

CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS



REPORT ON SOMALI YOUTH ISSUES

BY:

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AND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April of 2005, Uptown began experiencing a series of armed robberies allegedly committed by Somali youth. The increase in interactions with the police and the Somali community prompted MDCR Civil Right's Director, Jayne Baccus Khalifa* to commission a consultant, Shukri Adan, to research issues in the Somali community. This report serves three purposes: (1) to acknowledge the problem of crime and gang activity in the Somali youth community; (2) to identify the difficulties faced by the Somali community, and ways these difficulties contribute to increases in crime committed by its youth; and (3) to make recommendations on how the City of Minneapolis can work with the Somali community, other governmental agencies, schools, and social service agencies to coordinate strategies to address these issues.

Throughout this report, the author identified serious challenges within the Somali community such as poverty, lack of recreational opportunities for youth, language barriers, educational barriers, homelessness and criminal gang activity.

* Jayne Baccus Khalifa was the Civil Rights Director from July 2004 – May 2006.

Some Somali immigrant youth lost immediate family during the Somali civil war and/or have survived traumatic experiences in refugee camps, resulting in problems adjusting to life in the United States. Additionally, many of the guardians or parents interviewed did not realize these challenges until their children were in court facing truancy charges or other criminal activity.

The author's most important recommendation is to develop more cohesive coordination with school administrators, teachers, non-profits, government and law enforcement officials in order to track and prevent gang growth and violence in the Somali youth community. Specific recommendations include working with existing partnerships, such as the Youth Coordinating Board, engaging the community and policymakers in solutions regarding Somali youth issues, collaborating with philanthropic agencies to create a youth drop-in center, and increasing outreach to immigrant communities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 2005, the frequency of violent crime in the Uptown Area of Minneapolis surged, attracting nationwide attention.¹ During this surge in April of 2005,² Uptown experienced a series of armed robberies concentrated in the area of 24th to 34th Streets on the northern and southern boundary, to Hennepin and Pleasant Avenues on the eastern and western boundary.³

During the morning of May 1, 2005, the police arrested four Somali males, ranging in age from 16 to 19, in connection with the robberies.⁴ Law enforcement officials later confirmed that gang members, comprised of Somali juveniles, carried out the crimes.⁵ Alarmed by the nature and frequency of the robberies, residents, business owners and patrons voiced their concerns to Minneapolis officials.

¹ Richard Willing, *Robbers brandish BB guns, police say*, USA TODAY, (Jan. 15, 2006), http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-01-15-bb-guns_x.htm.

² Repya, Robyn, *Four arrested in Uptown Robberies, Charges Expected* SOUTHWEST JOURNAL, (May 5, 2005),

<http://www.southwestjournal.com/articles/2005/05/06/news/news04.txt>.

³ See Appendix A.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

In response to the community, MDCR Director Jayne Baccus Khalifa commissioned a consultant, Shukri Adan, to conduct a study into Somali youth and criminal activity in Minneapolis.⁶

The author submits this report for three purposes: (1) to acknowledge the problem of crime and gang activity in the Somali youth community; (2) to identify the difficulties faced by the Somali community, and ways these difficulties contribute to increases in crime committed by its youth; and (3) to make recommendations for the City to work with the Somali community, other governmental agencies, schools, and social service agencies to coordinate strategies to address these issues.

⁶ The study is authorized under the MINNEAPOLIS, MINN., FIRE AND POLICE PROTECTION CODE TITLE 9, §172.60 and MINNEAPOLIS, MINN. CODE §141.80. Even though the scope of this study was prompted by criminal activity in the 10th Ward, it will reference other Wards affected by these overlaying issues.

II. BACKGROUND

In 1991, former Somali leader Siad Barre was removed from power. Since then, civil war and clan warfare continues to devastate the economy in Somalia.⁷ Consequently, a large influx of Somali refugees began immigrating steadily to Minneapolis and other Minnesota cities. About one-third of Minnesota's Somali residents emigrated directly from refugee camps; others settled in another state and later relocated to Minnesota.⁸

Minnesota is now home to the country's largest concentration of Somali immigrants. Sources estimate the Somali population in Minnesota at 14,000–15,000 statewide.⁹ Most Somali immigrants reside in the metro area, with the greatest number in Minneapolis.¹⁰

⁷ Kebba Darboe, *New Immigrants in Minnesota: The Somali Immigration and Assimilation*, 19 JOURNAL OF DEV. SOC'Y, 458-472 (2003), at: <http://jds.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/19/4/458>.

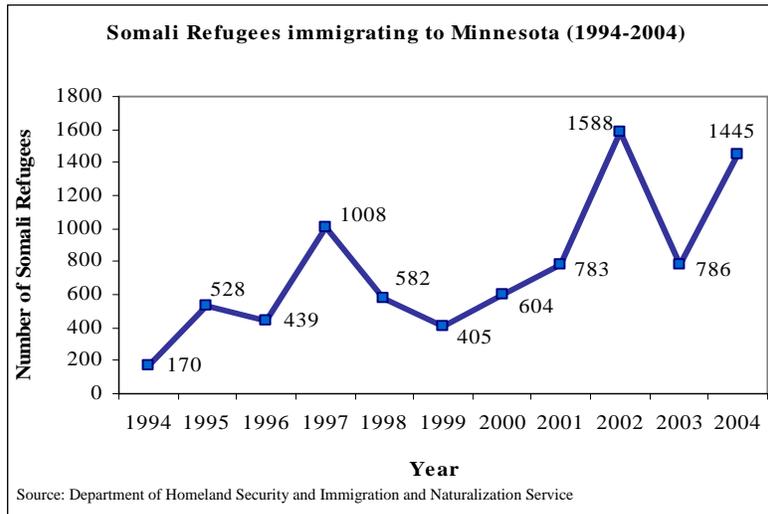
⁸ The Minneapolis Foundation, *Immigration in Minnesota* (2006), at: <http://www.minneapolisfoundation.org/immigration/africa.htm>

