



MODULE VI: PUBLIC BENEFITS & COMMUNITY SERVICE

Objectives

Participants will—

1. Become familiar with public benefits and community services.
2. Develop the skills to access these benefits and services without the sponsoring agency's assistance.

Overview

Public benefits and community services may be new concepts for refugees. What they have been told overseas, whether through pre-departure orientation or through hearsay, may not be accurate. At times refugees may continue to receive inaccurate information after they arrive in the United States. Inaccurate information can lead to false expectations, some of which may be counterproductive to the goal of the refugee program—self-sufficiency. Recent changes in the welfare laws, as well as the impact those changes may have on refugee families, need to be addressed.

Also included in this module is a section on community services. Local community resources need to be identified and participants must learn how to access them in order to increase their sense of independence.

The sections in this module cover the following topics.

Section 1: Public Benefits & Community Services Assessment

Section 2: Family Assistance, Food Stamps, & Health Insurance Programs

Section 3: SSI & Disability Benefits

Section 4: WIC & Other Food Programs

Section 5: Community Services & How to Access Them

Methodology

This module uses a combination of methods. The trainer or speaker will teach participants the facts they need to know, such as the laws governing the eligibility for public benefits, work requirements, etc. Participants will then





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discuss this information—expressing opinions and asking questions to clarify issues of concern to them.

1. *Activities:* Group discussions, an instructional field trip, and role-playing.
2. *Materials and Handouts:* Application Form for Public Benefits, Informational material published by the county's Department of Social Services (DSS).

Note to Facilitators:

Local DSSs may be called by different names, such as Department of Human Services (DHS), in different locals. It is recommended that trainers use the appropriate name for their county offices.

3. *Resources/Readings:*
 - ❖ Directory of Social Service Agencies in the community (May be compiled and published by the local United Way).
 - ❖ Resources produced by: Refugee Welfare and Immigration Reform Project, Institute for Social and Economic Development, 1901 Broadway, Suite 313, Iowa City, IA 52240 (www.ised.org); Phone: 1-800-888-4733; Updated Fact Sheets: A) Refugee Eligibility for Food Stamps, and B) Refugee Eligibility for Supplemental Security Income and Other Publications, and C) Refugees and Temporary assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as well as other publications. (*See Appendix C: Public Benefits & Community Service for above publications.*)
 - ❖ Resources published by Social Security Administration: Supplemental Security Income, Disability Benefits, How Work Affects Your Benefits, Basic Facts, Benefits for Children with Disabilities, and others. The Social Security Administration has a toll-free automated document fax service, 1-888-475-7000.

Differences to Consider

Several issues to consider in conjunction with this module:

1. Eligibility requirements for public cash benefits may vary from state to state, as well as by county. The trainer needs to obtain information appropriate to the county/state.
2. Likewise, community resources vary. The trainer needs to provide a listing of local resources.
3. The field trips and handouts suggested in this manual are to be used as necessary. Using the participants needs as a guide, the trainer should decide what are appropriate activities or resources to use.





Section 1: Public Benefits & Community Services Assessment

Objective

Participants will assess how much they know about the different public benefits and community services available to them.

Materials

1. Public Benefits Assessment Questionnaire
2. Flipchart
3. Markers

Introduction

For many years, the U.S. government guaranteed public assistance benefits (known as Aid for Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]) to families with minor children where one of the parents was unable to provide for the family because of disability or unemployment or where one parent was absent or deceased. In August 22, 1996, the federal government passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA), which made many significant changes to public benefits, eliminating AFDC and introducing a new program known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). In addition, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Act of 1998 restored eligibility for benefits for certain non-citizens who had lost them as a result of PRWORA.

The purpose of this module is to inform the participants of the public benefits that may be available to them and of the laws that apply to refugees. This module also provides information about community services and how to access these programs, as well as explaining how the participants can gain greater self-sufficiency through self-advocacy.

