

# **Geo-Free-O Distinctions and the Implications for VOLAGs and LPH**

Presentation by Tonya Cook to  
the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual LPH – VOLAG  
Forum, November 5, 2008

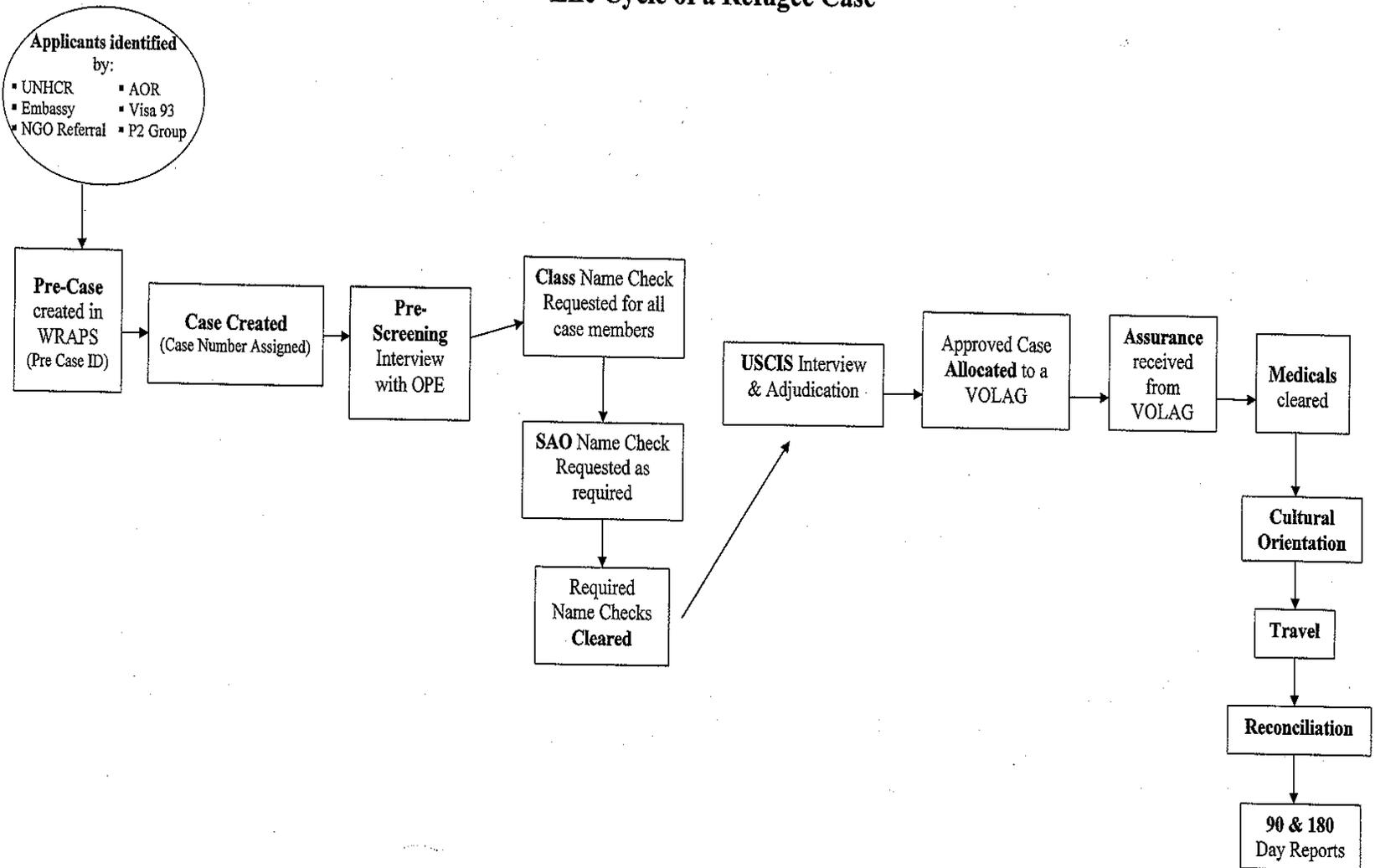
# How Do Refugees Get Considered for Resettlement to the U.S.?