⁹ Paula Woessner, *Size of Twin Cities Muslim Community Difficult to Determine*, THE FEDERAL RESERVE BANK - COMMUNITY DIVIDEND (2002), at: <http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/cd/02-1/population.cfm>.

¹⁰ See supra note 7 and accompany text (Data from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning on children in public schools who Somali-speaking. In contrast, differs from many Somalis estimate their population in MN to be at 80,000 or more.

Almost a third of Minnesota public school students speak Somali at home.¹¹ Smaller populations of Somalis reside in Rochester, Owatonna, and other suburban and Greater Minnesota communities.¹²

The chart below provides data on Somali immigration rates according to the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Naturalization Service:



The increase in the Somali population in Minneapolis has greatly transformed the City's social and economic landscape.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² The Minneapolis Foundation, *Immigration in Minnesota* (2006), at: <http://www.minneapolisfoundation.org/immigration/africa.htm>.

The number of Somali-oriented businesses along Lake Street and in the Cedar-Riverside area is increasing. Today, more than 120 African-owned businesses reside along Minneapolis' Lake Street corridor.¹³ Many Somalis also contribute to the Minnesota economy by working to provide services to other Somalis, or by engaging in various other entrepreneurial efforts.¹⁴

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴The Minneapolis Foundation, *Immigration in Minnesota* (2006), <http://www.minneapolisfoundation.org/immigration/africa.htm>.

III. METHODOLOGY

The author conducted this study using a “research-corroboration”¹⁵ method. First, the author selected various “official” resources, and cited them herein. Second, the author conducted a series of interviews and discussions in order to: (1) identify issues; (2) gather facts; (3) identify possible solutions; and (4) make recommendations.

¹⁵ A “research-corroboration” method utilizes the techniques of qualitative research and corroboration, described as the following: “**Qualitative research** is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Detailed data is gathered through open-ended questions that provide direct quotations. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation. The purpose of **corroboration** is not to confirm whether people’s perceptions are accurate or true reflections of a situation, but rather to ensure that the research findings accurately reflect people’s perceptions, whatever they may be. The purpose of corroboration is to help researchers increase their understanding of the probability that their findings will be seen as credible or worthy of consideration by others.” James P. Key, *Research Design in Occupational Education*, § Qualitative Research, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY (2003), at: <http://www.okstate.edu/ag/agedcm4h/academic/aged5980a/5980/newpage21.htm>.

The author also considered several culturally sensitive factors from the Somali community into the study, such as:

1. On many occasions, Somali community members identify individuals in their community with their professions and seek those individuals for information and services; and
2. Many Somali community members provide information more candidly to members of their own community than to those considered “outsiders.”

Finally, since the concern prompting this study was the Somali youth in the community, the author took several steps to incorporate a full perspective on: (1) the parents in the Somali community; (2) the teachers working with Somali students; (3) community agencies catering to the Somali community; (4) police officers from the Minneapolis Police Department; and (5) other Somali youth.

In sum, this study identifies the experiences of the Somali youth in the community, which is essential to the development of solutions for in order to aid in the development of solutions for the challenges they face.

IV. DIFFICULTIES CONFRONTING SOMALI YOUTH IN MINNEAPOLIS

The factors contributing to crime by Somali youth are complex and numerous. The author's research revealed that Somali youth crime usually stems from one or more of the following root causes: (1) compromised mental health; (2) poverty; (3) community resource issues; (4) homelessness; (5) education issues; and (6) truancy and gang membership.

This study will consecutively outline many of the obstacles, with each discussion intended to provide the reader with greater insight into the complexity of the issues.

A. Mental Health in the Somali Community

Many of the challenges faced by Somali immigrants are due, in part, to their traumatic experiences as refugees. For many, mental health issues, resulting from experiences of stress after leaving a country torn apart by civil war, exacerbate the natural challenges involved in acclimating to a new country.

One individual described the Somali refugee experience as follows:

Many arrived having recently experienced the loss of family members from war or persecution, and many are survivors of violence and danger themselves. As a result, relatively large proportions of these groups may have frail mental and physical health. In addition, many have been deprived of vital sources of social support through death or separation, and many Somali, more recently arrived, are largely responsible for the support of relatives who are still in refugee camps.¹⁶

Individuals refugees may face numerous traumatic events; they may experience and/or witness fighting and destruction, violent acts perpetrated against family or friends, or sexual violence. Having left their homes, refugees often experience loneliness, resentment, violence, and racism in their new locations. Moreover, refugee camps are often overcrowded, archaic in design, and plagued by the threat of infectious diseases.

