

Breaking Through Barriers To Refugee Self-Sufficiency

As RefugeeWorks moves into its eighth year as the ORR technical assistance provider for employment, we are excited to announce some new developments, which we believe will enhance our services to you in the coming year. To begin, RefugeeWorks has been reorganized to better reflect the nature and flexibility of our work in relation to you. I have been appointed as RefugeeWorks' national coordinator and senior consultant and Cheryl Hamilton and Rebecca Armstrong are henceforth employment consultants. Indeed, we are your consultants. Together, we will continue to provide technical assistance in the form of trainings and consultations that focus on improving your day-to-day realities in the field. For example, we continue to modify existing and develop new training sessions that respond directly to your needs and requests. At our recent Employment Training Institutes in St. Paul, we introduced new sessions on mental health, financial literacy, and xenophobia. Moreover, RefugeeWorks is increasing the number of institutes offered annually from two to at least six: you'll find a list of cities and registration information in this issue. Even if you've attended an Employment Training Institute in the past, we encourage providers to revisit RefugeeWorks and discover the new and exciting initiatives in the works. In this newsletter, we explore with our colleagues at SAMHSA, Catholic Charities, and the AFL-CIO how barriers such as mental health, national identity, and language acquisition affect an individual's ability to achieve self-sufficiency.

As always, we want to hear from you regarding difficulties and "best practices." Contact us, we remain at your service.

Best Wishes,



Tom Giossi
National Coordinator and Senior Consultant

EMPLOYMENT & REFUGEE WELL-BEING

Economic self-sufficiency has long been the goal of helping refugees secure employment. In the following article Capt. John Tuskan of the Refugee Mental Health Program—a special program of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services—addresses the complementary mental health benefits of working.

The Meaning of Work

Although the meaning of work has changed over the centuries as ideologies and religious beliefs have evolved, one factor has remained consistent throughout time—the importance

of work in the lives of people. Historically, ideologies and belief systems all spoke in varying ways about the importance of work, from the positive effects of employment to the negative effects of under-employment, unemployment, and status loss.

Modern psychologists emphasize the importance of the work experience as a determinant of psychological growth, mental health maintenance. In other words, people are productive, satisfied, and mentally healthy when provided opportunities for achievement, recognition, challenge,

(Continued on page 2)

EMPLOYMENT & REFUGEE WELL-BEING

(Continued from page 1)

responsibility and learning. It is also desirable that work provides adequate income, competent supervision and safe working conditions. These latter factors can be the difference between employment contributing to personal satisfaction, fulfillment and resilience, or eventually leading to long-term stress and subsequent health problems. Although the psychological costs of employment problems may be great, no one should be surprised that, in almost all cases, people are much better off with jobs than without.

Refugee health, well-being and employment

Forced migration exposes people to a host of physical and mental health risk factors. Refugees often arrive in their host country with high rates of infectious and parasitic diseases, as well as an increased susceptibility to chronic illnesses. Factors that contribute to this increased susceptibility include the ongoing stress of resettlement and psychosocial adjustment (e.g.,

language barriers, welfare dependence, crime, racism, *under-employment or unemployment*, low health literacy, diet, substance use, and lack of access to, or low utilization of appropriate health care services). Of all the

“Work is not man’s punishment. It is his reward and his strength and his pleasure.”

George Sand

variables, **employment is one of the most critical factors for successful long-term adaptation, good health, and overall well-being**—for the individual, family, community and greater society.

Although employment problems may generate similar issues for every American, two main factors differentiate the effects of refugee employment problems from those of the native-born. First, refugees are less likely to find employment at the level for which their education and training may have prepared them, resulting in *underemployment*. Secondly, the inability to fully integrate into the workforce may result not only in psychological problems, but also in broader adaptation difficulties. Under-employment, status loss, and other adversities experienced in employment may lead to acculturative stress, negative self-concept, and alienation from society. **The combination of employment-related psychological problems and adaptation difficulties may over time weaken, rather than re-enforce or build up, refugee resilience and**

natural coping mechanisms and abilities. The end result is chronic stress, poorer state of health and well-being, and subsequent weakening of refugee family and community structures. Therefore, resolving refugee employment problems becomes essential not only for an individual’s economic stability, but also for his or her physical, mental, and social well being.

