

## Vietnamese Foster Grandparents

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President Clinton's Executive Order 13166 (August 11, 2000) implemented Title VI of the Civil Rights Act for all agencies receiving federal funds. Now these agencies are obligated to serve people with limited English proficiency. Agencies accredited through the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services, Inc., have similar obligations.

The Catholic Charities Foster Grandparent Program of Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas is an example of a program serving people with limited English proficiency pursuant to guidance provided by the Corporation for National Service in January 2001 (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2001). Before 2001, the Program had recruited five Vietnamese foster grandparents. By 2002, the Program had recruited 25 Vietnamese foster grandparents, 20 percent of all the program's grandparents. Only two were bilingual. The success and shortcomings of this Program in serving people with limited English proficiency illustrates the potential and challenges of the President's Executive Order.

### **Background**

The Executive Order applies to all federally funded programs. Federal agencies have developed guidance for their grantees (U.S. Department of Justice). Older Americans as well as younger Americans with limited English proficiency are guaranteed access to programs such as public transportation and employment. President Bush, despite opposition to the executive order, continues to support its implementation.

Wichita, Kansas has the third largest population of Vietnamese people in the Midwest (Pfeiffer, 2001). Catholic Charities has had a longstanding relationship with Vietnamese people through its immigration and refugee services. The Wichita Indochinese Center supports a weekend senior center for Vietnamese people. Family members provide essential services to the older generation; however, the older Vietnamese generation has an unmet need similar to the older English speaking population, the need for meaningful activity rather than the inactivity that our society offers.

The Foster Grandparent Program is one of three volunteer programs for older adults funded by the Corporation for National Service. All three programs (Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and Retired & Senior Volunteers) offer older adults opportunities to contribute their time and talent to their communities. The Foster Grandparent Program recruits low-income older adults to work 20 hours per week with children who have special or exceptional needs. The Program provides the volunteers with a stipend of \$2.65 per hour plus transportation, accident insurance, training, and meals. As an intergenerational program, it benefits both the older adults and the children.

## **Recruitment**

Catholic Charities has had a few Vietnamese foster grandparents for many years. Two grandparents have served nine years at Rainbows United, an early childhood education program for children with disabilities. A mother and daughter have served at a Head Start site. Another grandparent has worked at an elementary school. An expansion grant from the Corporation for National Service in 2000 gave Catholic Charities the opportunity to grow the program by 25%.

Catholic Charities took advantage of that opportunity beginning in March 2001. A new member of the program's advisory council, Tina Phuong Nguyen, invited the director to speak at the Vietnamese senior center. Nguyen knew about the program because her mother and grandmother served as foster grandparents at a Head Start site. The program had brochures in the Vietnamese language and a new video featuring a Vietnamese grandparent working at Rainbows United. The senior center was a logical starting point for recruitment.

The experience of recruiting at the center illustrates the potential and challenges of implementing Title VI. The program director could not find the center on the day of the scheduled presentation. The center is located in an unmarked building near an Asian supermarket. Fortunately, the center gave the director a second chance and a large group saw the video and took brochures. Nguyen was an essential link between the program and the potential recruits. She translated for the meeting and spoke of her personal experience with the program. She gave credibility to the presentation of an outsider.

One question from the potential recruits proved to be the hardest to answer: "Will the stipend reduce my government benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income?" Many older Vietnamese adults rely on government benefits. The potential loss of benefits is a deterrent to many good prospects. Federal law exempts foster grandparent stipends and other cost reimbursements. Therefore, federal, state and local programs cannot count these reimbursements as income. Convincing people that this is true is not always easy.

People have reason to worry about losing benefits. One of the new recruits in 2002 received a letter from the Social Security Administration saying that his benefits would be reduced and he would have to pay back some benefits because of his income from the foster grandparent program. A call by the director to the Society Security office corrected this error; but the foster grandparent soon quit the program because of his

health. Another foster grandparent almost quit because of a rumor that his benefits would be cut. Only the assurance of another experienced foster grandparent saved him. In 2000, the Corporation for National Service distributed to state and local governments a memo about income disregards. Only recently has the Kansas Department on Revenue agreed to comply with its provisions. Recruitment of people with limited English proficiency requires a credible answer to the question: "Will my benefits be cut?"

