

REFUGEE WORKS

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY


 a program of
LIRS
 LUTHERAN IMMIGRATION
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Job Upgrading

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Like this month of June, job upgrading is busting out all over. Apprenticeships, vocational training, subsidized employment, licensing and recertification vouchers, career pathways counseling—our network is trying out all kinds of strategies which will launch working refugees beyond entry-level employment. A variety of factors have propelled and energized this job upgrading movement:

- The allocation of \$8.5 million by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) for “planned job upgrading services” in a formula set-aside to all state refugee coordinator offices
- Fewer refugee arrivals, which enables job counselors to spend more time on career laddering with underemployed refugees who have revolved through a series of entry level placements
- Leveraging and coordinating of such other programs as ORR’s Targeted Assistance, the Labor Department’s skills training vouchers, and the Education Department’s recertifying services to further career goals
- Employer-driven initiatives to promote refugee workers from within the company

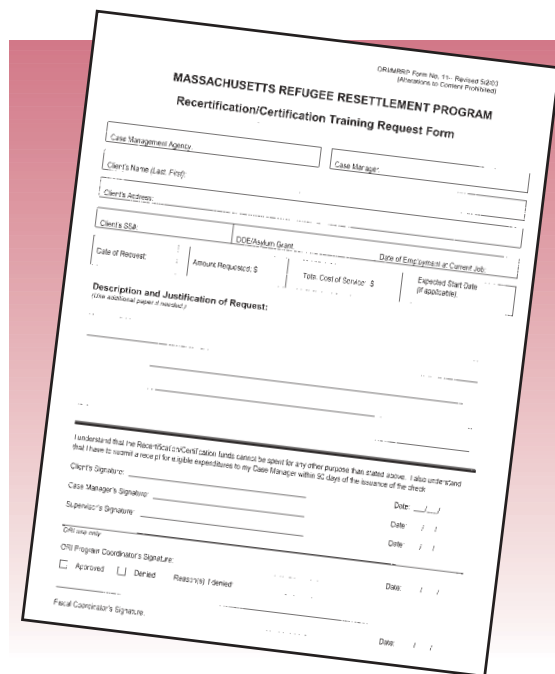
I hope this is just the start, reflecting a real shift in mission from a focus solely on early job placement to a longer-term commitment that helps refugees climb the career ladder to self-sufficiency and professional fulfillment.


 Jane E. Bloom, ACSW

MASSACHUSETTS ISSUES RECERTIFICATION VOUCHERS TO REFUGEES; OTHER STATES TRY DIFFERENT APPROACHES

The Massachusetts Refugee Resettlement Program (MRRP) offers refugees up to \$2,000 each to help them reclaim their careers or become certified in new careers. Here’s how it works: The refugee client’s case manager—in consultation with his/her employment counselor—verifies that the “Recertification/Certification Training Benefit” will be used for appropriate training and that clients are motivated and serious about using and completing the training to progress in their careers. Once the decision is made to proceed with a request for funding, the case manager submits to the State a request form (right) on behalf of the client. If approved, MRRP then mails a

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DRMBR Form No. 11 - Revised 5/03
 (Wherever in Context Provided)
MASSACHUSETTS REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM
Recertification/Certification Training Request Form

Case Management Agency: _____ Case Manager: _____
 Client's Name (Last, First): _____
 Client's Address: _____
 Client's State: _____ DDE/Adm. Unit: _____ Date of Employment or Current Job: _____
 Date of Request: _____ Amount Requested: \$ _____ Total Cost of Service: \$ _____ Expected Start Date (if applicable): _____
 Description and Justification of Request:
 (Use additional sheets if needed)

I understand that the Recertification/Certification funds cannot be spent for any other purpose than stated above. I also understand that I have to accept a receipt for a single expenditure to my Case Manager within 30 days of the issuance of the check.

