DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 157 UD 024 780

AUTHOR Sweeney, Michael; And Others
TITLE The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Portland, Oregon.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Refugee Resettlement (DHHS), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Jun 84
CONTRACT HHS-600-82-0251
NOTE 71p.; For related documents, see UD 024 774-784.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; Adult Learning; *Asian Americans; Community Attitudes; Economic Development; *Educational Experience; *Employment Opportunities; Employment Patterns; English (Second Language); Immigrants; Job Training; Labor Market; *Land Settlement; Migration Patterns; *Refugees; Welfare Recipients; Welfare Services
IDENTIFIERS California; *Hmong People; *Oregon (Portland)

ABSTRACT

This document reports on the resettlement of Hmong Refugees in Portland, Oregon: what their employment experiences have been, which resettlement efforts have been successful, and how current resettlement efforts could be altered to improve the Hmong's long-term adjustment. The report is part of a larger, national project on Hmong resettlement. Section I gives general information about Portland, its population, economy, employment market, welfare, housing, refugee services, and the mixed community reaction to Hmong refugees. Section II gives brief information on the size and history of the Hmong population in Portland, which was approximately 1,068 in 1983. Section III discusses employment and education issues. Section IV discusses the unique significance of Portland as a site in that it experienced an emigration of Hmong which reduced the refugee population by three-fourths. The section also summarizes the site findings, which include: (1) secondary migration from Oregon to California has significantly affected the Portland Hmong community; (2) the Hmong desire economic self-sufficiency and feel that public assistance should be tied to employment; (3) despite a poor economy, many families have at least one employed member; (4) the Hmong feel they have not benefited from employment services and mostly have found jobs through community networks; (5) there are few vocational or job training opportunities and they feel that ESL should be closely tied to job training; and (6) high school students have difficulty graduating and are not receiving adequate vocational training. (CG)

THE HMONG RESETTLEMENT STUDY

SITE REPORT:

PORTLAND, OREGON

June 1984

Prepared for:

Office of Refugee Resettlement
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, S.W., Room 1229
Switzer Building
Washington, DC 20201

Ms. Toyo Biddle, Government Project Officer

Contract #HHS 600-82-0251

Submitted by:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Literacy & Language Program
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

Stephen Reder, Project Director

THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED BY:

Michael Sweeney

With the Assistance of:

Stephen Reder, Project Director
Mary Cohn
Karen Green
William Hadley
Bruce Bliatout
David Thow
Nancy Bliatout

This project has been funded with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under Contract No. HHS 600-82-0251. The contract, which was competitively awarded to Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, is for a total contract amount of $225,029. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, nor does mention of organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(Continued)

LIST OF TABLES

PREFACE

The Hmong Resettlement Study is a national project funded by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. The study is the joint undertaking of Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Portland, Oregon), the University of Minnesota and Lao Family Community (Santa Ana, California). The major purposes of the Study are to examine closely the resettlement of Hmong refugees in the United States, focusing on the following issues:

What has been the resettlement experience of the Hmong?

- How are the Hmong faring in terms of employment, dependence, and adjustment?
- Are there areas of employment in which the Hmong have been particularly successful?
- What do resettlement workers and the Hmong regard as the major impediments to effective Hmong resettlement and self-sufficiency?
- What role does secondary migration play in the resettlement of the Hmong? What are the reasons for secondary migration among this group? What are the implications for resettlement strategies?

What resettlement efforts and economic strategies have provided effective results for the Hmong?

- How are problems being handled? What kinds of solutions are being tried, by different resettlement communities and by the Hmong themselves?
- How many and what kinds of entrepreneurial economic development projects involving the Hmong are currently in operation, e.g., farming projects, Pa ndau cooperatives? How were they developed and how successful are they?
- What kinds of Hmong employment strategies have been particularly successful?

How might current strategies be changed to result in more effective resettlement and long-term adjustment of the Hmong?

- How might resettlement be conducted differently for the Hmong? What new projects and approaches are being considered by those involved in Hmong resettlement? How would the Hmong want resettlement to be done differently?

- How can the Hmong be resettled in a way that better utilizes their strengths and unique characteristics?

- What do the Hmong want for themselves? What do Hmong view as essential for effective resettlement? What are their goals for the future? For the next generation of Hmong?

Research conducted in the project included analysis of existing data about the Hmong, compilation of information gathered through numerous informal face-to-face and telephone conversations with Hmong informants across the country (in nearly every Hmong settlement which could be identified) and on-site observations, group meetings and personal interviews with Hmong individuals and families (as well as resettlement officials, service providers and members of the host communities). On-site case studies of Hmong resettlement were conducted in seven selected cities:

Orange County, California
Fresno, California
Portland, Oregon
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas
Fort Smith, Arkansas
Providence, Rhode Island

Staff from the participating institutions worked as a team to conduct the overall project and the seven case studies:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Stephen Reder, Project Director
Mary Cohn
John Finck (also with State of Rhode Island)
Michael Sweeney (also with Portland Public Schools)
Bruce Thowpaou Bliatout (also with City of Portland)
Karen Reed Green
William Hadley
Marshall Hurlich (also with University of Washington)
Dan X. Mua (also with Portland Public Schools)

University of Minnesota

Bruce Downing, Subproject Director
Simon Fass
Doug Olney
Sarah Mason
Glenn Hendricks

Lao Family Community

Shur Vang Vangyi, Subproject Director
Dang Vang
Thongsay Vang

The Project Officer for the Office of Refugee Resettlement was Ms. Toyo Biddle.

The results of the project are available to the public as a series of reports published by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). Copies may be ordered from:

Dr. Allan Gall
Office of Refugee Resettlement
330 C Street, S.W.
Switzer Building, Room 1229
Washington, D.C. 20201

or

Mr. Bud Tumy
Refugee Materials Center
U.S. Dept. of Education
324 E 11th Street, 9th floor
Kansas City, Missouri 64104

Reports

Vol. 1: Final Report
Vol. 2: Economic Development
Vol. 3: Exemplary Projects
Executive Summary (written in English)
Executive Summary (written in Lao)
Executive Summary (written in Hmong)

Site Reports: Orange County, California
Fresno, California
Portland, Oregon
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas
Fort Smith, Arkansas
Providence, Rhode Island

For further information about the Hmong Resettlement Study, contact either:

Dr. Stephen Reder
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204
(503) 248-6800

Dr. Bruce Downing
SARS
124 Klaeber Court
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 376-3486

Ms. Toyo Biddle
Office of Refugee Resettlement
330 "C" Street, SW
Switzer Building, Room 1229
Washington, DC 20201
(202) 245-1966

Details of Fieldwork Conducted in Portland, Oregon

The fieldwork in Portland was conducted in March and April 1983. Project staff who conducted interviews and meetings, discussed the results and wrote sections of this report include Bruce Bliatout, Mary Cohn, Karen Green, William Hadley, Stephen Reder and Michael Sweeney.

The fieldwork consisted of a number of group meetings and individual interviews. All meetings and interviews took place in Hmong unless participants preferred to converse in English. Five group meetings were held: an entry meeting with all interested members of the Hmong community in Portland (25 men and 7 women were present); a meeting with each of two major clans (approximately 20 people attended each); a meeting with Hmong teenagers (attended by 6 boys and 9 girls); and a women's meeting (attended by 10 women).

Indepth interviews were conducted with Hmong informants, including a bilingual aide with the public schools, a welfare caseworker, one of the City of Portland Refugee Coordinators, an employment service counselor, an elder, and several community leaders. Staff also interviewed nine Hmong families: two families with both parents employed, one with father and widowed daughter-in-law employed, three with husband only employed, one with widowed mother employed, one with both parents unemployed, and one with mother as household head unemployed. Americans with experience in Hmong resettlement in Portland who were interviewed include: the director of a women's employment program, a job services director, an individual familiar with employment and youth issues, two high school teachers, two adult ESL teachers, a welfare director, a VOLAG supervisor, and three individuals participating in exemplary projects concerning the Hmong.

The authors wish to acknowledge the kind cooperation and assistance of the many people who gave their time to this Study. The thoughtful participation of Hmong leaders and families and of other individuals involved in the resettlement process made the Study possible. The hospitality of the Hmong families who opened their homes and shared their hopes and concerns with staff members is particularly appreciated. The authors have attempted to portray the views of all participants as accurately as possible. Any errors in fact or interpretation of information presented in this report are solely the responsibility of the authors.

I

GENERAL CONTEXT

Setting and Climate

The Portland metropolitan region (Portland SMSA) occupies 3,693 square miles of land in northwestern Oregon and southwestern Washington, lying in a valley situated between the coastal mountains and the west slope of the Cascade mountains. Both the Willamette and Columbia Rivers bisect the area. Portland has a temperate maritime climate characterized by dry, moderately warm summers and wet, mild winters. Summer temperatures above 100 degrees and winter temperatures lower than 10 degrees are rare.

Almost 90% of the rainfall occurs between October and May. The growing season begins in May and runs through mid-October, the period between the last and first frosts of the season. This means that the normal growing season lasts about 170 days for crops that are not frost resistant. Cold-tolerant crops can grow for an even longer period.

General Population and Other Minority Groups

Based on the 1980 Census, 1.24 million people reside in the Portland SMSA. One million people, 83% of the population, live in the urbanized area. Racial minorities comprise only about 7% of the Portland SMSA's population. Blacks, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans make up the largest identifiable segments of the minority population. Forty-one percent (41%) of minorities inside the SMSA are Black, 28% are Asian/Pacific Islanders, 10% are American Indian and other native Americans, and the remaining 21% are of Hispanic origin and other minority groups. Although people of Hispanic origin

(of all racial groups) are the state's largest ethnic minority, they account for only approximately 2% of the entire region's population.

Estimates by the personnel at the Refugee Coordinator's office for the Portland metropolitan area place the current number of Southeast Asians at 18,000. The following are estimates for the refugee population of Portland:

Table 1

REFUGEE POPULATION IN PORTLAND

	Number	Percent of Refugee Population
Vietnamese	8,100	45.0
Cambodian	2,650	14.7
Hmong	1,068	5.9
Ethnic Chinese	1,600	8.9
Mien	1,100	6.1
Lao	2,100	11.7
Other (Afghan, Czech, Ethiopian, Pole, Rumanian, Russian)	1,400	7.8
TOTAL	18,018	100.1[1]

Economic Base

Data on the value of outputs by sectors of the economy are available for the state of Oregon as a whole, but not for the Portland area. However, extrapolations from these data can be made for Portland. With the exception of farming and the lumber/wood products industry outputs, the state-wide data are fairly representative of the Portland economy. Non-manufacturing constitutes the largest sector (63%) of the economy of the state and of Portland as well.

[1]Total not exactly 100 due to rounding.