¹⁶ WILDER RESEARCH CENTER, THE ISSUES BEHIND THE OUTCOMES: BARRIERS AND SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES THAT AFFECT OUTCOMES FOR SOMALI, HMONG, AFRICAN AMERICAN, AND AMERICAN INDIAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE MN FAMILY INVESTMENT PROGRAM (MFIP), AMHERST H. WILDER FOUNDATION, 21 (APR. 2003).

Additional chronic stressors for refugees include socioeconomic disadvantages, poor physical health, and the collapse of social support. Furthermore, many Somali refugees, including the youth, arrive in the United States while suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).¹⁷

It is not common practice for most refugees to seek professional counseling to assist in overcoming mental traumas. Unfortunately, this report revealed that many Somali elders mistakenly assumed that the younger refugees would overcome their difficult experiences without additional intervention once they resettled in the new country.

¹⁷ American Psychiatric Association defines Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as affecting “people who have survived earthquakes, airplane crashes, terrorist bombings, inner-city violence, domestic abuse, rape, war, genocide, and other disasters, both natural and human made. In people with PTSD, memories of the trauma reoccur unexpectedly, and episodes called ‘flashbacks’ intrude into their current lives. This happens in sudden, vivid memories that are accompanied by painful emotions that take over the victim’s attention. This re-experience, or ‘flashback,’ of the trauma is a recollection. It may be so strong that individuals almost feel like they are actually experiencing the trauma again or seeing it unfold before their eyes and in nightmares.” American Psychiatric Association, *Let’s Talk Facts...about Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* (1999), <http://www.psych.org/disasterpsych/fs/ptsd.cfm>.

For many of the Somali youth who have not been able to recover from their experiences in war or refugee camps, life has continued with a pattern of self-destructive behaviors, eventually leading to gang membership and/or a life of crime. The numbers of Somali youth affected by this phenomenon are greater with those who have lost their immediate family and resettled in the United States with extended family (i.e. aunt, uncle, cousin, or family friend).

B. Poverty

The Refugee Resettlement Program coordinates services to assist refugees in making the transition to life in the United States. Some services include resettlement and placement, financial and medical assistance, as well as employment and social services.¹⁸

For example, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides eight months of economic assistance for food and shelter. After that time, the ORR expects families to be self-sufficient.

¹⁸ Minn. Dep't of Human Services, Refugee Assistance, (2006), http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/economic_support/documents/pub/dhs_id_004115.hcsp.

Notwithstanding this support, the majority of the Somali immigrants utilizing government assistance secure factory or service based employment, which does not lead to eventual self-sufficiency.¹⁹ Moreover, these jobs often pay minimum wage, which does not correspond with the actual costs of living. Many Somali immigrants also believe that:

The rules [required by economic assistance programs] do not allow them the time they need to learn English and [obtain] enough formal education to qualify for jobs that will allow them to support themselves. In addition, because of their typically large family size, the [services] available through welfare are not enough to overcome some of the extra difficulties that they face in becoming self-sufficient. Besides the need for jobs, at more than minimum wage, these [services] also include finding and paying for childcare, and [having the funds for] medical care to cover their families.²⁰

Therefore, living in poverty might be one factor that leads Somali youth to resort to criminal activity.

¹⁹ WILDER RESEARCH CENTER, THE ISSUES BEHIND THE OUTCOMES: BARRIERS AND SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES THAT AFFECT OUTCOMES FOR SOMALI, HMONG, AFRICAN AMERICAN, AND AMERICAN INDIAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE MN FAMILY INVESTMENT PROGRAM (MFIP), AMHERST H. WILDER FOUNDATION, 21 (APR. 2003).

²⁰ *Id.*

C. Recreation

Statistically, criminal activity increases in the summertime. This is particularly the case in areas where there is a low number of structured youth programs.²¹ Studies have also shown that many youth engage in criminal activities because of a lack of “something to do.” Conversely, recreational activities require participation, which, in turn, involves time, effort and commitment. Furthermore, recreational activities also provide opportunities for youth to develop coping skills and resiliency, which assist in the avoidance of truancy, crime and violence. By working collaboratively to create and support recreational programs, families, schools, parks, health and community organizations foster healthy youth development.

²¹ Kathy Hunt, *Recreation Services for Youth-at-Risk*, PARK & REC. DEP’T, ONT. CAN. (2006) at: <http://www.lin.ca/lin/resource/html/twy.htm>.

Poverty, however, is still a factor and limits the availability of resources for recreational funds in most Somali families, although some recreational programs are affordable and/or free of charge. Most programs offered in community centers charge a nominal participation fee, even on a sliding scale. Nevertheless, many immigrants live on fixed incomes and nominal fees can pose a barrier to program participation.

A lack of transportation often prevents Somali youth from participation in recreational activities. The majority of Somali families do not have vehicles when they arrive in the United States. First, in situations where cars are available, several family members and friends often share them. Shared vehicles are often only used for very necessary functions such as work, school, medical appointments and grocery shopping. Second, the expense of insurance, gas, repairs and maintenance often prevent most families from purchasing a vehicle. As a result, most families choose to live within the City because of accessibility to affordable public modes of transportation.

One possible solution would be, in part, to orient some recreational activities towards Somali youth. This may thwart some temptation to engage in criminal activity. In the end, collaboration between local government and private non-profits is instrumental in order to encourage Somali families to access these available programs.

