
African and Asian Refugees Consortium (AARC): Pathway Strategies To Dignified Economic Independence for Refugees

In 2007, UWM - Center for Urban Community Development received the Refugee Social Services and Creating Strong Families grants and in partnership with the Pan African Community Association (PACA), Hmong American Women's Association (HAWA) and Sebastian Family Psychology Practice, formed the African and Asian Refugees Consortium (AARC) to implement the grant. The Consortium proposed a 'Pathway Strategies to Dignified Economic Independence for Refugees Program', a culturally-coordinated response to providing refugee services aimed to:

- 1) Coordinate and strengthen the ability of the consortium partners to provide high quality, culturally-responsive, social supportive and case management services for the African and Hmong refugee families.
- 2) Develop and implement an integrated case management and delivery system between and among the consortium partners that would focus on the strengths of each consortium partner.
- 3) Enhance the capacity of refugees (and their families) to be fully equipped to adapt and move towards self-sufficiency life goals.

The 'Pathway Strategies to Dignified Economic Independence for Refugees Program' of the AARC uses a Consortium program design and approach that is rooted in the **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** program model. The Consortium Model Chart (see back) delineates four major interconnected and overlapping service threads:

First Thread: **Bilingual and Bicultural Case Management Services** - These services for refugees/asylums in the Hmong and African community include initial in-take, assessment, referrals and case management plan, tracking and monitoring to strengthen client's access to economic, health or social services.

Second Thread: **Supportive Social Services** - These services serve to improve the refugees' adjustment process and increase civic participation by providing **orientation** workshops/trainings, citizenship programs/activities, referrals to other social support services in the community, and access and participation in AARC agencies in-house programs and services.

Third thread : **AARC Capacity Building** - Capacity building is targeted to HAWA and PACA and to the strengthening of the African and Asian Refugees Consortium as a collaborative that will enhance emerging refugee agencies' knowledge and abilities in managing their programs, operations, finances, and staffs to improve their services and achieve positive outcomes for the refugees they are serving.

Fourth thread: **Community Relations Building**. This hinges on the need of AARC members as emerging community agencies to build on the existing capacities of the Milwaukee Area Refugees Consortium and other community agencies to provide more resources and services to the Hmong and African refugees. Part of this community relations building is for AARC agencies to know the community resources and agencies, staff providing the services, how to locate and access these services, the service eligibility guidelines for these services, and referral process and systems of the agencies. The referrals would include for example direct and assisted referrals to these community agencies for employment, basic needs, ESL and related refugee education, **health**, and other needs that the AARC members are not able to provide due to their limited staffing and resources.

The locus of the Consortium paradigm is the facilitation of **Participatory Action Research (PAR) group process** that enables that AARC to work towards implementing a more unified, coordinated and integrated response to the needs, issues, and problems affecting the Asian and Pan African communities, such as on **health**, employment, education and other life challenges in order to strengthen the refugee individuals, families and community the Consortium serve.

Finally, the AARC opened opportunities to members for participant outreach and recruitment, information sharing, service referral & coordination, resource generation, program collaboration and funding to sustain services for the ethnic communities.