The Portland economy is more diversified than that of the remainder of the state; certain industries are clustered in Portland. In the manufacturing sector, six industries account for the bulk of the manufacturing employment in the SMSA: electronics, metals, machinery, food and kindred products, lumber and wood products, and paper and allied products. Wholesale and retail trade, providing 136,200 jobs in 1982, and services, providing 109,900 jobs in 1982, are the other two major sectors of the SMSA economy. Projected growth in these two sectors will generate jobs that refugees have a reasonable chance of obtaining. Per capita income in the Portland SMSA in 1981 was $10,650, 12% higher than the national average.

Employment

The Portland labor market, as in other parts of the country, experienced a substantial downturn in 1982 and 1983. To lend some perspective to the economic climate in which Hmong must survive, a summary of the Portland labor market for the past four years including the average resident labor force, employment by industry, number unemployed and percent of the labor force unemployed is presented in this section. Currently, the regional economy still is not experiencing the upturns occurring in other parts of the country, particularly the Sunbelt states. Although seasonal factors influence the labor market to an extent, the three-month average for December 1982, January and February 1983 indicated that economic recovery had not occurred in Portland. Official unemployment rates averaged 11.3% and increased to 13.3% when discouraged workers were included. Moreover, total wage and salary employment only averaged 511,000 jobs, of an average 657,300 in the labor

force. In fact, the number of wage and salary jobs in Portland had declined monthly since September 1981, except for a small seasonal upturn in June 1982

Another perspective can be gained by comparing the rate of unemployed workers among SMSAs. Based on data compiled in December 1982 and January 1983, the Portland SMSA ranked about 83rd in unemployment rates out of 220 SMSAs nationally. This means that 62% of SMSAs in the country experienced lower unemployment rates than Portland in December 1982 and January 1983.

Employment in manufacturing and services. The majority of jobs that refugees, particularly those with little education, could readily obtain are found in two segments of the local economy: manufacturing and services. Combined, these two sectors have contained an average of 40% of the jobs in the SMSA over the past four years (1979 to 1982). The average number of manufacturing jobs decreased from 1979 levels in 1980, 1981 and 1982; approximately 15,800 Portland manufacturing jobs that existed during 1979 no longer exist. Many of these jobs were entry-level, low-skill jobs that many refugees could perform. Jobs in the service sector of the economy have not retreated to 1979 levels, but the number of service jobs available in 1982 averaged 1,700 less per month when compared with 1981 employment levels.

Competition for the remaining service and manufacturing jobs has increased substantially so that individuals with relatively high skills are competing for the jobs that are available. Because of this competition, many refugees with less marketable job skills have been laid off or effectively are precluded from entry into the labor force.

Agricultural employment. The agricultural sector of the economy employs an average of about 6,000 persons per month. In the peak berry harvest months, June and July, as many as 13,000 persons are employed in agriculture. Many refugees participate in crop harvesting during the summer months. In

fact, the demand for seasonal labor often outstrips the supply of available workers. This is the only component of the job market where the number of refugees obtaining employment has increased.

Economic future. Economists and other labor market experts project that certain segments of the state's economy will show improvement as the national economy recovers. These projections indicate that employment possibilities will exist for refugees, particularly in service industries and manufacturing (as operatives and laborers). On the negative side, only small increases are projected for farm and general labor occupations, jobs that refugees can most readily obtain.

Economists feel the Portland SMSA's economy will recover but at a slower pace than the national economy. Portland is expected to fare better than the industrial Midwest, but not as well as the Sunbelt states. Due to the diversity of the economy in the Portland area, upturns and downturns will not be as marked as in other parts of Oregon. Electronics manufacturing and the service sectors are expected to be the growth areas of the regional economy during the next three years. Since the service industry contains many entry-level or low-skill positions, refugees with low labor market skills may be able to obtain these jobs. Whether Hmong people make inroads into Portland's electronics industry has yet to be determined.

Welfare Benefits and Regulations

Public assistance programs are administered by the State of Oregon through its Human Resources Department, Adult and Family Services Division. Eligible refugees in Oregon may receive assistance through the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program or through the regular State Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. The State of Oregon has no AFDC-U (unemployed

parent) welfare program; families in which there are two parents living in the household are not eligible for AFDC assistance unless one of the parents is disabled. General Relief in Oregon is extremely restricted, usually limited to one-time, emergency grants.

AFDC payment schedules apply to most refugee families in Oregon receiving public assistance. Monthly benefits range from $239 for an individual to $836 for a family of 10. Table 2 is a listing of benefits based on the number in a household included in the grant.

Several welfare policy changes in the last five years have had a considerable impact on the size and nature of the Portland Hmong community. First, in 1978, the State of Oregon eliminated AFDC for two-parent households. This set the stage for later refugee out-migration, triggered by the change in federal policy implemented in the spring of 1982, in which RCA

Table 2

STATE OF OREGON AFDC PAYMENT SCHEDULE
Spring 1983

Persons on Grant	Monthly Maximum Payment
1	$239
2	303
3	358
4	433
5	508
6	579
7	647
8	710
9	757
10	836

Over 10 persons, add $78 per each additional person.

assistance was reduced to 18 months after arrival.[2] For some refugees these changes meant slight differences in the amounts of aid received. For most refugees in Oregon, however, it meant loss of eligibility for public assistance because refugee families tended to be intact with two parents living in the household, and therefore did not qualify for AFDC in Oregon.

Low-income Housing

Housing is available in Portland at competitive rates due to the downturn in the region's economy. In general the housing stock in Portland is in better repair than in most major metropolitan areas. The median value in 1980 dollars of owner-occupied housing was $64,500, but 40% of homes were valued at less than $50,000.

The median monthly rent for the 155,000 rental units in the SMSA (at the time of the 1980 census) was $228. However, 6.5% of the units were available for rental at $100 or less per month and another 49.5% were available for less than $200 per month. A rental survey conducted in 1982 by Apartment Data Center, a local research firm, indicated an SMSA vacancy rate of 8.3%. The same survey found that "close in SE-NE Portland" rents (where many refugees reside) ranged from an average of $255 for a one bedroom unit, to $271 for a two-bedroom unit and $312 per month for three-bedroom apartments.

Hmong in Portland tend to try to live close to relatives. They have clustered in several apartment buildings in Portland. A few reside in rental

[2]However, in keeping with the 1980 Refugee Assistance Act, the federal government still reimburses states for assistance provided to refugees who have been here up to 36 months and who are eligible for regular state assistance programs.

houses somewhat separate from other Hmong residential clusters and eight Hmong families own their own homes.

Upon first arriving in Portland, Hmong resided primarily in the neighborhoods where rents were least expensive, many in low income, predominantly Black neighborhoods. There many Hmong met with hostility or resentment from their neighbors. Slowly Hmong began making efforts to move out of these areas into neighborhoods in Portland they perceived as safer; currently Hmong are distributed in several neighborhoods throughout North, Northeast and Southeast Portland.

Subsidized housing. Approximately 5,300 subsidized housing units exist in the Portland area. Large families such as Hmong families have more difficulty obtaining housing since the Housing Authority does not have many units to accommodate large families. According to Housing Authority personnel there are only 14 five-bedroom units under Housing Authority control. If a family wants to access the Section 8 program, finding housing could take several years.

At present refugees constitute only about 4% of the families receiving housing subsidies. Housing Authority personnel told Study staff that few refugees come to their office, although they inform refugee service providers about the Housing Authority programs. (For one creative approach to low income housing for refugee populations, see "SEARP Housing Project" in Volume 3 of the Hmong Resettlement Study Final Report.) Housing Authority staff feel that refugees must be receiving housing assistance from some other source.

Refugee Services Available

The Portland Area Refugee Services Consortium receives federal refugee funds administered by the State Refugee Program. Formed in 1981 to provide comprehensive services to refugees, the Consortium is an unincorporated association of non-profit agencies that have agreed to provide services to refugees. The Consortium has developed an operational case management system with automated data retrieval capacities that is serving as a model for many other refugee resettlement programs throughout the country. The following agencies form the Consortium:

Participating Consortium Agencies

International Rescue Committee
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services
Soar/Church World Service
United States Catholic Conference
World Relief
Indochinese Cultural and Service Center
Portland Community College, ESL and Refugee Employment Project
Clackamas Community College ESL
Mount Hood Community College ESL
Southeast Asian Refugee Federation
Center for Urban Education

Cooperating Agencies

Adult and Family Services
Child Services Division
Multnomah County Health Department Refugee Health Clinic
Washington County Health Department
Clackamas County Health Department
RAIN Community
City of Portland
Portland Public Schools
Beaverton Public Schools
IMPACT, Inc.
Portland Area Refugee Forum

Hmong are employed in many of these agencies as translators, caseworkers, or community outreach workers. One of two City of Portland Refugee Coordinators is Hmong.

The Portland Area Refugee Services Consortium offers a range of services to assist refugees to become self-sufficient: case management, employment services, English as a Second Language, and support services.

Case management. Case management services are provided by local voluntary resettlement agencies: Church World Service, International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, U.S. Catholic Conference. The Center for Urban Education acts as fiscal agent for the voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) and maintains computer tracking for case management clients.

Case management staff offer a variety of services: resettlement counseling and case planning, referrals to appropriate services, problem-solving and follow-up services. Case managers also have administered emergency assistance funds for refugees without resources in fiscal year 1983.

Employment services. Two refugee-specific employment programs provide the majority of employment services for Hmong in Portland beyond the Hmong network itself. Employment services are provided by the Portland Community College Employment Project and by the Indochinese Cultural and Service Center Job Services. Services include: registration and evaluation, employment counseling, job marketing and development, job placement and job follow-up. Both programs operate on Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) funds received by the State of Oregon. In addition to these two refugee employment programs, some refugees can use traditional employment programs like the State Employment Service and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Case managers in volunteer agencies also try to find employment for their clients, as do other service providers. Adult and Family Services, the state agency administering cash assistance programs, has a small job placement unit which attempts to find employment for public assistance recipients. In addition, a

few Hmong, ages 16 to 22, receive summer employment and work experience through the City of Portland's Summer Youth Employment Program.

All of these agencies emphasize job development and placement activities, rather than training; two provide some job training. Job training programs specifically designed for refugees have been limited. Refugees who can pay for their own training can access both local community colleges and proprietary training programs in the area.

English as a Second Language. Portland Community College, Mount Hood Community College and Clackamas Community College provide English as a Second Language instruction. Small private volunteer efforts such as Laubach literacy programs and church groups also provide English training for a limited number of people. Instructional foci include: ESL survival skills, intensive ESL, vocational ESL, language laboratory instruction, tutoring and bilingual advising.

Support services. The Southeast Asian Refugee Federation and Indochinese Cultural and Service Center provide support services. The Southeast Asian Refugee Federation provides cultural orientation, interpretation, an emergency services hotline, transportation, family outreach and assistance and economic development technical assistance. The Indochinese Cultural and Service Center provides counseling services and translation services.

Client eligibility. Clients with refugee status are eligible for most Consortium services until they qualify for U.S. citizenship. Selected services have time limits, as defined by local agency policy.

