

Program Snapshot:

Commonwealth Catholic Charities

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program

OPRE Report #2021-45

Richmond, Virginia

March 2021

This program snapshot describes the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program provided by Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC) in Richmond, Virginia. 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 CCC's URM program structure, participants served, services offered, and notable practices.



Commonwealth Catholic Charities

CCC opened in 1923 and has served URM youth since 1982. The URM program is one of CCC's many programs; the agency provides more than 24 programs to a broad range of populations throughout Virginia. Overall, CCC's services include behavioral health and disability services, children's services, income and asset-building services, supportive housing and homelessness services, and resettlement and immigration services. CCC's URM program falls within their

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>.

children’s services department, though they collaborate with staff from the resettlement department, particularly for interpreters. The URM program is their largest foster care program, and it operates exclusively from the main office in Richmond.

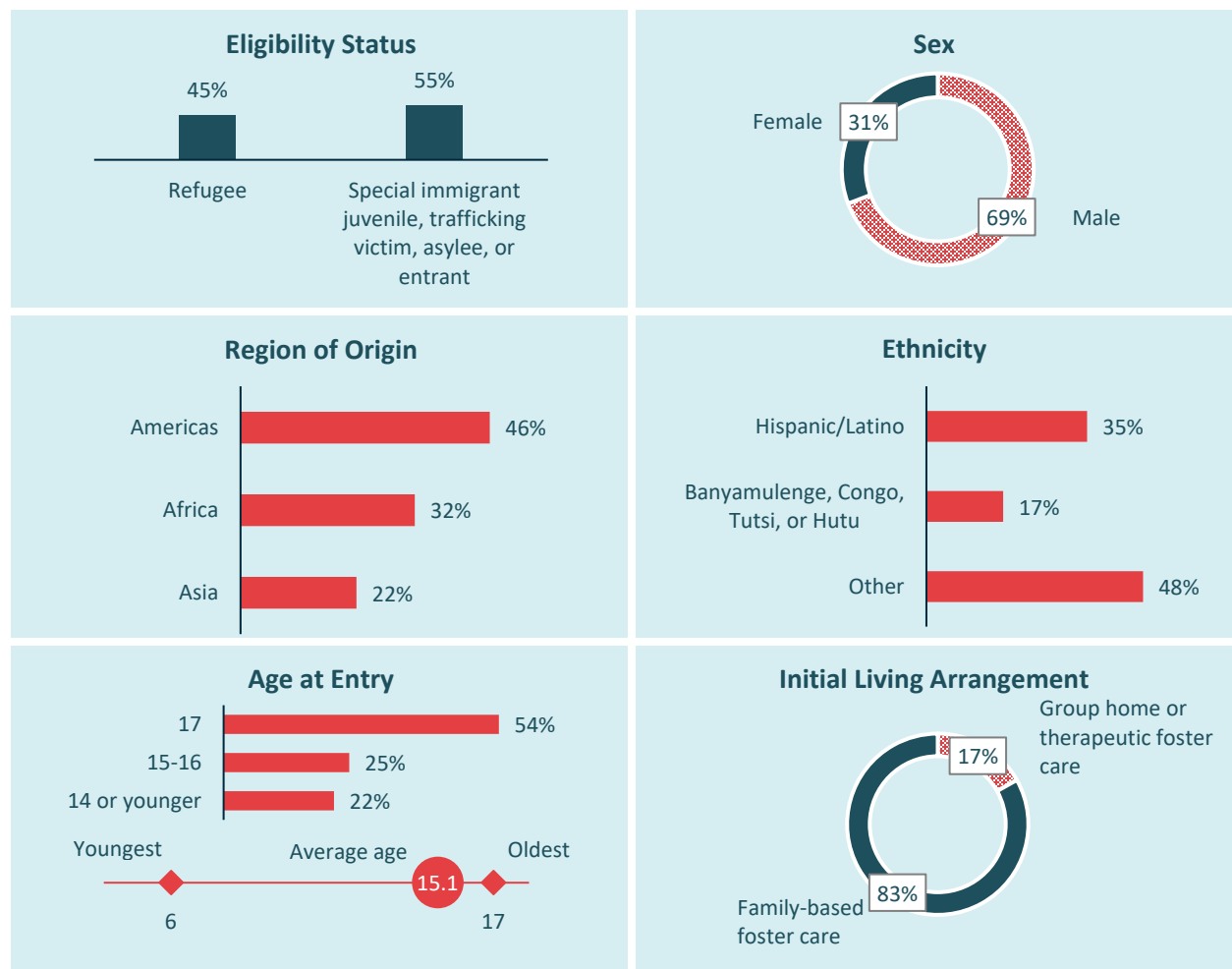
CCC has approximately 14 staff who run their URM program. These staff help provide case management services for URM youth and their foster families to ensure that their needs are met. CCC is also responsible for ensuring the services provided to URM youth mirror those provided to youth in the domestic foster care system. CCC is licensed as a child-placing agency by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VADSS). Within VADSS, CCC also works with the Office of New Americans, which monitors CCC’s URM program and assists with policy and regulatory issues.

