

A CENSUS AND BASIC NEEDS SURVEY
OF THE HMONG POPULATION OF LA CROSSE

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ABSTRACT

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A survey was developed and implemented to acquire information regarding the demographic nature of the La Crosse Hmong population and their specific needs. The information documented was: total population and ages, English proficiency and education concerns, employment, and medical/physical well being. Also included in this study is general information about Laos and the Hmong culture. The survey results showed there were seventy-two Hmong households consisting of four hundred twenty four individuals living in La Crosse in February, 1983. The infant to 3 year old age group was the largest age group. The major problems facing the La Crosse Hmong population concerned English proficiency, unemployment, inadequate housing, and insufficient clothing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Author's note: I lived in Southeast Asia for ten years. Six years as a Peace Corps Volunteer, three years as a field manager for a Thai company, and one year as an interviewer/caseworker in several Indo-chinese refugee camps in Thailand. During those ten years I had very little opportunity to speak English. Much of that time, I spoke only the local languages and lived according to the local customs.

My Thai wife and I were married by Lao ceremony, presided over by the village elder of my wife's village. Many of the houses I lived in during my stay in Southeast Asia did not have running water or electricity. I used kerosene lamps for light and charcoal for cooking. Water for household use, carried by bucket, came from the nearest well.

I had a major case of culture shock when I first returned to the United States. I could not order food at a fast-food restaurant or even talk on the telephone because I had not used the vocabulary for these operations for a long time. Imagine the Hmong refugees first arrival to the United States. The culture shock must have been even more severe. When I first met

the Hmong families in La Crosse we discovered we had many things in common.

Background

The total Hmong population of La Crosse in August 1978 consisted of one individual. In February 1983, there were 72 Hmong households consisting of 424 people living in La Crosse. This researcher predicts that well over a thousand Hmong will be living in La Crosse by the end of 1984.

The Hmong, once farming people in Laos, have been swiftly and massively impacted upon during the past thirty years when they experienced greater cultural changes than in the previous century. These rapid changes were mainly the result of the war in Southeast Asia which brought modernization and improved air and ground transportation resulting in vastly expanded communications and intercultural contacts. Most of all the war brought death.

For 14 years warfare ebbed and flowed through their homeland. In the end, America's Hmong allies lost. In the debris of defeat 30,000 Hmong lay dead; the survivors had been driven from their homes. In one province not a village still stands. To translate the disaster into American terms imagine a holocaust that wiped out 18,000,000 of us and forced the remainder of the population to flee to Mexico. Toward the end, 10 and 12 year olds were sent out to fight, they didn't live long enough to learn fear. (Garrett, 1974. P. 83)

More recent events have further impacted upon the Hmong people. During the past several years reprisal policies upon the Hmong by various groups have resulted in their fleeing Laos in large numbers. "According to the particulars of the policy, the fields and houses

of any pro-American Hmong village were to be burned, the animals therein to be slaughtered, and the people who lived there were to be chased down and killed" (Koumarn, 1978, p. 15).

Stress and trauma resulting from the move was further compounded because many families and individuals were separated from relatives. Self-reliance and independence are strong Hmong traditions which thrive when families have the opportunity to work cooperatively. Traditionally, the Hmong often have large extended family systems providing the necessary moral and material support to individual members. This type of system is especially beneficial now because the vast majority of Hmong refugees in La Crosse are still unemployed.

Partly because of the existence of the La Crosse Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association Inc. (HMAA), La Crosse is rapidly becoming a center for secondary migration as families reunite here. HMAA is a non-profit Wisconsin corporation established December 9, 1982 by all the Hmong refugees then living in La Crosse County. The Association was set up to act as an educational and charitable corporation to assist the members to adapt to life in the United States.

Need for the Study

A second migration of Hmong refugees into La Crosse was well under way and it has been anticipated that there will be a significant increase in the La Crosse Hmong population within the coming year. The HMAA was without funds other than a few small contributions; therefore to aid the La Crosse refugee population the HMAA's top priority has been the quest for state and federal grants. The first

step in writing a grant was to determine if a need for grant assistance existed.

A census and need survey of the Hmong population of La Crosse was necessary to find out how many Hmong lived in La Crosse, and to what extent their basic needs were being met. A thorough grant proposal could be written only when the La Crosse Hmong population and their basic needs were documented and assessed.

Statement of the Problem

Although there has been some recognition that the La Crosse Hmong population have a variety of fiscal, nutritional, and other needs, the response has been inadequate because so little was known about the Hmong population. A survey was developed and implemented to acquire information regarding the demographic nature of the La Crosse Hmong population and their specific needs. This information was to be used to support a grant proposal for this population.

Assumptions

1. Surveyors would go to all the known Hmong households in La Crosse.
2. Surveyors would be able to explain adequately the survey questions in order to elicit correct responses from the subjects of this study.
3. Surveyors would write the exact answers given to them by the subjects of the survey.
4. All subjects of this study would answer the survey questions honestly and to the best of their ability.

Limitations

The HMAA office was a small room in a local church and consisted of only a desk, a chair, and a telephone at the time of the survey. The HMAA office was staffed by unpaid volunteers, and was understaffed at the time of the survey. The staff had numerous daily routine duties and could not keep up those duties and also respond to the numerous calls dealing with the survey.

The immediate need for survey results led to the hurried survey questionnaire construction, and to the sending out of minimally trained surveyors. Even though they were unemployed and seeking employment at the time of the survey, these Hmong surveyors were asked to help because they were the more educated Hmong of the community. They were expected to go to all the known Hmong households in La Crosse without benefit of reimbursement for their time or travel expenses. Many times the head of household was away from home and the surveyors had to return more than once to the same household; also, the surveyors discovered new households daily and it seemed that their job would not be finished before the deadline.