D. Language Barriers

Lack of English proficiency within the Somali community can also precipitate involvement in juvenile delinquent behavior. Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, write, or understand are defined as “Limited English Proficient” (LEP):

LEP individuals are further defined as those aged three to 21; enrolled or preparing to enroll in elementary or secondary school; who were not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing or understanding English may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the state’s proficiency level of achievement on state assessments, the ability to achieve success in classrooms where the instruction is in English, or the opportunity to participate fully in society.²²

²² Jamal Abedi, *Inclusion of students with Limited English Proficiency in NAEP* (Jan. 2004), at: <http://www.nagb.org/pubs/conferences/abedi.doc>

Children have an easier time learning English than their parents, but they are still challenged with obtaining unaccented fluency in the language. One concern regarding the language barrier is that sometimes Somali children will try to limit their parents' access to information about themselves. For example, children may take advantage of their parents' inability to communicate by reducing their access to information on behavioral or academic problems at school. Recently in Minneapolis, school administrators recognized these problems and started notified the parents of behavioral issues through a Somali teacher or aide.

Acknowledging the existing language barrier helps to reinforces the need to support the City's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) policy, which it instituted as part of a federal mandate. Communication gaps tend to lead to low enrollment of Somali youth in community programs. This study revealed "LEP parents" have trouble identifying available youth programs in the community, which contributes to the low enrollment of Somali youth.

E. Community Resources and Programs

Results from this study show there is a lack of funding for existing programs and a lack of participation in such programs by Somali youth.

1. Existence of Appropriate Programs

In neighborhoods with high concentrations of newly arrived immigrants, community agencies have attempted to respond to the myriad of problems with relatively limited funding.²³ For example, in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, which has the largest concentration of Somali families in a 5-mile radius, three youth workers serve approximately 300 families.²⁴

²³ Currently, in the 2006 Budget the Minneapolis Health Department has additional funds available for community programs.

²⁴ Pillsbury United Communities funded many of the programs offered at the Brian Coyle Community Center. Many of the Somali community organizations expressed frustration and the sensation of helplessness from their limited role as consultants for various, more established organizations instead of being funded directly.

One worker from the Brian Coyle Community Center, whom the author interviewed privately, expressed his frustration with the following issues:

- (1) working longer hours because the need was so critical;
- (2) more kids on the street;
- (3) discouragement on accomplishing their work while funding tightened;
- (4) witnessing too many unsolvable issues; and
- (5) feeling personal failure and responsibility when children he works with are incarcerated.

Nevertheless, the youth worker expressed optimism the consolidation of services will help solve some of the issues plaguing Somali youth.

2. Mainstream Programs

Despite the existence of many mainstream youth programs, Somalis, for the most part, do not utilize these resources. Many of the more mainstream organizations often fail to conduct outreach activities or connect with the Somali community. Therefore, many Somali community members are unaware of the existence of these resources.

Additionally, the stereotyping within the Somali community and the mainstream community sometimes affect enrollment in available programs. Some community organizations expressed concern that Somali immigrants seem unapproachable and overly strict. Meanwhile, many Somali families have misconceptions that mainstream organizations offer only Christian-based programming that encourages boys and girls to work together on recreational activities, which is contrary to Somali norms and traditions. Moreover, many Somali girls are often expected to attend after-school classes or stay home to help their families, leaving them with fewer options for recreation. Thus, there is a concern that the exclusion of girls from community based programs further limits their options for extracurricular activities

One of the ways to dispel these misconceptions is to encourage mainstream organizations to increase outreach and education to Somali families.

F. Homelessness among Somali Youth

StreetWorks, a collaborative youth-outreach organization, serves approximately 120 Somali children considered chronically homeless. Homeless youth who do not stay in shelters often are undercounted because they intermittently live with friends and family.²⁵ Often times, homeless youth, have “a difficult start early in life and [experienced] serious upheaval before reaching adulthood.”²⁶

Some Somali youth arrive in Minnesota with extended family because they have lost immediate family in the civil war. In Somalia, society enforced a strict moral code and expected its youth to be loyal and obedient. In the United States, many Somali children have started to rebel, and as a result, the parents, elders or guardians have lost their authority.

²⁵ Individuals under the age of 18, who reside primarily in shelters, live or “double up” with friends, or stay in inhabitable places, such as condemned buildings or under freeway bridges are considered chronically homeless. WILDER RESEARCH CENTER, HOMELESS YOUTH IN MINNESOTA, AMHERST H. WILDER FOUNDATION, 21 (FEB. 2003).

²⁶ *Id.*

A “role-reversal” occurs when parents become dependent upon their children to act as translators or interpreters for family communication with the outside world, which sometimes results in a loss of respect for parental authority. Somali teens find their growing autonomy leads to family tensions; parents or elders feel that their children are forgetting their “culture” or becoming “too American.” On the other hand, children become frustrated with the feeling that they are living in two culturally different worlds. Nevertheless, many Somali children expect their parents or guardians to adjust to life in the United States as quickly as they have, and grow frustrated when this does not occur.

With regard to the homeless Somali youth, as home life becomes more tumultuous, they run away rather than work through the challenges. Thus, after repeatedly suffering problems at home and/or school, many Somali children experiencing homelessness have exhausted traditional support systems existing in family and clan relations.