Differences to Consider

Eligibility and requirements for the above programs may vary from state to state and county to county. The trainer should obtain appropriate information about programs available in the community before the next section.





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Assessment

Have the participants complete the Public Benefits Assessment Questionnaire. Once completed, have them share their answers with the rest of the group.

Note to Facilitators:

The following questionnaire is not designed to be just an ice breaker activity, but rather to help the trainer(s) understand the situations of the participants and particular issues they may be facing. Trainers should consider this section as an opportunity for the participants to educate the trainer(s). Trainers should expect to make modifications in the curriculum based on the outcomes of this first section, as well as knowledge of community issues prior to commencing the program.





Public Benefits Assessment Questionnaire

1. What government and/or social service programs were available to you and your family in your home country?
 - a. How did you meet your family's financial needs?
 - b. How did you know where to get help in your community?
 - c. What benefits and services did your family receive while in the camp?
2. What benefits do you think are available to refugees in the United States?
3. What are the main worries that you have about your ability to provide for your family in the United States?
4. How would you describe your present standard of living in this city compared to your standard of living in your country of origin?





Outline/Lesson Plan

Presentation & Group Discussion

Presentation & Group Discussion

Present a brief history of public benefits in the United States and provide an overview of some public benefit programs, such TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Disability Program, etc., that will be discussed at length in the specific sections.

Present refugee-specific programs such as Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance. Explain how these programs differ from "mainstream" public benefits programs, particularly in regard to eligibility and time limitations.

Other programs to mention include: Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, school breakfasts and lunches, child care subsidies, food programs, special milk programs, and the Nutrition Program for the Elderly.





Section 2: Family Assistance, Food Stamps & Health Insurance Programs

Objectives

Participants will—

1. Become familiar with Family Assistance, Food Stamps, and Health Insurance.
2. Differentiate between Cash Assistance, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
3. Discuss time limitations for refugees, eligibility requirements, work requirements, transitional benefits, and other related regulations.

Materials

1. Flipchart
2. Markers
3. Handouts and Materials

Introduction

The goal of this section is to discuss the current welfare program. The major public assistance programs, TANF, Food Stamps, and Health Insurance programs will be explained. The benefits and laws that govern their use will also be discussed.

Note to Facilitators:

TANF is called by different names from state to state, for example, it is known as CalWORKs in California.

Differences to Consider

Regulations may vary from state to state and from county to county. The instructor should be aware of local regulations. Refugees are eligible for some benefits for which other qualified Aliens (such as immigrants) may not be eligible. Some states fund their own food programs that cover certain non-citizens who are not eligible for federally funded food stamps. Trainers need to be sure they check into eligibility for their own state.





Outline/Lesson Plan

Presentation & Group Discussion

Presentation & Group Discussion

Introduce the general topic by asking the participants to identify what welfare benefits they are receiving. Pay special attention to women who are receiving benefits under TANF or the Safety Net Program. Encourage the group to ask questions about specific concerns throughout the presentation.

Describe the TANF, Food Stamps, and Health Insurance programs. Identify what benefits are received in each program (For example, Cash Assistance, Food Stamps, and Medicaid). Differentiate between TANF and Medicaid and Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance. If available at your agency, discuss welfare alternative programs such as Match Grant, Fish-Wilson, or Alternative programs and clarify how these programs differ from public benefits programs.

Describe the General Assistance program, if available in your state, and programs such as Employment Assistance, Child Care, and Transportation Assistance. Be sure to cover the laws that are important for refugees to know, such as time limitations, eligibility requirements, work requirements, transitional benefits, work exemptions, and rules regarding non-compliance.

Thoroughly explain the application process and initiate a discussion about the participants' experiences during their initial applications. Ask them if they are aware of the re-certification process and its requirements, and address any issues they may have.

Note to Facilitators:

The County Department of Social Services may have information available for applicants. The instructor should obtain copies from the Department and, in preparation for re-certification process, go over the application form with the participants.

