

Program Snapshot:

Bethany Christian Services

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program

OPRE Report #2021-46

Grand Rapids, Michigan

March 2021

This program snapshot describes the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program provided by Bethany Christian Services (“Bethany”) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This snapshot is one of six developed as a part of the Descriptive Study of the URM Program. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation awarded MEF Associates and its subcontractor, Child Trends, a contract to conduct this study (for more information see textbox on page 5). The overall goal of the snapshots is to highlight variation across URM programs. This snapshot describes Bethany’s URM program structure, participants served, services offered, and notable practices.



Bethany Christian Services

Bethany opened in 1944 and has served URM youth since 1975. Bethany’s Grand Rapids location is both the headquarters of Bethany globally and one of their six program branches in Michigan. Overall, Bethany offers services related to family strengthening and preservation, foster care, and adult and youth refugee resettlement. Bethany also offers foster care programs for Unaccompanied Alien Children. Many of Bethany’s employees are bilingual and/or bicultural, particularly within their large in-house translation department.

About the URM Program

The URM Program serves refugees and other eligible youth within the United States who do not have a parent or relative available to care for them. The Program is funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Administration for Children and Families. The URM Program has served more than 13,000 minors since the federal program was founded in 1980. Many URM youth come from abroad, where the State Department identifies youth who are refugees who are under 18, and unaccompanied (i.e., without an adult to care for them). These youth are placed in the URM Program once they are resettled in the United States. Others are identified by ORR after arrival in the United States. These youth are often first identified as unaccompanied alien children (UAC; for more information on the UAC Program see: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/ucs>) and referred to the URM Program after an eligibility determination. Currently, eligible youth include refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking, Cuban and Haitian entrants, youth with Special Immigrant Juvenile classification, and youth with U-status.

As of 2020, there were 22 local URM provider agencies in 15 states throughout the country offering URM programs, some of which operate in multiple locations in their state. URM programs are expected to provide the same range of services to URM youth as are provided to youth in the domestic foster care system in the state. URM programs provide out-of-home placements (e.g., foster care, group homes) and other child welfare services to promote youths’ well-being. URM programs also include services focused on integrating the youth into their new communities while preserving the youth’s ethnic and religious heritage. However, providers’ implementation of these services differs from program to program. This program snapshot highlights how one program implements its services. For more information on the URM Program, see the URM Program website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/urm>.