In summary, individuals concerned with the mental health, well-being and adaptation of refugees should continue to do the following:

- Work to understand the meaning and function of work for all people, and more specifically for a particular refugee community, family and individual.
- Recognize that alienation and isolation are outcomes of adversity experienced in employment life and that economic adaptation is key to long-term health and sense of well-being.
- Acknowledge the importance of English language courses, including appropriate technical language that allows efficiency in the workplace.
- Address ongoing issues related to domestic recognition of foreign occupational accreditation and education.
- Understand that, since employment is crucial to adaptation, health and well-being, employment service providers and community mental health service providers should work collaboratively.



Refugee Mental Health Technical Assistance

Technical assistance in refugee mental health is available from the Office of Refugee Resettlement funded Refugee Mental Health Program (RMHP). The RMHP is a program of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services. For information or assistance, please contact Captain John Tuskan at john.tuskan@samhsa.hhs.gov.

JUST FIVE MORE MINUTES FOR MENTAL HEALTH

In the proceeding article, “Employment and Refugee Well Being,” Capt. John Tuskin addressed how employment can affect an individual’s mental well-being. At the same time, mental health can also affect a person’s performance at work, making it important for refugee employment specialists to continually consider their clients’ mental health.

Licensed clinician and refugee practitioner Jodie Gerson at Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services in Las Vegas believes that spending five more minutes for mental health will help your client and your agency. In her position as supervisor, she ensures that mental health is considered continually throughout a clients’ resettlement process, including during the employment assessment and follow-up. Gerson contends that monitoring mental health can save agencies hours of intensive case management and often improve job retention and satisfaction. In her words, “If we don’t consider mental health, employment counselors will be looking for three to four jobs for their clients, instead of just one, which creates unnecessary work for the agency and is certainly detrimental to the client’s well-being.”

Refugee programs are not unique in this regard. Businesses are also finding preventive care a cost-effective choice. Delta Airlines, for instance, recently reported in an NPR interview that they save \$1.50 for every \$1.00 spent on employee mental health services.

Although employment specialists should never replace licensed mental health providers when it comes to providing treatment, job counselors should be aware of mental health signs and symptoms (see side bar). Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are two common mental health illnesses affiliated with refugee populations; however, neither needs to be a barrier to employment. If typical symptoms are observed, Gerson encourages providers to casually approach clients in a non-clinician manner. She asks, “You don’t seem right, is everything okay?,” “You look sad, is there anything going on?,” “How are you feeling today?” If the client confides in a staff member, they should listen with understanding and not shy away; but they should also know their limitations. Employment providers should not be trying to diagnose or treat clients. Instead, agencies should build relationships with local mental health networks and make referrals when appropriate.

Of course, introducing the subject of mental health to refugee service providers and clients can be sensitive. Mental health is interpreted differently across cultures. In some cultures, people with a mental illness are shunned by their communities. To overcome these challenges, Gerson steers service providers away from terms such as mental health, psychiatrist, or clinician.

Instead she recommends “wellness” or “being healthy.” If a refugee needs to see a specialist and is concerned about what their relatives will think, Gerson encourages them to say they are seeing a special case manager or employment counselor. “It is all related,” Gerson explains. “We don’t lie, we are just creative. You have to be in this field.”

From Gerson’s experience, with early intervention, accommodations at the workplace can be made and/or counseling provided to help clients keep, and succeed at, their jobs. As she explains, “We try to identify and address problems as early as possible. In other words, we try to put out the campfires before they become forest fires.”