Three types of refugee cases:

- 1) Priority One: *Individuals* of compelling humanitarian concern referred to the USRP by UNHCR, U.S. Embassies, or NGOs. Case generated overseas.
- 2) Priority Two: *Population* of special humanitarian concern. A group of refugees are identified and offered an opportunity to apply to the USRP. Must still make refugee claim. Case generated overseas.
- 3) Priority Three: *Family Reunification*. Case is generated in the U.S. by a refugee filing for eligible family members who are living in refugee situations overseas. Case generated in the U.S.



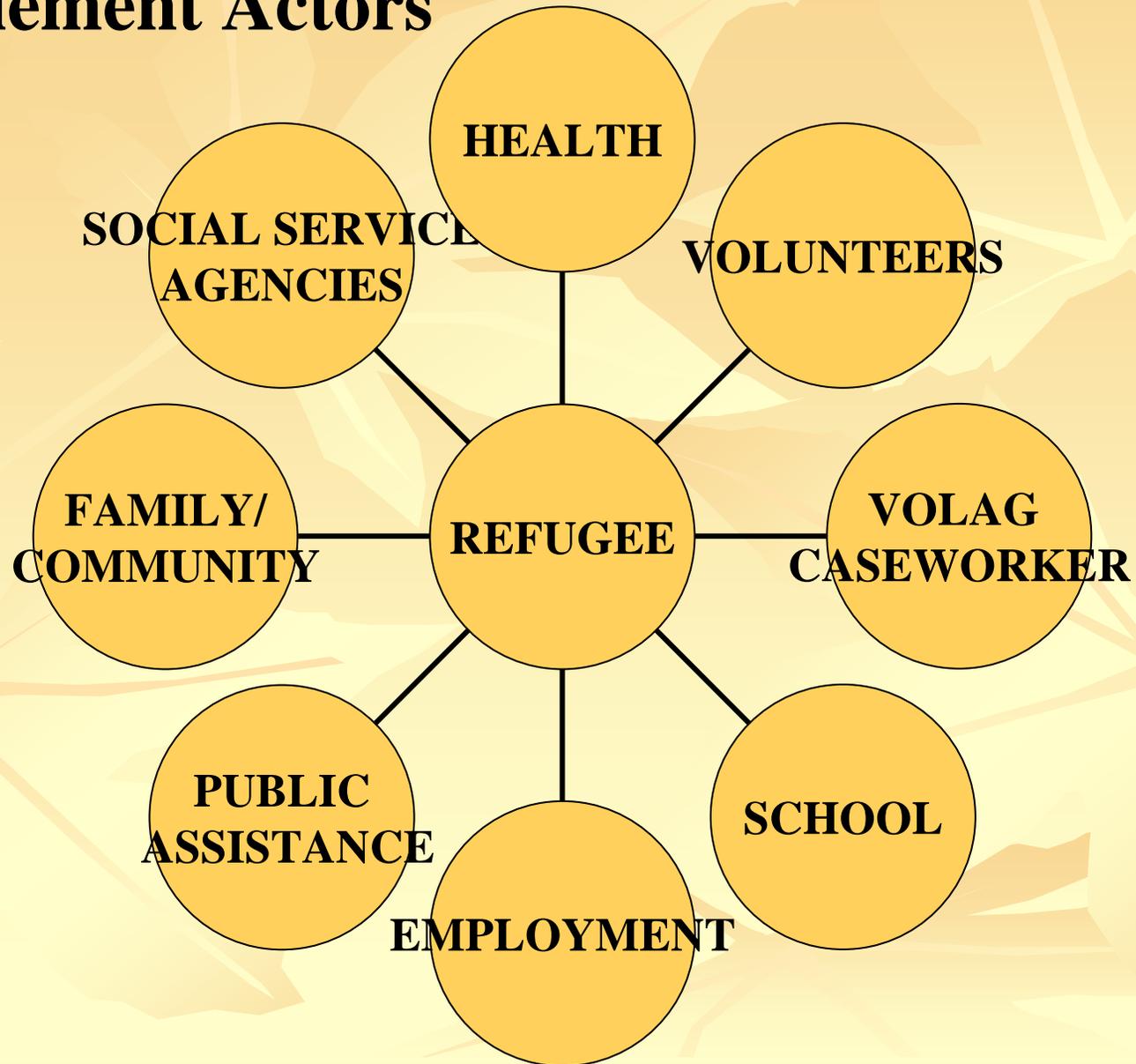
## Life Cycle of a Refugee Case



# Who are the Actors Involved in the Resettlement of Refugees?

- VOLAGs (Resettlement Agencies)
- Ethnic Community Based Organizations (ECBOs) such as Vietnamese Social Services, Confederation of Somali Communities, etc.
- Other Social Service Agencies
- Family/Community
- Financial worker if eligible for public assistance.
- Job Counselor
- Schools
- Health care
- ELL
- Volunteers

# Resettlement Actors



# Role of the VOLAGs

- *The “VOLAGs” are Nine agencies contracted by the U.S. Dept. of State to provide “initial reception and placement” services to newly-arrived refugees.*
- *Through other funding sources, VOLAGs also provide other services to refugees such as Employment Services, Refugee Cash Assistance, Immigration Services and other specialized services for refugees and immigrants.*

# **There are Five Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) in the Twin Cities**

- **Catholic Charities**

- **International Institute of Minnesota**

- **Lutheran Social Services**

- **Minnesota Council of Churches**

- **World Relief Minnesota**

# VOLAG Responsibilities

## “Initial Reception and Placement” Services

- Case management services and regular contact with refugee families for their **first 90 days**.
- Case Managers ensure that all refugees receive proper immigration documents (I-94s and Employment Authorization Documents) and social security cards and that they receive public benefits they are eligible for.
- Case Managers provide information and referrals as needed to the refugee families and assist them toward **self-sufficiency**.

# **VOLAG Responsibilities**

## **“Initial Reception and Placement” Services**

- **Airport reception**
  - **Housing/utilities (Home visit)**
    - **Food/Clothing**
- **Basic furniture and household supplies**
- **Home and community orientation**
  - **Apply for Social Security cards**
    - **Draft Registration**
    - **Public assistance**
- **School registration/ESL referrals**
  - **Employment assistance**
- **Medical care/refugee screening**
- **Travel loan/Family reunification**
- **Special care of separated/unaccompanied minors**