This information may have been translated into appropriate languages; trainers should be sure to ask for materials in all languages that are available.





Section 3: SSI & Disability Benefits

Objectives

Participants will—

1. Become familiar with SSI and SSD.
2. Discuss the eligibility requirements and application process.
3. Consider the implications of the 40 quarters of work credit, and SSI eligibility of themselves and their family members.

Materials

1. Flipchart
2. Markers
3. Materials and Handouts

Introduction

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federally funded program administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that provides monthly cash benefits to eligible people who are 65 or older, blind, or disabled. Cash benefits can also go to eligible disabled and/or blind children. Social Security Disability (SSD) also pays cash benefits to people who are not able to work for a year or longer because of disability. Disability is defined as no longer being able to do the kind of work which one was able to do, and that the disability has lasted or is expected to last for at least a year or to result in death. Such individuals need a work history (at least 20 credits during a 40 quarter period) to qualify. According to the SSA, disability is defined as "the inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity...." Usually individuals that receive SSI or SSD can also receive Food Stamps and Medicaid. Most refugees are eligible for these benefits; however, trainers should check the Institute for Social and Economic Development's (ISED's) fact sheet for specific eligibility rules.

Differences to Consider

SSI is for specific populations. The focus of this lesson should be adapted to meet the needs of the class. For example, if there are no elderly clients in the class or families with disabled children or adults, few details need to be discussed regarding the SSI program.





Outline/Lesson Plan

Presentation & Group Discussion

Presentation & Group Discussion

Explain the importance of each participant's Social Security Number (SSN) as an identification, the purpose of the Social Security deduction from their payment, and the 40 quarters of work credit toward an eligible member of the family (see *Appendix C: Public Benefits & Community Service*).

Hand out the ISED's Refugee Eligibility for SSI fact sheet (see *Appendix C: Public Benefits & Community Service*) and discuss the SSI and SSD eligibility requirements and application procedures, including where to apply for the different programs. Be sure to differentiate between temporary vs. long-term disability benefits.





Section 4: WIC & Other Food Programs

Objectives

Participants will—

1. Become familiar with the WIC Program.
2. Discuss other food programs available in the community.

Materials

1. Flipchart
2. Markers
3. Materials and Handouts

Introduction

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a federal nutritional program providing food, nutrition counseling, and referrals for health care to eligible pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and infants and children under 5-years-old. While anyone receiving Medicaid is eligible, referrals from a doctor, hospital, or health department are necessary. Some people who do not receive Medicaid may still be eligible for WIC because they meet financial eligibility requirements. There are also other available community food programs that can be accessed by the participants.

Differences to Consider

Community food programs may vary from community to community. Some items from community food pantries may not be appropriate for refugee families for cultural/religious reasons.

Outline/Lesson Plan

Presentation & Group Discussion

Field Trip





Presentation & Group Discussion

Begin by asking the participants if anybody is receiving WIC. The trainer may need to describe the WIC program by describing the food checks they are using.

Explain the eligibility requirements, application process, and purpose of the WIC program and hand out brochures from the local WIC program. Encourage those participants who are receiving WIC to talk about their experiences with the program, including which food checks they often use and which they do not use at all. Discuss ways of using the food checks appropriately.

Inform the participants of the other food programs that are available in the community, such as school breakfasts and lunches, child care food programs, special milk programs, and nutrition programs for the elderly. Briefly discuss food pantries and soup kitchens (a listing may be useful).

Field Trip

A field trip can be essential in promoting the self-sufficiency of the women participants in learning to access community services on their own.

The trainer can arrange a field trip to a supermarket to assist participants to learn how to substitute food products that will be acceptable in the WIC program. Before the field trip, the trainer needs to arrange it with a local supermarket. Customer service personnel may help the group in arranging this tour and provide the use of a meeting room for discussion.