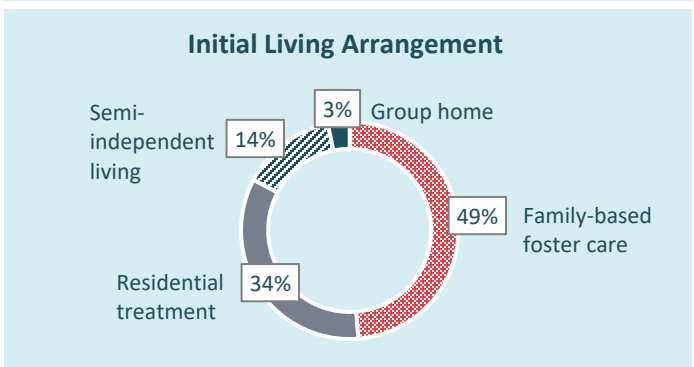
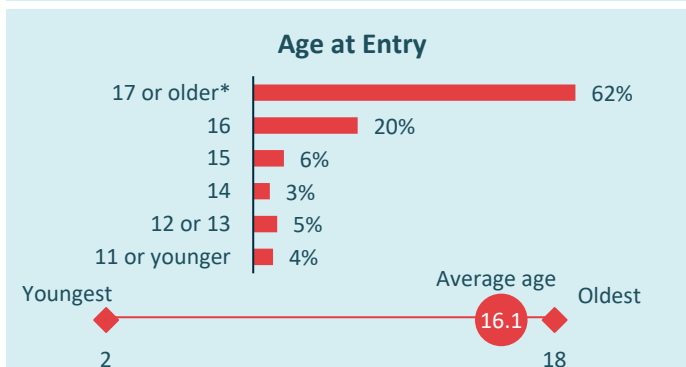
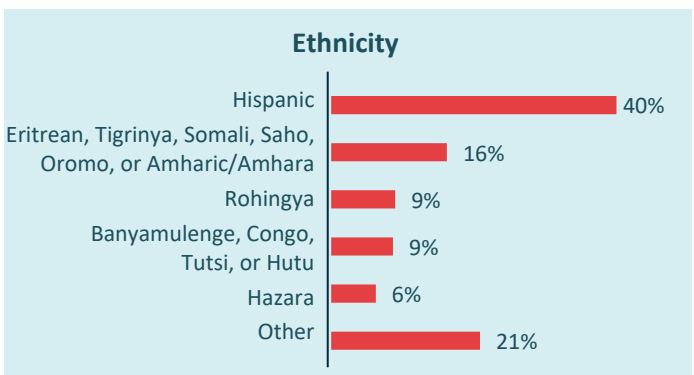
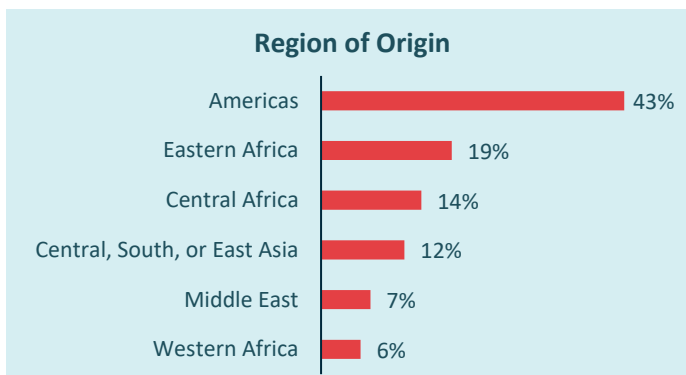
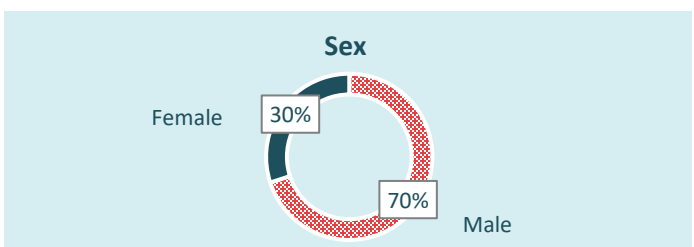
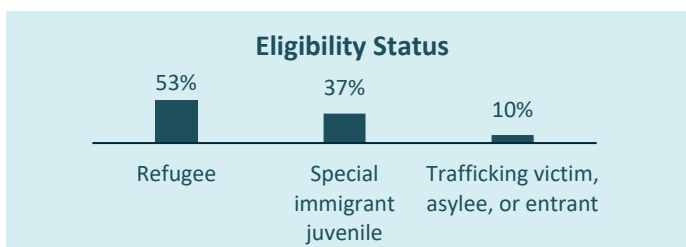
Bethany’s URM program is the largest in the country. Bethany operates their URM program in four of their branches in Michigan: Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Traverse City, and Madison Heights. With the exception of the section below on URM program participants, this snapshot focuses only on the URM program in Grand Rapids, which is the largest branch. The Grand Rapids office has 77 staff who run the URM program. These staff help provide case management services for URM youth and their foster families to ensure that their needs are met. Bethany works closely with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to ensure the services provided to URM youth mirror those provided to youth in the domestic foster care system.

Key Facts about the Bethany URM Program

- Year program started: **1975**
- Custody arrangement: **Public—State**
- Number of youth who entered program in FY2014-FY2018: **373**
- Number of youth served by the program in FY2018: **353**
- Number of program staff as of September 2019: **77**

Bethany URM program participants

From federal fiscal year (FY) 2014 to FY2018, 373 youth entered Bethany’s URM program in their Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Traverse City, and Madison Heights locations. The graphs below show the characteristics of these 373 youth.



Notes: These figures are based on original analysis of data from ORR’s Refugee Arrivals Data Systems (RADS). To protect the identity of program participants, categories with less than 10 youth were combined with other categories. Therefore, countries of origin were collapsed into global regions. No youth came from Europe or Australia. For ethnicity, the next largest ethnicity grouping placed within ‘other’ included Indigenous Guatemalan. For living arrangement, some states define living arrangement types in different ways, which can lead to variation in how programs report living arrangement types. *On rare occasions, there is an age redetermination done after a youth enters the program that determines that they were 18 or older at entry (this does not change their program eligibility). Bethany Christian Services | 2

Bethany URM program services

Services offered

Bethany provides a wide array of services for URM youth within their agency and through partnerships with external organizations. Bethany provides the basic services expected from a child welfare agency for domestic youth, such as case management and permanency services, in addition to services tailored to the needs and experiences of URM youth. Below is a summary of the services available to URM youth and who provides them.

