



FACT SHEET

October 2016

UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS PROGRAM



Program Description

The Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program provides culturally and linguistically-appropriate child welfare, foster care, and independent living services to unaccompanied minors in the United States (U.S.) who are:

- Refugees,
- Cuban/Haitian entrants,
- Asylees,
- Victims of human trafficking, who receive an Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) eligibility letter,
- Non-citizen victims of domestic violence and other serious crimes who have been granted a U-Visa from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, and meets all other eligibility requirements, or
- Youths granted Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) while in ORR's custody.

The URM program originated in the 1980s to address the needs of children who arrived in the U.S. from Southeast Asia, because of the Vietnam conflict, without a parent or guardian to care for them. Since 1980, almost 13,000 youth have entered the URM program nationally. At its peak in 1985, the URM program provided protection to 3,828 youth. As of March 2013, 1,300 youth were in URM care nationwide. Many have been separated from their parents due to war, political unrest, or political or religious persecution.

The federal ORR administers the URM program and determines which youth are eligible for the program. To be eligible, youth must be under the age of 18 at the time of entry into the program.

The U.S. Department of State identifies youth overseas who are eligible for resettlement in the U.S. based on the youth's refugee status. Upon arrival in the U.S., youth who do not have a parent or guardian are placed into the URM program and receive refugee foster care and other services.

Unaccompanied Cuban/Haitian entrants are minors who enter the U.S. unaccompanied by a parent, an immediate adult relative or an adult having documentable legal evidence of custody of the minor, and who have no parent(s) in the U.S.

Unaccompanied youth who enter the U.S. without an immigration status must be granted asylum, determined to be a victim of human trafficking, be a non-citizen victim of domestic violence and other serious crimes and have been granted a U-Visa, or receive SIJS before being designated by ORR into the URM program.

ORR places youth in specific URM programs in coordination with two voluntary agencies: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). Although the program is state-supervised, ORR requires that only affiliates selected by USCCB and LIRS become URM service providers.

Reunification of URMs with their parents or other adult relatives is encouraged through attempting to locate an immediate family member thought to be in another country. Organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross coordinate family location activities for children's relatives living overseas. Because URMs may have parents overseas, parental rights are not generally terminated. If an URM has parents in the U.S., reunification services are provided if they are in the best interests of the children.

URMs may have other family members such as a sibling, aunt/uncle, or other extended family members in the U.S. In these instances, state URM providers arrange for the children to meet and establish a relationship with the extended family member with the intent of a possible reunification. If the state URM providers believe that it would be in the best interest of the children to live with extended family members, then the placement is allowable under program rules, and the children are exited from the program.

While trying to locate the URM's relatives, and in cases where reunification is not possible because of a relatives' death or abuse, URMs are placed in licensed foster homes or other licensed foster care settings, such as therapeutic foster care or group homes, to receive foster care services.

Adoption of URMs is not usually the goal of the program because children may eventually reunify with their parents if they are located overseas. Adoption is considered if it is known that the parents are deceased and/or it is in the best interests of the child.

California's URM Program

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) supervises the California URM program. CDSS contracts with two foster family agencies to provide URM services:

- Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County (CCSCC), a USCCB affiliate based in San Jose, Santa Clara County; and
- Crittenton Services for Children and Families (CSCF), a LIRS affiliate, based in Fullerton, Orange County.

California URM Benefits and Services

Under Title 45 Code of Federal Regulation Part 400.112, California's URM program must provide services that are equivalent to mainstream foster care and emancipation services. Additionally, states must provide child welfare services and medical assistance to refugee children according to the state's child welfare standards, practices, and procedures.

The following benefits and services are provided to children in the URM Program:

1. Case Planning and Management – Includes initial assessment, development of a service the plan, referral to service activities, family reunification and orientation, and counseling to facilitate the adjustment of the youth to the American culture.