Likewise, after a clan abandons a member, this decimates the member's social support system. Often times, the clan members will only convene again during a death of the estranged member. Because of the breakdown in family relationships, these young Somalis are starting and joining gangs to replace their erstwhile clan support systems. Many of the outcast Somali youth living on the streets have sought refuge in the staircases of the Cedar-Riverside high-rises or in the parks during the summertime.

For a female Somali, alienation from her clan and/or family propels her into a more dire cultural situation due to the additional burden of "disgrace," which is not imposed on males. Teenage pregnancy is rare among Somali females; however, the consequences of teen pregnancy are so severe that many feel running away is their only option.

G. Resources in Education

1. Bilingual teachers

Immigrants and limited English speakers are among the fastest growing populations in U.S. public schools:

The Urban Institute finds that the share of children enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade that is composed of children of immigrants (including both foreign-born children and U.S.-born children with foreign-born parents) more than tripled from 6 to 20 percent between 1970 and 2000. By 2015, if current immigration levels continue, children of immigrants will constitute 30 percent of the nation's school population.²⁷

The Minneapolis Public School (MPS) system attracts the majority of Somali refugees due to its reputation as a progressive school district. This reputation developed as a direct result of the number of bilingual teachers that were in the school system. Most of these teachers were highly educated Somalis that came to Minnesota as refugees.

²⁷ ANN MORSE, A LOOK AT IMMIGRANT YOUTH: PROSPECTS AND PROMISING PRACTICES, NAT'L CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (MAR. 2005), <http://www.ncsl.org/print/health/CPIimmigrantyouth.pdf>.

Prior to leaving Somalia, many had been doctors, scientists, engineers and administrators. As they began to resettle in Minnesota, they were unable to practice their former professions and, instead, became teachers in their new communities. These teachers integrated a generation of Somali students into mainstream society. The students pursued college and became professionals.²⁸ The teachers interviewed by the author expressed that, even though the Somali students had difficulty with English, they excelled in science and math. Since many of the bilingual teachers were members of the Somali community, they became directly involved in the community oversight of their students. They also felt comfortable routinely calling parents about any misbehavior by the Somali students. In turn, the parents were also actively participating in conferences resulting in an open dialogue between parents and teachers.

Unfortunately, many of these teachers were laid off as part of the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB) introduced in 2002.

²⁸ See Appendix B.

The NCLB mandate included stringent new teacher qualifications; requiring bilingual teachers to meet these “highly qualified” staff requirements by 2006. To be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have:

- a. a bachelor's degree;
- b. full state certification or licensure; and
- c. prove that they know each subject they teach.²⁹

“Taken in combination with the chronic shortage of teachers, particularly in hard-to-serve schools in urban areas and schools with a high percentage of LEP students, this requirement may exacerbate the challenges that schools face in their ability to attract and retain certified bilingual teachers.”³⁰ As a result, this federal policy mandating that all teachers must be certified and have their teaching license required school administrators to lay off many of these bilingual teachers.

²⁹ U.S. Dep’t of Ed., <http://www.ed.gov/nclb> (Last visited May 30, 2006).

³⁰ ANN MORSE, A LOOK AT IMMIGRANT YOUTH: PROSPECTS AND PROMISING PRACTICES, NAT’L CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (MAR. 2005), <http://www.ncsl.org/print/health/CPIimmigranyouth.pdf>.

2. Charter schools

The loss of bilingual Somali teachers devastated to MPS for two reasons: (1) the students miss the supportive environment and teaching skills of these educators; and (2) charter schools have easily recruited the bilingual teachers and many of the students.

MPS lost approximately \$10,000 for each child that left the public school system to the charter school system. The charter schools were able to recruit the students because they hired teachers laid-off by MPS as bilingual aides and teaching assistants. However, many of the charter schools are located in remote areas, leaving the parents with an added strain of having to secure transportation for their children. Again, the issue of limited transportation has a disparate impact on the Somali community.

3. Inappropriate placement

Students who arrive as refugees are often placed in classes with students their own age. Problems with inappropriate placement often occur when these students arrive in Minneapolis from various refugee camps with little or no formal education.

This might be a successful model for very young children; however, it is not the ideal solution for children enrolled in third grade and up.³¹

H. Truancy and Gang Membership

This study revealed three primary organized Somali gangs operating in Minneapolis; they are:

1. The Rough Tough Somalis (RTS) was one of the first Somali gangs in Minnesota. RTS started out as a non-violent gang, whose members tended to act out rather than harming people or property. Some of those former RTS members interviewed by the author made a successful transition from “gang life” to model citizens. The most infamous former member living in the Twin Cities is Keyse Jama. In fact, the U.S. Supreme Court heard his immigration case.³² His experiences transformed him and compelled him to turn his life around in a more positive direction.

³¹ Here, many students refer to Minneapolis Public High School as “junkyards.”

³² *Jama v. Immigration & Customs Enforcement*, 543 U.S. 335 (2005); *see also*, Tim Schepers, *Does the Punishment Fit the Crime? U.S. Alien Deportation and the Requirement of Acceptance in Jama v. I.N.S.*, 28 *HAMLIN L. REV.* 389 (2005) (*discussing* the background facts of *Jama*, current and past deportation law, and arguing that the U.S. Supreme Court should overrule the Eight Circuit’s 2003 ruling that the INS can deport aliens to Somalia even though it lacks a central government capable of accepting them).