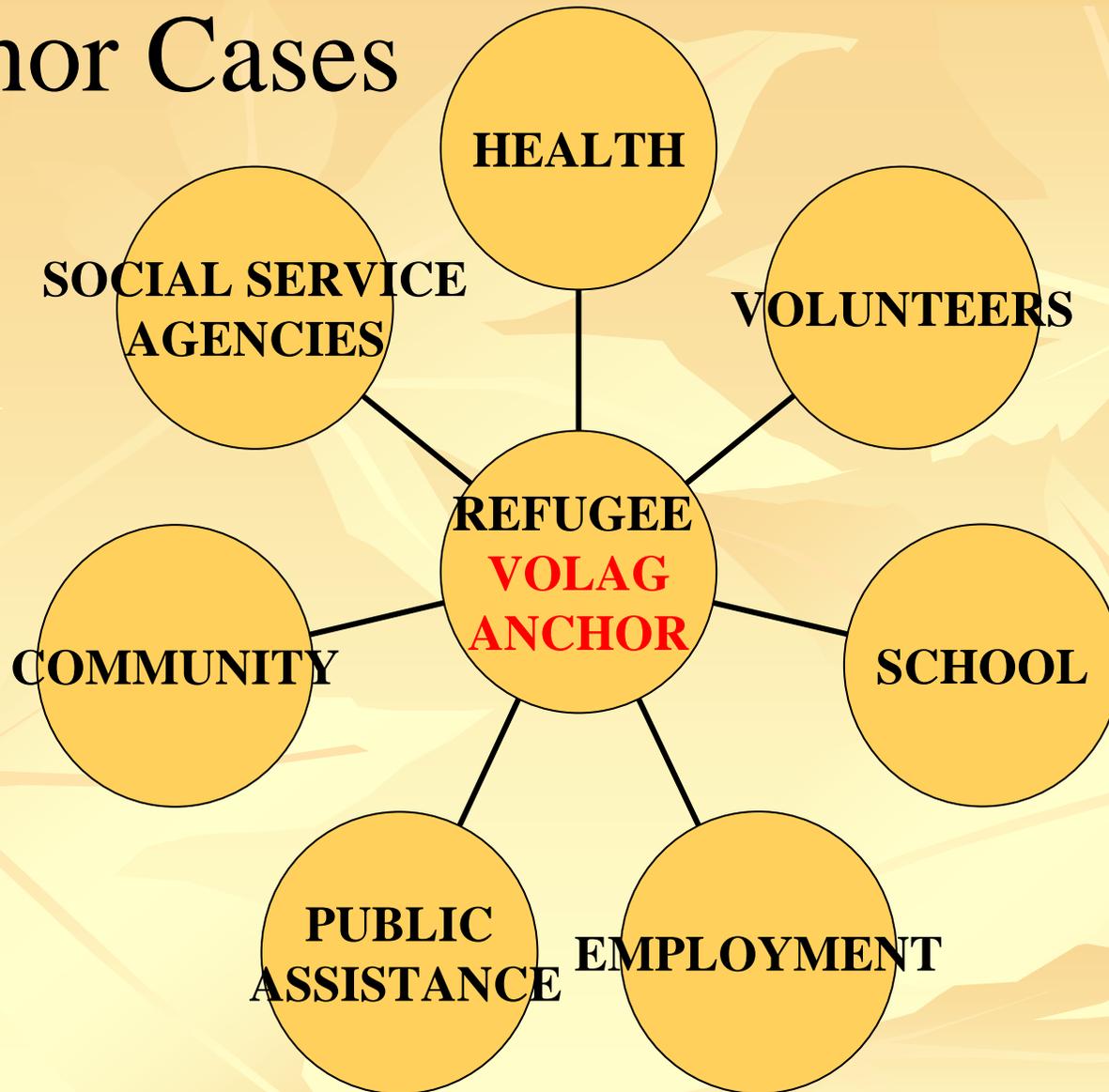
# Anchor vs. Free

- Another way to distinguish cases is according to who they are coming to join in the U.S. (if anyone).

# “Anchored” Cases

- An “anchor” is a family/friend in the U.S. who either:
  - 1) filed for the family to come, or
  - 2) Was named by the refugee during the overseas processing as someone they would like to join in the U.S.
- VOLAGS meet with anchors before the family arrives to determine whether they are able or willing to assist with resettlement services.

