



Web Conference: Orientation and Adjustment of Refugee Seniors

September 28, 2010

Cultural Orientation Resource Center, Center for Applied Linguistics

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) Vienna

International Organization for Migration (IOM) Nepal

Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc.

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)

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Funded by DHHS/ACF/Office of Refugee Resettlement and supported by DOS/Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Cultural Orientation Resource Center at CAL

Funded by the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration to:

- ▶ Research, develop and disseminate **resources** about refugee training and resettlement
- ▶ Provide **technical assistance** to refugee service providers on refugees' cultures, languages and orientation needs
- ▶ Develop a globally linked network to **exchange** refugee orientation information, concerns, and best practices

Funded by ORR to provide technical assistance on:

- ▶ **Enhanced and extended orientation** for **ORR-eligible clients** (refugees, asylees, entrants, etc.)
- ▶ **Characteristics, resettlement, and integration** of these groups

Widespread concern about refugee seniors

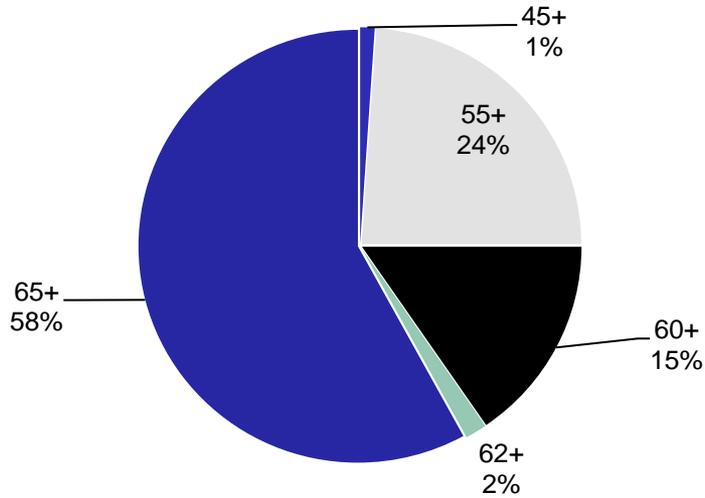
- ▶ Came to the COR Center's attention through a wide variety of sources:
 - Overseas CO program staff
 - Domestic service providers
 - ORR and PRM staff
 - COR Center home visits, focus groups, interviews, etc.

COR Center online survey

- ▶ Questions about orientation and adjustment of refugee seniors
- ▶ 96 completed surveys (out of 190 partial responses)
- ▶ 59 respondents willing to be contacted
- ▶ Being used to guide development of resources
- ▶ If you would like to participate, go to http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/orientation_for_senior_refugees

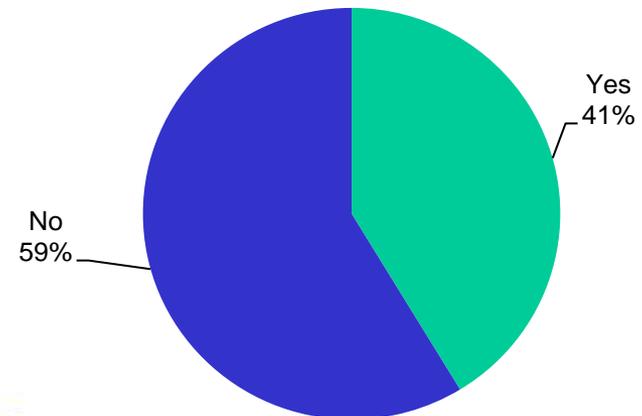
Responses to Online Survey

Age definition of a "senior"



Several respondents noted other criteria, such as health condition or family role (e.g. grandparent).

Orientation specifically for seniors



Senior-specific orientation and topics

Activities offered

- ▶ English language classes
- ▶ Orientation sessions
- ▶ Field trips
- ▶ Citizenship classes
- ▶ Social programs
- ▶ Volunteer opportunities, job clubs, mentors, tutors, etc.