2. The Hot Boyz Gang was established after RTS. The original members of Hot Boyz formed a rap group and ended their gang related activities. However, members who joined after them engaged in more aggressive and violent behavior.³³ The most notable factor about this group is that they are considered extremely aggressive, carry weapons and are alleged to have committed armed robbery.
3. The Somali Mafia is a very violent, highly organized gang. They carry weapons and prey on Somali shopkeepers and businesses in the various Somali malls. The Somali Mafia has functioned under the “police radar” since its establishment. The Somali Mafia is very sophisticated at eliciting loyalty among members and actively recruiting Somali youth to join its ranks.

Currently, the Metro Gang Strike Force (MGSF) has approximately fifty-two individuals identified as connected with a Somali gang.³⁴ Somali gang members comprise less than one percent (1%) of all individuals identified as gang members in Minnesota.³⁵ “The Somali gangs that do exist generally consist of a small number of loosely connected members who have adopted the gang culture, including signs and symbols to show their affiliation. Gang members trying to establish themselves are often the most violent.”³⁶

Frequently, teachers in the school systems are the first to recognize behavioral issues with Somali youth. The same children identified as “troublemakers” by community members eventually became high school dropouts and later transitioned into “gang members.”

³⁴ Howie Padilla, *Law Enforcement Officials Work to Curtail Gangs*, STAR TRIBUNE, June 8, 2006.

³⁵ *Id.* The MGSF has identified 11,773 people as gang members in MN.

³⁶ *Id.*

In many cases, gang members engaged in increasingly “at risk” behavior (i.e. unprotected sexual activity or drug use) as part of their “acting out.” Many of those interviewed had the perception that they felt “free to do as they pleased” with no parental or societal repercussions.³⁷

Truancy³⁸ from school is a common factor for the Somali youth interviewed in this study. These individuals are vulnerable to being recruited as gang members. Additionally, these children confessed to the author that they “started hanging out with gang members while they were suppose to be in school.”³⁹

³⁷ Interviews with Somali youth (Jan. 2006) (On file with author).

³⁸ Truancy or a truant child is defined in Minn. Stat. § 260A.01: “**Continuing truant** means a child who is subject to the compulsory instruction requirements of section 120A.22 and is absent from instruction in a school, without valid excuse, within a single school year for: (1) three days if the child is in elementary school; or (2) three or more class periods on three days if the child is in middle school, junior high school, or high school.”

³⁹ See Appendix C.

School administrators and teachers are developing lines of communication to be more effective in conversing with law enforcement officials and parents when truancy patterns develop, thus aiding schools in tracking and preventing gang growth and violence.⁴⁰

Finally, drug use is becoming increasingly common among Somali gang members. As a result, parents in the Somali community observed an increase in violent crime since the influence of drugs spread among Somali youth.

As previously mentioned, many displaced Somali youth are replacing a traditional family structure with gang relationships. At the beginning of this project, the author's assumption was that these "gangs" were merely a loose-knit group of raucous teenagers; however, the results of this study proved to the contrary.⁴¹

⁴⁰ In an attempt to improve lines of communication and understanding with the Somali Community, the author recommends that the Minneapolis Police Department's Cadet Program consider incorporating training in diversity and cultural awareness into its officer training programs, rather than in a post-graduate program.

⁴¹ Representative(s) from the 5th precinct identified the following trends in juvenile crime: (1) crimes by Somali youth in the 5th precinct are being perpetrated by a gang; (2) there is a lack of specific juvenile investigators which contributes greatly to their handling of those crimes; and (3) there is a decentralization of core juvenile services which affects juvenile crime rates.

These groups are indeed criminal gangs; however, they tend not to have a particular leader. It follows therefore, that there is no “established hierarchy” in many Somali gangs. Nevertheless, older members are often treated with more deference and respect than new members. Moreover, older members often have the “final say” on whether a new member can join.

This study also revealed that these gangs are becoming more sophisticated at networking and collaborating, often times working together to:

- (1) bail each other out of jail;
- (2) support and visit each other during incarcerations in order to pass information in and out of the prison system;
- (3) ask younger gang members to take responsibility for crimes as a show of loyalty to the gang, because they are more likely to be sent to juvenile detention centers for less time.

These behaviors result in traits evidenced in the mainstream society: the formerly incarcerated Somali youth acquire more skills that are criminal, therefore increasing their street credibility and recognition.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Recommendation One: Address the Concerns Raised in this Report with the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board

The Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board is an intergovernmental organization dedicated to the healthy, comprehensive development of all Minneapolis children and youth (ages 0-20) through collaborative action. The Youth Coordinating Board is comprised of the following representatives:

- (1) the Mayor;
- (2) two City Council members;
- (3) two Hennepin County Commissioners;
- (4) two Minneapolis Public School Board members;
- (5) one State representative;
- (6) one State senator;
- (7) one Hennepin County Judge;
- (8) one Library Board member;
- (9) one Parks and Recreation Board member; and
- (10) the Hennepin County Attorney;

The author recommends that the Youth Coordinating Board consider cultural and diversity training.

B. Recommendation Two: Explore a Youth “Drop-in” Center.

The author recommends that the City focus its efforts in confronting Somali youth crime, by collaborating with philanthropic agencies to create a “drop-in” center in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Presently, Hennepin County funds various non-profit agencies to perform “ground work” in neighborhoods.