To locate mental health providers in your community, visit the ORR website at www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/orr/tehasst/

Mental Health Signs and Symptoms

Depression

- Sadness, anxiety or irritability
- Thoughts of suicide
- Frequent crying and tearfulness
- Isolation, spending time alone
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Feeling of helplessness, hopelessness
- Trouble concentrating, remembering
- Changes in sleep or eating habits
- Feeling slowed down or restless
- Feeling tired all the time
- Inability to care for self
- Worthlessness
- Difficulty staying focused

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Recurring, distressing memories
- Avoiding situations
- Becoming emotionally numb
- Difficulty sleeping and concentration
- Fearing for personal safety
- Nightmares of events
- Flashbacks, hallucinations

Specific to Work

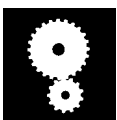
- Decrease in job performance
- Changes in tardiness/absenteeism
- Increase in complaining
- Client appears more physically tired
- Decline or increase in breaks
- Sudden outburst or crying
- Decrease or increase in appetite

AFL-CIO Breaks Down Barriers for LEP Workers

Across the country, employers, service providers, unions, and educational institutions are working together to help refugees and immigrants get the education and training they need while working at jobs that help them support their families and their communities. A new report from the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute suggests that future arrivals may find the career ladder a little easier to climb thanks to an increase in innovative vocational training programs for limited English proficient (LEP) individuals. According to Laura Chenven, AFL-CIO field specialist and author of the report *Getting to Work: A report on how workers with limited English can prepare for new jobs*, “Learning English and getting a good job do not have to be mutually exclusive.” In the report, Chenven surveys best practice models for serving LEP populations that combine job training with language instruction. Four primary service sectors are highlighted, including hospitality, manufacturing, construction, and healthcare.



Hospitality: Nevada Partners, a comprehensive, not-for-profit organization, operates a satellite One-Stop Career Center. It offers training programs in partnership with the Culinary Training Academy, a program of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 226 and most of the major hotels in Las Vegas. They offer a vocational English as a Second Language job readiness program. LEP workers attend a three-week, 30-hour program that prepares them for jobs, primarily in hospitality, that require an English-language job application and interview. New placements in the industry receive an average of \$9–\$10 per hour in union jobs with benefits (including health insurance and pensions) and negotiated step-raises based on length of employment. Once in the job, the workers become eligible for continued ESL instruction along with upgrade training in hospitality skills such as culinary arts and hospitality management. This program is currently being accessed for refugees by Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada.



Manufacturing: Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago, Illinois runs a bilingual manufacturing program to help participants gain language and other skill pre-requisites for advanced manufacturing training. Its goals are job advancement for incumbent LEP manufacturing workers and placement for dislocated workers. These goals remain viable even with the downturn in the manufacturing sector because of continuing shortages in critical advanced manufacturing skills. Through providing both occupational English language instruction and skill training, Instituto has helped thousands of workers get good jobs with average wages of more than \$10 an hour. They also provide ongoing family literacy and ESL services.



Construction: The Laborers Training and Retraining Trust of Southern California is a joint labor/management fund providing apprenticeship (earn while you learn) and advanced construction training to the members of the Laborers International Union of North America. The bilingual program allows LEP workers to learn alongside their English-speaking colleagues. A combination of excellent instructional methodology, hands on demonstration, translation of key terms, and a spirit of support and solidarity helps LEP workers get jobs paying from \$12–\$25 an hour. The program acknowledges, however, that the vocational English workers learn during their apprenticeship training is insufficient to give them full access to career advancement. The program is currently looking at offering more opportunities to learn English, from take home ESL videos to training trades instructors in principles of language learning.



Healthcare: The Bill Michelson Home Care Industry Education Fund, part of the New York Hospital League/Service Employees International Union 1199 joint training program, is addressing the nursing shortage by helping foreign-educated nurses, currently working as home care workers, get certification to work in the United States. The instructional part of the program consists of intensive language instruction and preparation to take the National Council Licensure Examination for nursing certification. The immigrant and refugee workers in this program start off in low wage jobs, but through the opportunity provided by this partnership, they are able to obtain excellent jobs while benefiting the community through full utilization of their skills and abilities.



To download the complete report at no charge, visit www.workingforamerica.org.

Ask RefugeeWorks



Q: *How do I respond to employers who call and request clients from particular refugee populations? Like when a company calls and says, send me your Hmong and Bosnians refugees, but no Somalis?*

—Employment Counselor
Minneapolis, MN

A: Thank you for your great question. It is one we are often asked from resettlement agencies and a good first subject for our new “Ask RefugeeWorks” column. Here is what you need to know. According to Title XII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, **employers cannot discriminate on the basis of national origin.** It is illegal and employers can be heavily fined for unfair employment practices. Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly to some readers, employment-staffing agencies that support an employer’s request can also be charged. In other words, if an employer approaches your agency and only wants to hire individuals from particular refugee groups and you knowingly support their request, **your agency becomes an accessory and can also be charged with discrimination.** Obviously, you do not want to risk this sort of liability for your agency.

