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USCRI Launches New Program to Serve North Carolina's Immigrant Children

WASHINGTON DC, September 26, 2006— The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) announces the launch of a new, model program that will meet the health, social, and legal needs of immigrant children in North Carolina.

Two years ago USCRI established its National Center for Refugee and Immigrant Children, a pro-bono program which recruits and trains law firm attorneys to represent the children in immigration court. It quickly became apparent that these children not only have legal problems but also health problems, suffer from depression or other mental health concerns, or have encountered obstacles to their success in school.

“We are grateful to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for supporting this innovative program for immigrant children, many of whom experienced trafficking, abuse, persecution, domestic violence, or other horrors,” said President Lavinia Limón.

In North Carolina, USCRI will provide case management services to unaccompanied immigrant children who are initially picked up by federal authorities and are subsequently released from protective custody into the care of a family member.

USCRI projects that over 7,000 unaccompanied immigrant children will be held in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in 2006 and that 4,700 of these children will be released into U.S. communities, including a few hundred in North Carolina.

For example Jose, a thirteen-year-old from Honduras, came to the United States after his mother abandoned him and his father died. At the time he was released into the Charlotte, NC area to live with his aunt, a U.S. citizen, Jose was still suffering from the trauma of having witnessed severe physical abuse perpetrated upon his sisters in Honduras.

“With a case manager and pro bono lawyer working as a team, USCRI will give Jose and other children the best chance at gaining immigration status and adjusting to life in the United States,” said Director of Policy Analysis and Research Gregory Chen.

Through coordination from USCRI’s operations in Washington, DC and North Carolina, the new program will share lessons learned and best practices with lawyers, case workers, and practitioners nationwide.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has provided a two-year grant to support the initiative. “The Foundation is pleased to be a partner in this new innovative approach to improving the health of immigrant children,” said Wendy Yallowitz, RWJF program officer.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is a non-profit, nongovernmental organization that has served refugees and immigrants and defended the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons worldwide since 1911. USCRI's resettlement program and network of community-based partner agencies

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