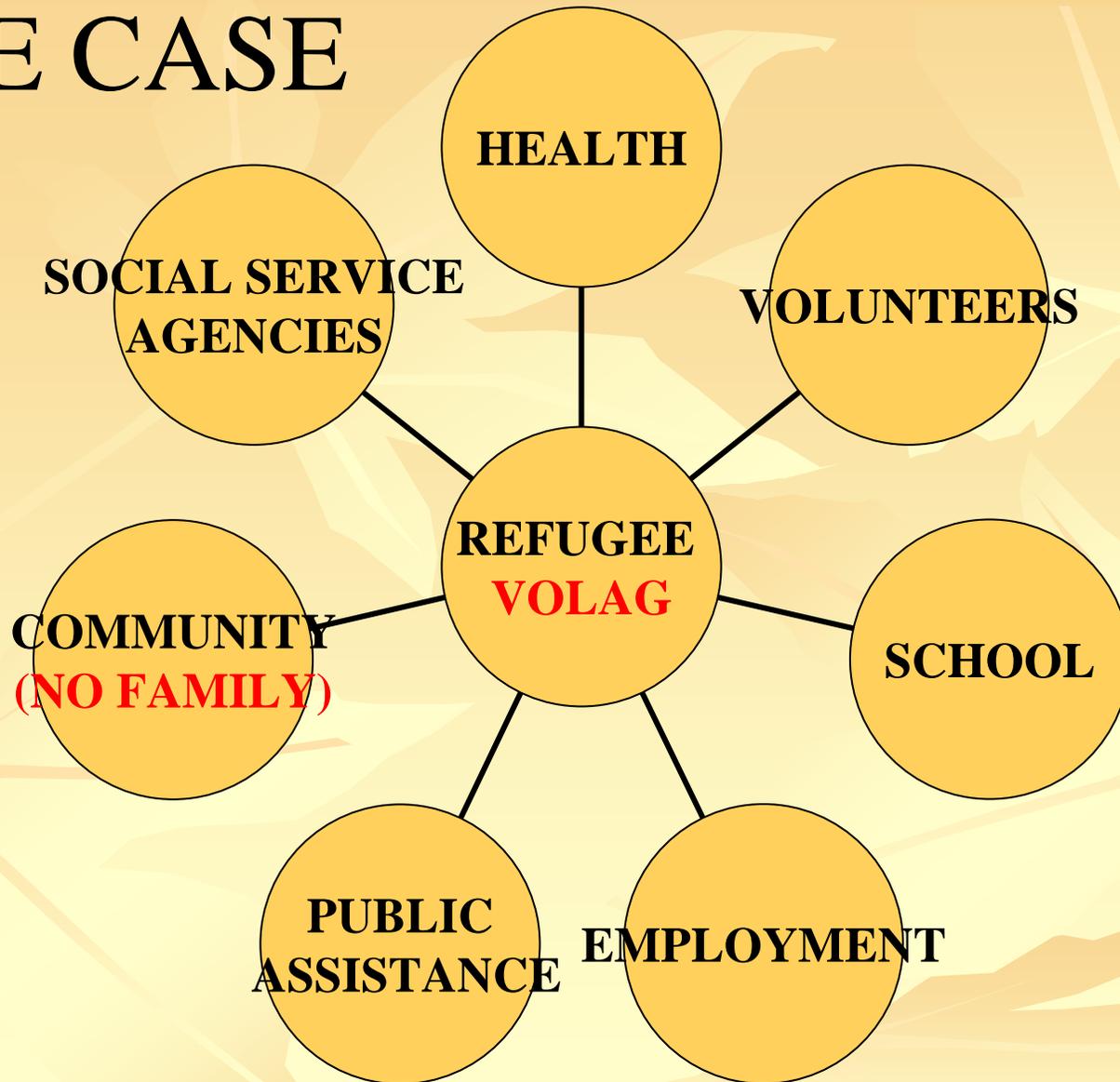
# Anchor Cases



# “Free” Cases

- If refugees do not have any family or friends in the U.S., they are called “free” cases and have no choice where in the U.S. they resettle.
- There are no relatives to assist them and the VOLAG completes all resettlement responsibilities.
- MN is not allowed to accept “FREE” cases because of the lack of affordable housing and limitations to finding immediate employment.