Community Receptiveness to Refugees

The spectrum of community receptiveness to refugees in Portland ranges from outright hostility culminating in intermittent incidents of physical

abuse in neighborhoods and fights in public schools to warm, curious hospitality manifested by individuals who make refugees their personal concern. Outbreaks of violence between members of the host community and refugees are rarer now than they were from 1978 to 1980 when high concentrations of Hmong occupied low income housing and at times served as a convenient target for the very real socioeconomic problems of other Portland citizens.

Many of the problems Hmong had were solved because so many left Portland for California. For those remaining, greater familiarization with the law enforcement agencies has helped Hmong feel more secure. This familiarization has been facilitated to a large degree by the efforts of one of the City of Portland Refugee Coordinators who is Hmong. Through carefully planned networking, ties of communication now exist between the Portland Police Department, neighborhood associations, and local agency translation services. Hmong express relatively positive feelings today about their relationship with the police.

The level of community interest in Southeast Asian refugees in general and the Hmong in particular has been broad based over the years. Many facets of Hmong culture have been studied with the purpose of improving the general awareness of Portlanders. Grants have been awarded by the Metropolitan Arts Commission, the Oregon Arts Commission, the Oregon Committee for the Humanities, the City of Portland and the National Endowment for the Arts to support research and dissemination of information about Hmong culture. These programs have presented the varied aspects of Hmong culture to the general public in the form of concerts, a folk arts festival, artists-in-the-schools programs, publications about culture written by Hmong youth in summer CETA programs, films and videotapes, and numerous public lectures. The Hmong

themselves have contributed to better community relations in Portland through such activities as inviting hundreds of local citizens to their annual New Year's celebrations. It would be an error to assume, however, that the general climate of public opinion is well informed about the Hmong, or that the general public even knows who the Hmong are as distinct from other Southeast Asians.

II

LOCAL HMONG POPULATION

Size

As of August 1983, Portland was home to about 144 Hmong households, comprising about 1,068 individuals. This number was down from an estimated maximum population of about 4,500 in December 1981. Local leaders project this number to remain constant in the coming year, if not to increase slightly, due to the anticipated arrival of 20 to 30 Cha families from Minnesota.

The majority of the Hmong population in Portland is affiliated with the Cha clan group, which represents about 70 households. Members of several other clans also reside in Portland: The Ly and Thao clans are relatively large groups; Her, Moua, Vang, Xiong, and Yang are also represented.

History of Settlement

First arrivals. The first Hmong refugees arrived in Portland in 1976. Their resettlement was handled by voluntary agencies, such as the Catholic Resettlement Office of Catholic Charities, who identified sponsors for the refugees and facilitated their initial entry into the host community. At first, sponsorship was provided through church groups and associated American families. As the number of Hmong families in Portland grew, resident Hmong families increasingly became the sponsors themselves for their relatives and friends still in Thailand. Family reunification became a major emphasis of resettlement efforts. Respondents to a household survey conducted with approximately 90% of the Hmong households in Portland in April and May 1981

reported the following: 76% were sponsored by Hmong families, 14% by American families and 10% by church and other organizations (Reder, 1982).[3]

Growth and secondary migration. The Portland Hmong community grew steadily from 1976 through the fall of 1981, swelling with new arrivals from Thailand in 1980 in particular, supplemented by Hmong families from other nearby states who joined their relatives in Portland. (In the 1981 survey referenced above, 29% of the respondents said they had migrated to Portland from another state.) As noted earlier, by the end of 1981 Portland's Hmong population had grown to 4,500 residents, becoming one of the largest Hmong communities in the country at that time.

The drastic reduction in the size of the community that began in the fall of 1981 and continued throughout 1982 is perhaps what distinguishes Portland most from other resettlement sites in this study. At that time, Portland Hmong began a mass migration to the Central San Joaquin Valley of California, which by the spring of 1983 reduced the community to 1,068, less than one-fourth of its 1981 size. Hmong from around the United States had already begun to congregate in the Central Valley, some lured by the dream of agricultural work, others by the possibility of reuniting not only family and friends, but clan, village and camp groups as well. For many Hmong, California seemed a land of promise. The small number of people moving from Oregon to California rapidly grew to take on the proportions of a mass migration in the space of a few short months.

---

[3]For a more thorough description of the background characteristics of the Portland Hmong as of April/May 1981, refer to "A Hmong Community's Acquisition of English" (Reder, 1982). This article gives details of such factors related to the community's history as: province of origin, year of departure from Laos, number of months in the U.S., age by sex composition of the population, education, literacy, employment, etc. This survey was conducted as the Hmong population was approaching its peak.

The reasons for this wave of secondary migration out of Portland are complex. The final impetus to move for many Portland Hmong was the impending possibility of being left with no viable source of income. During the late fall of 1981 and early spring of 1982, Oregon's economy had continued to decline. Most of Portland's Hmong population were illiterate, uneducated farmers or former soldiers who spoke little or no English. They were on the bottom of the job-skills ladder in Portland and were becoming increasingly aware that they were competing with many native-born Americans who were also without work. Late in 1981 word began to spread that the federal government was considering a change in its refugee cash assistance policy, the result of which would mean virtually no federal assistance for the majority of refugees remaining in Oregon because they could not meet the requirements of the state's welfare regulations after the impending 18-month cutoff. News from relatives and friends in California included the fact that California's requirements for public assistance were more favorable to most Hmong. Also, rumors circulated that more English language training was available. These rumors were false at that time, but for those Hmong who believed that they needed more English before they could get a good job, the fact that welfare was available, allowing time for English study, was enough to make them seriously consider moving. The mass exodus began. The California Hmong communities of Fresno, Merced, Stockton and Sacramento mushroomed.

The nature of the federal policy change regarding welfare benefits for refugees was little understood by the Hmong community; only the result was clear. Concerned individuals and some state and local agencies, aware of the refugees' lack of appropriate job skills and insufficient command of English, protested the proposal to cut back federal aid. Since Oregon, unlike California, offers no public assistance through an AFDC unemployed parents

program to members of households in which both parents are present and offers only very limited general assistance, there was virtually no public assistance program in Oregon for which the majority of the Hmong would qualify unless they chose to split households to qualify for single parent AFDC.

By the time the federal policy became effective (April 1982) and was implemented in Oregon (May 1982), nearly three-fourths of the Portland Hmong community had taken up residence in California.

The Hmong who stayed. The Hmong remaining in Portland appear strongly organized on several levels. First, some elements of traditional clan-based lineage associations of relatives have been successfully transplanted from Laos to Portland. This is the case with the largest group in Portland, the Cha. Second, Hmong from several clans related through marriage appear united behind the strong leadership of one individual who expresses as well as influences the group desire to get jobs and avoid welfare. Third, a few young, talented leaders are looked to by the entire Hmong community to represent and interpret their interests vis-a-vis the English-speaking bureaucracies. Fourth, even though the majority of their relatives have moved to California some Hmong have made individual decisions to remain in Portland, mainly to retain jobs but perhaps also to retain some influence and status for themselves and for Hmong in general. Fifth, among the Hmong remaining, the level of employment is relatively high; 65% of the households have at least one person working full time. All these factors are combining to give new form and a more viable economic base to the Hmong community of Portland.

Directly tied to the massive out-migration to California is some temporary seasonal migration which is emerging. During the summers of 1982 and 1983, several hundred Hmong have come north to Oregon to pick produce. Whether or not this seasonal migration becomes a consistent migratory pattern for a segment of the West Coast Hmong remains to be seen.

III

RESETTLEMENT ISSUES

Employment

Although one of the distinguishing features of the Portland Hmong community is a relatively high rate of employment as well as a strongly articulated philosophy of obtaining work and avoiding welfare dependence, several factors persist that impede the ability of many Hmong to obtain employment or to advance beyond entry-level positions. The most obvious obstacle, placed in the path of all Oregon job seekers, is the regional economy and labor market that remains hard hit by the recent recession. In addition, employment service programs in Portland have faced an uphill battle to meet the needs of most Hmong. Partly in reaction to these obstacles, according to several informants, the Hmong community is planning a reorganization intended to preserve and perpetuate Hmong ethnic identity by achieving Hmong community-based economic self-sufficiency.

The ability and opportunity of Hmong in Portland to obtain employment and to remain in Portland has been tied to time, economic conditions and attitudes toward employment. There have been two contending work philosophies in the Hmong community: (1) find work immediately and avoid welfare, and (2) stay on welfare and study English--the more English acquired the better the chances for eventual good employment. With the 18-month refugee cash assistance limitation, time became a critical factor in these philosophies: Adherents of the former philosophy had to find work or move; adherents of the latter philosophy moved largely because public assistance was more generous in California and they could continue to study English. Economic conditions also eroded the ranks of people who wanted to find work and avoid welfare. Unable

to find work and unable to qualify for public assistance, they moved. This process of selection, partially based on attitudes towards employment and partially on economic conditions, left Portland with a substantially reduced population which placed a high value on employment and welfare avoidance.

This filtering out process has been verified in conversations with individual Hmong informants, community leaders, and local service providers. For example, a 54-year-old widow said she saw no reason to move to California because both she and her son hold jobs in Portland. Several Hmong community leaders estimated that at most only 20% of the families who migrated to California included one family member who was employed. Due to the large size of Hmong families, even those families with one wage earner could not support themselves if cash assistance was withdrawn. While employment was not the only factor that mitigated against leaving Portland, for those families who chose to remain it was a major factor. This is evidenced in the comparison of the employment characteristics of the current Hmong population in Portland with those of the April/May 1981 population.

At the time of the household survey cited above--April and May 1981--the number of Hmong in the greater Portland metropolitan area was nearing its peak. Survey findings, representing 332 households (approximately 2,500 individual Hmong), showed that 92% of the households received income from public assistance, 25% from work, and approximately 1% each from unemployment insurance and "other" sources. Households sometimes combined income from two sources: 80% had only one source (welfare in almost all of the cases), and 20% had two sources (almost always work and welfare).

Current employment. In contrast to the picture of high unemployment in 1981, of 140 Hmong households in Portland in the spring of 1983 for whom

information was available to this Study, the following employment picture can be drawn:

Table 3

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF HMONG HOUSEHOLDS

Employment Status	Number of Households	Percent Total
Employed full-time (at least one person in the household working full-time)	91	65%
Employed part-time (at least one person in the household working part-time)	28	20%
Odd jobs and seasonal labor	17	12%
No employment in the household	4	3%
	140	100%

Information provided on 70 Cha clan families, representing about 50% of Hmong in Portland, portrays an even greater level of labor market participation. Seventy-four percent of the Cha households have at least one family member employed: In 32 Cha households (46%), both the husband and wife are employed, while in 20 households (29%) at least the husband is employed.