Table 1. Services provided within Bethany and through partners

Types of services	Provided within Bethany	Provided both within Bethany and through partners	Provided through partners
Acculturation services	Cultural orientation/integration classes, one-on-one discussions, activities to support ethnic and religious heritage, opportunities to socialize with other youth, and mentorship	N/A	N/A
Health services	Mental health screenings, individual therapy/counseling, and services for survivors of torture	Routine doctor visits and substance abuse treatment	Psychotropic medication management
Education services	Tutoring, tuition assistance, workforce development training, and job search assistance	N/A	English classes, GED classes/testing, and assistance with college/vocational school applications
Life skills/ independent living training or services	Financial literacy, household management, finding/managing housing, personal care and hygiene, access to transportation, and problem solving	N/A	N/A
Legal assistance services	N/A	N/A	Legal services for establishment and maintenance of legal responsibility within the foster care system, immigration relief, adjustment of status, work authorization, and legal advocacy services
Permanency services	Reunification efforts	Relative search/engagement	N/A

Data source: Survey of URM Program Directors administered in Fall 2019.

Living arrangements available

In addition to the wide variety of services available to URM youth, Bethany offers many different types of living arrangements, either directly or through partnerships with external providers (see Table 2 below). Living arrangements are determined based on the needs and required level of care for each youth.

Table 2. Living arrangements available within Bethany and through partners

Through Bethany	Through partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-based foster care • Kinship care/relative foster care • Independent living arrangements • Semi-independent/supervised living facilities • Therapeutic foster care • Medical foster homes • Group homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential treatment facilities

Data source: Survey of URM Program Directors administered in Fall 2019.

Coordination with the child welfare system

Michigan has a public custody arrangement, meaning MDHHS (the public child welfare agency) has legal custody of URM youth in Bethany’s program. MDHHS employs “monitors” who oversee caseloads of URM youth; they are responsible for reviewing services and service referrals for youth, approving placements, and eventually closing cases when youth age out of care. They also support Bethany on an ad hoc basis on cases, service provision, and policy. Overall, Bethany reported on a Fall 2019 survey that, in addition to licensing foster parents, the local DHHS is “highly” involved in providing direct services for URM youth. Bethany also reported that program staff interact “daily” with the local DHHS regarding services for URM youth.

Bethany innovative practices

Bethany has many notable innovative practices in their URM program. We highlight three of these practices below to facilitate peer-to-peer learning among URM programs.

Variety in available living arrangements

As described above, Bethany offers a wide variety of living arrangements to URM youth. In terms of foster care, Bethany trains all foster parents as therapeutic/treatment foster parents. Bethany also offers a URM group home for boys under age 18 where staff are available on site at all times. Bethany also has several different independent or semi-independent living arrangements available. In one of these arrangements, known as “Independent Living Plus,” youth live in a home managed by Bethany and pay rent directly to Bethany. Independent Living Plus is available for youth ages 17 to 19 for up to one year. The house is staffed part time and youth can choose to come and go as they please as long as they do not miss classes or meetings. Staff regularly meet with each youth and provide life skills classes or other independent living services. Bethany staff said that this arrangement is particularly good at providing a step-down between group homes/foster homes and full independent living arrangements.

Robust mental health services

Bethany provides robust mental health services in-house to URM youth. Bethany’s staff includes both therapists and behavioral health specialists. By providing these services in-house, staff feel they can

provide more consistent support tailored to the unique needs of URM youth. Weekly group therapy is provided to youth who live in group homes. Additionally, as mentioned above, all foster parents are also trained to provide therapeutic foster care, which means they receive training on how to support youth with severe mental health needs.

Refugee-focused high school

Since 2014, Bethany has partnered with Lighthouse Academy to provide a high school specifically for refugee youth. About half of the students in this school are URM youth, while the other half are refugee youth resettled with families and unaccompanied alien children. The school is specifically designed to support youth with a history of trauma. They allow youth time to adjust to a school environment and youth are able to stay in the school until age 22 to complete their high school diploma.

For more information on Bethany



<https://bethany.org/locations/us/michigan/grand-rapids>



<https://bethany.org/contact-us>



(616) 224-7550

About the Descriptive Study of the URM Program

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families awarded MEF Associates and its subcontractor, Child Trends, a contract to conduct a descriptive study of the URM Program to better understand the range of child welfare services and benefits provided through the URM Program. The study included three primary components to answer our research questions: a survey of URM providers, State Refugee Coordinators, and child welfare administrators; analysis of existing program data; and site visits to six URM programs (conducted between November 2019 and January 2020). This snapshot highlights one of the programs visited by the study team. Please see our study overview for more information on the study, including the study's research questions: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/descriptive-study-of-unaccompanied-refugee-minors-urm-program>. The Federal Project Officer is Gabrielle Newell at OPRE and the Project Director is Sam Elkin at MEF Associates.

This report is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This publication was developed under contract number HHSP233201500077I. This report and other reports sponsored by OPRE are available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>.

Suggested citation: Child Trends & MEF Associates. (2021). "Program snapshot: Bethany Christian Services." OPRE Report #2021-46. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.