Client's Signature: _____ Date: / /
 Case Manager's Signature: _____ Date: / /
 Supervisor's Signature: _____ Date: / /
 ORR/Program Coordinator's Signature: _____ Date: / /
 Approved Denied Reason(s) Denied: _____ Date: / /
 Fiscal Coordinator's Signature: _____ Date: / /

STATES MAKE CREATIVE USE OF UPGRADE SET-ASIDES

On July 8, 2002, ORR published its fiscal year 2002 Social Services Formula Notice, which included an \$8.5 million set-aside for job upgrading, employment retraining and subsidized employment strategies leading to an offer of unsubsidized employment. For activities funded with the set-aside allocation, the ORR director waived the five-year limitation, allowing refugees who had been in the United States longer than 60 months to benefit from these job-upgrading services if they have not yet attained U.S. citizenship. Upgrade allocations to the states ranged from \$5,000 for Arkansas to nearly \$1.9 million for Florida.

RefugeeWorks conducted an informal survey of state refugee coordinator offices to see how the upgrade set-asides were being spent. Here is a sampling of their responses:

- **FLORIDA's** Office of Refugee Services (ORS) is developing career laddering components in addition to its existing employment contracts. The ORS approach will focus set-aside funds on those refugees with "proven professional credentials and experience," persons with advanced education, and those with experience in the trades or health professions. Clients who fit this profile will receive thorough counseling resulting in a career ladder plan and placement in a suitable position. Contractors will hire additional job developers who will complete a labor market analysis and work closely with employers and chambers of commerce.
- On April 1 **IOWA** opened an Assessment and Training Center with its upgrade funds. The staff of six will work with refugees from Polk County to develop individualized employment plans and to offer customized training through a local community college.
- **LOUISIANA's** resettlement agencies will reassess currently employed clients, offer job seminars for persons wanting to upgrade and conduct job development activities for upgraded positions.
- **MARYLAND** modified its existing contracts with three providers. The two ESL providers—Montgomery County Public Schools and Baltimore City Community College—will offer additional classes toward jobs such as fiber optics technician, chauffeur, daycare assistant and certified nursing assistant. The third provider, Lutheran Social Services, will collaborate with the ESL partners in referring candidates to the classes and procuring appropriate placements for the graduates.

- **MISSOURI** amended its current contracted service providers' social services contracts to include the upgrading component. In Kansas City refugees benefit from customized on-the-job training contracts with employers. In the Jefferson City-Columbia area, funds are being used for computer skills training. And in St. Louis a program is underway to upgrade refugees with a medical background to patient care associate positions.
- In **TEXAS** the funds are being used to offer more comprehensive skills and strengths assessment, long-term career planning, and vocational training. Approximately half of the state's employment providers also have used the set-aside to purchase diploma and credential evaluation services. Contractors have developed cooperative agreements with some public and private training institutions to reduce course fees, extend course lengths, modify eligibility requirements and make other accommodations in order to facilitate refugee participation in skills training. To date refugees have enrolled in the following types of training, which were paid for wholly or in part by



the state's upgrading dollars: certified nursing assistant, truck driver, computer technician, paralegal, general office clerk, financial software technician, aircraft dispatcher, medical coding and billing specialist, and home health aide.

- The **VERMONT** Refugee Resettlement Program's upgrade project involves review of refugees' employment needs case-by-case, development of individual upgrade plans, and facilitation of training partnerships.

Several other states polled, including Arizona, Idaho, New York and Utah, are in the midst of revamping their current systems, issuing new requests for proposals and designing new outcome measures for the upgrading component.

RECERTIFICATION VOUCHERS *(Continued from page 1)*

check for the grant amount directly to the client, who in turn submits an enrollment confirmation and a receipt for tuition payment and certification to the case manager within 90 days after issuance of the check.

To be eligible, refugees must be employed at least 20 hours per week, and seeking training or certification in professional and para-professional fields, skilled trades and other fields that require such certification or recertification. Funds are limited to no more than 80 percent of the total cost of the purchased service.