2. Foster Care – Foster care services are provided to assist youth to develop appropriate skills to enter adulthood and achieve social and economic self-sufficiency. Youth may voluntarily exit the program at age 18. Beginning January 1, 2012, eligible youth

may elect to stay in foster care up to age 21 if they meet one of following participation criteria:

- Completing high school or an equivalency program;
- Enrolled in post-secondary or vocational school;
- Participating in a program or activity that promotes or removes barriers to employment;
- Employed at least 80 hours per month; or
- Is incapable of participating in any activity as described above due to a documented medical condition.

3. Medical Benefits – URMs are entitled to full-scope Medi-Cal, California's Medicaid program. URM providers are instructed to first access Medi-Cal for medical needs; however, some urgent medical costs not covered by Medi-Cal may be paid by the URM program.

4. Mental Health Services – Children in the URM program are often victims of trauma, and some are survivors of torture. All URMs are provided with initial individual or group counseling. URM providers are instructed to first access Medi-Cal for mental health needs. However, in some instances, where an appropriate Medi-Cal therapist cannot be located due to language needs, the URM Program may cover these counseling costs. The URM program offers placement into therapeutic foster homes and group homes and has collaborated with local mental health providers that specialize in treating victims of human trafficking and survivors of torture. In certain cases, URMs with severe mental health needs requiring hospitalization are referred to the county mental health system for treatment.

5. Independent Living Program (ILP) Services – ILP services begin with a self-sufficiency assessment and development of an individual Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP). The TILP identifies the youth's current level of functioning, emancipation goals, and the specific skills needed to prepare the youth to live independently upon leaving foster care. Services offered include: daily living skills and household management; money management; housing and employment services; preventive health and safety skills including, but not limited to, substance abuse prevention, smoking cessation, pregnancy prevention, and nutrition education; and interpersonal, social, and self-development skills. The plan is mutually agreed upon by the youth and the social worker.

6. Emancipation/Supported Housing Program

(SHP) – The URM program offers a SHP for a maximum period of 36 months, which is equivalent to the state’s Transitional Housing Program - Plus. The SHP provides a safe living environment while helping youth master life skills needed to achieve self-sufficiency. Benefits and services include financial support for housing and other necessities and case management. Eligibility for the program is dependent on the URMs’ ability to adhere to their TILP and meet employment and/or education requirements.

The URM program also offers Emancipated Youth Stipends, which provide financial assistance to emancipated foster youths in need of assistance to retain employment or housing in order to remain self-sufficient and independent.

7. Education Services – Many URMs lack strong academic backgrounds due to lack of educational opportunities. The URM program funds tutoring assistance based on the needs of the URM youth; provides educational vouchers up to \$5,000 per year for post-secondary education; and offers educational support through career, college, and vocational counseling and training.

8. Additional Services – The URM program provides tools and opportunities to prepare URMs for participation in American society. There is a special emphasis on American acculturation training to facilitate the URM’s social integration and prepare them for independent living and economic self-sufficiency. In addition, the program provides opportunities for cultural and religious preservation and incorporates such activities as part of the youth’s case plan.

Funding

The URM program services and benefits are 100 percent federally-funded by ORR. Medical assistance is funded by Medi-Cal.

URM Program Providers

Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County
Angela Albright, Division Director
2625 Zanker Road
San Jose, CA 95134
(408) 325-5268
aalbright@catholiccharitiesscc.org

Crittenton Services for Children and Families
Ana Eykel, Vice President of Foster Care and Adoption
801 E. Chapman Avenue, Suite 106
Fullerton, CA 92831
(714) 680-8200 ext. 313
aeykel@crittentonsocal.org

Additional Information

Office of Refugee Resettlement’s URM website:
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/urm/about>

Refugee Programs Bureau’s URM website:
www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/refugees/programs-and-info/urm

For more information regarding California’s URM program, please contact the RPB by email at RPB@dss.ca.gov, or by telephone at (916) 654-4356.