Explanation of terms

The following list of terms and their explanations were compiled from all the resources read, and used in the writing of the paper. Explanation of terms was used instead of definition of terms because the researcher believes definitions are restricting and do not adequately cover the material presented in the paper.

Animism A belief that certain spirits with great power over the destinies of men are present throughout the material and non-material universe.

Clan The division into which the Hmong group to form families. There are twenty clans in Hmong society. Some of the clan names are: Chang, Lee, Moua, Lor, Thao, Vang, Vue Xiong, Yang, Hang, Kue, Chue, Her, Pha, and Kha.

Cross-culture Ideas and methods of living that cross cultural lines.

Cultural assimilation A person becomes "totally Americanized", tends to reject traditional cultural background and associations with people from that culture.

Cultural pluralism The person becomes bicultural, he/she adopts come American cultural customs and traditions but retains many of their own.

Cultural separation The person identifies with his/her own culture only, he/she rejects the American culture.

Culture shock This concept represents the difficulties encountered in adopting to a new and different culture. When culture shock progresses in a normal pattern its steps can be defined as:

1. fascination with the host country.
2. hostility, anger, alienation.
3. adjustment.
4. genuine biculturalism.

Disability Any interference with function caused by any physical, mental, or emotional condition.

Exogamous marriage A marriage with a person outside the family, tribe, or clan.

Geneva Accords A 1954 agreement which was supposed to allow Laos to remain neutral territory.

Handicap Any physical barrier or regulation based upon individual or societal attitudes that limits a disabled person.

Head of Household Usually the oldest male in a Hmong household.

Household A group of people living under the same roof who may or may not be related. A household may consist of one or more individuals.

Hmong (moohng; initial H is silent) One of the three major minority groups in Laos. The Hmong prefer this title, which means free man. The Chinese call them Miao, and other Indochinese call them Meo, but both names are derogatory words meaning barbarian.

Indochina Southeast Asia. The southern peninsula of Asia, including North and South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula.

Indochinese The people from Indochina.

Lao The people of Laos are called Lao; they speak the Lao language.

Laos The name of a country in Southeast Asia.

Laotian Pertaining to Laos or the Lao.

Luang Prabang The Royal capital of Laos.

Nocturnal Death Syndrome A mysterious phenomena happening to male Hmong refugees. Thirty young healthy Hmong male refugees in the United States have died in their sleep. The victim begins to gurgle and may move as well. He cannot be awakened, and he dies within minutes, resuscitation efforts are generally

Nocturnal Death Syndrome (cont.) of no avail. The autopsy reveals no specific cause of death.

Oligarchial A government ruled by few.

Patrilineal clan system A system on which the society is divided into social groups, or clans, and a child at birth automatically becomes a member of the clan his or her father belongs.

Plain of Jars The fertile elevated farmland area of Xieng Khouang province in central Laos. Many large clay receptacles, thought to be ancient funeral jars, dot the area. (See Appendix A)

Prathet Lao Laotian nationalist/communist revolutionary movement founded in 1950 to battle French colonialism. They now control the Laotian government.

Pre-literate People who speak a language for which there is no written form.

Refugee A person who escapes from invasion, oppression, or persecution.

Secondary migration The movement of a refugee family from the site of initial placement to another location. All the Hmong households in La Crosse are a result of secondary migration. The majority of Hmong in La Crosse stated they migrated to La Crosse to reunite with relatives.

Secret War of Laos The C.I.A. hired a "secret army" of Hmong to fight for them so no American ground troops would be stationed in Laos. The U.S. had been bombing Laos for 6 years (1964-70) and kept it secret from the American public.

Slash and burn A type of agriculture used by the Hmong to clear their fields. The trees and underbrush are cut away and the field is burned to remove unwanted grasses.

Tha Deua Literally means "boat landing" in Lao. A small Lao town opposite the Thai province of Nong Khai.

Thailand (tie-land; H is silent) Country in Southeast Asia.

The only country in Southeast Asia that has never been colonized by a foreign power.

Vientiane The administrative capital of Laos.

Xieng Khouang A province in central Laos.

Yellow rain Chemicals dropped by airplanes on the Hmong in Laos.

These chemicals destroy crops, causes skin burns, nausea, and death. Survivors have used the words "yellow rain" to describe these occurrences.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE:
GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHY OF LAOS

Geographical Reference

Laos is situated in the center of the Southeast Asian peninsula and shares common borders with six other nations: on the north with China (264 miles); on the east with North Vietnam (1,018 miles) and South Vietnam (301 miles); on the south and west with Thailand (1,090 miles, 500 of these miles are along the Mekong River); on the south with Cambodia (366 miles); and on the northwest with Burma (147 miles). (See Appendix A.) "Each of its sixteen provinces borders a more populous foreign country, as if to affirm the paramount fact that throughout its history Laos has suffered the consequences of an intimate and at times destructive involvement with powerful neighbors" (Dommen, 1964, p. 1). Laos' 91,000 square miles (approximately the size of Idaho) is roughly shaped like Italy. Most of Laos, especially in the north, is covered by dense jungle and rugged mountains. The highest point in Laos is Pou Bia (Bia mountain) 9,242 feet above sea level.

Vientiane, situated along the Mekong River and directly across the river from the Thai province of Nongkhai, is the administrative capital of Laos. People visiting Vientiane from Thailand usually go across the Mekong River and through the village of Tha Deua (literally means boat landing in Lao) Immigration check point. Before 1974, Asians could

enter Laos anywhere along the Laotian border easily without concern for immigration documentation. Throughout the history of Laos there was little concern for geographic borders. According to Kunstadter (1967) various Southeast Asian ethnic groups traveled throughout Southeast Asia whenever and wherever they pleased and were loyal first to their families; there was little concern for loyalty to one specific country.

