only to keep her at home babysitting her 2 new children from a new relationship. Maria is sexually abused by mother's boyfriend; mother does not believe the allegations and DCFS takes custody of Maria. Maria's mother moves to another state and refuses reunification services. Dependency Court rules that it is not in Maria's best interest to return to Mexico.



Issues

- Mother refuses to provide DCFS with Maria's birth certificate
- Maria has limited ability to speak English
- Maria is behind in school
- Maria wants to work
- Maria shows signs of depression



Discussion

- Consulate of Mexico obtains the child's birth certificate and other legal records
- Child receives DCFS protective services in her own language
- Culturally appropriate mental health services
- Advocacy for school assessment and services that meet the child's needs
- Filing of legal status with USCIS and obtaining work authorization for child



Discussion



Within DCFS

- Maintaining management buy-in
- Advocating for policy that addresses changes in immigration laws
- Training
- Quality customer service
- Participation in conferences and resource fairs
- Collaboration with other DCFS programs (Emancipation, Probation Liaison, Kinship, Finance, Court Services, etc)

Discussion

Outside DCFS

- Foster working relationships by meeting on regular basis
- Value community partners and the services they offer
- Offer training and presentations for the agencies serving immigrant children and their families. Attend their trainings
- Open to collaboration outside your county/state



Discussion

Formalizing Agreements

- Court Blanket Orders
- MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding)
- Informal agreements
- Contracts
- Policies/Procedures
- Letters



Barriers

- Key contacts persons in organizations outside DCFS no longer available
- Need to invest time in rebuilding lost working relationships
- Agencies not honoring previous informal agreements
- New agencies providing services to immigrant children unfamiliar with child welfare services
- Changes in immigration law
- Anti-immigrant sentiments
- Reduction of government services
- Attrition rate in DCFS calls for continuing training on immigration issues



Conclusion



- The SIS Unit provides a valuable service to hundreds of immigrant children under the jurisdiction of DCFS but.....

we depend on the collaboration of our community partners to make this program successful. *It takes a community to raise a child!*

Contact Information

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Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

Resources Related to Refugee/Immigrant Child Welfare

BRYCS SPOTLIGHTS:

Visit BRYCS' Archives page (http://www.brycs.org/brycs_archive.htm) for links to all of our Spotlight articles and Lists of Highlighted Resources, including:

- Family and Community Centered Child Welfare Practice with Refugees and Immigrants
- Cultural Competency in Child Welfare Practice: A Bridge Worth Building
- Determining Child Abuse & Neglect Across Cultures
- Refugee Resettlement and Child Welfare: Collaboration for Child Protection

BRYCS PUBLICATIONS:

Visit BRYCS' Publications page (http://www.brycs.org/brycs_resources.htm) for links to all of our Publications including:

- Raising Children in a New Country: An Illustrated Handbook
- Raising Children in a New Country: A Toolkit for Working with Newcomer Parents
- Serving Foreign Born Foster Children: A Resource for Meeting the Special Needs of Refugee Youth and Children
- Brighter Futures for Migrating Children: An Overview of Current Trends and Promising Practices in Child Welfare

BRYCS "PROMISING PRACTICES":

BRYCS has highlighted over 60 programs for refugee/immigrant children and their families. To read about any of the 60 programs, go to the "Advanced Search" page (http://www.brycs.org/brycs_advsearch.htm) and under "type of resource," click "program description." You can pull up all of the program descriptions, or narrow them down by keyword.

REFUGEE PARENTING INTERVIEWS:

BRYCS has conducted interviews with refugee parents from a number of countries. Visit http://www.brycs.org/brycs_archive.htm#INTERVIEWS to read the interviews.

INFORMATION ON THE UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINOR FOSTER CARE PROGRAM:

Please check out the outreach brochure at http://www.brycs.org/documents/URM_outreach_brochure-May07.pdf.

MIGRATION AND CHILD WELFARE NATIONAL NETWORK (MCWNN):

BRYCS/USCCB is one of the main organizations that helped form the MCWNN in 2006. MCWNN members learn from the experience and expertise of others and participate in collaborative efforts to improve services for immigrant families in the child welfare system. For more information, visit <http://www.americanhumane.org/migration>.

BRYCS CLEARINGHOUSE:

The BRYCS Clearinghouse has over 2,000 resources. Go to www.brycs.org and type keywords in the search box at the upper right hand part of the screen.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

If you need help locating resources on any topic or would like to consult about a specific refugee/immigrant child or family, please contact us.