



# Cultural Snapshots

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MARSHALLESE IN OUR COMMUNITY

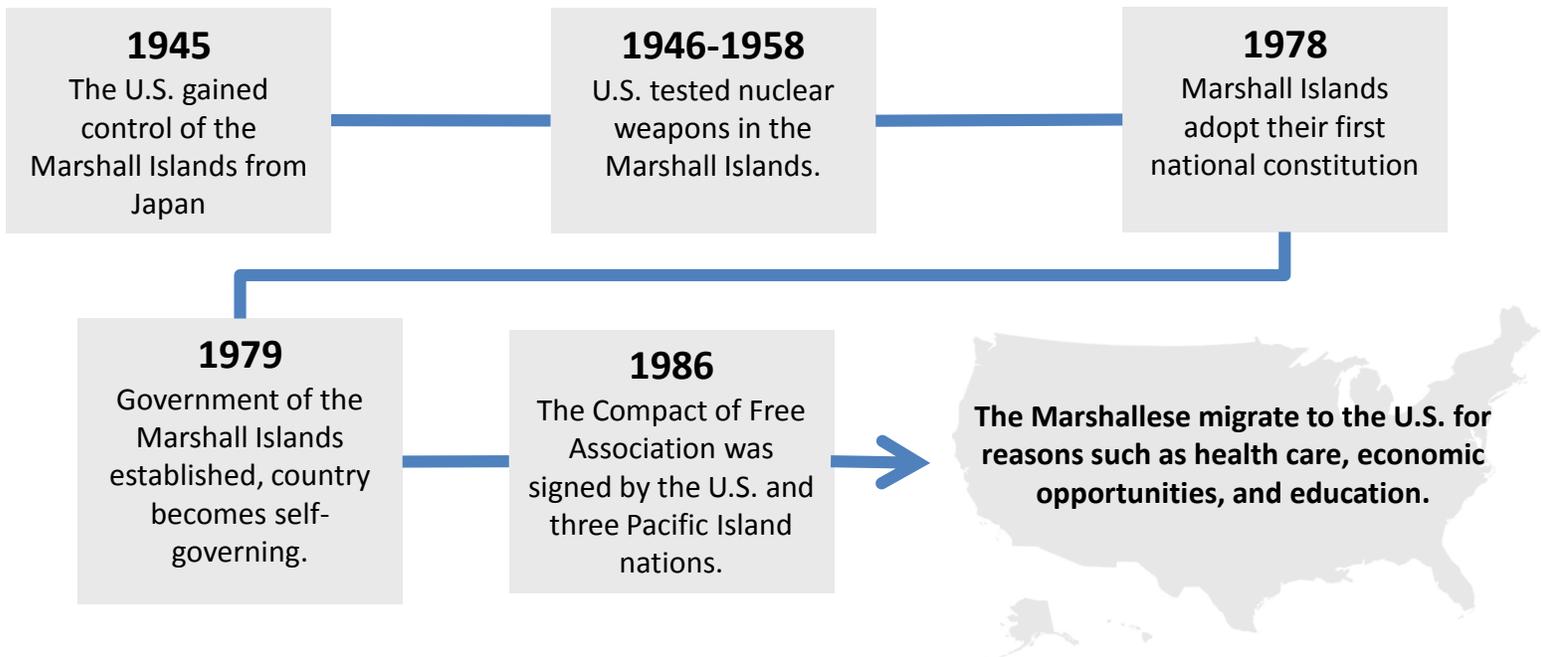
A short report in a series highlighting some of our Dubuque neighbors

## The Human Rights Department

- This report is one of a series of works to highlight the cultural vibrancy present in our community and to contribute toward the work of Inclusive Dubuque. The reports support the Council’s 5-year community goal of social and cultural vibrancy, which seeks to increase mutual understanding, knowledge, and acceptance while continuing to become an inclusive community where all feel welcome and included.
- Inclusive Dubuque network partners collaborating on this report and future actions include: Mercy Medical Center, Crescent Community Health Center, Northeast Iowa Community College, the Multicultural Family and IowaWorks.
- The information provided in this report has been gathered from a combination of academic publications, anecdotal evidence, and results of community based research including a surveying effort in the Marshallese community.

## Background and History

- The Marshall Islands are located in the remote Pacific Ocean midway between Hawaii and Australia.
- The Marshall Islands total to 70 square miles of land. This is about 1/9<sup>th</sup> the area of Dubuque County.
- 70% of the population (61,815) live on two urbanized islands, Majuro and Ebeye.