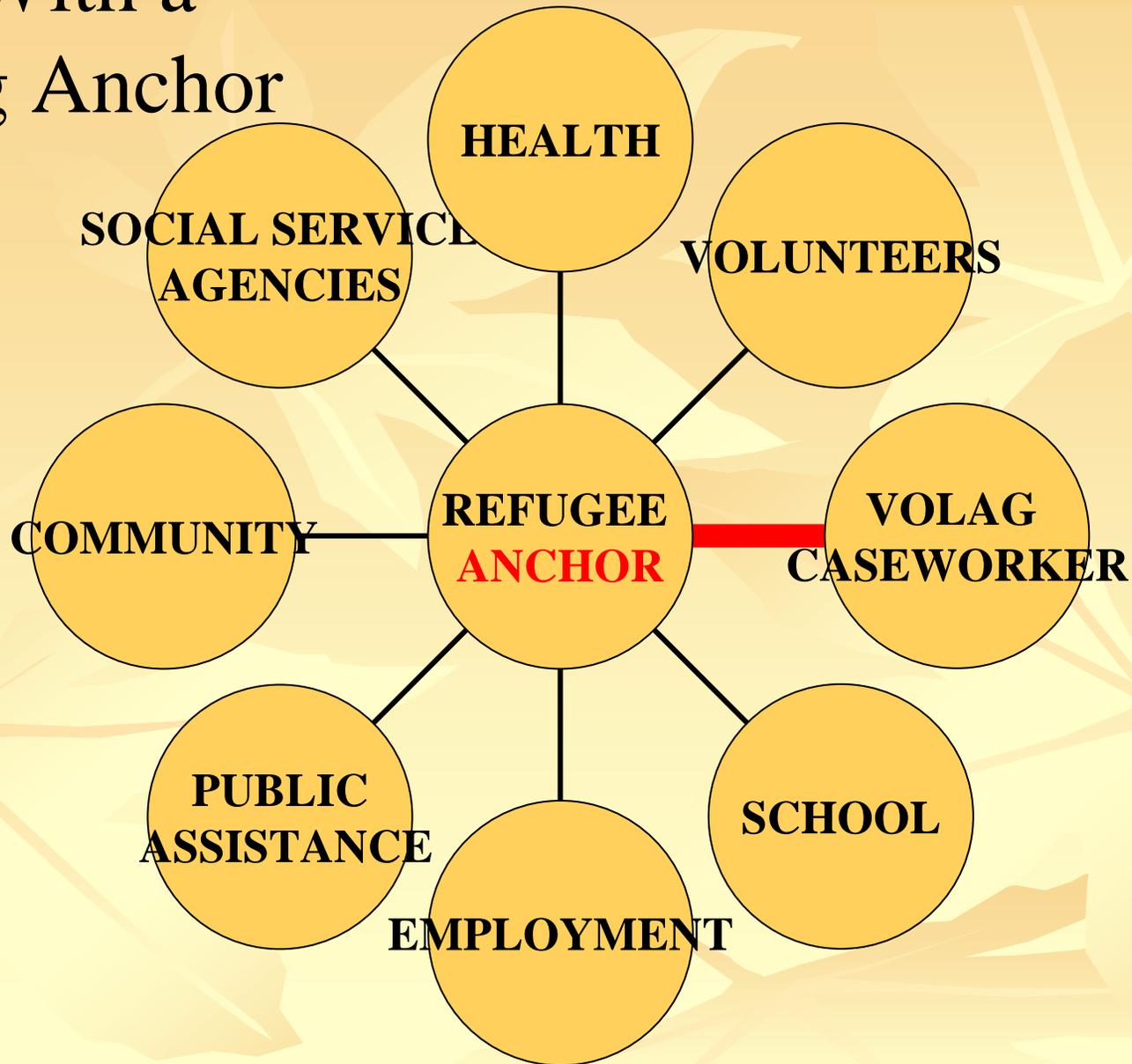
# FREE CASE



# History of “Anchors” in MN

- For the past few years, refugees arriving to MN were joining large, established refugee communities (i.e. Hmong, Somali).
- Anchors from these communities are generally more established, with knowledge and experience with U.S. social services. Because they were willing and had a desire to help their families with their resettlement services, they often played a central role.
- Anchors made it possible to resettle refugees within an 100 mile radius because anchors were able to help with resettlement of their relatives.

