

Improving higher education outcomes for students from foster care and those experiencing unaccompanied homelessness.

# Federally-funded Foster Care in Washington State

WPN Webinar - January 19, 2022



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# Webinar information

- This webinar is being **recorded** and will be **posted** on the Washington Passport Network YouTube channel
- All attendees are muted
- Please submit questions in chat or “Q&A” at any time



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# Welcome!

## Presenters:

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# Overview

- Federal foster care
- Agencies that work with unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) and unaccompanied children (UC)
- URM program history
- URM programs in Washington
- Program structure and funding
- Eligibility and demographics
- Comparison to DCYF foster care program
- Services - special needs & considerations



# What is federal foster care?

- Two types of federally-funded programs in Washington
- Since 1979 in Washington – the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program (URM)
- Some youth are placed in Washington in care settings while still in federal custody – Unaccompanied Children's Program (UC)



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# Which agencies work with UC/URM youth?

- Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM)
  - Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCS)
  - Catholic Community Services of Western Washington (CCS)
  - 2 agencies provided staff residential placements
- Unaccompanied Children (UC)
  - Friends of Youth
  - Catholic Community Service
  - other programs with onsite schooling
- **All youth who are participating in Passport to Careers program would be URM**s



# How did the URM program start?

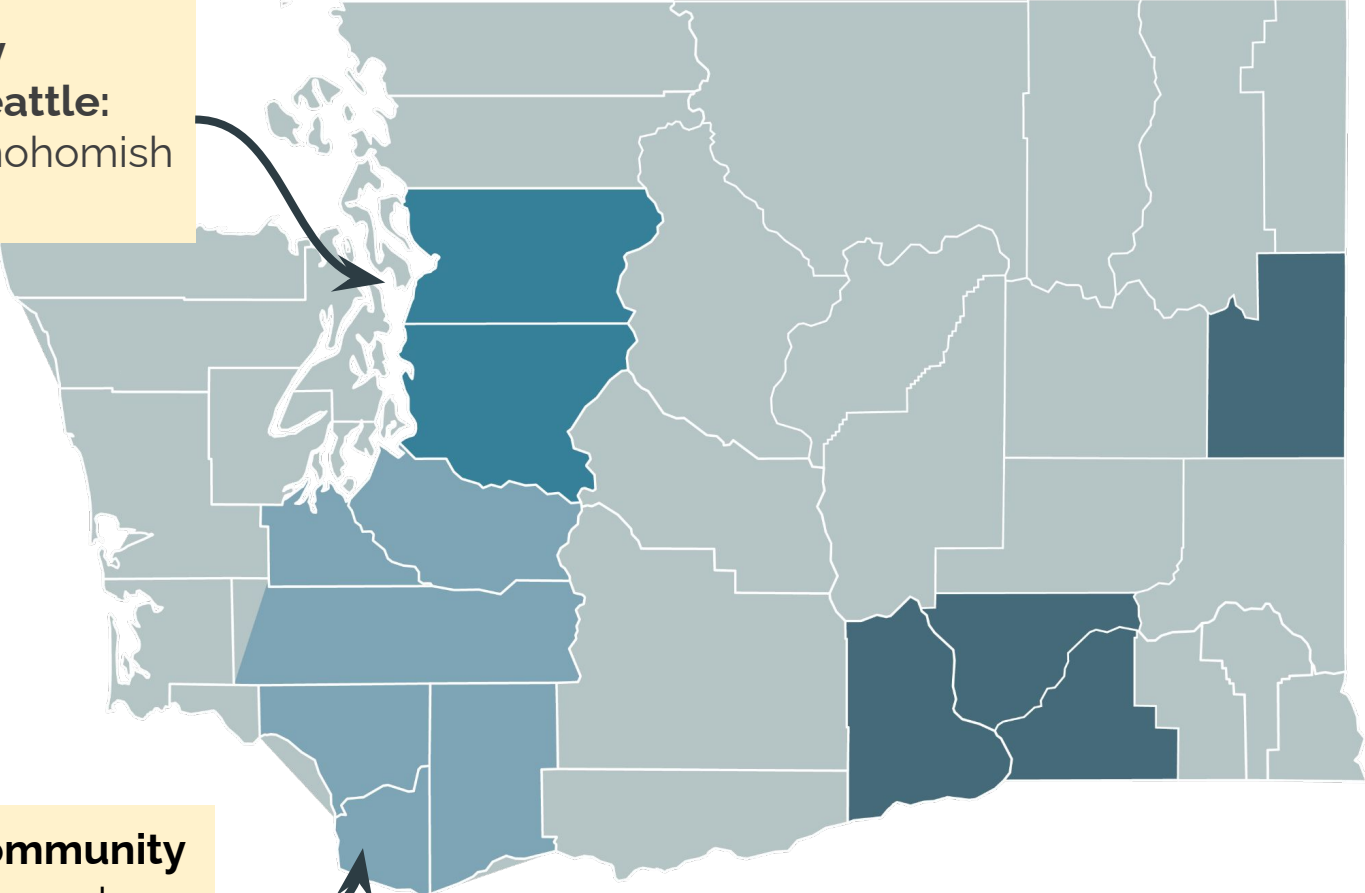
- 1979 in Washington State
- Part of Refugee Act of 1980
- Resettlement for refugee children without a parent, relative or other adult caregiver
- Two national refugee resettlement agencies, Catholic and Lutheran network of agencies
- Currently: Seattle; Tacoma through Vancouver; Spokane; expanding to Kennewick