Luang Prabang, situated in north central Laos, was the Royal Capital of Laos until 1975 when the new government abolished the monarchy. Throughout the history of Laos, Luang Prabang was the rustic, tranquil home of the Royal family.

The Plain of Jars, located in the Laotian province of Xieng Khouang, was one of Southeast Asia's most fabled, fought over, and prosperous regions. "The area takes its name from the large clay receptacles found there, which are believed to be the funeral urns of an ancient and long-forgotten Mon-Khmer race" (Branfman, 1972, p. 9). The Plain of Jars' fertile elevated farmland valleys made it an ideal invasion route for all of Laos' neighbors.

The Plain of Jars had another claim to fame, but not a pretty one. Branfman (1972) estimated that 75,000 to 150,000+ tons of bombs were dropped on the Plain of Jars between 1964 to 1969; and the bombing was kept secret to the outside world until March 6, 1970 when an American president first told his people that the United States had been bombing Laos for six years.

Many of the Hmong refugees living in La Crosse now, used to live near the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang province.

Historical Background

During the period 1893-1904, France established her control over Laos ending Thai domination of that country and reestablishing a somewhat unitary administrative entity which finally reemerged as the modern Kingdom of Laos. Laos gained its sovereignty from France on October 22, 1953 as an independent nation within the French Union. In 1954, according to Na Champassak (1961) Laos became totally independent, "at least on paper", after the signing of the Geneva Accords.

From the mid fifties to 1975, no national leader or party was established as the dominant force on a national level. Laos was a constitutional monarchy in which only the monarchy was stable. The history of Laos since 1954 has hinged on the struggle between the leftist, rightist and neutralist factions. The Prathet Lao (North Vietnamese oriented) led by Prince Souphanouvong have, from the very beginning refused to accept any government not controlled by the Prathet Lao as legitimate (Adams & McCoy, 1970).

The modern history of Laos according to Adams and McCoy (1970) struggle for dominance between these groups split by multiple cleavages: right/neutral/left; socialist/democratic/oligarchial; traditional/modern; pro Thai/pro Vietnamese; and the fraternal rivalry between Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Souvannaphouma.

Since 1954, Laos was divided into two zones of control. By 1973 the Prathet Lao had gained control over almost two thirds of Laos with the exception of the Mekong River valley and the major cities. The Royal Lao Government controlled most of the people, but only a third of the territory.

On February 14, 1973, a cease-fire was signed which reduced the level of combat, but did not end the continuing military conflict. In April 1974, a Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU) was established to seek methods by which Laos could be peacefully reunified. Under this agreement, the Prathet Lao were allowed troops in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, (with minor access to government control) but no Royal Government forces were permitted in the Prathet Lao "Liberated Zones" (Stuart-Fox, 1982). In 1973 this researcher had twice visited Laos with only an informal permission slip from Lao immigration officials in Tha Deua, but in May, 1974, this researcher was detained for six hours by Prathet Lao immigration officials at Tha Deua immigration check point and not allowed either to enter Vientiane or to return to Thailand.

In 1975, with the collapse of South Vietnam and Cambodia, the Royal Lao Government was no longer capable of effective resistance. In December of that year the Prathet Lao formally ended any pretense of cooperation with other Lao political groups and abolished the monarchy. Since then, according to Stuart-Fox (1982), the Kingdom of Laos has become the Democratic Socialist Republic of Laos, with the Lao Peoples Party (formerly the secret Communist Part of Laos) not in full control.

The Hmong in Laos

All sources agree that the Hmong originated in China, and started migrating out of China into Southeast Asia about 150 years ago. Records of their migrations vary according to the source, but it is generally agreed that these migrations were based upon either the need to find unoccupied land to settle or the pressure from hostile neighbors (Koumarn, 1978). Their preference for establishing small villages high in the mountains

mainly in Xieng Khouang province, allowed relatively peaceful relations with their Vietnamese, Lao, Thai and Burmese neighbors. Also, by living high in the mountains (3,000 feet or more) they were usually free from French colonial government interference.

In 1896 the Hmong were subjected to a French colonial tax system, a system not based on income but on population. So much had to be paid per family regardless of their financial status. Many Hmong could not pay the tax. The village chiefs refused to collect the tax and the French sent Indochinese Militiamen into the mountains in Xieng Khouang to intimidate the Hmong. The Hmong attacked this group but a cease fire was negotiated before much blood was shed (Koumarn, 1978). Adams & McCoy (1970) mentions a much bloodier revolt against the French tax system by the Hmong occurred in Vietnam in 1919 to 1921.

Between 1921 and 1941, French-Hmong relations were relatively peaceful. Opium poppies grow only at altitudes of over 3,000 feet, the lands occupied only by the Hmong. Opium production was a legal activity during the French colonial period and the Hmong were the major cultivators. The Hmong's strong cultural identity and their economic strength through opium production led the French to view them with more consideration than the numerous other minorities in Laos. The French took a greater interest in the Hmong and several Hmong clan leaders were given positions in local governments (Koumarn, 1978).

In traditional Hmong society opium had two uses. The first and most important use was a source of income. Opium was used to purchase silver, utensils, fabric, thread, shoes, and rice. The Hmong also hired other ethnic groups to work for them. "Hmongs do not ordinarily hire

other Hmongs to work for them; there is a strong tradition of helping one another, and as long as a household is able to help another household, it would like to do so without charging a fee" (Koumarn, 1978, p. 9). The other use of opium in Hmong society was as a painkiller. Because they lived in remote villages, they rarely had medicines to ease the pain of infections, malaria, fevers, toothaches, dysentery. While living in rural Thailand, the researcher once used opium successfully to alleviate amoebic dysentery when no other medicines were available.

