

## **For Congressman David Souder's Hearing on Faith Based Organizations**

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**April 22, 2004**

### **How Does World Relief Seattle, a Faith Based Organization, Serve People in Need?**

In Western Washington, World Relief Seattle has been serving refugees and immigrants since 1979 through the Department of State's Resettlement and Placement program. In the 15 years of my tenure, World Relief Seattle has resettled over 18,500 refugees. We serve the refugees by processing their paperwork long before they arrive. We meet them at the airport, arrange for housing, food, and other necessities. We link them to the necessary services – Social Security, health screening, the state's social services, English classes, and enrollments in school for children.

To integrate families into their new life here we teach English classes (ESL), assist with job placement, run savings incentive programs, provide immigration counsel, and teach English for their eventual naturalization. We have assisted their communities in the formation of community organizations, schools, and churches. We link immigrant and refugee churches with American counterparts.

World Relief believes that community involvement is integral to its work with refugee and immigrants. Our most faithful supporters are churches, ministries and other faith communities. Churches form sponsor teams who provide assistance, including temporary housing, and continue to build relationships with families long after their service is officially complete. Individual volunteers provide basic needs for refugee families such as transportation, ESL tutoring, cultural orientation (riding the bus, opening a bank account, etc.), assistance with job-related activities, and help staff in offices on an administrative level. Volunteers come to World Relief from churches, fellowships and colleges and, on the average, contribute over 1700 volunteer hours each month.

World Relief conducts programs in four different cities (Bellingham, Seattle, Kent and Tacoma) in Western Washington through 28 full and part-time staff, half of whom are former refugees.

### **World Relief's Experience with Government Funding and Contracting**

Beginning with the Department of State Reception and Placement (R&P) agreement in 1979, World Relief has extensive programmatic experience in contracting with

government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. Following is a sample of the grants awarded to World Relief/Seattle on each level over the past 15 year period:

Federal:

- Department of State – Resettlement & Placement since 1979.
- Department of State - Employment Services for one year.
- Office of Refugee Resettlement – Match Grant (employment program) since 2000.
- Office of Refugee Resettlement – Preferred Communities Grant for the Kurds in 1997 and Somali Bantu in 2003.

State:

- Washington State Department of Social & Health Services  
Employment - LEP (Limited English Proficiency) Pathway for seven years.  
Citizenship for the past five years.  
Social Services for the past five years.  
Drug Awareness in 2003.
- Washington State Employment Security Department

Local:

- King County Housing Authority
- City of Seattle

World Relief has implemented many successful programs following the guidelines of the various funding agencies. World Relief is generally known to perform high quality work has successfully weathered many program and financial audits over the years. For a comprehensive snapshot of programs administered by the regional office please see attachment titled *World Relief/Seattle Programs*.

### **Agency Practices**

In terms of practices World Relief serves all clients regardless of their religious or political views, national origin, or gender. From Southeast Asia, we have resettled Vietnamese Catholics, Cambodian Buddhists, and Laotian Mien animists. Many of the groups World Relief has resettled are Muslims – Kurds, Kosovars, Bosnians, Afghans. We do not make our programs or our services contingent on participation in church, or religious activities.

As a refugee service agency, we actively participate with and partner with other community groups. We attend gatherings and forums serving refugees, such as King County Refugee Forum, and Refugee Planning Committee. We speak in universities, community colleges and schools. We hold membership in chambers-of-commerce. We assist businesses with their Limited English Populations through interpretation and on-site English classes. We work with government agencies such as the former INS and the State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

We are part of the Evangelical Protestant community. We see our role as a representative of this community. As a religious organization that has a high priority on its faith, World Relief holds its programs to high quality standards and seeks staff and volunteers who will reflect the ethical and moral values of the larger constituency.

### **The Role of Faith in the Agency**

The role of faith is all-important to World Relief and its staff, and is the main motivating factor in working in this agency. World Relief/Seattle employs individuals who feel a sense of God's calling to work with refugees and immigrants. We try to teach staff knowledge of the Biblical perspectives on the treatment of foreigners and aliens, of the church's history in reaching out to refugees and immigrants, and the experiences of Christians as refugees. We teach staff to use spiritual tools as well as psychological resources in our work. As we confront the many inhumanities and horrors perpetrated on our clients by governments and other persons, we feel that our faith gives us philosophic tools to understand the larger questions of evil and suffering in the world. This approach, and the common values shared by the staff, forms the framework for the practices of the organization in our service to refugees.

Because World Relief has historic ties to the National Association of Evangelicals, we feel a kinship with the various Evangelical denominations, churches and institutions in this area. We feel that one role of World Relief is to bridge the world of the church to the world of refugees. The majority of the staff are actively involved in a local churches.

Individuals like to work and volunteer at World Relief because it allows them a fuller expression of their faith, beyond what would be allowed in another, similar, though non-practicing agency. They feel a sense of support, shared values, shared faith practices such as church attendance, Bible teaching, music, prayers. They feel that their vocation can be an integrated expression of their faith life, more than "just a job". There is a sense of participation in a larger common vision at work.