The majority of jobs obtained by the Hmong fall into four sectors of the Portland labor market: manufacturing, general services, social and educational services and agriculture. The preponderance of these jobs are entry-level positions, although some individuals have advanced to supervisory and skilled labor positions. Overall, the agricultural sector of the labor market employs the largest number of Hmong, providing both seasonal and permanent full-time work. Most permanent positions are found at nurseries, orchards and vineyards, while the seasonal work is done in berry and produce

farming. Most service jobs are in the janitorial, food service and hotel/motel industries. Manufacturing jobs involve primarily general labor and operative positions, although in one local firm some Hmong hold the highest skilled jobs, die makers. A total of 30 Hmong men and women are employed in various social service agencies and public education institutions. Most of these jobs are as translators, bilingual classroom aides, community agents and case workers.

At a meeting held for this Study of 16 male heads of households, seven were employed. Table 4 capsulizes the employment patterns of these household heads and serves to illustrate the general nature of Hmong employment in Portland.

Table 4

SELECTED EMPLOYMENT PROFILES

Approx. Age	Length of Time on Job	Type of Work	Full- or Part-time	Rate of Pay	Benefits
28	3 yrs.	Automotive craft work (fiberglass/ custom auto bodies)	Full-time	5.75/hr.	Yes
25	2 yrs.	Automotive craft work (fiberglass/ custom auto bodies)	Full-time	4.75/hr.	Yes
45	1 yr.	Making boxes and pallets	Full-time	4.30/hr.	No
35	2-1/2 yrs.	Making boxes and pallets	Full-time	5.00/hr.	No
35	5 mos.	Metal punch operator	Full-time	3.35/hr.	No
23	4 mos.	Restaurant (busboy/ dishwasher)	Full-time	3.50/hr.	No
25	5 days	Maintenance at a refugee multi-service center	Full-time	3.35/hr.	No

Hmong workers are integrated into all facets of one Portland manufacturer's labor force. The firm, which specializes in aluminum extruding and anodizing, is the single largest employer of Hmong in manufacturing. Currently, 18 of the company's 207 employees are Hmong. While the company also employs Mien, Lao and a few Vietnamese, the Hmong constitute the greatest proportion of the Southeast Asian workforce there. A few Hmong have worked in the plant since as early as 1977. Currently Hmong hold jobs in the entire range of available skilled and unskilled positions: One of six skilled machine operators is Hmong; and three of eleven die makers are Hmong (the highest skilled positions in the non-professional labor force). Several Hmong are "lead persons" on crews, which are composed of a mix of refugees and non-refugees. Wages for Hmong at this company range from $5.40/hour to $10.50/hour.

For the present Hmong population in Portland, the desire to work appears to be strongly rooted. Community leaders and individuals at various community meetings indicate that most Hmong people want to find work. For example, at a women's meeting nine out of ten women present stated that they would like to find work.

Seasonal labor. Hmong participation in seasonal agricultural work is increasing. Growers value the Hmong and other rural Southeast Asian refugees as harvest workers. Each year the numbers of Hmong working in the berry and cucumber harvests have increased. Some growers subsidized Hmong from California to come to Oregon for the summer of 1983. Between 350-500 Hmong were expected to come from California to participate in the berry harvest--approximately 450 eventually came. More than 200 additional local Portland Hmong also worked as pickers. Thus at least 650 Hmong harvested crops in the region. Earnings from seasonal labor vary widely from individual

to individual, but may range from fifteen to eighty dollars a day. If the venture is considered successful by the Hmong who traveled from California to participate in the harvest, both growers and Hmong leaders expect the number of seasonal workers from California to increase substantially in 1984. How this will ultimately influence Hmong resettlement in Portland cannot be determined at this time. There are additional implications as Hmong contemplate buying into the agricultural sector rather than serving totally as dependent laborers.

How Hmong find work. Due to the downturn in the region's economy, competition for the relatively small number of jobs available has been keen. The major reason Hmong people continue to find work in the region appears to be the growing reputation of the Hmong and other Southeast Asian refugees as productive, hard-working employees and the fact that Hmong lineage-based job-search networks have continued to find new jobs for fellow Hmong.

The good reputation of the Hmong was noted in interviews conducted in this study with employers of Hmong in both agriculture and manufacturing. An employment program operator noted that vineyard owners first hired a few refugees last year and "...now the farmers want only refugees." Similar comments were made by the personnel director of a large metal products company who stated that "...any new manufacturing employees hired by this firm will be Hmong and Mien." Their work performance in both skilled and unskilled positions in his plant was exemplary and set the standard for American employees to follow.

The lineage-based job search networks are fueled by the value placed on finding work, any kind of work. Progress in finding employment has not been dramatic, but has been steady enough to provide a growing economic base to support a community of 1,000 individuals.

Hmong job-search networks. When asked how Hmong find jobs, one American with past experience in an employment program serving refugees said "Hmong find Hmong most jobs--we don't." Hmong maintain that they find jobs without the help of employment programs because employment programs do not fill their needs. The consensus of Hmong interviewed for this Study is that 90% of the jobs they have found have been found on their own through employed friends, relations, sponsors, or with help from church congregations.

The strong Hmong socioeconomic organization at the level of the extended family, or clan-based lineage, may operate to lessen the economic effects of unemployment for some members by providing them with help finding jobs. This group of relatives tends to serve as an internal job referral network: As more people are employed, they in turn actively advertise among their employers to hire more Hmong. Cha clan leaders claim this tactic has been the only effective way for Cha clan members to obtain jobs in Portland.

Employment service programs. The two local employment programs for refugees in the Portland area mentioned earlier in this report devote most of their resources to job development and placement activities and provide a minimal amount of job training in special projects. Both programs offer the basic service array common to most employment programs. They emphasize job placement over training, and include employment counseling, employability assessment, pre-employment orientation, job marketing, placement and follow-up services.

For the first seven months of Federal Fiscal Year 1983, program records show that 117 Hmong have been placed in jobs by the combined efforts of the two programs. This figure includes both permanent, temporary and seasonal placements. These figures should be viewed with caution, however, since one of the employment program operators estimates that as many as 60% of those

Hmong placed in jobs have been laid off within 6 months of being hired. Other Hmong claim that the programs count as "placements" people who actually have found work entirely on their own, but had registered earlier for the program. As a result, it is difficult to tell how many individuals are actually placed by the programs in specific kinds of jobs.

Most Hmong interviewed feel that local employment service programs for refugees have not been able to meet the needs of the Hmong in Portland. At one local household meeting the following opinion expressed the feelings of other Hmong in Portland:

> They [local employment programs] don't work for us. There is no follow-through. Hmong people receive a phone call from them, we go there, we have to wait, then they tell us they will call to tell us if there is something open. No call ever comes.

Another man expressed his frustration at his apparent lack of qualifications:

> . . . work experience was very different back in Laos. When we are sent, or go looking for a job, we are always asked what experience we have, and if our experience is not appropriate we are not employed.

It is apparent from these and other comments that Hmong feel their particular needs are not understood and therefore not addressed by programs intended to facilitate their entry into employment.

The design of the local Portland programs emphasizes creating an environment in which the client has to be a responsible, independent individual in the American job market. Program administrators claim the single most important thing they can do for Hmong resettlement is to discourage establishing dependency. In line with this philosophy, both programs have initiated a "work registration" component, where refugees are responsible for finding their own work. If the program does not have an appropriate job referral for a given refugee, the individual is expected to go out and seek his or her own job.

A self-directed job-search approach is particularly difficult for some refugees, especially Hmong. Those who are not literate, have low skills in English, are not educated, come from rural areas, and were farmers do not have much success with a self-directed job search. The combination of low levels of English, little formal education, and lack of transferable labor-market skills effectively precludes this segment of the refugee population from seeking their own employment, unless they are applying for a job where other countrymen work or where the employer has had a previous positive experience with Southeast Asian refugees; in these cases, family networks may help locate employment.

Several Hmong said if self-directed job search is to succeed, job seekers must receive some training in the job-search process, often referred to as pre-employment training. Several Hmong, ranging from high school age to elders, stated that understanding the cultural processes of obtaining employment in America was also important. Many said they still had a poor understanding of the kinds of jobs available and qualifications needed for them. Hmong themselves stress their need to understand how to apply for a job, how to interview, how to fill out a job application, and other normal tasks related to finding employment in Portland. It should be noted that the "Women's Specialized Job Services Program," using ORR Impact Aid Funds, does provide a small number of Hmong women with 2 weeks of pre-employment orientation and training to help them locate work.

Unfortunately, as noted, competition for available jobs in Portland has been intense. With unemployment rates that peaked at 12% in 1982, Hmong people had little chance to obtain jobs through the client job-search process used by the two refugee employment programs in Portland. Many different Hmong informants voiced dissatisfaction with those two programs. One head of

household indicated programs "only referred me to jobs the staff saw in the paper, but the jobs required English and many years of work experience." From the Hmong point of view, this type of program does not expand their pre-existing skills; the Hmong still emphasize the need for job training. In addition, some Hmong perceive a bias in the selection process among and between refugee groups. An opinion voiced by a Hmong leader echoes feelings expressed by many members of the community:

> Hmong and Mien are perceived as the most backward people and even if a job comes up that might suit them they aren't served first. Vietnamese or Chinese are given the first choices for jobs since they are more educated. If road repair or chopping trees comes up, job counselors think of Hmong or Mien. But some of our people are not interested in these jobs. They have other ideas for what they want to do. So if they can't find a reasonable job they won't take one.

Clan leaders and other informed Hmong leaders feel that the programs are not effective at present in meeting the needs of the Hmong community in Portland.

Economic development projects. The capacity for employment generated by Hmong economic development projects appears to be linked to Hmong leadership dynamics. Hmong informants note that the potential for projects exists, but at present these projects cannot be attempted unless a Hmong leader can be found to actively participate in and direct the effort. For example, several American berry growers feel the Hmong could successfully compete in the local berry growing industry. While Hmong leaders are aware of this potential and some groups have expressed interest, little action has been taken on projects such as this and no leader has expressed sufficient interest in the project. Informants express optimism for the near future, however. Current and proposed development efforts seem to be tied to seasonal economic agendas of individual Hmong leaders. At this time one Hmong-owned grocery store is in operation and apparently doing well, and a small publication business is

starting up. Both of these ventures have been initiated by local leaders, are small, and do not involve family groupings much larger than the nuclear family.

Hmong economic development plans. Reorganization of the Hmong community following the migration of the majority of the Hmong to California is an aspect of resettlement in Portland that affects Hmong economic development, employment and job training. Community leadership, working closely with Hmong community members, is currently attempting to determine which segments of the local economy to target for Hmong entrepreneurial activities, job training and employment. It appears that an important first step toward Hmong economic development has been taken by consolidating and integrating the various segments of the remaining Hmong in Portland into a cohesive and organized community. Evidence of this process is the development of a local Hmong mutual assistance association (MAA), the Hmong Family Association of Oregon, Inc.