This said, we do not recommend you suddenly launch attack campaigns against suspect employers. Instead, try more diplomatic measures. Start by politely educating the employer. If given the benefit of the doubt, a company may not mean to discriminate. They may have truly had an exceptional experience with one refugee population and innocently assume they will have the same experience with people from the same national

origin. In this case, emphasize how all clients are carefully screened to match to the job and are generally exceptional employees. Also, reinforce how your agency is actually looking out for the employer’s interest by sending them clients who will best succeed at their business. In this way, you move the conversation away from nationality and concentrate on your clients’ skill sets instead.

If education fails, and an employer insists on only hiring people from a particular nationality group, you should contact the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC). The EEOC can speak with the employer and explain the law and legal implications of their actions. If the employer fails to heed the EEOC’s advice, the EEOC may pursue formal legal actions. If you are afraid to report a company for fear it will affect future job placements, you might want to ask yourself why you would want to place any refugees at a company where you already know discrimination occurs. We know employer relations are important; however, remember

that you are ultimately responsible to your clients and for protecting their rights. If you were to support hiring practices based on national origin your other clients would be justified both in criticizing and in filing a complaint with the EEOC against your agency. Obviously, you do not want this to happen. Your agency’s reputation will be tarnished and you will find it more difficult to develop trusting relationships with your clientele, a critical element in refugee resettlement.

To learn more, visit the EEOC website at www.eeoc.gov.

If you have a question for the “Ask RefugeeWorks” feature, email chamilton@refugeeworks.org.

EAD UPDATE

In our last newsletter, we covered in depth the Employment Authorization Documents (EAD). Soon after going to print, the Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) contacted the national refugee resettlement agencies to announce a pilot project testing a new system of issuing EADs to refugees. If successful, the pilot project conducted with Hmong refugee arrivals at the end of August will end the present issuance of only 35 EADs at the port of entry. Instead, all arriving refugees will complete I-765’s upon arrival, which the Nebraska Service Center will process expediently, and return to the affiliate offices within 10 days. As results and comments from this pilot project are compiled and reviewed, PRM will make a

decision regarding future proceedings and share it with the refugee network.

In addition to the pilot project for refugees, BCIS released an announcement that their office now has the discretion to modify EAD validity periods for initial, renewal, and replacement cards. In other words, BCIS will have the authority to change the one-year validity period on current EADs to reflect a more appropriate time period based on a person’s immigration status. For instance, individuals granted asylum will receive EADs valid for up to five years, unless otherwise appropriate. To learn more about the EAD initiatives, visit the BCIS website at www.uscis.gov.

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING INSTITUTES

**Learn
marketing
skills!**

*“All refugee
employment counselors
should attend similar
trainings!”*

— ETI Attendee

**Meet service
providers
from across the
country!**

**NEW WORKSHOPS!
Financial Literacy,
Client Wellness, and
Xenophobia in the
Workplace.**

2004-2005 SCHEDULE

FRESNO, CA

October 27-28, 2004

HOST: U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement

BALTIMORE, MD

November 17-18, 2004

Lord Baltimore Radisson
HOST: World Relief Headquarters

LAS VEGAS, NV

December 14-15, 2004

Aladdin Resort and Casino
HOST: Catholic Charities of Southern
Nevada and the Culinary Training Academy

JACKSONVILLE, FL

January 11-12, 2005

Omni Hotel
HOST: Lutheran Social Services
of NE Florida

OMAHA, NE

May 18-19, 2005

Hilton Garden Inn
HOST: WORKNET Foundation

Registration is OPEN for ALL five
Institutes! Deadline for applications is
one month prior to the event.

