

## **Denver Human Services Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program**

### ***URM Program Background***

The URM program was originally developed in the 1980s to address the needs of thousands of children around the world without a parent or guardian to care for them. For refugee minors, the State Department identifies children overseas who are eligible for resettlement in the U.S., but do not have a parent or a relative available and committed to providing for their long-term care. Upon arrival in the U.S., these refugee children are placed into the URM program and receive refugee foster care services and benefits. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) also identifies certain minors who may become eligible for the URM program after they arrive in the United States and do not have a parent or a relative available to provide care. The majority of these minors identified by ORR within the U.S., originate as unaccompanied alien children (UACs) and are referred to the URM program once they meet all of the eligibility requirements. While most children are placed in licensed foster homes, other licensed care settings are utilized according to children's individual needs, such as therapeutic foster care, group homes, residential treatment centers and independent living programs.

### ***Program Description and Goals***

The URM program ensures that eligible unaccompanied minor populations receive the full range of assistance, care and services available to all foster children in the state by establishing a legal authority for DHS to act in place of the child's unavailable parent(s). The URM program encourages reunification of children with their parents or other appropriate adult relatives through family tracing and coordination with local refugee resettlement agencies. However, if reunification is not possible, the program works to design a case-specific "permanency plan" for each minor or youth in care. A permanency plan is the "long-term" plan for where a child will live, along with the development of what would hopefully become long term relationships, to help each child transition into adulthood. Through its network of providers, URM assists client youth to develop appropriate skills to enter adulthood and achieve social self-sufficiency. URM youth can remain in the care and custody of Denver Human Services until age 21, at which point, they emancipate from the foster care system.

### ***DHS Structure***

- **The program is unique, as Denver is one of just 20 cities in the United States that host the URM Program.**
- The URM program at Denver Human Services (DHS) is housed in the Youth Services Section under the Child Welfare Division. There is an Administrator overseeing the program, a .5 FTE Program Manager, and 2.5 FTE for Social Caseworkers. These positions are reimbursed through the grant.

### ***Children Served***

DHS has implemented the URM population for eight years and has served hundreds of youth. Currently, there are 26 URM cases and 30 children/youth in care. DHS has served URM youth from many countries including Myanmar, Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo, Uganda, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and most recently, an influx from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

### ***Placement***

All URM youth are placed in foster care upon arrival to the URM program. On rare occasions, according to need, higher levels of care are sought when necessary. While DHS receives custody of URM children placed with Denver, Lutheran Family Services (“LFS”, a child placement agency) is also a sub-awardee from the state and coordinates the placement for the majority of these children in Denver. LFS have a network of foster homes and youth are placed in them according to fit and availability. DHS casework staff work closely with LFS to develop and implement plans for children placed with LFS. Collaboration between DHS and LFS includes supervisory and admin staff discussing new URM arrivals, and development and implementation of each child’s ongoing case plan. In some instance, DHS receives referrals directly from the ORR, and in these cases, DHS determines placement and coordinates directly with the State (instead of utilizing LFS placements).

### ***Resources and Services***

There is a vast refugee service network in the Denver. The URM program ensures children have social, cultural, and religious needs met, along with referrals to other necessary services as appropriate.

Services provided to URM youth include:

- English language training
- Cultural and religious preservation
- Independent living skills training
- Educational supports including educational training vouchers (ETVs)
- Career/college counseling and training
- Mental health services
- Assistance adjusting immigration status
- Cultural activities
- Recreational opportunities
- Support for social integration