

## MANCHESTER CHAT

Tim Soucy's Living Room, Salem, NH, June 8, 2006 – 6:00pm

### IMMIGRATION CHALLENGES FOR MANCHESTER

**Presenters: Fred Rusczek (Manchester Health Department), Sgt. Kevin Kincaid (Manchester Police Department), David Scannell (Manchester School District)**

Attending: Tim Soucy (host), Martha and Jory Macomber, Elizabeth Foy, Katie Merrow, Don Crandlemire, Mary Ann Aldrich, Anna Thomas, Edda Cantor (LNH Staff), Melanie Waldvogel (LNH Staff)

#### **New Health Issues / New Health Needs**

Fred Rusczek began the conversation with deep concerns over the health needs of immigrants relocating to NH. Many refugee children leave war torn areas and come to NH to be faced with lead poisoning and other diseases (such as tuberculosis). Lead poisoning is a huge concern, with families moving into cheaper apartments with lead paint and dust. 120 kids in NH (the last place in the nation there was a lead poisoning death) last year developed lead poisoning. Lead is the #1 environmental hazard for kids in Manchester, and an especial concern to refugees who are not aware or warned of the danger. Iron supplements upon arrival could help, but currently aren't distributed due to cost, and a dosage, access system and lead abatement program are needed. Some costs are displaced to the Manchester Health Department when preventative counseling and medicine could greatly cut down on these costs.

Refugees are generally hard-working, appreciative of being in America and willing to assimilate, although they are worried about that assimilation. The Manchester Health Department has hired refugees as successful interpreters, but finding jobs for refugees is a challenge (the average wage for a refugee in Manchester is \$7.78 an hour). **The resources for refugees do not match the need.**

The Federal Government works with each state to determine resettlement. Family clans try to stay together. Local organizations in Manchester that help resettle refugees are Lutheran Services and the International Institute of NH (which usually do not have much notice of new refugees coming into Manchester). Refugees have to be integrated into society – ex: some have never cooked using stoves, used stairwells or a bathtub!

Sgt. Kevin Kincaid mentioned that problems with the law and refugees are prevalent, and the Manchester Police Department is responsible for everything from enforcement of the law to counseling, integration into communities and mentoring of refugees. The police are often the first ones to encounter issues, such as violence, spousal abuse and domestic violence, alcoholism, tensions and frustrations. Police often have to wear plain clothes, as refugees instinctively do not trust uniformed officers. Officers also see issues with the kids assimilating into the culture here first (due to TV and cereal), such as threatening to call 911 if their parents refuse them something. There are about 5,000 refugees in Manchester today.

David Scannell commented that there are 76 languages spoken in the Manchester school system, and 90 new students were integrated into the school system last year (learned about only two weeks before school started!). Refugee students bring problems with them to the school systems including: post traumatic stress disorder and nutrition challenges. We are currently not doing enough with our refugee students (programs are being discontinued due to budget cuts), but we are doing what we can considering the limited resources. The younger students enter the system, the better the chance they have. Sensitivity to issues is a huge part of the issue in the school systems as well: for example, Serbian, Bosnian and Albanian students have animosity towards one another and cannot interact. Staff need to be well educated about particular customs of different countries.

**For further Information, please contact:**

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