Since the program's inauguration 17 grants have been approved totaling \$22,563. Although most grantees are newly arrived refugees, three of the 17 requests approved came from employed refugees who have been in the United States for more than 36 months. Vouchers have been granted for training,

exams and licensing in the following professions:

- > acupuncturist (2)
- > aviation maintenance technician (1)
- > commercial refrigeration and steam engineering technician (1)
- > electrical maintenance technician (2)
- > medical doctor (1)
- > nurse (4)
- > paralegal (1)
- > pilot (1)
- > plumber (3)
- > welding and HVAC technician (1)

For more information contact Deni Ozan-George at 617/727-7888, extension 309, or deni.ozan-george@state.ma.us.

COMINGS & GOINGS

Our work this spring has taken us coast to coast and north to south. We were invited by several state refugee coordinator offices to help assess, expand, and redesign employment service systems funded through formula dollars, including social services, Targeted Assistance and the new Set-Aside. In just the last few months, RefugeeWorks has provided state-specific consultations in Nevada, Utah, Florida, and Kentucky. For the state of Massachusetts, we are helping to develop a first-ever integrated employment service (ES)-ESL continuum of service, which included a statewide ES-ESL cross training with Spring Institute in Waltham on May 21-22.

The Employment Training Institutes are going at full throttle. In late February, we ran the fourth—and largest—Institute in San Diego, California. Fifty-four participants, representing thirty-five agencies, attended; all but three were bilingual, bicultural job specialists. Salt Lake City, Utah, was the site of our fifth Institute with fifty in attendance from five states. Our last one in the series will be held in the Portland/Seattle area in September.

We've also been busy this spring with presentations and workshops on a wide variety of employment topics, including: employment and service strategies for the Somali Bantu at ECDC's



annual African conference; financial literacy and employment issues at the Center for Applied Linguistics' Cultural Orientation Meeting; a skills training session at the Maryland Coalition for Refugees and Immigrants Conference; early employment strategies at the HIAS National Matching Grant Conference; and summer employment options for Hmong Women's Circle's national meeting.

For the summer, RefugeeWorks has a full program of training and technical assistance activities planned. We will be in Nashville presenting two workshops at the Nashville New American Coalition's "Economy and Society in Change: Nashville's International Population 2003" Conference in July; in Los Angeles and New York City on Matching Grant consultations; and in North Carolina to train at their statewide refugee conference.

FROM THE FIELD

IT Training Results in Upgrade Success

Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) of San Francisco offers an Information Technology (IT) Program for refugees that is geared to specific licensing exams or certifications including the Microsoft Certified Professional Exam and the Cisco Network Administrator Exam. It consists of four training modules: computer assisted design and drafting (CADD), computer networking technology, UNIX systems administration and Windows networking technology. Most courses are offered evenings and weekends. A Vocational ESL (VESL) curriculum also accompanies the training, emphasizing technical communication, workplace literacy, and retention and advancement supports.

Funding for the IT project comes from the job upgrade set-aside and other refugee employment social services dollars. JVS also leverages resources from the U.S. Department of Labor's H1-B Technical Skills Training grant, and part of the instruction is covered by City College of San Francisco through the state's Americans with Disabilities Act funding. Sun Microsystems donated

hardware in support of the program, and AutoDesk, PTC, and Ashlar donated software.

The program trains approximately 12 refugee participants per year. All graduates receive individualized and group job placement assistance for 90 days. Although the minimum target wage for placements was set at \$15 per hour, many placed clients have exceeded this salary as illustrated in these two recent success stories:

- Ahmed H. worked as an assistant manager earning \$20 per hour. To keep this job he needed to become skilled at using the software program AutoCAD 2002. After the three-month JVS CADD training Ahmed got a new position as a document control manager in the same company, earning \$28 hourly.
- Alex S. was laid off from his job as quality assurance tester one year ago. After completing two modules of the CADD training he got a job as a tester of CADD software. He qualified for the job because he could combine his new knowledge of CADD software with his former quality assurance skills.

For more information contact Director of Training Jim Torrens of JVS, 415/782-6215 or jtorrens@jvs.org, or County Refugee Coordinator Karen Hart at the Private Industry Council of San Francisco, khart@picsf.org.