It is also important to note that both the French and American armies helped the Hmong transport their opium to market. The French aided the transactions mainly for the revenue it produced. McCoy (1972) stated the Americans, especially the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), transported the opium in their planes to insure fast transactions to get the money back to the Hmong who were fighting for the CIA. The CIA's secret army of Hmong guerrilla fighters, the most competent fighting allies of the U.S. in Southeast Asia, needed this inducement because of the heavy losses the Hmong were incurring in the war.

Hmong society was based on the patrilineal clan system. "System... in which the society is divided into social groups, or clans, and a child, at birth, automatically became a member of the clan his or her father belonged to" (Barney, 1961, p. 23). There were twenty clans in Hmong society. In addition to their given names, members of a household always carried their clan names, which generally found their origins in mythology. Complete strangers who had the same clan name, and did not know of any common ancestry, referred to each other as "clan brothers" and observed any family formalities required of them (Barney, 1961).

The household was the basic unit in the Hmong social structure. The household included all those who are under the authority of the head of household--usually the eldest male. They all did not need to reside in the same dwelling, but would consist of "the householder's wife or wives, his children, their wives and children, and possibly children in the next generation" (Barney, 1961, p. 23). The household may also have included disabled relatives who were unable to care for themselves.

The children were basically the responsibility of their immediate parents, however, the whole household served as trainers of the children in that household. Any member of the household could discipline a child without incurring the ill will of the parents. Corporal punishment of children was almost non-existent because of the deep respect and obedience children showed for their elders. The Hmong trained their children to be self-reliant, but when disagreements occurred, the head of the household was the final authority, and his word was obeyed.

Within a household a young man may disagree with his father only in the mildest terms, although he may oppose him strongly. As a man assumes family responsibilities, he may become increasingly self-assertive, but should always pay deference to his aging father. The women are recognized as possessing authority over the children, but in all family considerations the father's word is final authority. Yet should a father be the son of a householder, he is expected to acquiesce to the will of the householder (Barney, 1961, p. 24).

The household was the only formal education the Hmong had until the early 1950s. Missionaries began working with the Hmong during that time, but formal Lao schooling was still almost non-existent for

Hmong children.

The Hmong strictly observed the practice of exogamous marriage (marriage outside one's clan). It was taboo for boys and girls of the same clan to develop an interest in each other and marry (Barney, 1961). Acquaintance was often made and developed at such events as the New Year Festival Season, when villages invite villages of another clan to come for feasting and games. If a relationship between a boy and a girl developed into serious interest in each other, the boy would look for a "go-between" to negotiate with the girl's parents. After much negotiating a bridewealth (dowry) was delivered to the girl's parents and a marriage feast/ceremony was performed. After marriage the girl left her father's family and became fully identified with her husband's family, although she would not take his clan name (Barney, 1961).

Having more than one wife was common custom among the Hmong, depending on the wealth or social status of the man involved. One wife was considered the primary wife and directed the activities of the other wives in the matter of household duties. Barney (1961) states, they lived together under the same roof with no appearance of emotional strain.

The religion of the Hmong was animism. "The Hmong are animistic. They have numerous spirits (tlan) which are classified according to their functions. There are the tlan of the water, of fertility, of the trail, of the hearth, of the sleeping quarters, of the rice field, for hunting, and numerous other categories (Barney, 1961, p. 40)." In cases of illness, the Hmong considered that the soul was attempting to leave the body of the sick person.

Hmong language has been classified as a separate branch of Sino-Tibetan (Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave, 1964). It is monosyllabic with 7 tones. The written language has only recently been developed in 1950 through missionary efforts. Even though this gave educators a tool through which to teach the Hmong, the Hmong language system was not permitted to be utilized in any Laotian School. Only the Lao native language was permitted. As a result, many of the Hmong did not know how to read and write their native language, but did know how to read and write Laotian.

The Hmong in Thai Refugee Camps

Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in the Thai province of Loei was originally established in 1975 to help the earliest refugees from the Communist takeover of Laos. The camp was situated approximately nine miles from the Mekong River, the border of Laos and Northeastern Thailand. (See Appendix A.) To get to Ban Vinai the Hmong had to trek through the jungle for many miles. This journey was made particularly difficult because the Hmong had to avoid patrols of Prathet Lao troops and land mines that dot the area near the border. Thousands died before reaching the Mekong River. Because they had to cross the river in groups, they were more visible to the border patrols and many were shot while crossing the river. Many more died because their makeshift rafts broke or capsized, spilling many non-swimmers in the treacherous Mekong River. Even if they made the journey across the river safely, they were sometimes forced back by the Thai Border Patrol. While working in Thai refugee camps, this researcher heard many stories from the

refugees about how the Hmong were robbed of all their belongings and their women raped by the Thais once the Hmong reached Thai soil.

After spending a few weeks in a transient camp near the border, the refugees were brought to the main camp at Ban Vinai. When Ban Vinai was originally established in 1975 it was intended to hold about 12,000 refugees. In July 1979, the population of Ban Vinai was 42,000 and by 1983 it was still housing about 35,000 Hmong refugees ("Refugee Statistics," 1983).

Once in Camp Vinai they immediately sought out their relatives, who assisted them in obtaining food and getting settled. The Hmong at Ban Vinai were very organized. They were divided into clans, one chief in overall charge with several sub-chiefs below him who were in charge of smaller groups.

Life for the Hmong in Ban Vinai was quite similar to their life in Laos. The terrain around the camp is hilly and reminiscent of home and the remote lives they led there. Laos and Northeastern Thailand share cultural similarities. Customs of the household, exogamous marriage, polygamy, opium use, celebrations and animism, were the same as if the Hmong were still living in Laos.

About four out of five Hmong have asked to come to the United States. The Hmong practice of polygamy, perfectly acceptable in Laos, is not accepted in the United States. Since a man is allowed to bring only one wife, families must be broken up in order for some family members to immigrate to the U.S. Considering their reverence for family, this is very difficult for the Hmong. As a refugee caseworker/interviewer,

this researcher personally performed "instant marriages and divorces" to aid many of the refugees gain acceptance in the U.S. refugee program.