Section 5: Community Services & How to Access Them

Objectives

Participants will—

1. Become familiar with the different community services that are available.
2. Discuss eligibility requirements, application procedures, and other potential barriers to accessing community services as well as ways to overcome these barriers.

Materials

1. Pens
2. Flipchart
3. Markers
4. Materials and Handouts

Introduction

Various community services are available to refugees. The goal of this section is to enable participants to identify and learn how to access the resources available in the community. Some community services include food pantries, counseling services, free or discounted clothing and household stores, legal services, etc.

Differences to Consider

The instructor may need to research available community resources that may be commonly used by refugees.

Outline/Lesson Plan

Presentation & Group Discussion

Activity

- Case Studies

Evaluation





Presentation & Group Discussion

Ask the participants what community services were available in their own countries and how these services were accessed. Assess what community services they are aware of or have used in the United States.

Identify community services available locally that participants and their families can utilize. Discuss the type of service provided, how to access it, the income eligibility requirements, and the cost. A handout listing these services (including the name, address, and telephone number of the agency, and a brief description), as well as a map with all of the locations marked with information on how to get there by bus would be useful to distribute to the class. A statement that the participants can use to practice accessing service through the telephone would also be helpful, as would a field trip to visit particular services.

Discuss what barriers the participants can identify or may have experienced in accessing the community services. Suggest ways in which these barriers can be minimized or eliminated.

Note to Facilitators:

The resettlement agency or the United Way in the community may have a directory of social service agencies that the participants and their families can use.

Activity

Case Studies:

Time: 20 minutes

In the sample cases following, Case #1 lists nine community/social service agencies available in the United States and Case #2 lists eight. See if your group can identify all of them.

The participants will also match the names of different social service agencies to description of the services provided by the respective social services. The names and the descriptions will be provided on slips of paper that the trainer will create.

Procedure:

1. Divide the participants into two groups.
2. Give each group one case study from the sample cases and ask them to read the text and to list (in the blank space on the page) the social services mentioned in the text.





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3. Once they have listed the social services, distribute two sets of strips of paper to each group. One contains a one-sentence description of specific services offered by various social service agencies. The other contains names of different social service agencies.
4. Ask the participants to match the description with the appropriate name of the community/social service agency.

Note to Facilitators:

The case studies are samples to be adapted depending on the characteristics/ circumstances of the particular population(s) you are working with. If the participants are pre-literate, assign one literate person to each group and ask them to read the scenario to the group. In absence of literate participants, the trainer can read the scenario(s) to either the class or to smaller groups. With pre-literate participants, you may want to work only on identifying the service providers mentioned in the text and discuss what kinds of services they provide, while skipping steps three and four.





Case #1:

When M.F. arrived in the United States he told his resettlement caseworker that he wanted to see if he could find a job on his own initiative. He refused employment counseling classes which the VOLAG offered to their clients. He also refused an entry-level position offered by the VOLAG's job placement counselor. M.F. eventually found a job helping to maintain the vehicles and the area around the local fire department. M.F. was discovered drinking on the job, however, and was fired. He then started collecting Public Cash Assistance. At one point his wife moved into a women's shelter for a week with her children because M.F. was drinking and becoming abusive. She agreed to move back in with her husband when he agreed to stop drinking. M.F.'s wife found it almost impossible to live off of Public Assistance. She also wanted to improve her English and to gain some experience in the U.S. job market. She found a job, which meant that her family was no longer eligible for Public Assistance. M.F. contacted his caseworker at the VOLAG requesting some advice. He was no longer a client of the VOLAG, but a volunteer at the agency offered to help him sign up for employment counseling at the local employment center and to help him decide where to mail his resume. In the meantime, M.F.'s wife was unable to pay all the bills on her salary, so they could no longer afford day care. Eventually, M.F. found a job with a senior citizen's center. It involved delivering meals to senior citizens. Unfortunately, he hadn't stopped drinking and caused a car accident while he was making a delivery. He was taken to the emergency room at a local hospital and they found his blood alcohol level to be above the legal limit. As a result, his driving license was revoked and he is now attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in order to help him overcome his dependency on alcohol.

