

# The Coalition News

## In Brief

### History of CCMAA

The Connecticut Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations (CCMAA) was founded in 1995 to bring together the Mutual Assistance groups representing refugee and immigrant populations in the Hartford area and throughout the state. CCMAA is a tax-exempt non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Originally the organization served immigrants/refugees who were primarily Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong. Currently we serve refugees from Bosnia, Kosovo/Albania, Vietnam, Haiti, and various African nations, particularly Somalia. CCMAA has a staff of six part-time employees. It has an annual operating budget of approximately \$150,000. It has offices in Hartford and in New Haven.

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## CCMAA Principal Programs

### Seniors Services

This program, operated under contract with the State of Connecticut Department of Social Services and North Central Area Agency on Aging, Inc., is designed to offer a full range of social services directly to the diverse immigrant populations served by CCMAA. Main programming components focus on counseling/advocacy of seniors in the areas of health and nutrition, English as a Second Language, and advocacy in the legal and medical fields. CCMAA also facilitates socialization amongst elderly immigrant populations through its operation of these programs. In this way, CCMAA provides direct social services through advocacy and counseling, as well as making it possible for aged immigrants to form new connections in their new home.

### Community Organizing

With funding support from Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the City of Hartford, and the Local Initiative Support Center, CCMAA does extensive "organizing" and outreach to Vietnamese immigrants living and/or working in the Parkville neighborhood of Hartford. Working around the "theme" of "economic self sufficiency" we reach out to the neighborhoods immigrant through small culturally sensitive group meetings at which we gain insights and pass on information that can positively impact their financial circumstances: employment, education, English as a second language, as well as related themes such as insurance, savings, debt and asset management. The program is also designed to help identify indigenous community leaders

who may eventually play key roles in the redistribution of electoral power ... to better include immigrant communities.

### Crime Victim Advocacy

Funded under contract with the State of Connecticut Office of Victim Services, CCMAA employs four part-time Victim Advocates – each of whom provides 10 hours of service weekly to crime victims in separate immigrant populations: Vietnamese, Kosovars/Albanians, Haitians, and Africans. As part of this program, these advocates undertake home visits to crime victims, and can also provide "crisis counseling" for victims of domestic violence and other violent crimes. We contact police in the victim's behalf, attend court proceedings with victims, provide transportation to and from court proceedings, and provide translation

## Reflections

One of America's most esteemed recent immigrants (Peter Jennings) referred to his adopted country, the USA, as ... "this brash and noble container of dreams, this muse to artists and inventors and entrepreneurs, this beacon of optimism, this dynamo of energy, this trumpet blare of liberty." Well ... sort of. We arrive pursuing dreams (or

pursued by demons). We arrive eager to work and to succeed. We arrive with our limitless expectations as well as our expected limitations. We have strong minds and able bodies willing to work, anxious to contribute. But there are system barriers to our integration: limited language skills, lack of steady income, difficulties with housing,

transportation, and the ennui we experience when we encounter the judicial and the medical ... "systems". Most refugees and immigrants do not easily overcome these challenges. We bury ourselves in work, work long hours and low wages. We retreat into our own little ethnic communities. We struggle. We move forward. We form Mutual

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***Mission and Goals***

The mission of the Coalition is to help refugees and immigrants in Connecticut get adjusted to, and cope with the American culture. CCMAA's goals include offering assistance with language difficulties and cultural differences that immigrants and refugees encounter in dealing with assimilation into the American culture. Current areas of focus for the CCMAA include crime senior programs, community organizing and outreach, victim advocacy, youth development, access to health care, and assistance with translation and interpretation skills. In essence, CCMAA is an organized effort to reach out to the different immigrant communities in Connecticut in order to form a more cohesive and effective means of addressing the many problems they have with adjusting to a new life in this country and becoming self-sufficient on a permanent basis.



**CCMAA Youth Development  
Program (YDP)**

The Coalition's outreach effort to immigrant/refugee groups also includes outreach to the youth amongst this population. Currently, the primary form that the youth development initiative takes is a Soccer Program, though the CCMAA also offers other summer activities, including beach outings. The youth soccer program is run by a Bosnian immigrant who is a former Bosnian National Olympic Soccer Team



member and who is in a unique position to connect with the youth participants athlete and as a immigrant. Advocacy/counseling is also available to the children who participate in these programs, so that the program addresses not just social and health/nutritional needs, but also a wide range of other issues. The program is operated with funding support from the City of Hartford and

**Other Services at CCMAA**

**Access to Health Care**

The Coalition is developing a program to provide a unified approach to assisting new immigrants who are confronted with health care needs. We are attempting to build a program that assists immigrants when they are most in need – when they are ill, and ill-informed, without a road map and without resources.

**Translation and Interpretation**

To help immigrants/refugees become fluent, CCMAA offers ESL classes to assist individuals in preparing for naturalization are also offered. In addition, our advocates can provide assistance to non-English speakers in dealing with various organizations, including schools, medical providers, health, housing, and other social service agencies. CCMAA also encourages each ethnic group to offer classes to teach children their native language and culture.