Local Hmong leaders mentioned that a number of employment/training and economic development projects that are of interest to the community are being explored. These current efforts are guided by the shared idea that to successfully maintain Hmong ethnic identity a cooperative community effort to attain economic self-sufficiency for all Hmong is needed. Hmong in Portland appear to believe that a secure Hmong cultural identity vis-a-vis American society is most reasonably attained by economic independence. Capital for these and subsequent projects will come from the reorganized community as a whole, not from a specific lineage or clan. Decisions about options to pursue are based on obtaining a consensus within the community. Those who are interested in a particular project or business venture will then participate in the venture with community economic backing and social support. These projects include:

1. Leasing farmland in Salem, Oregon, to grow strawberries

2. Developing a carpentry/homebuilding training program

3. Buying land for home construction

4. Developing a Skills Center in cooperation with Portland Public Schools, a component of which would serve vocational training and career education needs of targeted student populations, including Hmong

5. Enhancing opportunities for young adults to obtain access to existing job training and high school shop classes in Portland Public Schools

According to several Hmong informants, Portland is different from many Hmong communities in the U.S. because the philosophy of the Portland community is to organize a successful economic base for the existing Portland Hmong population. They say that other communities still maintain as a high priority an eventual return to Laos. In the opinion of many Hmong interviewed in Portland, this view is both unrealistic and counterproductive to economic self-sufficiency in America. However realistic the hope of eventual return to Laos may be, some Portland Hmong reason that establishing a more secure economic base in Portland (or elsewhere in the U.S.) is crucial, and if the return to Laos should eventually succeed, then the accumulation of skills, knowledge and capital can only enhance the success of the return. If the return should not materialize, then a secure economic base to continue the life of Hmong in perhaps permanent exile will have been constructed.

Welfare Dependence

Utilization profile. As outlined in Section I, public assistance policies have undergone major changes. The 18-month RCA limitation policy change was one factor that spurred major shake-ups in the Hmong community in Portland. The degree of movement to California from Portland is well documented by state

welfare agency records. The Adult and Family Services Division, Oregon's public assistance agency, closed 350 Hmong cash assistance cases in January and February 1982 due almost entirely to family moves to California. In February 1982 alone, 134 Hmong cases were closed, compared to a total of only 13 cases for all other refugees combined. At the present time preliminary estimates provided by public assistance agency personnel at the state level indicate that no more than 40% of Laotian people, including Hmong, remain on refugee cash assistance. Most Hmong in Portland have exceeded the 18-month time limitation for refugee cash assistance. Those Hmong receiving other public assistance are primarily AFDC recipients.

According to the Portland office of Adult and Family Services, at the time of this Study Hmong accounted for the following numbers and kinds of cases:

32	Hmong cases were receiving RCA assistance and had been in the U.S. less than 18 months.
6	Hmong cases were receiving state funds which were federally reimbursed. They qualified for regular state aid programs and had been in the U.S. between 18 and 36 months.
54	Hmong cases had been in the U.S. longer than 3 years and were receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). (The requirements stipulate that to receive this aid one of the spouses must be incapacitated; a "caretaker" relationship must exist, i.e., children cared for by someone other than parents; or one parent must be absent from the home, usually due to death, but also due to separation of the parents.)
44	Hmong cases were receiving Food Stamps only, eligibility determined only by income.
136 cases	

Officials at Adult and Family Services estimated that about 310 Hmong individuals (excluding Food Stamp recipients) were receiving benefits. This indicated a rate of dependence for Portland Hmong of about 30%.

Questions concerning the role of welfare in Hmong resettlement elicited strong feelings in every interview of this study. Many Hmong feel that welfare or outright cash assistance payments are a disincentive to more active job searches. Some Hmong in Portland feel that the emphasis placed by Hmong elsewhere on public assistance as a subsidy to study English is inappropriate. These individuals argue that English is acquired too slowly and welfare payments are a disincentive to employment and subject to unpredictable changes or cuts. Several Portland Hmong, therefore, reason that seeking employment has a higher priority than remaining on assistance. Though English is not perceived by this Portland group as the key to employment, it is the most important factor in occupational advancement.

Public assistance disincentives to employment. Though a few employment breakthroughs have been achieved by Hmong in Portland, their successes in finding and keeping jobs that pay enough to support families have been limited. The generally bleak economic picture painted in Section I has not helped Hmong employability. Hmong themselves report that the work disincentives of welfare are of grave concern to them. Welfare payments are given with no exchange for work, or given in larger sums than individuals might make working. Many Hmong say they would prefer any kind of work in exchange for the welfare payments rather than the boredom and humiliation of "free" money.

One man interviewed has been employed in Portland for 3 years at an electronics manufacturing firm which employs a large number of Southeast Asian refugees but not many Hmong. He has, relatively speaking, an adequate job ($850/month take home) to support his family of seven. His perception of the most important welfare issue facing most Hmong is very representative:

Welfare, as it exists, is not an encouragement to seeking and maintaining a job. He explained:

> First, public assistance in exchange for nothing makes a person lazy. Hmong people should do any kind of work in exchange for money. The worst thing is to just sit at home and receive money. Second, if you get a job it should pay more than welfare. And if that job does not pay enough to cover medical costs or come with benefits, then medical care should be continued. Third, all of the money that has been spent on welfare for the Hmong could have been spent on land and the implements necessary to farm that land. Hmong could have become self-sufficient. The money could have been used to buy tractors and land rather than to pay people to stay home.

Hmong expressions of dissatisfaction with welfare dependence, and possible remedies. Virtually every interview with Hmong in Portland produced strong critical reactions to welfare.

At one meeting, the group leader who represented the interests of five allied clans prefaced his comments by saying that Americans may not like what he is going to say, but it needs to be said. He himself has taken a job that pays less than welfare. In addition, he has no paid medical benefits accompanying his job. But he feels that the influence of prolonged welfare dependence is so bad that he would rather take this job than go back to welfare. He said some Hmong laughed at him for this, but he feels they are weaker for not trying to be self-sufficient. He made the following points:

- The welfare system is not encouraging Hmong to make it in the American economic system.
- It encourages Hmong to feel incapable.
- The longer Hmong are on welfare the lazier they become and the less potential they have for gaining employment.
- The blame for failure to attain jobs is not primarily the fault of Hmong. They are essentially hard working people whose natural desire for work has been consistently eroded by welfare dependence.

- o All Hmong capable of working should be encouraged to find a job even if it pays lower than welfare; but if a job is found, medical assistance should not be cut.

- o Finally, take all of the money used to pay welfare and use it in connection with some kind of job. Don't give Hmong something for nothing.

These comments are representative of the statements of other Portland Hmong interviewed. The same man quoted above also stated, "If I was an American citizen I would be very worried about how the government is spending money on the Hmong with little to show for it."

Many Hmong interviewed suggested remedies. Their solutions are either to use welfare funds to subsidize any kind of job, so that welfare would have to be earned by work, or use the money for development of economic projects (farming was frequently mentioned). In general, Hmong are not opposed to the idea of receiving federal or state assistance; rather, they desire a restructuring of that assistance. Hmong are quick to recognize that the aged and infirm need some assistance if they cannot work. The need for assistance to those who have no other means of survival is also recognized.

Several Hmong interviewed commented that even in the most needy cases, it is not easy for Hmong to understand receiving something for nothing and to live with a fear that eventually all aid may be cut and they may still be unable to find jobs. They continue to ask if some type of job or job development plan could be coupled with assistance. Since projects of this kind do not appear to be on the immediate horizon it is not surprising that many Hmong in Portland have developed the attitude that continued dependence on assistance in Oregon must end.

Outlook for dependence. Effects of welfare on family structure and implications for continued dependence are of concern to both Hmong and American public assistance providers. At the time of the Study, there were 92

active Hmong public assistance cases and another 44 that qualified for Food Stamps. Sixty of the 92 Hmong cases were receiving AFDC under Oregon regulations. Two questions arise: How many of these cases are the result of Hmong families deciding to separate to be eligible to receive public assistance, and for such cases, will this contribute to welfare dependence in the future, thereby creating a precondition for the more long-term consequences of the poverty cycle?

Americans familiar with the Hmong, Hmong leaders and welfare caseworkers were approached with these questions. All agreed that in a few households parents had made a temporary decision to separate in order to survive economically in Portland. The decisions were not a commitment to remain on welfare because it was the easy way to get money. Rather the separation to receive AFDC was a last resort, meant to terminate with successful employment. The exact number of households that have made this decision is not known. Hmong informants say that separation to obtain welfare benefits is not prevalent. American informants from AFDC state that several other factors more adequately explain those who qualify for AFDC: death of spouse, incapacity of spouse, separation for other reasons, and divorce. One American familiar with the situation argues that a system that might make a few unemployed, illiterate, unskilled Hmong males feel they must separate from their families to subsist contributes to Hmong feelings of despair, disillusionment and perhaps cynicism about what the purpose of the helping system really is.

Job Training

Although some job training and vocational training opportunities exist in Portland for the refugee population in general, few meet the specific needs of

the Hmong. In addition, because of high costs of vocational training programs and the relative scarcity of funds earmarked for refugee employment services, local programs have de-emphasized vocational training for refugees. The vast majority of available vocational and job training programs in Portland require entry-level English skills beyond the capacity of most Hmong. The Hmong remaining in Portland have to compete with other Southeast Asian groups who are more numerous and have more education and English language ability.

Many Hmong express the concern that there is currently no job training available in Portland that would provide them with skills to gain access to entry-level jobs; they also say that there is little vocational training that they can access in the region that would train them for jobs which are not dead-end.

On the other hand, refugee employment program personnel maintain that sufficient funds are not available to meet the minimal employment needs of refugees. Vocational and job training programs are quite expensive relative to other employment services. Refugee service providers feel that emphasis on the delivery of job development and placement services is a more cost-effective expenditure of funds (at least in the short run). They say that another risk factor for expensive job training programs is the frequent change in labor demands. For instance, to meet increased demands for welders at FMC Corporation, many welders were trained; then the economy turned, leaving a lot of well-trained welders, but no welding jobs.

However, vocational training programs that are not refugee specific do exist in the community colleges, the public schools, and the State Employment Services and JTPA programs. Any person with the requisite entry skills may access these programs. Unfortunately, most Hmong, as previously mentioned, do not meet entry requirements.

Existing programs: Job training with Hmong-specific features.

The Hmong have access to a few other job training or employment enhancing programs. Several such programs are run at the Indochinese Cultural and Service Center (ICSC). The Job Services component has some job training which requires entry level English:

1) industrialized sewing, in which six Hmong have completed training and all have been placed in jobs, and

2) janitorial training, in which two Hmong are enrolled.

Another program at ICSC specifically serves women refugees. The project includes an intensive two-week pre-employment training segment. This program serves women exclusively from two-parent families who have been cut off from public assistance; participants are mostly from Southeast Asian refugee groups. There are very few Hmong women in this program. In the 3 months of the program's operation, eight Hmong (of a total of 113) have participated and of them have been placed in jobs (two in a nursery, one in power sewing). It is too soon to determine the success or failure of this project. However, the number of Hmong women participating is low. The reason for low Hmong participation is not known at this time.[4]

Hmong themselves express a strong desire for on-the-job training if companies would be willing to invest in them. At a large group meeting, one Hmong man even proposed that Hmong would be willing to work one month for free; if they proved adequate, then they could be hired.