List the nine community/social service agencies mentioned in the above sample.





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Case #2:

S.M. and his wife A.M. contacted their VOLAG as soon as they arrived in the United States. They enrolled in employment counseling and ESL courses within their first two weeks of arriving and were willing to accept entry-level jobs. S.M. found a job as a cleaner and A. M. obtained work stocking shelves in a supermarket. They became self-sufficient quickly and did not need to register for Public Cash Assistance. Their children adapted to their new lives quickly. Their older son D.M. (19) started to attend community college because he wanted to become an accountant. Their youngest son F.M. (11) started to play basketball at the YMCA and was one of their best players.

S.M.'s English improved and after six months he found a job with the post office. Although it was better than his cleaning job, he still hoped to work as a driver as he had in his country. He visited the police station to find out what qualifications he would need to drive trucks. He was advised to go to the DMV to get information on the type of license he would need and to find out about the testing procedures. S.M. studied the manual and obtained his license. He began contacting companies that transported goods or supplies. It took a year of sending resumes and meeting with personnel officers but he was eventually offered a job.

List the eight community/social service agencies mentioned in the above sample.





Names & Descriptions of Social Services In the United States

Volag	Voluntary Agency. An agency that is responsible for assisting refugees in their initial resettlement. This includes, at minimum, one month of financial assistance and three months of "core services." Some local Volags are funded to provide additional ongoing social adjustment services.
Welfare Office	The government department that processes documents for unemployed people who are seeking financial assistance.
Employment Center/Workforce Development Center	This center announces job openings and provides employment counseling.
Fire Department	This is a community service that you should call in case of fire. Most frequently the number is 911.
Alcoholics Anonymous	This is a free service for people who are trying to stop drinking alcoholic beverages.
Women's Shelter	This place provides temporary housing for women who are being abused in their homes.
Resettlement Agency	This is another name for Voluntary Agency (Volag).
Day Care	This is a center that provides a safe environment for children while their parent(s) are working.
Senior Citizen's Center	This center provides services to help the elderly meet their physical and social needs.
Supermarket/Grocery Store	This is a store where you can buy food and toiletries.
Post Office	This is where you can go to mail a letter, send a package or buy stamps.





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Community College	This is an educational institution where you can study for two years in order to achieve two years worth of credits towards a college degree or obtain an associate degree.
YMCA/YWCA	Young Men's Christian Association/Young Women's Christian Association. This is a place where young people can play sports or do other activities. Some centers have services for the entire family.
Police	This department is responsible for helping citizens maintain a safe community.
DMV	Department of Motor Vehicles. This is where you can apply for a driver's license, register your car or renew your driver's license.
Chamber of Commerce	This is an office that has information about the city, especially businesses.
City Bus System	People use this transportation system to go from place to place in their local community.
Emergency Room	This is a place in a hospital where you go if you have a problem and you need immediate attention.
Elementary School	Children receive their first eight years of education at this institution.
Before School/After School Programs	Children receive care and supervision while parents are working either before or after formal school hours.
Middle School/High School	Youth 12 to 18-years old continue their education at this institution.
Homeless Shelter	A temporary place of refuge if you have lost your home.
Mutual Assistance Association (MAA)/Ethnic Community-Based Organization (ECBO)	An organization founded and run by an ethnic-specific community to meet their community's ongoing needs.





Evaluation

Explain to the participants that you would appreciate their feedback on the classes. Pass out the following evaluations and have the participants complete them (or complete it as a group using a flipchart). The trainer should also provide feedback on the classes.





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Public Benefits & Community Services Evaluation

1. What information in the public benefits and community services section was useful?
2. What did you not like about the section?
3. Recommendations for future lessons on public benefits and community services.

