

IMMIGRATION STUDY

McLean County League of Women Voters

Question #1 - should the State of Illinois promote and fund local community efforts to provide orientation and counseling services for immigrants regardless of documentation status?

Possible examples are:

- Assimilation in the community
- English as Second Language (ESL)
- Financial counseling
- Housing and child care services or referrals
- Preventive health care
- Emergency health care
- Transportation assistance

Discussion point for consensus question:

Immigrants often face significant challenges learning to assimilate and to go about their daily lives after relocating to the United States. Some communities are providing services similar to those listed above however these services are not universally available in other communities.

The focus of the question is funding for counseling and orientation services and not funding for the services themselves.

McLean County

McLean County Population Statistics
Census data 2005

Race	Volume	Percentage
White	129,108	87.9
Black	7,533	5.1
Native American	326	.2
Asian	4,242	2.9
Hispanic or Latino	4,640	3.2
Total	146,894	

In McLean County, Hispanic immigrants receive support for translation services, public health services, housing and child care referrals through a network of agreements with the Western Avenue Community Center. McLean County has a directory for services, written in Spanish, and funded by State Farm Bank.

Statewide

There is an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 undocumented immigrants living in Illinois. The highest percentage is Hispanic/Latino. It is estimated that 80% reside and consume services in the Chicago Vicinity.

The State League has assembled materials supporting the diverse need for services and the barriers to providing those services. The need is great; however, there was very little material detailing the funding sources currently available or the application for those funding sources.

Education

Of the 138,554 Limited English Proficiency students attending school in Illinois in 2004, 112,757 attend Chicago Vicinity schools. The next highest volume below I-80 is Champaign County with 868. McLean County has 384.

The greatest need for bilingual services is among younger students. Only about 11% of LEP students are in high school. Many children of Mexican immigrant families, by far the largest segment of LEP students, face great pressure from their parents to work rather than study, and drop out of school to work as soon as possible.

Housing

The ability to secure affordable housing for all lower income residents is a universal problem, not exclusive to immigrants. New construction of low income housing is cost prohibitive. Most immigrants are renters and rentals are becoming scarce as some apartments are being converted to condominiums and affordable houses are being renovated and sold at a profit.

How do new immigrants find housing? The answer is connections with families and friends, who have arrived earlier, word of mouth, and shared living accommodations; therefore, some dwellings may be very crowded.

Preventive Care

According to the State League materials, immigrants do not typically consume preventive services, due to cost and transportation. It was mentioned that the WIC Program is only available for pregnant low income women and newborns. According to State League materials, access to preventive healthcare services are cobbled together to meet the need. This is true of all low income services.

Coordination of preventive healthcare services falls on county health departments, but transportation and communication remains the principal barriers to access. Neighborhood healthcare centers were popular in the 1970's and 1980's, but many closed due to lack of funding and regulatory constraints.

The WIC Program is managed by the McLean County Health Department for pregnant low income women and newborns. Vaccination clinics are held in the Western Avenue Community Center for large scale vaccinations. Hearing, eye, and dental exams are performed at the Health Department and/or local schools. Employer HMO Plans provide preventive care for immigrant populations. Most service providers are only available in the Bloomington-Normal area.

Emergency Care

Emergency care is not an immigrant specific problem. There is an overwhelming number of uninsured patients, either by choice, cost, or benefit offerings.

Assimilation

Historically, immigrants with language barriers, do not assimilate well into the general community. Undocumented immigrants, in particular, isolate themselves from the general population out of fear. Within immigrant communities, there may be cultural differences that prevent them from associating with one another. After discussing

this information with members of the community, I discovered that they do not want to be painted with a broad brush. Groups from Latin America, Mexico, and Central America do not want to be referred to as Hispanic or Latino. All of these groups find this labeling offensive.

Transportation

Immigrants who do not own vehicles or have a valid driver's license typically walk, bicycle, or ride the bus. Many try to live close to commercial centers. Some employers provide shuttles to and from work.

Conclusion

The need to counsel, guide, and coordinate services to immigrants is obvious. How to fund it is the basis of this question. There are numerous public and private grant opportunities for orientation, counseling, and coordination of immigrant services, which may or may not have been explored by the State League, when undertaking this study.

Federal Grant Assistance:

usgrantsguide.com - identifies potential funding sources both private and public

Refugee Children School Impact Grant - specifically for counseling, mediation, and cultural orientation for teachers, translating, interpreting

DHS Administration for Children and Families

State Grant Assistance:

DHS Counseling, Orientation, and Coordination

WIC, MCHS Block Grants, DASA

DHS listing of grant opportunities from: Federal, State, Foundations, Corporate

The Dell Foundation - Healthy Kids/Healthy Families, literacy

Pro Position

State should fund counseling and orientation to services for immigrants:

- Need is not balanced statewide,
- While funding may be available from other sources, it may not be at adequate levels due to geographical concentration.

Con Position

State should not fund counseling and orientation to services for immigrants:

- Our state taxes would be used to fund what appears to be a Chicago problem,
- No evidence to support attempts to secure other funding sources.