MEDICAL CAREER ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM

The impetus for the creation of the International Institute of Minnesota's (IIM) Medical Career Advancement Project (MCAP) in 1999 was a follow up study of IIM's nursing assistants training project. Of their 500 graduates, only 2 percent had advanced to higher-level medical positions. The goal of MCAP program is to upgrade the employment status of these refugees from their entry-level positions through education, training and support. Funded initially through a grant from the United Way the program is currently supported through grants from four local foundations.

Eligible participants must be working in an entry-level position in the medical field and have the support of their employer. Special assistance is available to help refugees and others improve their English language skills. Participants receive individual education plans, career counseling, assistance navigating the higher education system and tuition grants ranging from \$1,500 to \$1,800. The program also advises participants on other types of available financial assistance. IIM tuition grants are dispensed semester by semester, assuring continued interaction with the

participants throughout their studies. The clients are expected to pay their remaining educational fees and to continue working at least part-time during their schooling. The majority of the students attend two-year community or technical colleges; however, some clients are able to attend four-year universities, especially in nursing.

To date the program has upgraded 77 individuals primarily as licensed practical nurses or registered nurses, but also as respiratory technologists, surgical technicians, lab technologists, pharmacy technicians and a chemical dependency counselor. An additional 174 participants are currently enrolled. According to Jane Graupman of IIM, "MCAP graduates find employment easily because the health care sector continues to have a strong demand for workers in all fields and because the program's coordinator is an experienced registered nurse with strong ties in the medical community."

For more information contact Jane Graupman, jgraupman@iimn.org.

Refugees to be Teachers with Education Funds

Refugees from eight countries are enrolled in Milwaukee's Refugee Teacher Training and Mentoring Program to develop multilingual skills and become teachers in Milwaukee Public Schools. The program has recruited 49 refugees of whom 35 are now enrolled in classes. Some were teachers in their countries of origin and want to reclaim their careers, but most,



Pa Vang, left, and Kalyani Rai.

according to Project Director Kalyani Rai, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Continuing Education Center for Urban

Community Development, have the equivalent of a high school degree and are now "living their life's dream to be a teacher."

Now in its second year, the program will receive \$1.8 million in federal funding over five years through the U.S. Department of Education's National Professional Development Program. Funding pays for tuition, childcare, books and a stipend. The Milwaukee Teacher Training and Mentoring Program is a collaborative effort of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Cardinal Stritch University, the Milwaukee Public Schools and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

The program's goal is to prepare 90 refugees to teach pre-school children. Upon completion, students are certified to work in a daycare setting. Those who want to become licensed to teach at the elementary or high school level will be given the opportunity to go on for their bachelor's degrees.

Three components form the core of the training:

- coursework leading to a teaching certificate,
- participation action resource (PAR) classes, and
- an internship.

PAR classes meet each Saturday for three hours and help refugees learn how to assess achievement. Through PAR each refugee student designs curriculum with the help of a mentor. The student then recruits 10 parents from the community and offers a workshop to them.

Rai and Pa Vang, the project's outreach specialists,

FROM THE FIELD

take a family approach to recruiting refugee candidates. "Spouses and other family members attend intensive orientation sessions so the entire family understands what the student will be doing," they say. "We talk about filling out applications, how systems are arranged in the U.S., and about the rights that students have."

For more information contact Project Director Kalyani Rai, kalyanir@uwm.edu.

DISTANCE LEARNING OPTIONS TO UPGRADE SKILLS

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS), of East Orange, N.J., has produced an innovative series of CD-ROM-based Internet skills training programs for refugees that prepare them for customer service jobs in the hospitality, retail and healthcare sectors. Partially funded with a Cuban-Haitian grant from the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and developed in consultation with the National Institute for Literacy (NIL) and the National Retail

Federation (NRF), the JVS Learning Solutions courseware is intended to meet the language, scheduling and career development needs of both employed and unemployed individuals. Courses can be used in a distance learning format, a blended learning classroom, a computer lab or a self-paced study environment.

