

# **Challenges Encountered Reaching the Marshallese in Arkansas**

**June 3, 2009**

**Cheryl J. LeDoux, MPH  
Senior Epidemiologist  
Arkansas Assessment Initiative**

# Marshall Islands, Where are they?

- ▲ *Location : North Pacific Ocean*
- ▲ *Half way between Hawaii and Australia*
- 5                      *coral islands*
- 29                     *major atolls*
- 1,200                 *atoll-type islets*









# The Marshallese

## *Their Homeland*

▲ *Approximately 66 square miles of total land mass*

▲ *Population approximately 62,000*

### *Worldwide*

*25,000 on Majuro & 18,000 on Ebeye & 17,000 scattered throughout the outer islands*

▲ *Over 50% of the Marshallese are less than 20 years old*

▲ *Language Marshallese*

▲ *Democratic Government*

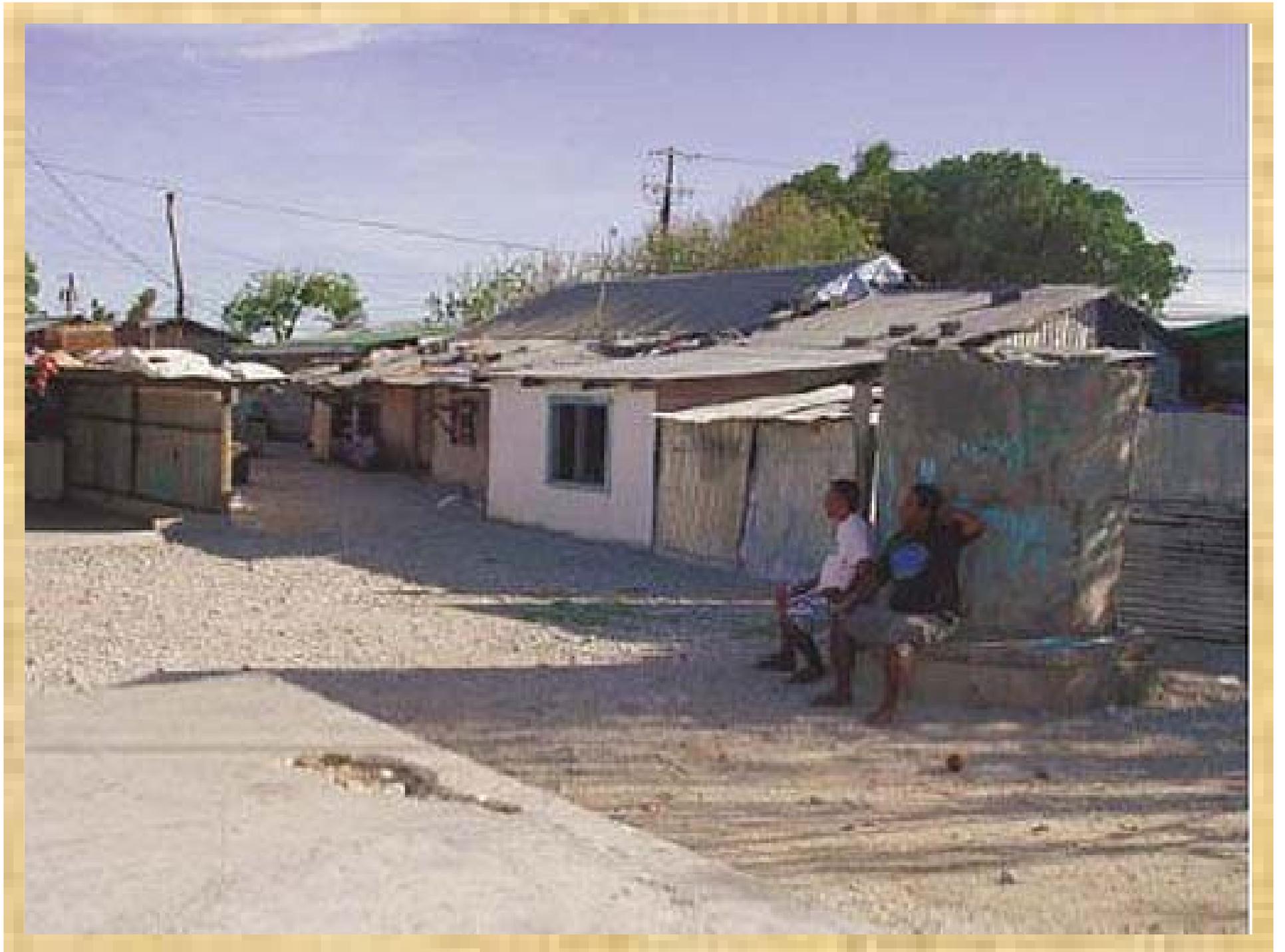


# Marshallese, Who are they?









# Why Leave Paradise???

- ▶ *Physical lack of land*
- ▶ *Population explosion*
- ▶ *Economy : Poor*
- ▶ *Funding from the US and Taiwan account for 75 % of the national budget*
- ▶ *Unemployment rate is 35.0%*
- ▶ *Minimum wage: \$2.00/hour*



# Why Northwest Arkansas??

## COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION

- ▶ *1986 US Congress ratified compact of free association with RMI*
- ▶ *Compact permits RMI citizens to freely immigrate to US*
  - ▶ *Good Schools*
  - ▶ *Plenty of work*
  - ▶ *Easy to get around*



# Disease Detection in Arkansas

- ▲ *High Incidence of Infectious diseases*

- ▲ *Tuberculosis*

- ▲ *Hansen's Disease "Leprosy"*

- ▲ *Syphilis*

- ▲ *Prenatal Hepatitis B*

- ▲ *HIV*

- ▲ *High Incidence of Chronic Diseases*

- ▲ *Diabetes*

- ▲ *Heart Disease*