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# Where do URM programs operate?

**Lutheran Community Services Seattle:**  
King and Snohomish Counties



**Lutheran Community Services Spokane:**  
Spokane, Tri-Cities region

**Catholic Community Services:** Pierce to Clark County, along i5 corridor



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# Program structure and funding

- Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
- Washington DSHS role
- Federal mandate: same array of services and benefits



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# Who is eligible for the URM program?

- **Refugees** – Overseas refugee youth separated from parent or caregiver
- **Victims of trafficking** – Youth identified as victims of human trafficking, lack a parent or caregiver
- **Special Immigrant Juveniles** – Youth who have abused, neglected or abandoned and received this visa in federal custody
- **Asylees** – Fled persecution in home country



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# What countries are URM youth from?

Initially Vietnam and Cambodia, now regions include:

- South and Southeast Asia
  - Burma (Rohingya minority); Bhutan
  - Afghanistan
- Central America and Mexico
  - Guatemala; Honduras; El Salvador; Mexico
- Africa
  - Eritrea; Somalia; Democratic Republic of Congo; Cameroon; Sudan



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# What are program demographics?

- 67% of youth are male
- Average age at program entry: 17 years
- Length of stay: Eligible until 21<sup>st</sup> birthday for placement services, ETV after that
- Small numbers of pregnant/parenting youth



# What types of services do URM youth receive?

- Foster care/group care/semi independent placement
- Intensive, wraparound case management services
- Private Agency assumes legal custody
- Legal immigration assistance, mental health counseling, school advocacy
- Independent living skills training
- Support for higher education



# Comparison to DCYF foster care

## Similarities:

- Foster care/semi-independent living placements
- Medicaid
- Services to promote independence
- Youth are dependents of the state through local juvenile court

## Differences:

- Private agency has legal custody (LCS or CCS)
- Mirrors DCYF but not 100%
- Post-secondary funding for education
- Some federal requirements may vary such as eligibility



# Services - Special Needs and Considerations



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# Special Needs and Considerations

- Social Adjustment
- Access to Services
- Youth Perspective on Postsecondary Education



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# Social Adjustment

- Age
  - Maturity and experience gap with peers
- Lack of common experiences and "common" knowledge
- Language acquisition
- Sense of belonging in local community



# Recommended Practices for Supporting Social Adjustment

- Familiarize youth with student clubs and activities where they might find youth with cultural commonalities and/or shared interests
- Set up a club or support group for refugee and immigrant youth on campus
- Provide and connect youth with mental health supports on campus



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# Access to Services

- Education gaps
  - Limited opportunities to build basic skills such as writing, reading, test-taking, or following class schedule
  - Difficult transition to post-secondary expectations
- Did not grow up with technology all around
  - Expectation to complete assignments with computers or online participation is a barrier
- Lack of exposure to support services
- Immigration status can be barrier for accessing scholarships and financial aid



# Recommended Practices for Supporting Access to Services

- Take extra time with youth to make sure they understand the system
  - Gravitate to "go-to" person
  - Face-to-face meetings
- Help youth use necessary technology
- Provide tutoring services
  - Writing, reading comprehension
  - Basic math, logic skills
  - Focus on critical thinking
- Mandatory study skills class



# Youth Perspective on Postsecondary Education

- Relative importance of education
  - Cultural differences
  - Difference priorities/stresses/life demands
  - Different perception of need for education
- Lack of understanding of different post-secondary systems and processes, or different career pathways
- Views on academic performance and success
- Stress of school can trigger or exacerbate mental health issues



# Recommended Practices for Supporting Postsecondary Education

- Take extra time in orientation to teach student about educator's role and responsibilities
- Facilitate introductions to educators and encourage youth to get to know their professors
- Accompany students to "office hours"
- Pair youth with a student who could help facilitate communication with educators
- Help youth understand the educational and experiential steps needed to reach career goals





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# Thank you!

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