To members of the Somali community, youth participation in extracurricular activities is the most important factor for crime prevention. This was the most serious need by those interviewed during the course of this report. Interviewees related English as a second language classes, basketball and soccer as key activities.

All community members realize that lack of activities for youth during “free time” is a significant factor to the Somali gang activity.

A youth “drop-in” center is critical to for the following

reasons:

1. It would be identified in the community as the place to take your child to access services;
2. It would be a center for members of the community to participate in reaching their youth: “a one-stop-shop for services”;
3. Volunteers would have a place to reach out to the community, especially university students who have expressed an interest in their neighbors;
4. Police would have a resource to contact parents of juveniles they have come into contact with, saving the City significant resources for police;
5. Food shelf activities for hungry youth could be provided at this location;
6. Health workers and child/teen checkups could be implemented in this center; and
7. It can be used to identify youth in trouble and to exert positive peer pressure to influence good behavior from other participants on the “right track.”

StreetWorks is one effective model of service delivery to homeless youth. On many occasions throughout this project, StreetWorks seemed to have a clear grasp on the problems and identified solutions for dealing with homeless youth because of its experience serving children on a daily basis.

C. Recommendation Three: Community Outreach

Community Outreach is an integral part of the solution. Immigrant communities generally view members outside their community with suspicion. The Community Outreach Plan should incorporate members of the community, since they would be able to connect with them because trust is already established.

Outreach to the Somali community will enable the City of Minneapolis to gain an insiders perspective on “what is actually taking place” within the Somali community. The Community Outreach Plan should seek to connect with key stakeholders in the community helping the population develop and grow. The Community Outreach Plan should identify people in the community who hold positions of trust to advise the City on what services work, and even more important, what services do not work.

The other important aspect of the Community Outreach Plan should be to inform the community about available city services. Community outreach to the Somali Community will serve as bridge between the City and its target population to build trust and lasting partnerships.

VI. CONCLUSION

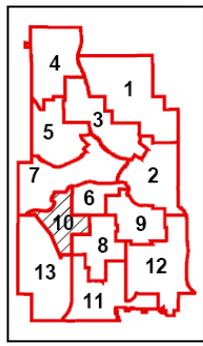
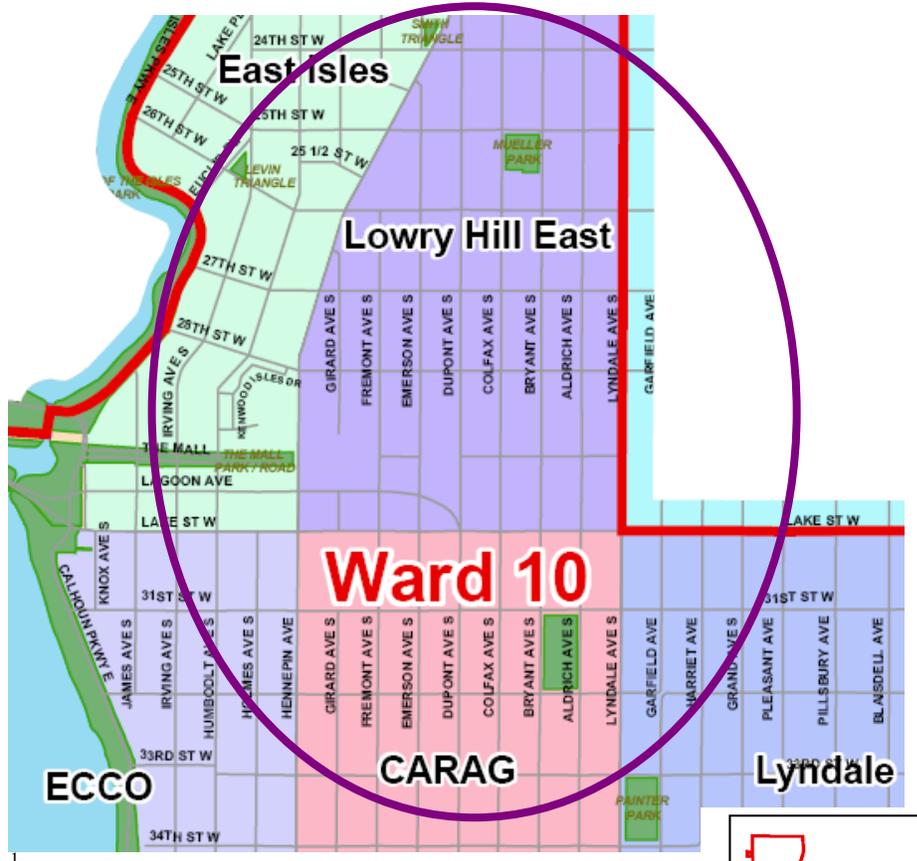
Minneapolis continues to welcome Somali immigrants and their contributions to the City's social, economic and cultural landscape. In acknowledging the many ways Somalis enrich our community, the City of Minneapolis also recognizes its responsibility to identify the difficulties of enculturation, which affect the welfare of all citizens.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shukri Adan', written in a cursive style.

Shukri Adan

APPENDIX A



¹ City of Minneapolis - City Council Ward Maps – Ward 10 (2006), available at: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/about/maps/ward10.pdf>.