JVS Learning Solutions courseware design is specifically tailored to two significant national educational efforts: first, the NRF's Customer Service and Sales Skill Standards, which define what knowledge and skills support effective customer service performance in the retail industry; and second, the NIL's Equipped for the Future framework. The courseware integrates the acquisition of basic skills, computer skills and vocational knowledge. It also responds to the need for multi-faceted learning approaches. Instructors are able to monitor a learner's progress, add comments and grade completed assignments in real time via the Internet.

According to Nancy T. Fisher, director of education and training at JVS, "we have found that the limited English proficient population is thriving with this new training methodology." Indeed, in the most recent reporting period 22 individuals completed the program, resulting in 14 new job placements and three job upgrades.

For more information contact Myra Boxer, learningsolutions@jvsnj.org.



FROM THE **FIELD**

EMPLOYER OPENS CAREER PATHWAYS

BB&T's Korey Kilmer (far left) and Mike Reardon with Linda Campbell (far right) and refugee employees.



Charlotte, N.C., is the number two banking center in America, but there had never been many banking jobs for refugees in that community. It took one bank manager, one job developer and two Somali refugees to make it happen in 1998, and it has been a growth market ever since.

Mike Rearden, operations manager for the processing center of BB&T Bank in Charlotte, had a high turnover rate in the center's proof department, which was facing 30 vacancies for operator positions. The vacancies caused a slowdown in production, which affected all other operations within the center. At the same time Linda Campbell, job developer with Catholic Social Services of Charlotte's Resettlement Office, was looking for upgraded jobs for two bankers from Somalia who had over 25 years of experience in banking, but no computer experience. Several other banks had turned her down, but then she called Rearden. Rearden hired the two Somali bankers for his item processing area.

Campbell then brought in two Bosnian women to take the 10-key test to become operators. Although neither candidate passed the test, Rearden was impressed with them and decided to hire them as trainees. Several women from Ukraine and Russia then interviewed and were added to the 10-key area, as well as a Ukrainian man who was fluent in English. He soon became instrumental in the hiring of Russian refugees with limited English, and today he works as a highly respected trainer for the 10-key area.

By this time, word was getting around the refugee communities that BB&T was a very good place to work. As the 10-key area's turnover rate improved, the proof department stabilized, which increased productivity for the whole operations center. Mike likes to call it a "win-win-win" situation for the bank, the refugees and the resettlement office. BB&T was awarded the North Carolina Employer of the Year for 1998-99.

The latest group to find success at BB&T is Bosnian teenagers. Needing after-school jobs, they were given a chance to train as 10-key operators and have proved themselves to be responsible and reliable. Eight of them are working there now.

At this point the bank has refugees working all over the processing center in such positions as sorter operators, mail clerks, and deposit collections workers. There are 30-35 refugees employed at the operations center alone. The starting salary is generally \$9 per hour and medical benefits are provided after three months.

And the two Somali bankers? "You will find them working diligently and proudly, along with a third banker, another friend of theirs from Somalia," says Ms. Campbell. "They are among the top producers in that area."

For more information contact Linda Campbell at lindavc23@yahoo.com.

Foreign Credential Evaluation

One of the most important first steps refugees can take to reclaim their professions in the United States is an evaluation of their foreign education, licenses and experience. A "foreign credential evaluation" compares a person's work outside the United States with U.S. levels. Foreign credential evaluation can be used for high school, undergraduate or graduate admission; employment; professional licensure; and other purposes.

This task of evaluation was originally accomplished through the U.S. Department of Education; however, there are currently no national government standards for evaluating foreign educational credentials. The two most common sources for credential evaluation are: 1) admission offices of colleges and universities or 2) private credential evaluation services. Colleges usually perform this service free of charge to those foreign

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RECLAIMED CAREERS, RENEWED HOPE

The two refugees next profiled are representative of many who climb the ladder to reclaim or reframe their former careers. Please keep these “success stories” coming in! For upcoming newsletter issues, we would be especially interested in secondary wage earner case studies and on-the-job training successes. Please remember to get permission from the refugee(s) to be showcased.