## **Training**

Five people who attended the senior center meeting or who heard about the meeting decided to join the program. On April 3, the program held an orientation for them with Tina Phuong Nguyen as translator. The Corporation requires 40 hours of training for new foster grandparents, including 20 hours of pre-service training and monthly inservices. The challenge is using English language training tools and speakers with people who do not speak or read English.

A friend of Nguyen's translated the program's handbook into Vietnamese. The handbook, Nguyen's experience as a staff member of the Parents As Teachers program and as a relative of two foster grandparents, and the experience of current Vietnamese grandparents were the only training resources available to the program at the time. The abbreviated pre-service training lasted one day, rather than the four days normally scheduled.

The program placed all of the new grandparents in early childhood education settings where language was not a barrier to working with the children and staff. If a child's work is play, as many believe, then foster grandparents with limited English proficiency can work successfully with children who need to learn by playing. Many of the grandparents work in Head Start centers, where the positive impact of foster grandparents is documented (Westat, 1998).

Successful intergenerational childcare requires good training and training resources for people with limited English proficiency are limited. An Australian childcare center has experimented with Internet training in Vietnamese. A Canadian childcare center has promoted multicultural training. Kansas training resources are in English.

Catholic Charities successfully collaborated with United Way of the Plains in 2000 to apply for a Smart Start grant to help young children prepare to succeed in school. The grant offered Catholic Charities funds to pay for extra training for foster grandparents in early childhood education. By the summer of 2001, Vietnamese foster grandparents began to take advantage of Smart Start training with the assistance of the program's contract translator Kim Pham. The Wichita Area Technical College offers 10-hour inservice courses for early childhood education staff. Catholic Charities offered two of these courses during the summer of 2001, Play and Preschool Math.

Catholic Charities modified its Smart Start plan for 2002 to offer more opportunities for training to grandparents with limited English proficiency. In addition to the Technical

College workshops, Catholic Charities started to offer monthly inservices in Vietnamese. The February inservice offered epilepsy workshops in Vietnamese and Spanish. The April inservice offered an autism workshop in Vietnamese. The texts for these workshops were bilingual manuals produced by the Vietnamese Parents with Disabled Children Association, Inc. The presenters continued to be English speakers with a Vietnamese translator.

A future workshop will use the new “Language Is the Key” Vietnamese video by Washington Research Institute. The Institute has produced videos also in English, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, and Chinese. The tapes promote language development in children with disabilities, including children whose heritage language is not English.

Meanwhile, the program has contracted for a translator for all orientation and inservice training. Beginning in June 2001, all grandparents have received the same hours of training. Videos, speakers and handouts are still usually in English, but the translator facilitates discussions. Handouts on a few topics (e.g., fall prevention and mold) have been available in Vietnamese.

Some sites have used the translator to orient a new foster grandparent during the first day on the job. All of the grandparents with limited English proficiency interview with the translator present. At sites with no bilingual staff, the translator can help new foster grandparents make introductions and learn the site’s routines.

The training falls short of ideal. Local bilingual trainers on children with special or exceptional needs are nonexistent. Bilingual print and video resources are scarce. Federal resources could help through the production and distribution of more bilingual print and video training tools.

## **Supervision**

All of the volunteer sites working with Catholic Charities are English language sites except one dual language (Spanish/English) elementary school. All the directors at these sites speak English or Spanish. Only a couple of sites, a Head Start site and a childcare site, have staff that speaks Vietnamese. None of staff at Catholic Charities speak Vietnamese. Supervising 25 Vietnamese foster grandparents is a challenge.