We have found that most refugees are religious and do not have the same antipathy to discussing the topic. For many of them, a secular world is an unfamiliar one. Refugees are often the first to bring up the subject of religion and find relief in engaging staff who are also religious.

Working in a faith based organization also allows us freedom to explore some of the faith themes and to connect in a different way with the history and heritage of this great country. We feel we are able to communicate a deeper understanding of the formation of this country by those who fled religious persecution, and that we have an added understanding of the perspective of founding fathers and historic figures because of the common Christian faith. See attachment *Quotes on God and Country* for some additional quotes we have used in citizenship classes.

While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest Glory to laud the more distinguished Character of Christian.

*George Washington, Valley Forge, May 2, 1778*

I would like to point out that the quotient of faith in various Faith Based Organizations (FBO's) varies: some agencies may be organizationally related to ecclesiastical institutions or churches, but have little of faith in practice. Among the agencies I work with, very few leaders of the church-related agencies or their staff report church attendance, religious affiliation or practice. In spite of the tie to churches, work is little more than an interesting job. In these workplaces, there may be much less sense of shared values. Therefore the degree to which FBO's comply with a secular or non-religious agenda will differ depending on how active agency personnel are practicing their faith.

### **Concerns in contracting with the government**

On the whole we welcome the opening up of the contracting process to faith based groups, since much of the heavy lifting in human and social services is already being done by these groups. While World Relief has had great success in contracting with the government, it has not without its problems. As the government seeks to open up federal funds to greater numbers of FBO's, churches and ministries need to carefully consider whether these funds are appropriate for their agency. There are major concerns when contracting with government agencies.

- A major concern for a faith-based organization (FBO) is the need to have control over its hiring policy in order to maintain its mission viability. This is probably the main issue – that government funding will encroach on its values. The fact that hiring values held by an agency, and its constituency, may not be honored, or that they may be sued for a particular stand is a great fear of many FBO's.

For example, World Relief was awarded a contract with a local municipality. In that year, the City Council passed an ordinance mandating a non-discrimination policy regarding sexual orientation for all contractors with the city. Since this was not acceptable to the Board, World Relief/Seattle gave up the contract even though we had been working the program for two months.

- Government money is rarely without cost. Many boards and leaders of churches and ministries have little practice in managing outside funds, especially public funds. An FBO needs to be aware of the added burden of oversight, accountability, micro-management, and record-keeping, and the need for added staff, that will be imposed on it by the government funds. Ever-increasing government regulations of programs moves World Relief to debate the desirability and viability of some of these programs.

- An FBO needs a clear understanding of what Uncle Sam will and will not pay for. There is no preaching of the government dollar. The FBO board and staff will need to segregate bookkeeping of ministry activities from social service programs. This line may not be so clear when educational curriculum is Bible-based, or when counseling includes prayer. Board and staff need to be aware of compromises that need to be made. In many cases it may be advisable to incorporate a separate nonprofit organization to handle public funds. Within World Relief, we have had to walk a fine line much of the time.
- The government usually has an agenda and is not able to be totally objective in its relationships with FBO's. A secular agenda whose values are dissimilar to those of the FBO may not understand the context of actions, nor their behaviors. The government tends to bat away any behavior they see as "religious", especially if it is "Christian", in an irrational fashion and sometimes prosecute it with its regulatory means.

For example, a refugee family requested a clergyman to accompany them to the airport and say a prayer of welcome for their family upon arrival. This clergyman was in a World Relief office during an audit and was asked by the audit staff what he did at the airport arrival. When he innocently related that he prayed for the family that arrived, the World Relief office was cited for "proselytizing the new refugee family". Auditors would not listen to explanations over the role of the clergyman. The fact that he had not been in a paid staff capacity for this episode and that the request was made by the welcoming family in America did not seem to matter to the auditors.
- Although current laws state that they would like to "welcome" FBO's and that FBO's do not need to change the character of their workplace, or mission statements, it is our experience this is easier said than done.

For example, World Relief/Seattle's vision statement – "to be the hands, feet, and face of Jesus Christ to refugees and immigrants" - does not connect well with government personnel, who seem to have an incessant fear of anything religious. The agency's old mission statement at the international level - "to alleviate suffering world-wide in the name of Christ" also is not well understood by secular persons. It is much safer to say that we "serve refugees" or that we do disaster relief, but in the process have a sense of watering down the mission.
- Current governments have not been even-handed with respect to religions; they tend to be anti-Christian in emphasis and overly tolerant of non-Christian groups, and groups that are politically correct. Historically evangelical Christian groups have not been invited to the table for much of the recent past. This is symptomatic in the inability to find common vocabulary by which to dialog without politicizing issues. Communication between this large segment of the society and the government should become a higher priority.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to give input to the process of understanding faith based organizations.