Lack of any official documents, ie birth certificates, marriage licenses, military records etc., also hindered immigration registration. Many refugee workers gave birthdates by approximation because the refugees were required to memorize their birthdates listed in their interview files. Anyone working with refugees in the U.S. will notice the date and month of their birthdate are the same number. It was much easier for the refugees to memorize 2/2/46 or 12/12/70 than some other arbitrary number, especially since they had little use for specific birthdates previously. Many birthdates are grossly incorrect and cause problems for refugees now living in the U.S.

About 40% of the Hmong presented to the U.S. immigration service have been rejected, even though many were former military volunteers from Laos' pre-communist days and seemed to stand a good chance of being accepted for the U.S. program. Other factors may also keep the Hmong from resettlement. The old have been reminded of their homeland in Ban Vinai, and consequently they often shunned resettlement. Many young Hmong have said they want to resettle, but they had to stay and care for their parents.

Most Hmong refugees would prefer to return to Laos, but knowledge of the conditions of the Hmong in Laos prevent them. Vue Mi, the current leader of the Hmong in Ban Vinai, spoke about the Hmong who have remained in Laos since 1975. "They are scattered in jungles where it is difficult to help them because there are no roads, no transportation,

and the Hmong are sprayed with yellow rain" ("In Profile," 1983, p. 3).

The Hmong in the United States

LyFu Vang, the current Director of the La Crosse HMAA, stated that approximately 63,000 Hmong refugees have arrived in the United States since 1975. The earliest arrivals were more educated and had more readily adjusted to their new life in the U.S. The later groups of Hmong, mainly uneducated farmers and soldiers, had difficulties because of their lack of sophistication.

Most of the later arrivals had never previously turned on a water tap, switched on an electric light, used a refrigerator or gas stove, or even locked a door. Americans are notorious for their ignorance of other cultures, and many of the American sponsors of Hmong families were unprepared when the Hmong arrived. The host families did not realize the extent of training the Hmong needed just to settle in a house. There were reports of Hmong families using refrigerators as closets, wood fires built on top of electric ranges, and even some families unable to leave their house because the door was locked.

Culture shock and homesickness devastated many of the older Hmong, especially in the winter when the cold weather kept them indoors for long periods of time. Medical authorities were worried by the high number of sleeping deaths of healthy young Hmong males. This phenomenon has been labeled Nocturnal Death Syndrome and has claimed at least 30 Hmong males since 1978 (Lemoine & Mougne, 1983).

The lack of any type of job, even for the Hmong who spoke English

well, was a great concern to the Hmong community. Being dependent on welfare for an indefinite period was also a source of great distress. It is difficult for a once hard-working and proud people to find that some people consider them "good for nothings". Jacques Lemoine and Christine Mougne noted increasing problems of adjustment. "The Hmong... are being sought after by various Christian groups competing for their souls, and by some zealots eager to 'liberate' the Hmong women. This has disrupted family balance and in a few extreme cases has led to suicide or murder" (Lemoine & Mougne, 1983, p. 12).

There are many Hmong with good jobs and stable households living in the United States. Some have graduated with honors from high school and attend Universities. Some already have successful businesses of their own. There are some Hmong successes in the U.S. but there should be more. The Hmong died helping America in Southeast Asian war, but America has yet to repay that debt to the survivors of that war.

Summary

Laos, a very small Southeast Asian country in the middle of powerful neighbors, has been a buffer state turned into a battlefield. The Hmong tried to survive in the middle of this battlefield with all the resources they could muster. The United States departed from Laos in 1975 and left in their wake a bomb cratered country ruled by Laos' hated neighbor, Vietnam. America's most competent ally in Laos, the Hmong, were left to fend for themselves. The victors, the Prathet Lao, ordered the execution of all Hmong who had allied themselves with the United States. The Hmong, vastly outnumbered by their enemies, had only one alternative,

leave their beloved homeland. They fled to the closest sanctuary, Thailand. The treacherous journey to freedom decimated their numbers as much or even more than the war. Thailand, already overcrowded with refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia, forced many of the Hmong back into Laos to almost certain death.

Two U.S. presidents had promised the Hmong a home in the U.S. if the U.S. lost the war in Southeast Asia. Even though the Hmong were once America's most competent ally in Laos, they were very slowly repatriated to the United States. About 40% of the Hmong presented to the U.S. immigration service have been rejected, even though many were former volunteers fighting with the United States military in Southeast Asia.

There are now 1,200 Hmong living in La Crosse as of January 1985, not only survivors of a tragic war, but survivors of bureaucratic red tape that is still keeping 40,000 of their kin in refugee camps in Thailand.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

A few years ago some concerned people from La Crosse formed the La Crosse Refugee Task Force. Included in this group were teachers, church personnel, social workers, health officials, refugees, and several other people from the area. At one of the monthly meetings, many members inquired about La Crosse's Hmong residents.

The whole Task Force wanted to know the exact number of Hmong residing in La Crosse. The teachers wanted to find out the general level of English proficiency of the Hmong, and also if there were any school-age Hmong children who were not attending school. Health officials wanted to know if they were experiencing medical problems. Service agencies wondered if their agencies were reaching all of those Hmong who were eligible for benefits. Church representatives wanted to know about immediate problems, such as non-adequate housing or clothing, and job opportunities. The Task Force suggested to the HMAA that they might prepare a survey with questions under the following categories.

1. Census--including age, number of households and individuals.
2. Level of English proficiency and education concerns.
3. Employment concerns.
4. Medical and physical well-being.