# Case With a Strong Anchor



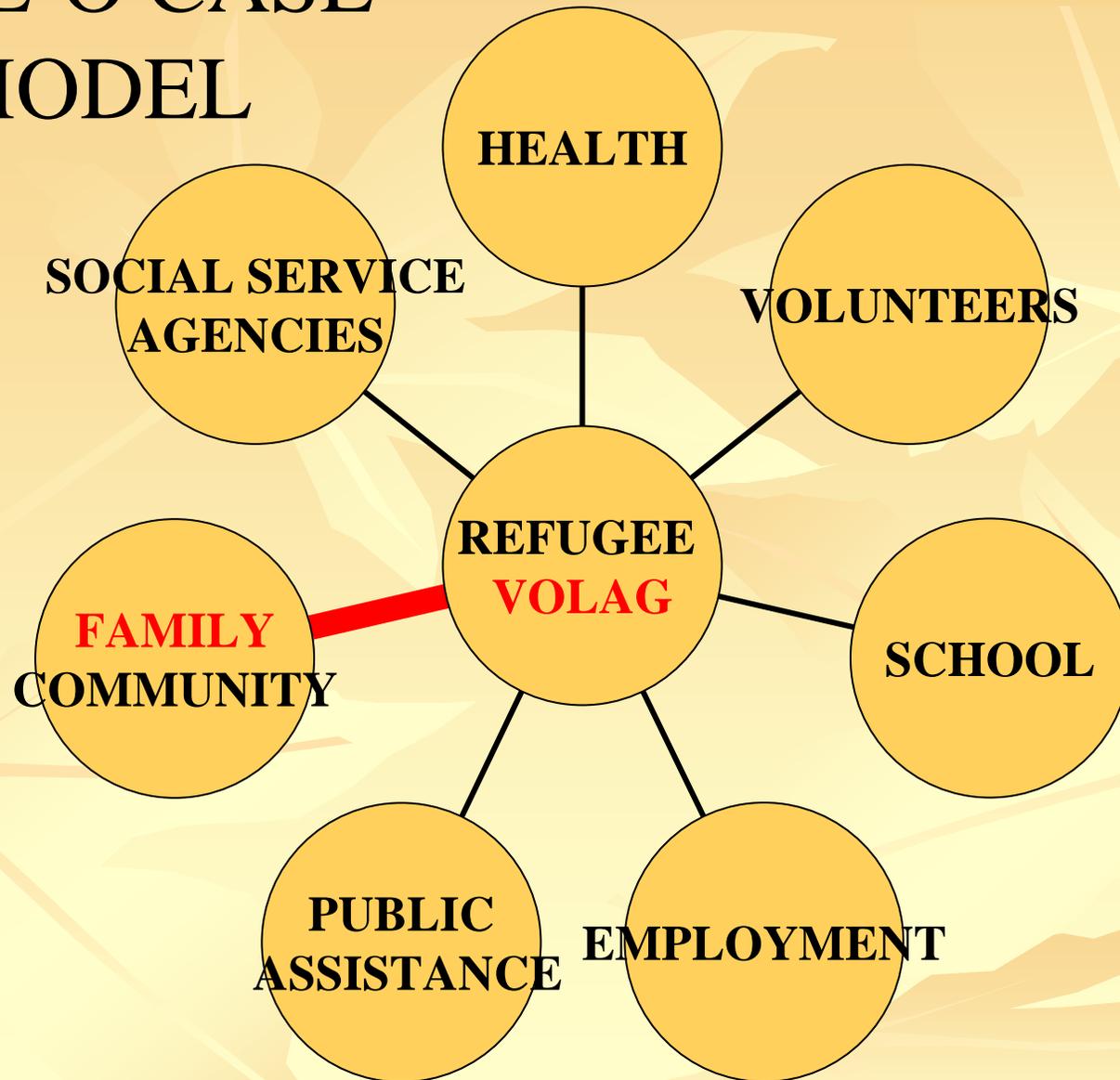
# Recent Changes in Resettlement to MN

- In the Spring of 2008, the U.S. Department of State Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) reclassified ALL refugees from Burma and Bhutan as FREE cases.
- This was done because these are two new refugee populations who often do not have established communities or anchors.
- “Anchors” listed for cases are sometimes new arrivals themselves, or do not speak English or drive, and are not able to assist with resettlement services.
- This set the expectation that the VOLAGs will likely provide all R&P services to Burmese/Karen and Bhutanese cases.

# Free Cases That Come to MN: “Free-O”

- Burmese/Karen and Bhutanese who list an anchor on their application are called “free with geographic preference” or “free-o” as it is becoming known.
- Free-O cases allowed to come to MN.
- All Burmese/Karen and Bhutanese are now treated like “free” cases, with little or no anchor assistance with resettlement services.

# FREE-O CASE MODEL



# Implications

- More outside support needed (churches, volunteers)
- VOLAG assisting in all resettlement services
- No safety net of a strong anchor after VOLAGs complete 90 days of case management or to take care of the needs beyond the R&P duties.
- More community support needed (Karen Support Project)

# Implications for Public Health

- Need for increased communication with VOLAG agencies.
- Increased need for collaboration with community partners (ECBOs, volunteers, etc.)



**Thank you!**  
**Questions?**