High school programs. As will be mentioned in the education section below, Hmong and other preliterate, unschooled refugee groups are becoming recognized as a student population of special need by Portland Public

[4]Subsequent to the fieldwork conducted for this Study, Targeted Assistance for Highland Lao began to plan other training for the Hmong.

Schools. That special need translates into the need for appropriate vocational training and job placement for students, the majority of whom will be unable to attain a regular high school diploma, which is defined in terms of meeting minimal competencies in academic subjects.

One public school training program, a power sewing training class with employment as its aim, started just 6 months prior to fieldwork for this Study. Ten of the 38 students who have completed the course are Hmong, and two of them have already found jobs as a result.

School officials, Hmong community leaders and informants familiar with City programs have stated the need for more vocational training of Hmong students within Portland Public Schools. It was the opinion of these informants that the training should fill three needs: (1) pre-vocational training (e.g., shop classes, use of basic tools, measurement, basic math skills, vocational ESL, etc.); (2) vocational training that will prepare people for entry into the labor market (e.g., auto mechanics, sheet metal, printing, building construction, etc.); (3) skill development training (e.g., math, reading, writing, etc.) to enable Hmong youth to take advantage of other existing vocational training resources within the community, such as community colleges and proprietary vocational training schools, when they complete high school. Screening would assign students to the component that they could most effectively use. Those Hmong youth with sufficient English, math and literacy skills would be selected for entry into the vocational training track.

Such a system does not exist in Portland at this time, but school officials and refugee leadership agree that there is a need for Hmong students to take advantage of the vocational and skill training programs within the Portland Public Schools. School officials are exploring possible program configurations and implementation strategies. At the same time, some Hmong

leaders, through discussion with Portland Public School vocational education personnel, are well aware of the need and they are now developing some strategies to encourage the schools to facilitate the entry of Hmong students into these three types of programs.

Creative on-the-job training in one social service agency. The head of one Portland agency, Adult and Family Services, looks at employment of bilingual refugee translators and caseworkers as a means to:

(1) help to teach these individuals and hence their communities about how the American bureaucratic "system" works, and

(2) increase Americans' awareness of the competence of refugees.

She goes on to state, "When I first began working with the refugee program, people didn't believe there were any qualified Hmong or even bilingual Hmong!" All along, her intention has been not only to employ Hmong and other Southeast Asians for the above reasons but to train them in all aspects of the job so that they could handle all cases, not just those of their own ethnic group. This approach has been successful for several Hmong caseworkers who are now in the transition to handle non-Hmong cases. This example indicates the capacity of the social service systems which need to hire Hmong to train them for advancement as well. Unfortunately, only a small number of Hmong possess the bilingual capacity necessary for obtaining such a job in the first place.

Conclusions. If Hmong are experiencing a relatively high rate of employment in Portland already, and the majority of jobs have been found by Hmong for Hmong, why do the Hmong feel such a strong need for more job training? Analysis of interview data shows two factors contributing to a continued need for appropriate job training:

- o The need for re-training of the entire community. All generations of Hmong continue to need orientation about the concept of work in America and training in specific job skills here. Even if many people already possess jobs, the community perceives that more education/training is vital for continued and increased employment and eventual economic independence of Hmong people.

- o Hmong with jobs desire advancement. Many Hmong hold entry-level, dead-end jobs and are therefore especially subject to layoffs. Continued training guarantees diversification of employment opportunities.

Hmong interviewed for this Study have clearly indicated that their aspirations are not recognized. The Hmong recognize the precarious situation inherent in entry-level occupations, and they also have aspirations for better jobs. They are looking toward the future with raised expectations.

Education

Virtually all school children in Portland attend Portland public schools. There were relatively few Hmong in the Southeast Asian refugee student population arriving in the Portland schools from 1975 to 1978. Because of the rapid increase in Hmong resettling in Portland between 1978 and 1981 and the migration of Hmong to communities in the Central Valley of California between 1981 and 1982, the Hmong population has fluctuated drastically in Portland schools. Some minor fluctuations continue, but the Hmong student community in Portland now appears stable.

The figures below present Portland's Hmong student population from June 1979 through March 1983 as compiled by the English as a Second Language (ESL)/Bilingual Education Department (Portland Public Schools) in "Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Population by Years and Language Groups." The percentages represent the Hmong proportion of the total LEP population served by ESL/Bilingual.

Table 5

HMONG STUDENTS IN PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
6/79 - 3/83

	6/79	6/80	6/81	6/82	10/82	3/83
Hmong Students	110	478	884	340	235	218
% of total LEP Students	15%	32%	35%	16%	12%	11%

Statistics representing the Hmong as a separate ethnic group were not available until June 1979, at which time Hmong students numbered 110, or 15% of the entire population of 750 served by ESL/Bilingual programs in Portland. An administrator of the ESL/Bilingual Department in Portland Public Schools stated, "We didn't know who the Hmong were for the first year we had them in the schools. They were represented to us as Lao." In June 1981, Hmong students represented the largest LEP population in Portland Public Schools. Vietnamese were second at that time. In March 1983, Hmong still represented a significant student population (11%) ranking third behind Vietnamese (41%) and Lao (14%). Mien (9%) and Cambodian (9%) followed closely behind Hmong. As the table above indicates, from June 1981 to June 1982 the Hmong student population dropped from 884 to 340, reaching a low of 218 students as of March 28, 1983. Among the sites investigated in this Study, the secondary migration patterns probably had the greatest effect on the education of Hmong children and adolescents who have attended Portland schools. Both migration out of Portland and frequent moves to different schools within Portland have affected the quality and continuity of children's education.

Because of the great fluctuation in the numbers of Hmong attending Portland schools, particularly between 1981 and 1982, Portland schools have

found it difficult to maintain programs for Hmong needs in schools which lost many Hmong to the Central Valley or to other schools within the district. Teachers feel that not only does secondary migration interrupt the continuity of Hmong education, but it leaves innovative, expensively developed programs tailored for Hmong students underutilized. An instructor who has been teaching ESL and basic skills to Hmong at the high school level expressed her views on the effects of secondary migration on education:

> It [the move to California] has hurt the education of many Hmong teenagers. They [the Hmong] have set themselves up for educational failure or at least retarding this education by leaving in droves. Programs designed for the Hmong in Portland will take a long time to develop in California . . . . The moves to California will especially hurt Hmong females. There is not real advocacy for their educational needs.

Many Hmong students who have had to change high schools within Portland said that they were not happy changing high schools; some make long bus rides to continue at schools where they had begun and felt more comfortable. Because in most places where Hmong have settled in California students may only attend high school until the age of 19, while in Oregon they can remain in high school until they are 21, when families move to California many Hmong students remained behind to continue their education in Oregon. In a small reverse migration, other young people have returned to Portland to complete their high school degrees after having moved to Califoria. Students who remain behind in Portland or return from California and finish school are highly motivated; they sacrifice important personal ties with their immediate families and live collectively, in apartments or with other relatives, getting by on small remittances from their families or pooling money from part-time jobs.

How Hmong are doing in school. Hmong students in Portland schools can be divided into two groups with different needs and experiences in school. The first group consists of younger students who have better English skills and experience with American school systems but who are caught between American school culture and the Hmong home culture. The second group consists of high school students attending school through the age of 21 and who have had minimal or interrupted education in Laos and the refugee camps.

The first group of younger students have better English skills than their older brothers and sisters, but these children and pre-adolescents face a particular set of problems. As one teacher stated:

> There is a lot more conflict in Hmong growing up from pre-adolescent to adolescent ages . . . the kids coming out of middle school are less Hmong culturally, or kind of schizophrenic culturally and are therefore more confused about their identity. The kids just entering high school now who have been through the middle schools for the past several years show more evidence of family problems. Several kids are in foster care which is highly unusual for Hmong. There are more behavior problems from this group, and though their English is substantially better than older, adolescent students, they seem to have accepted a level of pidginization--they've reached a plateau and don't want to change.

Although there are many individual exceptions, Hmong teenagers as a group are experiencing difficulties in school. Most are enrolled in some type of ESL classes for part of the day. They often lack the necessary literacy skills to keep up with required readings in mainstream classes, a problem that is particularly pressing since in 1984 Oregon will institute competency examinations which students will be required to pass for an Oregon diploma. Several heads of ESL departments in Portland high schools estimated that of the 23 Hmong graduating in 1983, only one would be able to successfully pass all of the 1984 competency exams.

In Portland schools, many Limited English Proficient (LEP) students have been given special diplomas for graduation. Students who have graduated with such diplomas are still in need of language and vocational training; the group aged 15 to 30 appears to be particularly at risk in terms of continuing education or job prospects.

School dropouts. Although estimates vary because of the high rate of out-migration from Portland, it is clear that a large proportion of Hmong who have attended schools have dropped out before graduation. The dropout rate for girls is considered by teachers and students to be much higher than for boys. Major factors in high school dropout include academic difficulties in school, lack of counseling, and early marriage and pregnancy. The traditional Hmong pattern of early marriage persists in Portland and has not fit well with the American school system; marriage and pregnancy are the primary reasons for girls dropping out of high school, many before they even reach high school. Girls feel under pressure to marry by age 17 or 18 at the latest. Hmong girls stated only three or four married girls in Portland ever returned to high school.

With large families and inadequate education, these young families are in danger of becoming a new generation of welfare dependent or impoverished households. One bright, articulate young Hmong expressed his views of the problem:

> Very few Hmong youth have seen success. The only good thing is they have an opportunity to go to school. But they need more help and guidance in school. If they do not get this, they will have more problems than their parents because when they grow up they won't have the same opportunity as their parents to get assistance and won't be able to go to college, get a job, or get training . . . 25% of the boys and 75% of the girls drop out of school now.

Preparation for work or higher education. Hmong students and teachers interviewed see an increased need for Hmong students to be prepared for employment after high school. In Portland schools, the primary orientation of both the ESL department and mainstream classes is academic, with the goal of preparing students for college, but most Hmong are left far behind. Only a few exceptional Hmong students are able to apply for and succeed in college after high school. With high Hmong dropout rates and toughening entrance requirements for state universities, the need for realistic vocational education and counseling for Hmong students to prepare them to enter the work force has become evident.

In recent years, Hmong have been effectively precluded from making maximum use of the vocational education offered in the public schools, such as wood working, sheet metal, automotive and drafting classes, because it has been assumed they lack the necessary English skills. A former youth employment supervisor with the City of Portland stated that the main barriers for students like the Hmong to gaining access to existing vocational education programs include reluctance on the part of the teacher to have students with limited English speaking students in their classrooms, insufficient advocacy from Hmong students to assure the Hmong places in those classes, and insufficient literacy skills for required readings.