Many Hmong and American volunteers worked on the construction of the survey to assist in determining the kinds of questions to be included

under the categories suggested, and how such questions should be phrased. The survey was constructed (Appendix B) and a local law firm volunteered to type the survey form and provide a sufficient number of copies.

Three Hmong volunteers went to all the known Hmong households in La Crosse in February 1983 to conduct the survey. There was one survey form for each individual household to which the head of household was asked to respond.

The questions were given in three languages: Hmong, Lao, and English, and the surveyors wrote in the responses that the head of household gave for his/her household. A few survey forms were filled out by some heads of household themselves and the completed forms given to the surveyor, however the exact number was unknown.

Using one completed survey form as representing one household, the survey forms were counted to determine the number of Hmong households in La Crosse. To determine the total of individual Hmong people, the number of individuals indicated on each form were added together. This researcher used a blank survey form as a tally sheet. The numbers and responses for each question were manually tabulated on the tally sheet.

This researcher discovered that three households had duplicate survey forms. The researcher contacted these three households, and after being personally assured that these survey forms were indeed duplicates of the same household, the duplicates were discarded. The total number of survey forms tallied were seventy-two.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Introduction

This researcher acknowledges that this survey was far from being a precise measuring instrument. The reader may find many discrepancies in questions and answers. The questions appeared in English on paper, but to elicit answers, questions were sometimes asked in three different languages to enhance clarification. Questions that seemed simple to native speakers of English, turned out to be exasperatingly complicated to the people surveyed. The main reason for these problems is that concepts in English do not always translate clearly into another language. Problems of this type are noted in the data discussion.

Using one completed survey form as representing one household, the survey forms were counted to determine the number of Hmong households in La Crosse. To determine the total of individual Hmong people, the number of individuals indicated on each form were added together. Data is presented in five categories. In presenting the results of the survey, all data includes the number in parentheses which correspond to the number of the question on the survey form.

Population by Age

There were 72 households consisting of 424 individuals living in La Crosse in February 1983 (1). It is important to note that a household may consist of one individual or several. The several, may or

may not be related, but were considered a household because they were living together in the same house at the time of the survey. Data percentage was calculated by household and individuals; thus, 36 households out of a total of 72 households is $36/72$ or 50% and 212 individuals out of a total of 424 individuals is $212/424$ or 50%.

Three households reported that they had lived in the United States less than 18 months, and sixty-nine households reported that they had lived in the United States longer than 18 months. Over 95% of the households living in La Crosse have been in the United States more than 18 months (23, 24). No data was collected as to how long these households have been living in La Crosse.

The breakdown for ages and the number of individuals in each age group has been provided in Table 1. The largest group was the infant-3 years group with 115 individuals or 27.1% of La Crosse's Hmong population. Another important revelation was that a combination of the first three age groups (infant to 10 years old) totals 219 individuals or 51.6% of the Hmong population of La Crosse.

Table 2 showed the number of responses for questions 12-14. The total, 403, indicated that some of the population surveyed included infants as non-speakers, and some did not include the infants as non-speakers of English. The important fact in this data is that 86.8% of the Hmong who responded spoke little or no English.

Questions 15 and 16 asked about the ages of the people who spoke English "well" and "just a little"; however, "not at all" was inadvertently not included in the questions. A great deal of confusion occurred

because of the omission of "not at all" in the question. Many people responding to those two questions did not include their total household. For example, one head of a seven person household responded that the person age 30 spoke English "well" and the 3-year old spoke English "just a little". Initially this researcher assumed the other five members spoke English "not at all"; however, this researcher was personally acquainted with other members of this household and knew that some spoke English well. This researcher checked several other forms from households he knew personally and found similar results. Because of this, no data was tabulated for these two questions.

Table 1
Age Group Distribution & Totals

Age Group	Total Number of Individuals	Individual Age Group Percentage
Infant-3 yrs.	115	27.1
4-5	58	13.7
6-10	46	10.8
11-13	22	5.2
14-17	22	5.2
18-21	23	5.4
22-30	69	16.3
31-45	40	9.4
46-60	16	3.8
61+	13	3.0
Total	424	99.9%

Language Concerns

Table 2
English Proficiency

Survey question	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
How many of these persons speak English...		
(12) well	13	3.2
(13) a little	107	26.6
(14) not at all	283	70.2
Total	403	100.0

A sizable majority, 315 out of 424 individuals 74.3% of the Hmong population of La Crosse stated they want English lessons (46). 366 out of 424 Hmong individuals, or 86.3% of the Hmong population of La Crosse said they needed bilingual assistance (48).

Employment concerns

Since adequate transportation is essential in both job seeking and employment, the Hmong were asked about their transportation. Thirty four households said they had access to transportation (44), but the types of transportation were not stated. Forty households said they needed better transportation (45).

Six individuals stated they were employed full time and two individuals stated they were employed part time (17, 18). Several respondents personally told the researcher that (19) was a ridiculous question because, "many of the employable Hmong were working very hard looking for work." Because of the verbal response, and confusion caused by (19), the actual data of (19) was not tabulated.

Ninety one individuals stated they were looking for work (47). It was reported that 50 females need child care services. There is no data on the nature of the child care services needed, however, this researcher assumed these females needed child care services because they were looking for work (49). If you consider the 161 Hmong individuals in La Crosse ages 18-61+ (see Table 1) as the available work force, then less than 5% of the available work force is employed.

Education Information

Table 3
Number of Individuals Attending School

Survey question	Total responses
How many persons in the household are going to public school?	
(20) Public School (grades 1-12)	41
(21) Vocational school	99
(22) College	0

This researcher knew there were more than 41 Hmong children attending grades 1-12 in the city of La Crosse at the time of the survey, however, the exact number was unknown. According to Table 1 there were 90 Hmong individuals of school age (grades 1-12) at the time of the survey. This researcher knew that one Hmong male was attending a local college at the time of the survey, but apparently he was not surveyed. Most of the 99 students attending vocational school are attending only classes involving teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

The number of individuals taking classes other than ESL was unknown at the time of the survey.