Communication is the biggest challenge. Scheduling transportation requires communication between transportation staff that speaks English and foster grandparents. Transportation agencies have the same federal mandate to serve people with limited English proficiency (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2001). Communication remains a problem for grandparents trying to cancel or change rides, but communication will improve as the federal Title VI is implemented.

Communication between Catholic Charities staff and foster grandparents requires the assistance of translator Kim Pham. She began in 2002 to translate the program’s

quarterly newsletter into Vietnamese. The office computers now have Vietnamese fonts, which she uses to finish memos or other translations.

Communication between site staff and foster grandparents relies on limited English and signs. Not all sites have been willing to risk supervision with limited communication, but the sites with flexible staff have been rewarded with valuable help. More experienced foster grandparents have helped new foster grandparents. Foster grandparents knowing some English have helped foster grandparents knowing little English.

Personnel problems have usually been no more difficult than problems with English speaking foster grandparents. There are child-rearing differences between generations and cultures that do require some adjustments by the grandparents (Phung, 1993). The teaching styles of older adults can complement the professional styles of teachers (Larkin and Newman, 2001). Volunteer sites with the ability to work around problems have gained 500 hours per week of volunteer help from the Vietnamese grandparents.

### **Summer Day Camp**

The highlight of the recruitment campaign came in July 2001 (Dove, 2001). Tina Phuong Nguyen started the first intergenerational day camp for Vietnamese students at a local elementary school. Six Vietnamese grandparents and four English grandparents worked with 12 students daily for one month. The Vietnamese grandparents taught Vietnamese language and culture using teaching tools developed at a summer school in Washington, D.C. The English grandparents taught English using teaching tools developed by the Wichita Area Reading Council for foster grandparents.

The day camp offered students the opportunity to learn their heritage language and culture. Research shows language is an important link between generations (Schmidt, 1991). The day camp also offered students the support of their ethnic community, a successful strategy among Vietnamese people (Zhou and Bankston, 1998). Research shows that programs targeting Vietnamese children need to include Vietnamese parents and elders (Zhou and Bankston, 2000).

An evaluation of the day camp showed high satisfaction among students, parents, and foster grandparents.

### **Results**

Catholic Charities implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act has increased the participation of Vietnamese older adults in Wichita, Kansas from 5 to 25 in one year. The recruitment of volunteers with limited English proficiency shows the untapped potential that communities have available. The experience also shows the challenges in managing such a volunteer program.

Barriers to participation are surmountable. The expense of a translator can be substantial at \$20 per hour; however, the nonmonetary costs are important. The first barrier is

attitude. Grandparents and staff must be flexible, believing that participation is workable. The second barrier is communication. Grandparents and staff need a liaison, not merely a translator, who can bridge the gap between cultures. The third barrier is programming. The program must be attractive; foster grandparenting with its intergenerational approach and cost reimbursements is a good example. When these barriers are surmounted for some participants, word of mouth will make the program possible for many more.

Catholic Charities conducts an annual satisfaction survey of foster grandparents. The August 2001 survey of Vietnamese grandparents showed high satisfaction with their participation. Catholic Charities also surveys volunteer sites to assess their satisfaction with the volunteers. The May 2002 survey found high satisfaction with the performance of the foster grandparents.

Good training continues to be a challenge. Finding speakers, handouts, and videos in Vietnamese is an ongoing treasure hunt. Eventually, the program will need to develop two parallel inservices, one in English and one in Vietnamese.

The program also needs to recruit Spanish-speaking volunteers and capitalize on its experience with the Vietnamese-speaking volunteers. The achievement gap between white and Hispanic students is a local and national problem that needs the help of many volunteers.

The program will develop as an important link between two cultures. Vietnamese grandparents now learn about opportunities to study English through the local school district. The Older Americans Act nutrition program now serves Vietnamese older adults who would not otherwise participate. These are programs that are no longer just theoretically and legally guaranteed to people with limited English proficiency in Wichita, Kansas. These programs actually include a more diverse population as intended by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

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