The problem of Hmong students' preparation for the future has recently become more recognized within the public school system. Students are responding to these efforts by their participation in new special programs. In recognition of the special needs of some of the Southeast Asian refugee students, a power sewing training class has been started as well as vocational language training classes. As noted earlier, of the 38 students in the power sewing class, 10 are Hmong; five of these Hmong students have found jobs, at

least two as a result of this project. The vocational language class, "Job Placement Preparation for LEP Students," had 80 students, 10 of whom were Hmong.

In a meeting of 15 Hmong teenagers (six boys and nine girls), the need for counseling and orientation to career planning was expressed. No one in the group had had any class about career options. When asked about their plans for the future, all of the boys and six of the girls said they would like to go to college (one young man in the group was already attending college). Individual career goals included: nurse, accountant, secretary, engineer, and auto mechanic. These students exemplified the transitional dilemma encountered by most Hmong teenagers in this country: They are caught between the pressures placed upon them by the surrounding American society (for example, speak English, wear acceptable clothing, go out on dates, plan for college or a career) and the expectations their parents and extended families express which have served Hmong society well for so many generations (such as obey your parents, marry young, have a family and become responsible members of the Hmong community). One girl noted that she has little choice in determining what classes to take, since her older brother must approve. She also feels very confined; her American girlfriends ask her to spend the night, but her parents won't let her. A young man who doesn't know what he would like to do after high school wishes his father would tell him what to do. However, his father cannot, because he doesn't have enough knowledge of the options available to his son in this society. Counseling for students and orientation for their parents regarding the educational system and career options would help to diminish the confusion felt by many students.

Adult ESL

Factors in Hmong acquisition of English. Teachers cite age, previous literacy and sex as the major determining factors in acquiring English. Analyses of the 1981 Hmong household survey data regarding English acquisition found that the following factors predicted respondents' English proficiency: age; length of time in the U.S.; proficiency in speaking Lao, reading Lao and reading Hmong; and education in Laos. A person's sex was not a factor once the differences between men's and women's background characteristics were taken into consideration. For those who had received adult ESL training in the U.S. separate analyses indicated that time in the U.S., proficiency in speaking Lao, and ESL training were the most powerful predictors of English proficiency (Reder, 1982).

Preliminary findings of longitudinal research on adult functional literacy in the Hmong community of Portland indicate that previous literacy (particularly Hmong literacy) appears to be one of the most influential factors in predicting both oral and written English proficiency (Green & Reder, 1983).

Many older students, in the opinion of ESL teachers, show no significant progress for 2 or 3 years, and "older students may never be able to be mainstreamed with other groups, that is, non-Hmong." Of course, some quite significant exceptions exist. One Hmong elder (65 years old) has learned enough English to work with Portland schools as a presenter of Hmong culture, primarily music. He is considered an intellectually exceptional man within Hmong society. Teachers see 40-45 years of age as the cut-off when rate of learning English begins to drop off rapidly. Hmong strong points in learning English, according to these teachers, are represented in the following quote:

> The Hmong as English speakers are particularly strong in verbal skills. They have little trouble with English pronunciation, and have good memories for words. They often surpass other groups in their ability to communicate orally in English.

Previous literacy skills, teachers said, are significant in predicting how rapidly a Hmong adult will acquire English. Many Hmong have been learning Hmong literacy since they have come to the U.S. and the teachers feel this enhances their ability to grasp English, especially English literacy skills. Hmong themselves show mixed feelings about the need to learn Hmong literacy. At a meeting of Hmong adults with administrative personnel from Portland Public Schools, they said that Hmong literacy was not very important. On the other hand, many individuals interviewed for the Functional Literacy Project research (cited above) stated that they thought Hmong literacy was important in facilitating the acquisition of English literacy.

Teachers also noted that the differential background characteristics and educational expectations of Hmong males and females make sex, in their opinion, a significant factor in ESL instruction. Many women simply state that they will not be able to learn English as long as they must also bear a primary role in child raising. But most are able to work out child care arrangements so they can go to school. Still, the relative linguistic inexperience of the women (few speak a second language), their lack of literacy and schooling, and their domestic role in Hmong society place them far behind Hmong men in entry-level classes.

Programs. As of the spring of 1981, 96% of Hmong women and 92% of Hmong men in Portland had taken some English classes (Reder, 1982). Women averaged 8.8 months of instruction, men 12.7 months in this country; but at the time of the survey only 33.3% of women and 42.7% of men were attending English classes. Almost all the Hmong interviewed by the Hmong Resettlement

Study--male, female, young and old--would like more schooling. The Portland Hmong community, prior to the mass migration to California, placed a very high value on education. Many of the Hmong who left Portland did so in part because they felt compelled to go where they could continue their ESL training unimpeded by the daily necessity of searching for work (without having what they considered to be necessary English skills) or by cutbacks in program size or hours of instruction.[5]

English instruction that would enhance vocational training, general employability, and occupational advancement are seen as a prime need by Hmong. Several Hmong informants criticized the lack of effective interface between perceptions of Hmong vocational ESL needs and actual ESL provision. As one man in an intermediate class stated, "Even if we go to school, we don't learn anything about vocational training. I haven't learned yet how to fill out an application for work. If I learned that, I could go around by myself."

Comments of adult ESL teachers mirror those of Portland Public Schools staff regarding their initial encounters with the Hmong in 1978--they were represented to them as Lao. There was no information on the Hmong and no forewarning that a new Southeast Asian population with distinctively different cutural characteristics was arriving in classes. Early arriving Hmong were simply put into classes with other Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants. Because these early arrivals had a more educated background and some

---

[5]Information filtering back from California indicated the opportunity to study more hours per week there than in Oregon; unfortunately, Portland Hmong found this was not the case they arrived in California. However, now that programs in California have had a chance to develop, some locations do offer more intensive training.

familiarity with literacy in Lao, Thai or Hmong, they presented fewer special problems than the later influx of largely uneducated, preliterate Hmong who began to appear in Portland in 1979.

The later arrivals are representative of the majority of the Hmong population in the U.S. today. They have little, if any, previous schooling and limited literacy skills; some have second language skills. According to the household survey conducted in April and May 1981 cited earlier, the Hmong population of Portland reported the following educational background characteristics: 73% had no previous education; 43% had some literacy skills in Hmong; and 29% had some literacy skills in Lao (Reder, 1982).

Special classes for pre-literates have been designed, but some teachers feel that while they are intended to deal with special Hmong needs, perhaps, teachers have held expectations for Hmong students that are too low. A factor in this may have been a lack of familiarity with Hmong culture and therefore no firm idea of what to expect from Hmong adults as students. But, as program design for preliterate populations passed through its initial stages, many teachers began experimenting with and inventing techniques and materials for preliterates. Over the years, as Hmong have gained greater experience with the school environment and teachers have improved language teaching through trial and error and gotten to know the Hmong, both sensed improvement. However, ESL teachers lament, the program they helped to develop is now prepared to teach Hmong effectively, but it is no longer needed, because the majority of their lower skilled students in need of these special classes have moved to California.

Perhaps one of the most effective adult ESL classes was the Indochinese Cultural and Service Center Women's Program. This program was designed to meet refugee women's needs and included child care, a feature which made it

the only available ESL option for many women. The Women's Program was sensitive to the background characteristics as well as the adjustment concerns of Hmong women; it provided special cultural orientation which enabled the participants to learn survival skills more effectively. Hmong women who participated in this program expressed positive attitudes about this approach to learning English. Teachers in other programs subsequently observed what they described as a "relatively uninhibited desire to learn and use English" in many who passed through these classes. The Women's Program, however, was a casualty of a declining funding environment and was cut 2 years ago.

Hmong attitudes and perceptions about learning English. The Hmong who have stayed in Portland feel that with welfare regulations the way they are and employment an absolute necessity, many of them cannot afford the time or money to go to school. Hmong who are employed feel that more English classes are necessary to guarantee job security and, especially, to enhance their chances for advancement. Several individuals interviewed feel somewhat trapped in present entry-level or low-skills occupations because there is no way that they can improve their English. It is difficult for these individuals to work and go to school at the same time. Most have family responsibilities; some take care of the children so other family members can go to school. Others are too tired to attend classes after a long day's work. Some also expressed psychological problems in learning: Stresses from war injuries, relocation trauma, and the burden of providing for a family when job security is uncertain make learning difficult. One man said, "I learn, then forget immediately. I think this is because I am depressed; I worry about taking care of my family; I worry every day if food can be provided and the rent paid."

IV

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

The Portland Hmong community is unique among the sites chosen for this study because it has experienced a massive out-migration which reduced the total Hmong population by three-quarters (from a peak population estimated at 4,500 in December 1981 to a total of 1,050 in April 1983). The reasons for this exodus have been detailed in a preceding section of this report. Of greater importance to the Portland case study of Hmong resettlement are the reasons people had for staying in Portland and the ways that they are adapting. For the last several years, Portland has been suffering from a severely depressed economy. The unemployment rate for the general population continues in double digits and the prognosis is not good: Oregon's economic recovery is predicted to lag several years behind the recovery of the nation as a whole. In addition, the State of Oregon offers only limited public assistance; most notably, members of most families in which both parents are present are not eligible for assistance (other than very limited, one-time emergency funds). In a reverse of the trend throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the population of Oregon has recently declined, resulting in reduced state coffers and, thus, even fewer funds available for public services. Given this financial scenario and the strong pressure that the Hmong who have congregated by the thousands in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California have exerted on their relatives and friends to join them, one wonders why there is any Hmong community in Portland at all. What distinguishes the people who have remained from those who have left the state? What can be learned from the Portland resettlement experience?

Factors in the Decision to Stay

The description of the Hmong population in Portland presented earlier in this report pointed out the diversity among the people who have elected to live in Portland. There is no single answer to the question, "Why did they stay?" There is not a characteristic common to all Hmong in Portland which explains their residence here. Understanding the decision-making process of the members of the current Hmong community would seem much simpler, for example, if they were all of one clan or lineage group, but they are not. The Cha are clearly in the majority, but Her, Kue, Lee, Lo, Mua, Thao, Vang, Xiong and Yang, while not as numerous as the Cha, are also active in the community.

During discussions with individual informants and with groups, the following emerged as important considerations in the decision to remain in Portland: employment and economic well-being, welfare (availability or dependence), education, and the potential of Portland as a viable Hmong community. Although all of these considerations might be involved in a person's decision to stay, each individual's decisions are modified by his/her position in a sub-lineage and lineage group. As one Portland Hmong man put it: "We have a saying that explains my feelings: If you have dry weather, all under the roof are dry and in wet weather all are wet."

Employment and economic well-being. Having a good job in Portland was a weighty consideration, particularly as word filtered back that unemployment rates were as high or higher in California's Central Valley. Some Hmong employed in Portland found service provision jobs in California or made plans for setting up their own businesses there before they moved. Other individuals with steady, established jobs moved with no guarantee of future

employment. Some individuals who stayed also foresaw the opportunity for filling a job left vacant by a fellow Hmong who had decided to move. It appears that the majority of Hmong with good jobs in Portland have preferred the relative security their employment provides to the still only rumored promise of agricultural enterprise in the rapidly growing Hmong communities of California.