APPENDIX B

CASE STUDY #1

Nimco Ahmed is a young Somali girl who has achieved much in the little time she has been here in Minneapolis. Nimco arrived in the United States with her mother and siblings. When she enrolled in Roosevelt High School, tensions were running high between African American students and Somali students. In 1999, at the age of 15, Nimco organized Somali students and started a dialogue with the other students and teachers. She mediated peace between the African American and Somali students.

Nimco eventually started the Mother-Daughter Initiative, which focused on breaking cultural barriers between Somali mothers and Somali girls. It also became a support group for mothers facing challenges adapting to life in the United States. In this unique program, Nimco moderated conversations between mothers and daughters. She helped the Somali girls to empower themselves, to pursue educational goals, to be proud of their cultural identity, and to recognize their importance within the larger community.

Nimco continued her discussion groups at the Bryan Coyle community center, the Boys and Girls Club, and the YMCA. The discussion groups continued to grow to include girls from several Minneapolis schools. Somali boys in the community asked Nimco to organize a soccer tournament in the summer of 2004. Nimco collected money and held various fund raisers in the Somali community to make this event happen. It was a rousing success.

Nimco left the Somali organizations in Minneapolis to work on the campaign of a New Jersey governor. Nimco is back in Minneapolis working on another major political campaign. The youth community in Minneapolis deeply admires Nimco and her creative and ambitious work. Although the patriarchal structures within the Somali community have restricted Somali women's opportunities to obtain and advance in non-stereotypical careers, Nimco's success shows that Somali women can overcome those barriers and help other women do the same. Nimco's story further demonstrates that all immigrant youth have the potential to become leaders and to be successful making a difference in the lives of others.

APPENDIX C

CASE STUDY #2

“Mohammed” is 22 years old. Mohammed came to the United States when he was 14 years old, after spending many years in Utange refugee camp in Kenya. Mohammed cannot recall ever living a stable life. Having suffered severe hardships as a refugee, Mohammed is now a very guarded young man.

Mohammed lost both his parents in the Somali Civil War. His memory of them is clouded. After relatives rescued him from the war, he and his sister fled to Kenya. Mohammed learned at a very young age to fend for himself, so that now he lives by a survival instinct. Mohammed continues to suffer emotionally from the traumatic experiences of the war.

After arriving in Minneapolis, Mohammed enrolled in middle school. He struggled with the adjustment to life in the United States and with the structure of formal schooling (something he never experienced). Due to the language barrier, Mohammed had difficulty following instructions and adhering to school rules. He felt ostracized from the mainstream class. Mohammed realized very quickly he did not fit in. Although he spoke English, Mohammed never learned how to read or write. Mohammed was suspended from school several times. Hoping that he could get a fresh start, Mohammed’s sister eventually transferred him to a different school; but Mohammed never adjusted.

He continued to hang around with friends from his old school, with whom he had a lot in common. They were all disillusioned by the same issues and were not adjusting to their lives or school. During his suspension from school, Mohammed’s sister grounded him from leaving the house. Defiantly, while his sister worked, Mohammed left home and began shoplifting with his friends. That was the beginning of a downward spiral for Mohammed.

Eventually he was caught shoplifting. In the high-rise buildings where he lived, Mohammed had many teenage friends that had joined Somali gangs. Mohammed began to feel that he belonged with them. Mohammed's initiation into the gang involved helping other gang members in steal cars and selling electronic equipment on the street. Mohammed officially belonged to the Rough Tough Somali Boys gang.

Later, the police caught Mohammed assisting in a car robbery, and he was sent to juvenile detention for six months. Mohammed met more experienced criminals in juvenile detention. There was no rehabilitation component to his incarceration; instead, Mohammed learned more criminal activities and better skills on how not to get caught. Mohammed developed a drug habit after one of his many stints in juvenile detention. When he got out, he had to support his habit. He stole from relatives and friends, and eventually all his family members would not allow him to visit or stay with them. Therefore, Mohammed moved in with his gang member friends and committed more criminal acts.

A week after he turned 18, Mohammed was arrested on armed robbery charges. Because he drove the getaway car, he pleaded to have his sentence reduced. In order to get the sentence reduced, he had to reveal the identities of his fellow gang members. Mohammed went to jail for a year and a half and then was placed on probation for six months. Mohammed wanted to return to his gang, but his fear of retaliation by the other gang members he identified kept him away. Mohammed still talks about his friends in the gang with fondness, but realizes that in associating with them, he risks more prison time.

Mohammed's prison experience made him rethink his life. His incarceration forced him to quit using drugs. Mohammed now lives in the suburbs with his sister, but he does not have sufficient skills to get a job. With his criminal record, Mohammed has difficulty acquiring even manual labor jobs. The fact that he must depend on his sister for support is extremely frustrating and depressing for Mohammed. His sister wants him to enroll in a trade school, but the trade school informed him that he must have a high school diploma. Mohammed feels embarrassed to go back to school as an adult.

Mohammed made the following remarks about the things he wished had happened that could have changed his life for the better:

- He wished that when he came to Minneapolis there was a separate program for all the kids like him to learn English and other subjects intensely.
- He wished there was an activity or program for children his age to help him understand living here.
- He wished he had homework help.
- He wished someone had referred him to a social worker or therapist.