Topics

- ▶ Health; insurance programs
- ▶ Status and citizenship
- ▶ English language
- ▶ Cultural adjustment
- ▶ Services/programs available
- ▶ Safety, transportation, SSI, etc.

Successes observed

- ▶ “Everybody wants to go to ESL class to learn English. Many people know how to ride Metro Bus. They keep home clean and go to the hospital.”
- ▶ “Age-appropriate opportunities to learn have helped refugee elders retain their status as elders within their family and community.”
- ▶ “The class has helped seniors to be more confident in their skills – more independent, able to do things on their own, to interact with Americans, feel more adjusted, participate in American civic life.”

Challenges for agencies, for refugee seniors

For Agencies

- ▶ Funding (and staffing)
- ▶ Translation
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Space
- ▶ Outreach, cultural challenges, attendance, etc.

For Refugee Seniors

- ▶ Reluctance; dislike of change; negative attitude about learning
- ▶ Mobility and transportation
- ▶ Language
- ▶ Medical barriers
- ▶ Slow to learn
- ▶ Isolation, dependence, need for family involvement

Non senior-specific orientation; successes

- ▶ Majority of respondents note that seniors participate in standard orientation
 - ▶ Some note ESL classes, field trips, and employment orientation
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- ▶ “Refugee seniors report less depression and loneliness because they feel more a part of the community. The community garden has been of particular joy for refugee seniors.
 - ▶ “They have an opportunity to go to school which many of them were unable to do in their own country. They establish a sense of independence and self-worth...
 - ▶ “Senior’s needs are currently best met by the case manager providing individual attention and ongoing orientation outside of structured workshops.”

Challenges for agencies, for refugee seniors

For Agencies

- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Language/interpretation
- ▶ Attendance, participation

For Refugee Seniors

- ▶ Perception of need and relevance
- ▶ Mobility and transportation
- ▶ Difficulty understanding; slower to learn
- ▶ Language/interpretation
- ▶ Medical barriers
- ▶ Isolation, need for family support

Other activities for seniors

Wide variety in various locations

- ▶ ESL, citizenship, health services, others noted previously
- ▶ Help with applications, complaints, and billing issues; cultural programming; lunches, mental health services....

Wish list

- ▶ ESL, citizenship, others noted previously
- ▶ Social programs
- ▶ Gathering place
- ▶ Transportation support
- ▶ Ethnic community building and support
- ▶ Art programs, etc.

Concerns regarding seniors

Respondent after respondent used the following words to describe refugee seniors:

- ▶ Depressed
- ▶ Isolated
- ▶ Marginalized
- ▶ Dependent
- ▶ Hesitant or reluctant to adjust
- ▶ Confused
- ▶ Slow to learn English

Other concerns noted:

- ▶ Little to no funding
- ▶ Medical issues
- ▶ Transportation

How to strengthen senior orientation in U.S.

- ▶ Orientation specifically for seniors
- ▶ ESL specifically for seniors
- ▶ Funding to support senior-specific orientation and ESL
- ▶ Increase interaction with Americans
- ▶ Social activities
- ▶ Connections with agencies providing services to aging
- ▶ Conducting needs assessment with refugee seniors
- ▶ Create discussion groups, conduct class in native language, develop tools for relatives, arrange field trips, fund community liaisons, develop video showing active seniors in U.S., etc.

COR Center Resources

- ▶ Presentations from this web conference
- ▶ *Providing Orientation to Refugee Seniors: Tips and Strategies* Digest addressing seniors in an educational context: ways to accommodate potential challenges and strengths
- ▶ Descriptions of programs providing orientation and other services to seniors; refugee senior case study
- ▶ Overseas CO lesson plans regarding seniors and families
- ▶ In development: brief video of interviews with refugee seniors of various ethnic groups on challenges and successes

All in “Seniors” resource package on COR Center Web site:

www.culturalorientation.net

- ▶ “Refugee Discussion” group: write COR@CAL.org to join