*“I found the two-day
training very
informative and I am
walking away with
some new and fresh
ideas.”*

— ETI Attendee

**Exchange best
employment
practices!**

*“I feel better equipped
to serve refugees.”*

— ETI Attendee

**Improve
Employment
Outcomes**

A P P L I C A T I O N F O R M

Institute (check one): Fresno Baltimore Las Vegas Jacksonville Omaha

Name: Mr. / Ms. _____ Title: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Are you a Vegetarian? Yes No

How long have you worked in refugee employment? _____

Registration Fee: \$50 per person includes breakfast, lunch, and training materials. (Does not cover travel and hotel.)

Method of payment:

Check enclosed in the amount of \$ _____

Charge \$ _____ to (Check one) Visa Mastercard Discover

Credit card account #: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Authorized Signature: _____

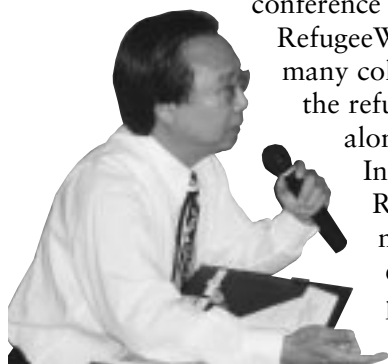
Mail, fax, or email registration and payment information to: **REFUGEEWORKS**, 700 Light Street, Baltimore MD 21230.

Phone: 410.230.2876. Fax: 410.230.2859. Email: registration@refugeeworks.org.

Note: Logistics and accommodation information will be provided upon receipt of application.

COMINGS & GOINGS

RefugeeWorks literally traveled from coast to coast this summer. From the two Employment Subsidy Program (ESP) site visits in Merced and Stockton, California to the annual State Coordinators of Refugee Resettlement (SCORR) conference in Florida, RefugeeWorks staff met many colleagues within the refugee network along the way.



In June, RefugeeWorks moderated an employment panel at the Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) annual consultation in Washington, DC. And in August, RefugeeWorks also hosted with ORR two back to back two-day employment training institutes in St. Paul;

the first for regional agencies being impacted by the Hmong refugees, the second for matching grant staff from affiliates throughout the U.S. Both sessions were well attended. During the summer, RefugeeWorks staff also provided in-depth training sessions to service providers in Maryland and Nevada. In California, RefugeeWorks is wrapping up a two-year refugee youth contract with the state. We hosted a final conference entitled "Reflections and New Directions" in the beginning of September for service providers and participants.



Images from Employment Training Institute in St. Paul, MN.

RefugeeWorks Welcomes Theron Cozart

In May, administrative assistant Maia Bottemiller left RefugeeWorks to relocate with family. Maia's warm character and talented coordination skills will be missed. At the end of the summer, RefugeeWorks welcomed a new administrative assistant, Theron Cozart. Theron comes to RefugeeWorks with considerable experience in organizational and administrative support. Please join us in wishing the best of luck to Maia and in welcoming Theron! Theron can be reached at tcozart@refugeeworks.org.



REFUGEEWORKS

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BREAKING

NEWS

On October 4th, the Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004 was signed into law extending the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and Welfare-To-Work tax credits (WTW) through Dec. 31, 2005.

ONLINE CONNECTION

www.samhsa.gov

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration

SAMHSA's Refugee Mental Health Program functions as the Office of Refugee Resettlement's technical assistance provider for mental health. Visit SAMHSA website for contact information and to learn more about its activities, which include consultations, community assessments, research, and training programs.

www.spring-institute.org

The Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning

The Spring Institute fulfills the role as the Office of Refugee Resettlement's technical assistance provider for English language training. The organization is dedicated to demonstrating that national, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences need not be barriers to understanding and cooperation.

www.cvt.org

The Center for Victims of Torture

CVT works locally, nationally, and internationally to heal the wounds of torture on individuals, their families, and their communities and to stop torture worldwide. Visit their website for information on trainings, research and referral services. The Minnesota based center also manages ORR's national capacity building program for treatment centers for victims of torture.

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/orr/technical-assistance>

ORR Technical Assistance

The Office of Refugee Resettlement provides technical assistance in other areas in addition to employment, mental health, and English language learning. For a complete listing of subject areas and contact information, check this ORR website.

REFUGEEWORKS

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