

AFSC midyear conversation 4.12.22

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Program: Social worker for seniors in NJ immigrant rights program

This program seems really grounded and solid now, sure of what it needs to do and how, anchored in relationship building. They have built a network of service providers and have established reliability and trust from these providers as well as the clients. Both the Newark and Redbank offices are busy, and outreach presentations have resumed. With greater awareness, they can refer some people to other agencies which have funding for specific situations. They appreciated the help given early on to identify key partners. The State of NJ has also made additional efforts to serve immigrants by reducing the numbers in detention, creating an Office of New Americans, and allowing non-residents to obtain drivers licenses.

Four additional social workers have been hired using new State grants; three working with detainees and one with unaccompanied minors. They also have two social work students and hope to have some again next year. Students have built a resource database and are planning a staff training on trauma informed care.

The pandemic highlighted service gaps for older clients: lack of access/familiarity with technology as many services pivoted to virtual, housing is a serious need, reluctance to seek help due to the public charge rules (improvement in past year), mental health issues, isolation (many older clients have no family in US). Wait times for paperwork processing have lengthened. While the population served has always been diverse (background, immigration status), they are seeing an increase in Haitian and Ukrainian migrants.

At the end, we talked about sustainability and the challenge of continuing support for unique programs as well as giving support to new programs. AFSC continues to seek additional sources of funding. The VanAmeringen grant was renewed for 2 years and Fund for NJ for 3. The State is also now supporting some of the social workers. AFSC is also examining its own structure with an eye toward improving sustainability. I recommended they also talk to PACF to explore whether there are individual donors who are interested in immigration.

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