1. The nuclear testing consisted of 67 explosive tests which equates in total power to 7,200 Hiroshima sized weapons. This created many serious direct and in-direct health outcomes.
2. The COFA permits Marshallese to legally live and work in the U.S. while retaining their citizenship in the Marshall Islands. As non-citizens, many Marshallese are excluded from safety net and federal benefit programs.



**300-600** Marshallese reside in Dubuque and over **1,000** in the state of Iowa. The largest populations of Marshallese in the U.S. live in Arkansas and Hawaii.



The Marshallese have some of the highest rates of cancer and diabetes. Diabetes prevalence is estimated at **25-50%** of Marshallese adults.



There were **155** Marshallese speaking students enrolled in the Dubuque Community School District in the 2015-2016 school year.

# Social and Cultural Vibrancy



## Family

- ❖ Kinship structure for the Marshallese is largely centered around females.
- ❖ Sisters often raise children collectively across multiple households. Males are active in helping raise their sister's children.<sup>12</sup>
- ❖ Marshallese are a collectivist-focused society with the extension of families across households. This focus counters the norms of individualism in the U.S.<sup>12</sup> Marshallese emphasize helping each other.

## Faith

- ❖ The Marshallese bring a strong faith community to Dubuque who emphasize service to others, the community, and other Marshallese community in the United States.
- ❖ The Marshallese are predominately Christian. Sundays are devoted to rest, relaxation, and family church services.
- ❖ There are four congregations present in Dubuque: Paradise Assembly of God, New Hope, Full Gospel, Church of the Latter Day Saints.

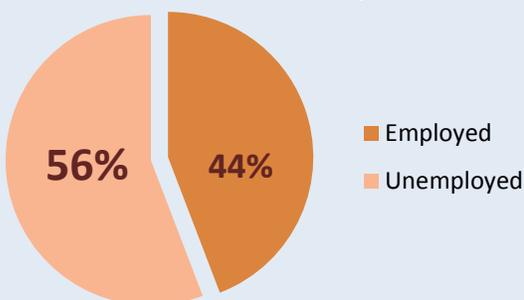
We Marshallese are very thankful to be here in Dubuque. Thankful that we are part of the community.

A Marshallese Resident

## Dubuque Contributions

- ❖ The Marshallese help the Dubuque community celebrate Marshall Islands Constitution Day in May, an event put on in partnership with the Multicultural Family Center.
- ❖ Marshallese come to Dubuque to raise families, find employment, education, and continue their traditions. They contribute to the Dubuque workforce and many are currently seeking employment.
- ❖ In the community survey, the Marshallese emphasize their desires for their children to have opportunities for education and to attend post-secondary schooling.
  - ✓ They recognize the importance of education for future employment and in order to better access resources and services to better their lives.
  - ✓ They also emphasize the need for adults, who lacked educational opportunities in the Islands, to find resources and services in the Dubuque community.

The results of the community survey indicate high **unemployment** in the Marshallese community.



Commonly reported employers include: Hormel, Wal-Mart, Mount Saint Francis, and Mt. Carmel.

We hope that the community would realize that more than anything we are looking forward to a better future here in Dubuque.

A Marshallese Resident

### ***How long have you lived in Dubuque?***

Average: 6.6 years

Range: weeks- 24 years

### ***How long have you lived in the U.S.?***

Average: 12.3 years

Range: 0.5-28 years

# Challenges and Opportunities

## Housing

- Challenge: Nearly all the Marshallese participating in the community survey reported renting a home or apartment, or living with other family members.
- Opportunity: Marshallese reported wanting to access education on financial management.

We people from the Marshall Islands are very thankful to be here, live in the US, but also can be challenging. There is difficulty accessing health care. Thank you to the Dubuque community recognized Marshallese to be part of the community.

## Food

- Challenges: The most commonly purchased foods reported on the community survey included: rice, canned meat, ramen noodles, and fruits/vegetables. Over 50% of Marshallese families reported using food stamps
- Opportunities: Many Marshallese reported wanting to know more about how to eat healthy and prepare foods. Nearly all survey respondents wrote that they would like to eat healthy foods and to learn more about eating healthy diets.

Many patients are so ill or chronic disease is so progressed by the time they arrive at the clinic, their care is beyond the capabilities of family practice, yet specialty care is out of reach due to cost.

Health Care Provider

Do you feel like you eat a healthy diet?