Those Hmong without jobs who are not eligible for public assistance other than food stamps appear to be coping by means of traditional Hmong helping networks. Some have stayed if they had a close relative with a good job who might help them out until they too found work. Some have combined resources by moving in with relatives or close friends. The vast majority of the Portland Hmong community supplement their limited resources by finding seasonal work whenever possible. Local growers have increasingly called upon Hmong crews to harvest their crops. Some families also maintain individual gardens in available space, a practice which shows potential for increased supplementation of diet and perhaps income. (The special project RAIN, described in Volume 3, is an example of this potential.)

Welfare. Welfare played a significant role in the decision many individuals made to stay. Some have remained in Portland because they have been in the United States less than 18 months and are thus still eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance. Of those who have been here longer than 18 months, singles, young adults, childless couples and couples with no children under 18 quickly learned that they would not be eligible for assistance whether or not they stayed in Oregon or moved to California.

Quite apart from concerns about eligibility for benefits, many Hmong individuals remaining in Portland voiced the feeling that welfare might not last forever, so that allowing oneself to become dependent upon it might not

be a wise decision. Indeed, some warn others emphatically about the dangers of the pattern of welfare dependence they see emerging. They feel the Hmong might never be self-sufficient if they passively wait for the government to help them. Indeed, what may be comparatively interpreted as a distinctive community philosophy appears to be emerging in Portland regarding the benefits of working (at any cost) versus the problems of remaining on welfare for an extended period. For many Hmong in Portland this attitude is evolving to include avoidance of continued dependence on sources of support beyond direct control by Hmong themselves.

Education. For many of the Hmong adults who left Portland, the possibility of continuing to study English full-time (while receiving public assistance in California) was an overriding factor. Also, California was rumored to offer more hours per week of English instruction than Oregon. However, for some of the families who chose to say in Portland, the education of their children was the issue. One older couple (the husband in his early 60s, the wife about 55) has lived in this country for several years. Neither has ever had a job. They have six children, between the ages of 8 and 20. They subsist in Portland on income they receive from the husband's social security supplement and a special State grant for one of their daughters who is retarded. Together with food stamps, that income is barely enough to pay the rent and feed the family. When asked why they have stayed in Portland, the mother of this family stated:

> I have so many kids. If we moved, it would be fun down there, lots of Hmong, but they wouldn't learn or study. I stayed because I have children and they can go to school here and learn.

Her children's education was a constant theme throughout the interview. Others nave expressed a similar concern about living in large concentrations of Hmong people and not having to learn and use English.

The age regulations for high school eligibility are yet another educational factor keeping some individuals in Portland. As noted earlier, many families with children enrolled in high school in Portland moved to California only to find that California's regulations were different than those of Oregon: Portland Public Schools allows students enrolled in high school to continue to study for their diploma until the age of 21. But a number of students over the age of 19 who moved to California and were unable to enroll to complete their studies have returned alone to finish high school in Portland. For some young men, this has meant leaving their wives and infant children in California while they return to study.

The potential of the Portland community. Underlying all of the above considerations is the perception that Portland is a desirable place to live. Many individuals here have expressed a preference for Portland over other options, particularly California. The Northwest is viewed as a pleasant place for most Southeast Asian refugees to live; the host community response has been relatively favorable; the climate is temperate. In spite of the depressed economy, the majority of the Hmong who have stayed here have been able to find some employment. In a sense, the magnitude of migration of Hmong out of Portland cemented and in some cases created opportunities for those who stayed. Individuals have established and begun to realize their roles and status within the Portland Hmong community here and see no community purpose in moving on to yet another new community. As one household head put it:

> Lots of Hmong people in Portland feel that Portland is a place where growth can still happen. California is all full grown. There is no more space to grow. But in Portland there is some opportunity for starting a business, and buying land and homes is less expensive than California.

Despite the continuing presence of diverse elements within the Hmong community here, a cohesiveness appears to have emerged within the last year. This community reorganization is based on a coordinated leadership model which is giving direction to the Portland Hmong. This model will be discussed further below.

The Emerging Structure of the Hmong Community of Portland

At the height of the growth of Portland's Hmong population, the community was fraught with factionalism. Myriad loyalties existed, whether tied to a particular clan group leader, religious affiliation, or social service agency (via the Hmong individuals employed there). The community was diverse and divided. One of the results of the massive out-migration which subsequently occurred was a reduction of factionalism. There are many reasons for this. Some of the factions simply left. However, diverse groups still exist in Portland. Their willingness to cooperate and form a unified front in part may be a function of the smaller, more viable size of the community. Such unity is also due to a large extent to the nature of the present leadership in Portland. The leaders who decided to stay have been consolidating their positions over a period of years and have established a firm foundation within the community. In addition, a new element of leadership was introduced. A Hmong man from Hawaii was invited to direct a newly formed MAA, the Southeast Asian Refugee Federation (SEARF). In 1981, he and a few members of his community in Hawaii moved to Portland and have taken an active role in the Hmong community here. This man is currently Refugee Co-Coordinator for the City of Portland. He and two other Hmong leaders already residing in Portland appear to be the most significant Hmong community leaders at this time and state that they attempt to maintain constant communication with one another.

There have been basically two types of Hmong leaders in Portland: those who are perceived by Hmong community members to be their leaders and those who the world outside of the Hmong community perceives as Hmong leaders. Before the large numbers of Hmong moved to California, these two types of "leaders" did not often overlap. That is, the outside world of refugee service providers tended to assume that ability to speak English was the foremost prerequisite for Hmong leadership. Consequently, that status was readily conferred on bright young Hmong men who worked as interpreters and aides. Though some individuals filled both leadership roles, in general community leaders in the traditional sense were not visible to the outside world. As the Portland community has evolved, the leadership structure appears to have been refined--or at least defined to outsiders in a way that includes both types of leaders. The current leaders who are most visible to the outside world also appear to carry heavy leadership responsibility within the community. They emphasize, however, that they are not respected because of their knowledge of Hmong tradition, but rather because of their higher education and ability to speak English. The emerging leadership structure has the following configuration:

1. major leaders who filter contacts from the outside world (that is, to gain access to the Portland Hmong community an outsider must go through the proper channels, visible Hmong leaders, who will then consult with at least two other leaders--usually Hmong Family Association board members--before any decision is made);

2. the Hmong Family Association of Oregon, Inc., a private non-profit organization with by-laws and a Board of Directors; and

3. the Council of Elders, who advise the community on cultural affairs, particularly advising the youth of the community about Hmong culture, history, traditions, etc.

There seems to be another reason for the emergence of this unified structure for presenting the community to the outside world. As one leader

put it, "We are grateful for all that has been done for us, but it's hurt us more than it's helped...we have to do for ourselves."

Historically, the Hmong have been known for their independence and industriousness. Those who find employment here quickly gain the reputation of being reliable, hard workers. Simply receiving various kinds of aid has not promoted a positive sense of self-worth. The general perception in the Hmong community is that although the various agencies have made significant attempts to serve the Hmong, they have not succeeded in meeting their needs. Discrepancies exist between the perceptions of Hmong clients and those of agency personnel regarding the role of the agencies. Some Hmong suggest that perhaps Hmong characteristics and needs have not been clearly understood. Some agency personnnel suggest that the Hmong must recognize the system within which they are now operating and adapt to its rules of behavior. Privately, some Hmong mention that they wonder if agencies aren't more concerned about the perpetuation of their programs than serving the needs of the clients.

In response to the need for Hmong to "do for themselves," the Portland Hmong leadership seems to be making a very conscious effort to coordinate the resources and energies of the community as a whole. The leadership, which has developed considerable expertise in interacting with the host community's institutions, is defining Hmong community needs and interests and identifying ways to address them from a Hmong perspective while utilizing the tools of the host society's system.

A very important part of this carefully formed, emerging leadership role is the emphasis placed on appreciation for and conservation of Hmong culture and the perception of being Hmong. In addition to being a vital element in the maintenance of an individual's positive self-image, a conscious recognition of one's "Hmongness" has potential as a unifying force.

It is much too soon to tell if the Portland Hmong will realize their aspirations. But given the desire for success, a community-based philosophy of reorganization and development, and enlightened, informed assistance from the public and private sector, success may be possible.

Summary of the Site Findings

The following summarizes findings from the Portland case study of Hmong resettlement:

- Federal and state policies have had a significant impact on secondary migration.
- Secondary migration from Oregon to California has greatly affected the composition and reorganization of the local Hmong community.
- The Hmong remaining in Portland have purposively reorganized to overcome factionalism and develop a community identity and consensus.
- The Hmong community in Portland desires to be economically self-sufficient (both on the individual level and on the community organization level).
- Many Hmong feel public assistance funds should be tied directly to employment or economic development projects.
- The desire to maintain "Hmongness"--Hmong ethnic cultural identity and traditions--is strong and is considered functional to the successful resettlement of the community.
- The decline in Portland's economy and labor market have made it difficult for many Hmong to find permanent employment. These conditions continue to the present. Despite these facts, many families have at least one member employed.
- The Hmong in Portland feel that they have not benefited from local employment service programs as much as other Southeast Asian refugees. Many Hmong cannot effectively use one of the two major employment seeking strategies practiced by local employment service providers.
- Portland Hmong tend to find their own jobs using Hmong community networks. Many who did not find employment moved to California.

- Employers of the Hmong in Portland rate them highly as employees.
- Hmong leadership in Portland is beginning to identify possible economic development, training and labor market strategies.
- The Hmong are becoming more involved in seasonal agricultural work. Approximately 500-600 Hmong from California and Oregon worked in local Portland agriculture during the summer of 1983.
- Few vocational/job training opportunities presently exist for the Hmong in Portland.
- Hmong adults feel ESL instruction needs to be more closely tied to vocational training and employment.
- Hmong high school students continue to have difficulty meeting minimal competencies for standard high school graduation requirements.
- Hmong high school students are not obtaining enough access vocational training programs.
- The delivery of educational programs to meet Hmong needs is difficult because of shifting population patterns.

REFERENCES

Green, Karen Reed & Stephen Reder. Factors in individual acquisition of English: A longitudinal study of Hmong adults. In Glenn Hendricks (Ed.), The Hmong in Transition. Minneapolis and New York: Jointly published by Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, and Center for Immigration Studies, New York, in press.

Reder, Stephen. A Hmong community's acquisition of English. In B. Downing & D. Olney (Eds.), The Hmong in the West. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Urban Studies and Regional Affairs, 1982.

Scott, George M., Jr. The Hmong refugee community in San Diego: Theoretical and practical implications of its continuing ethnic solidarity. Anthropological Quarterly, July, 1982, 55(3), 146-160.