# Tuberculosis

▲ *114 TB cases in Arkansas*

*50 of these cases were Marshallese*

## **Case Rates 2005**

▲ *Republic of the Marshall Islands  
(RMI) TB 111 cases/100,000*

▲ *U.S. TB 4.8 cases/100,000*

▲ *Arkansas TB 4.1 cases/100,000*



# Diabetes in the Islands

- ▲ *Rates of type II diabetes in the Marshallese are among the highest in the world*
  - ▲ *Estimated 28.0% over 15 years of age have diabetes*
  - ▲ *Estimated 50.0% over 35 years of age have diabetes*
  - ▲ *Diabetes accounts for 30% of Deaths*
- ▲ *Heart Disease Rates*
  - ▲ *Marshall Island Heart Disease Rate 526/100,000*
  - ▲ *United States Heart Disease Rate 188/100,000*



# Syphilis

- ▶ *38 cases of Syphilis in Northwest Arkansas and 21 were Marshallese*
- ▶ *Prevalence in this population is estimated to be 15 times higher than overall syphilis incidence in Arkansas*
- ▶ *Prevalence of Syphilis in RMI is not known*



# Congenital Syphilis

- ▶ *ADH reported 40 cases*
- ▶ *13 Marshallese cases in Northwest Arkansas*
- ▶ *54% identified at birth, 31% at prenatal visit, 8% provider referral, and 8% unknown.*
- ▶ *There were 2 cases of stillbirth*



# Perinatal Hepatitis B

- ▶ *13,153 Live births in Northwest Arkansas in 2005*
- ▶ *459 babies born to Marshallese mothers*
- ▶ *44 babies born to Marshallese mothers positive for hepatitis B virus*
- ▶ *At the time of this investigation, 31 of the infants had completed hepatitis vaccination series*



# Hansen's Disease “Leprosy”

- ▶ *WHO - RMI has highest reported prevalence of Hansen's disease in the world*
- ▶ *17 cases reported to National Hansen's Center in Baton Rouge*
- ▶ *8 were Marshallese in Washington County*