Physical Well Being

In response to how many rooms your household share (25), almost every household reported either one or two rooms. Based on personal knowledge of many Hmong households, this researcher speculated that the respondents were reporting the number of bedrooms shared and not the total rooms in their dwelling.

Table 4
Housing Needs

Survey question	Total household response
What changes do you need in housing?	
(27) more room	31
(28) how many more rooms	
(29) more heat	11
(30) better insulation	24
(31) hot water	5
(32) lower rent	52
(33) more beds	29
(34) other	27

The same household may have stated they needed more heat only or they could have stated that they needed all of the above (27-34); separate data was not tabulated. It is evident that the households feel they need more room and lower rent. Five households did not have hot water in February.

In response to the questions concerning temporary or permanent physical problems, four individuals reported they were handicapped (37); however, specifics were not reported. Five individuals reported they were disabled (39); however, the type of disability was not recorded. Twelve women indicated they were pregnant at the time of the survey (38).

This researcher wanted to ascertain the extent of physical disabilities in the Hmong population and the extent to which external factors were creating obstacles for the successful development of Hmong individuals. The former concern was reflected in the question about the existence of disabilities and the latter concern was intended in the question about being handicapped. However, this researcher feels that the Hmong did not understand the distinction between the terms disabled and handicapped.

The "yes" answers were the only answers tabulated to the survey questions concerning the need for special medical treatment. Nineteen households reported they needed special medical help (35).

The data on clothing needs were tabulated by counting the affirmative answers to the questions. Out of 72 households, 64 (88.9%) need more winter clothing, and 56 households (77.8%) need other clothing. Children's clothing was the type most needed (42).

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This researcher readily admits that the survey was an inadequate and, in some instances, confusing instrument; however, enough information was gathered about the Hmong population of La Crosse to enable the HMAA to write a thorough grant application. The conclusions from the study are presented in the following categories: population, education, employment, physical needs.

Population

The infant to 3-year old age group (27.1%) and the 22-to-30-year old age group (16.3%) were the two largest age groups of the La Crosse Hmong population. Since the Hmong tend to marry young and have large families, the infant to 3-year old age group will probably be the largest age group of the La Crosse Hmong population for many years to come. Even if some families move away, the infant to 3-year old age group will still remain high because of the high number of pregnancies in the Hmong women remaining in La Crosse. As an illustration, twelve Hmong women reported they were pregnant at the time of the survey.

Education

There will be increasing numbers of Hmong children enrolling in the La Crosse schools. Since 86.8% of the La Crosse Hmong reported they spoke little or no English, it will be necessary for the La Crosse

schools to add additional staff to handle this increased enrollment with its special language needs.

Employment

Another disturbing fact brought out by the study was that only 5% of the available Hmong work force were employed at the time of the survey. The Hmong pride themselves as being very industrious and self-supporting, but now they have to rely on public assistance to live. They are deeply ashamed of this situation. Many of the Hmong moved to La Crosse because of family reunification as well as job opportunities; therefore this researcher concludes that if they have to rely on public assistance much longer many will pack up their reunited families and search for employment elsewhere.

Physical Needs

There is a definite need for more low-income housing for the Hmong population of La Crosse. Over half the households reported they need more room and lower rent. This researcher concluded that many Hmong were uncomfortably cold during the winter of 1983. There is no snow or freezing weather in Laos and many of the Hmong were facing their first Wisconsin winter at the time of the survey.

In addition, 88% of the households reported they needed more clothing, especially children's clothing, at the time of the survey, and five households reported they had no hot water. It seems obvious from these data that many of the La Crosse Hmong population had difficulties, but it took a survey to bring these difficulties to the attention of the community since there were no complaints from the Hmong community.

There were no complaints about being called "chink" or "gook", names this researcher personally overheard the Hmong being called many times. This researcher was aware of some families who did not receive their damage deposits even though the houses they rented were in better condition when they left than when they first rented. Because many Hmong drive newer cars, there are numerous rumors in La Crosse that they receive free cars from the government. That rumor is definitely false. Many Hmong families pool their money together to purchase a car and one or two licensed family members are required to handle all the families' transportation needs. They feel a newer car will last longer and they will not be over-charged for repair work, a situation which many have previously encountered because of their limited English.

The La Crosse Hmong could have taken some well-founded complaints to court, but they refuse to testify as it would draw embarrassing attention to them. This researcher has first-hand knowledge of all of these situations, and has tried to alleviate them through community education. The Hmong will need help and understanding from the community in order to develop skills to help the community in return. This researcher, based on personal knowledge of the Hmong, concludes that the Hmong will not only survive these obstacles, but will excel and La Crosse will be the beneficiary of their excellence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, and because the latest estimated La Crosse Hmong population is 1,200 individuals, this researcher proposes the following recommendations:

1. A funded, more thorough Basic Needs Survey should be conducted of the La Crosse Hmong population. The surveyors would need more training and the population to be surveyed be notified in advance. A sample survey should be conducted before the actual survey in order to iron out survey problems in advance.

2. The information gathered in this study should be presented to the School District of La Crosse so they can better prepare for the increased population in the schools.

3. The information gathered in this study be presented to local churches, agencies, and other charitable organizations which could provide immediate aid to the Hmong population in those areas where such aid is urgently needed.