Key Facts about the CCC URM Program

- Year program started: **1982**
- Custody arrangement: **Private**
- Number of youth who entered program in FY2014-FY2018: **65**
- Number of youth served by the program in FY2018: **77**
- Number of program staff as of November 2019: **14**

CCC URM program participants

From federal fiscal year (FY) 2014 to FY2018, 65 youth entered CCC’s URM program. The graphs below show the characteristics of these 65 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, with the Middle East included within Asia. No youth came from Europe or Australia. For ethnicity, the next largest ethnicity groupings placed within ‘other’ included Hazara and Indigenous Guatemalan.

CCC URM program services

Services offered

CCC provides a wide array of services for URM youth within their agency and through partnerships with external organizations. CCC provides all 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 CCC and through partners

Types of services	Provided within CCC	Provided both within CCC 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 and group counseling	Individual therapy/counseling	Routine doctor visits, psychotropic medication management, and substance abuse treatment
Education services	Job search assistance	Tutoring, workforce development training, and college/vocational school application assistance	English classes, GED classes/testing, and tuition assistance
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	Legal assistance for establishment and maintenance of legal responsibility within the foster care system	Legal services for adjustment of status and legal services for work authorization	Legal assistance for immigration relief and legal advocacy services
Permanency services	Relative search/engagement and reunification efforts	N/A	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, CCC 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. While CCC has the capability to offer all of these living arrangements, CCC assesses which placement type is the best fit and based on this assessment, initially places nearly all youth (83%) in family-based settings with foster parents.

Table 2. Living arrangements available within CCC and through partners

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

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

Coordination with the child welfare system

Virginia has a private custody arrangement, meaning CCC has legal custody of URM youth in their program. VADSS licenses CCC as a child-placing agency, which allows CCC to license foster parents and approve placements. The state conducts semi-annual audits. Overall, CCC reported on a Fall 2019 survey that, outside of licensing foster parents, the state and local/county child welfare agencies are “rarely” and “not at all” involved in providing direct services for URM youth, respectively. CCC also reported that program staff interact “a few times a year” with the state child welfare agency and “never” with local/county child welfare agencies regarding services for URM youth.

CCC innovative practices

CCC 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.

Intensive life skills day camp

In the summer, CCC provides a one- to two-week intensive life skills day camp for URM youth. During this camp, youth learn about an independent living skill in the morning and then immediately see its practical application in the afternoon by visiting car dealerships, apartment complexes, and other stores and services. The program uses guest speakers from the community to discuss potential careers in which youth might be interested or to teach about independent living skills. In recent years, guest speakers have included a nurse, a doctor, a fitness trainer, a reporter, a respiratory therapist, bank employees, and police officers.

College preparation and individualized support

CCC works with the Great Expectations program, which is a program for youth in foster care and adoptees in Virginia that helps students enroll, continue, and complete community college. It is funded by the state of Virginia and the community colleges where it operates. Great Expectations helps make community college accessible to URM youth and domestic youth in foster care by providing individualized support

from the application process all the way through graduation. Several URM youth from CCC have completed college with support from the Great Expectations program.

Performance quality improvement

CCC sets annual performance quality improvement targets to internally measure success. CCC sets these targets for their own internal purposes rather than to fulfill external performance monitoring requirements. As a part of its performance quality improvement process, CCC tracks data on the percent of youth who experience an unplanned move or disruption, the number of approved foster homes, and client satisfaction. To understand client satisfaction, CCC administers an annual survey to youth, foster parents, and their partner agencies. CCC feels this data-driven approach will ultimately help them better serve URM youth.

For more information on CCC



<https://www.cccofva.org/>



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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.

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