Costume Designer for Opera Company is Perfect Fit

Milivoj Poletan just celebrated his one-year anniversary in the United States. He is Serbian and his wife is Croatian. They were displaced from their home in Bosnia in 1992 and filed for refugee status in 1997. The request was granted four years later and the couple was resettled by International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Salt Lake City. Poletan had a degree in fashion design from Anton Mavarak College in Bosnia. The challenge was finding a job in the fashion industry that matched his skills and made use of his designer talents.

His caseworker, Diane Bras, described Milivoj's successful job progression this way:

He was in the Match Grant program and he got himself a job at the Hilton Hotel while I was working on (finding him a fashion design placement). I had called virtually every theatre group in our city. Utah Opera was the last that I contacted, and it proved to be the ‘pot of gold’ for Milivoj.

He began in their costume shop (four months after arrival) and rapidly made himself invaluable to them with his wealth of skill and knowledge that goes far beyond just the stitching. By mid-season he was working the ‘run of shows’ and helping with hair and make-up as well as the costumes. Very soon he was earning 50 cents more per hour and finished the season with the possibility of a substantial raise for next season along with an offer to join the permanent full-time staff.



Milivoj Poletan wearing one of his designs.

For the future, Poletan plans to return to hair styling for which he won many honors in European competitions during the 6 years in owned a salon in Bosnia. Now an apprenticeship program is helping him obtain his beautician's license.

His wife continues to work at the Hilton Hotel, and they were able to substantially upgrade to another apartment recently. Their two teenage children are looking forward to attending their second year at Camp Anytown this summer where the staff would like them to join the staff for future camp sessions.

Surgeon is Back on the Job

Susanna Deng, a medical doctor and a refugee from Sudan, had to complete three steps soon after her 1999 arrival in Denver before she could apply to U.S. medical residency programs: credential evaluation of her undergraduate and medical school transcripts, passing the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam, and completing a clinical skills assessment.

Susanna said that the lengthy process was worth it, and gives credit to the employment coordinator at Lutheran Family Services of Colorado who helped her find an entry level job as a surgery technician at a local hospital. The surgeons she met on the job provided valuable recommendation letters for her interviews for surgery residency programs. She is now a resident in general surgery at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York.

Susanna has the following advice for other refugees who want to reclaim their careers: “Start at an entry job in your field. It will give you a chance to interact with people above you, they will start to see your potential and recognize your abilities. I have found that this is the best way to climb up the career ladder.”

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Foreign Credential Evaluation

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applicants awaiting admission. Private companies determine the cost of their services based on the complexity of the evaluation. For example, fees may range from \$60 for a document-by-document evaluation to \$200 for an engineering or physical therapy course-by-course evaluation to \$400 for a graduate program evaluation.

Generally the application process is similar from one service to another and includes submission of the following items:

- A completed and signed application. These can be downloaded from the computer from some services.
- Photocopies of documents such as diplomas, licenses, transcripts and certificates that have been officially translated into English. Sometimes original documents may be required. It is also important to note that some services will cancel a request without refund if altered documents have been submitted. They may

retain all the documents submitted and report the information to the appropriate authorities.

- A personal check, cashier's check or money order.

As many refugees have discovered, opinions, services and prices vary widely. It may pay to try different routes advises Farah Noor Hassan, originally from Somalia. Hassan needed a foreign credential evaluation in order to enroll in a degree program at the University of Colorado at Denver. He explained, "I first sent my foreign transcript to a national company and paid a \$140 fee. The company sent my application back to me a couple of times because of missing information. I started to get frustrated with the whole process. Then an American friend of mine recommended that I go directly to the University for the evaluation. I took his advice and found the school to be very helpful. I paid a \$50 fee and in about one week, my evaluation was complete."

REFUGEEWORKS

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