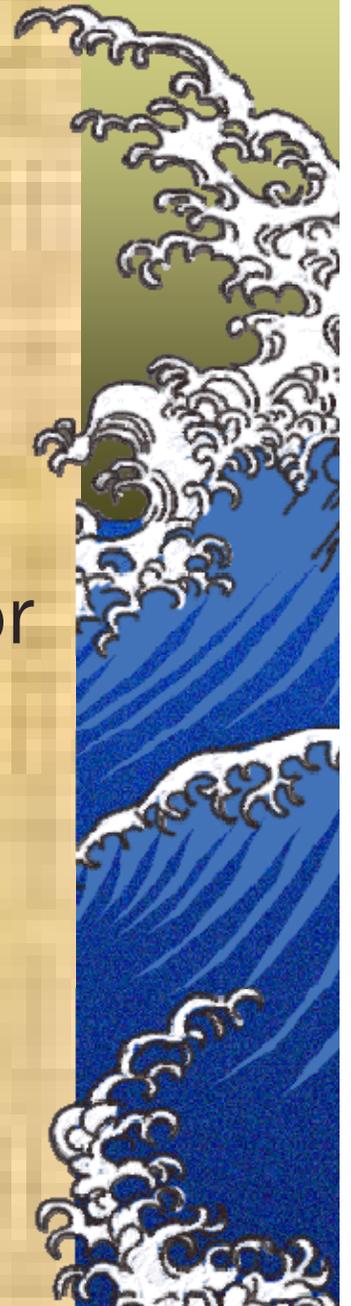
# HIV

- ▶ *Incidence is low in this population*
- ▶ *4 known adult cases and 1 pediatric*
- ▶ *2 cases identified through routine screenings and 2 cases identified through non-STD illness treatment*
- ▶ *All cases received anti-retroviral therapy and are improving*



# Barriers to Care

- ▶ Although Marshallese are able to live and work in the United States they are ineligible for federally funded public assistance
  - ▶ No Medicare
  - ▶ No non-emergency Medicaid (except for pregnant women and those with TB)
  - ▶ No social security benefits
  - ▶ No food stamps
  - ▶ No SCHIP programs nor TANF



# The Unanswered Question, How Many Live in Northwest Arkansas

- ▲ *Springdale - home to the largest number of migrants from the Republic of the Marshall Islands in the continental United States.*
- ▲ *Estimated Marshallese Population Northwest Arkansas:*
  - ▲ *2,000 by US Census in 2000*
  - ▲ *6,000 – 10,000 estimated in 2007*





**Welcome Guest**  
Join Us!

Create an account

**Login:**

User:

Password:

Remember me

Login

- Main Menu**
- Home
  - News Archive
  - yLinks
  - Forums
  - MobileNews
  - Guestbook
- Election 2007
- Official Candidates List
- Marshallese Community
- Honor Gallery

Community : Health Survey to Reap Benefits for Marshallese in Arkansas

**Health Survey to Reap Benefits for Marshallese in Arkansas**

Marshallse, 18 years and older, are invited to participate in a health survey hosted by the Jones Center for Families, in Springdale, Arkansas. The survey will be held in the Computer Center and will be conducted May 19-31, excluding Monday.

The first 600 to successfully complete the health survey will receive a \$20 gift certificate. "We are wanting 300 men and 300 women to take the survey," said Dr. Grace Donoho, director of education at the Jones Center.

Some participants will also have the opportunity to participate in a health screening.

Improving public health programs and services to the Marshallese is the focus of the program. The largest population of expatriate Marshall Islanders in the U.S. reside in the Northwest Arkansas region.

The project is funded by the Arkansas Assessment Initiative program funded by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Program dates and hours are:

- Tuesday - Thursday 8 am - 8 pm
- Friday 8 am - 9 pm
- Saturday 10 am - 8 pm
- Sunday 1 pm - 5 pm

- Yokwe Online, May 13, 2009