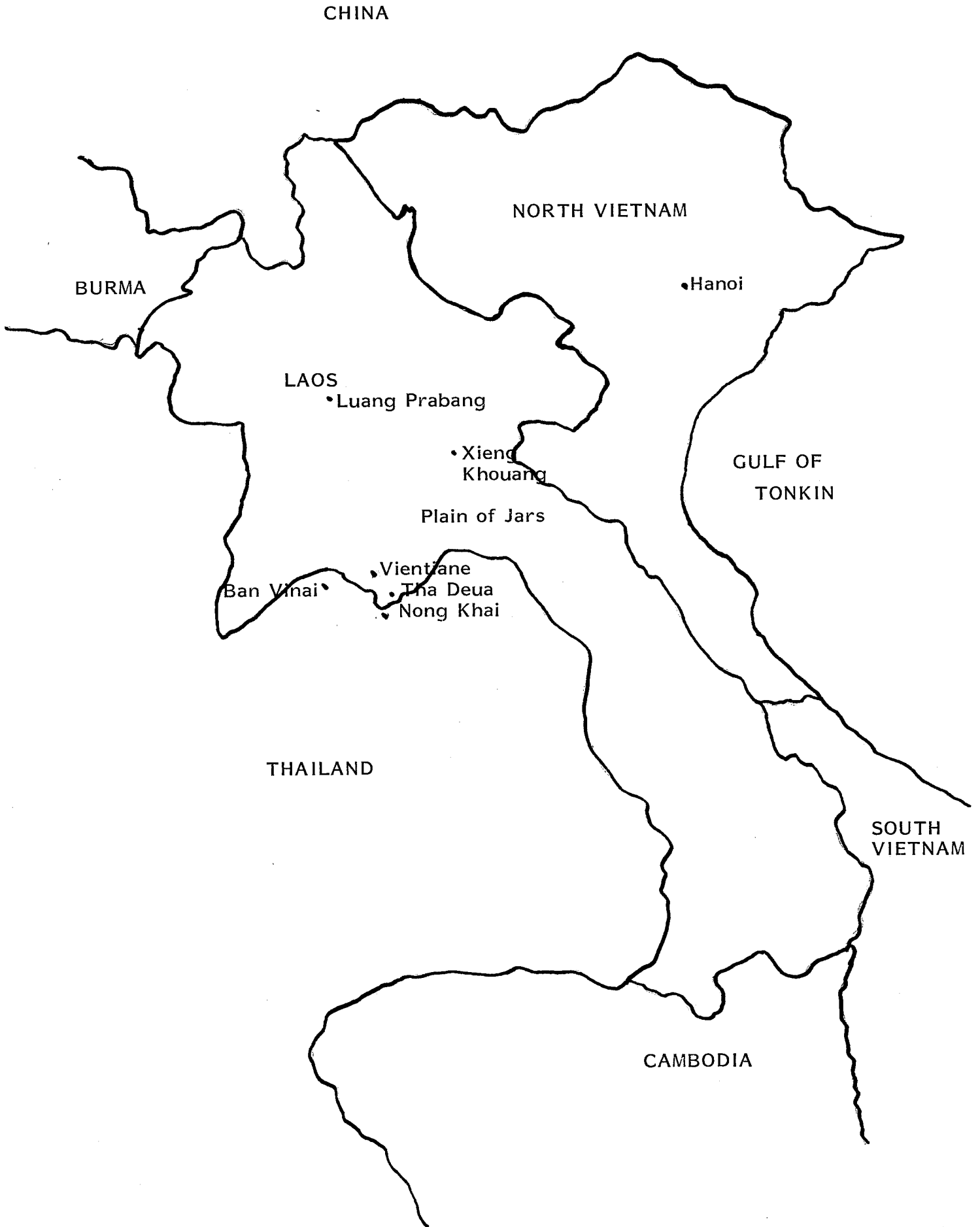
4. All educational institutions in La Crosse should contact appropriate people to speak or conduct workshops about refugee populations to help eliminate misconceptions and alleviate prejudicial attitudes.

5. Future grants should emphasize English acquisition as the main factor for grant need.

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APPENDIX A
MAP OF LAOS



APPENDIX B
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY FORM

Name of Head of Household: _____

Address: _____

1. How many persons live with you (TOTAL): _____

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
2. How many infants (1-3 years) -----	_____	_____
3. Pre-school children (4-5 years)-----	_____	_____
4. Grammar school age (6-10 years)-----	_____	_____
5. Middle school age (11-13 years)-----	_____	_____
6. High school age (14-17 years)-----	_____	_____
7. 18-21 year old persons-----	_____	_____
8. 22-30 years old-----	_____	_____
9. 31-45 years old-----	_____	_____
10. 46-60 years old-----	_____	_____
11. 61 + years old-----	_____	_____

How many of these persons speak English?

12. Well? _____ 13. Just a little? _____

14. Not at all? _____

What ages are the person who speak English?

15. Well _____ 16. Just a little _____

How many persons in the household are employed?

17. Full time _____ 18. Part time _____

19. Looking for work but not working _____

How many persons in the household are going to public school?

20. Public school (Grades 1-12) _____

21. Vocational school _____

22. College _____

How many have been in the United States?

23. Less than 18 months _____

24. More than 18 months _____

25. How many rooms does your household share? _____

26. Are the housing conditions satisfactory? Yes _____ No _____

What changes do you need in housing?

27. More room _____

28. How many more rooms? _____

29. More heat _____

30. Better insulation _____

31. Hot water _____

32. Lower rent _____

33. More beds _____

34. Other _____

35. Do any members of your household need special medical treatment? _____

36. What kinds? _____

37. Is anyone handicapped? _____

38. Pregnant? _____

39. Disabled? _____

40. Chronically ill? _____

Do any members of your household need ---

41. More winter clothing _____

42. If so, what sizes & kinds _____

43. Other clothing _____

44. Do you have access to transportation? _____

45. Do you need better transportation? _____

46. How many persons in your household want English lessons? _____

47. How many are looking for work? _____

48. How many need bilingual assistance? _____

49. Do you need child care services? _____