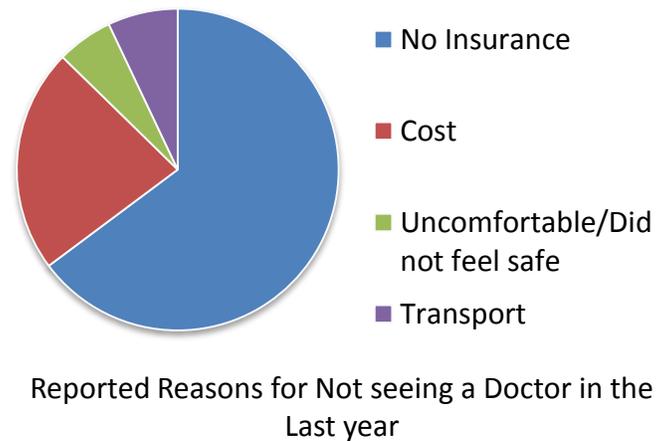
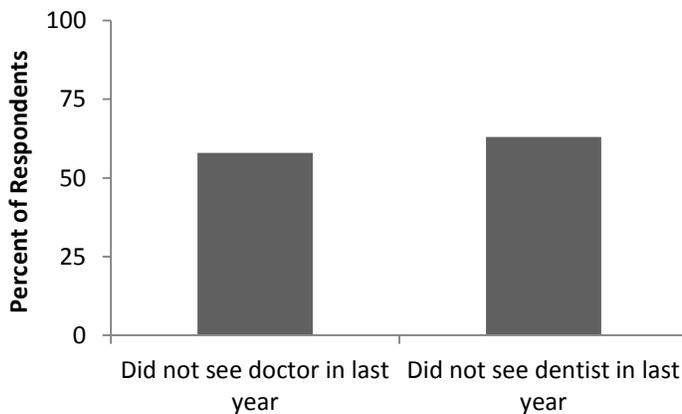
**Unsure (43 responses)**

Yes (29 responses)

No (10 responses)

## Health

- Challenges: The Marshallese experience disproportionate rates of many chronic diseases. They have some of the highest rates of diabetes and cancer. They lack access to the resources in order to prevent and treat their conditions. This stems from their ineligibility for federal insurance programs due to their non-citizen/immigration status. Other barriers include but are not limited to language, trust, transportation, communication difficulties, modesty, gender barriers, and discomfort.
- Opportunities: Marshallese reported wanting to access employment assistance services, English, and learning how to be involved in community sports or the arts.



# Partnerships and Future Action

The Human Rights Department connects Marshallese community members, Inclusive Dubuque network partners, and state and federal partners in order to facilitate inclusion in the broader community, access to resources, and improved cultural understanding to overcome systemic barriers.

## Culture:

- The Marshallese community leaders and members are taking initiative to work with local and national governmental and non-governmental organizations. In doing so, community members provide an overview of Marshallese culture and learn about the organization's operations. This allows the groups to work together to discover ways to overcome disparities.
- In addition, the Multicultural Family Center (MFC) has been working with the Marshallese community to celebrate their cultural events and engage them in the community activities at the center.

## Health:

- The Dubuque Marshall Islands Health Project was initiated when Trinity Health tasked Mercy with implementing a project focused on the social determinants of health. Mercy selected the Marshallese community as a community disproportionately experiencing chronic diseases and supported the initiative with initial funding from Mercy's Community Benefit Ministries. The future plan is to hire and train community health workers in collaboration with Crescent Community Health Center. The community health workers will be working with nurses and community members as bridge builders for health screening and services.
- The Iowa Department of Public Health's Office of Minority and Multicultural Health is working with the Marshallese community to provide education about health issues and healthy life styles.

## Employment:

- The Department is facilitating a partnership between Inclusive Dubuque Network Partner IowaWorks and the Marshallese Community to obtain stronger data on the unemployment rate and begin to expand access to entry level jobs and opportunities for advancement. Iowa Works and Human Rights have successfully identified a community member who is interested in working as a liaison between Iowa Works staff and Marshallese community member, offering interpretation and translation to assist Marshallese community members in finding jobs or improved employment opportunities.

## Language Access and Advocacy:

- Northeast Iowa Community college and other community organizations are in the process of creating an advocacy/interpretation & translation course focused on building skills for individuals interested in providing culture, language, and advocacy services. The goal is to better bridge the gap between community members with limited English language skills and service providers in the community.

## Legal and Immigration:

- The Immigration Legal Representative for Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of Dubuque provides legal representation for the Marshallese and offers presentations on Pathways to Citizenship.
- The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is planning to provide a series of learning sessions to the Marshallese community about the Naturalization process to how to become US citizens. In addition, they will provide presentations to service providers to learn about the legal and immigration status of the Marshallese community

## Civic Engagement:

- The Office of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs in the Iowa Department of Human Rights is planning to provide leadership and civic education to community members who are interested in learning about the democratic process.