

**Preparing Refugees for Employment:
The ABC's of Navigating the American Workplace – New and Innovative Practices and
Partnerships in Refugee Employment
September 16, 2014
1:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. All participants will be in a listen only mode for the duration of today's call.

Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. I will now turn the call over to Louisa Jones. Thank you. You may begin.

Louisa Jones: Good afternoon and good morning everyone. My name is Louisa Jones. I work for ICF International, and I am on the call today to represent Bridges for Refugees and Retirees, a technical assistance initiative sponsored by the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

And today we're discussing the ABCs of navigating the American workplace, new and innovative practices and partnerships in refugee employment. And we're very excited today to have the webinar to discuss possible strategies that refugee agencies and programs can work together and to support refugees in navigating and accessing employment and career path opportunities.

We actually have two different states to talk about some of the different programs in their states. Joining me is (Katherine Dachtler) with the Grand Forks Sub-Office Resettlement - the Grand Forks Sub-Office Resettlement Coordinator for the Lutheran Central Services of North Dakota.

And from Idaho we have (Tara Wilson), the Employment Training Program Manager for the Idaho Office of Refugees. And she is joined by (Lisa Cooper), who is the Co-Founder and Consultant for Global Talent Idaho, and also (Toni Richardson), an Employment Specialist in International - at the International Refugee Committee.

Just to review, as the operator said we're not taking any questions over the phone. All questions can actually be submitted online. So if you look at the top hand navigation bar at the Q and A button, you can see, all you have to do is click on the word Q and A. You can type in your question at any time during the webinar.

And we're going to be trying to monitor this as we go along and answer questions as we go. So maybe we can answer some of those right on the spot for you instead of waiting until the very end. And then you can click on the word "ask" to actually submit your question.

Today's webinar, while we're going to start with an overview from each of the states about the types of programs and what they're doing in each state. And then we're going to actually go into kind of a facilitated dialogue where we're going to have some different questions, led by myself.

And then also trying to interweave any questions that you have as well into the conversation. And again, we really encourage you to actually submit some Q and A.

And we're going to start with a poll question. And if you could answer this if you are online. Which agency is or organizations are represented by webinar attendees today? And you've got four options. And I'll quickly review those in one minute.

All right. We'll hold it open for about five more seconds. Looks like we've got about 38% - the majority, 42% was a state or local refugee agencies, followed closely by community-based organizations at about 20%. And then the middle is state or local refugee agencies (or all) state or local (tenant) agencies are kind of neck and neck there.

So thank you for including that. We really wanted to kind of see who was registered and who's actually on this webinar so we can actually tailor some of our presentation.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to (Katherine Dachtler) who is at the Lutheran Central Services of North Dakota to begin with a quick review of her programs in her state. Thank you (Katherine).

(Katherine Dachtler): Of course. Thank you very much. So as Louisa said, my name is (Katherine Dachtler), and I'm the Settlement Coordinator in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

We are a unique program in the sense that there's only one agency that does refugee resettlement for this state. And then also our director of our program is actually also the state refugee coordinator. So in some ways it makes us a little bit unique in the things that we can offer across-the-board with our different employment specialists on staff.

We do have resettlement in three different cities in North Dakota -- Bismarck, Grand Forks and Fargo. And we have four specific employment specialists on staff for those sites.

I think one of the biggest things for our program is that for employment we do focus on self-sufficiency. Making sure that clients can pay their bills and take care of their families and hopefully not necessarily need social services such as EBT or SNAP benefits.

But we focus a lot on financial independence. And the difference for us being we don't want to just stop at helping clients pay the bills and get by. We want to help clients get to a point where they can start making future goals. So they can start making life choices based on the quality of life that they want instead of just meeting the necessity.

And that kind of leads how we have formed our program. We have an extreme focus in North Dakota on building relationships with employers, which include emphasizing support services to them, such as interpretation or translation. Needs just to get them comfortable and get them started if there are not familiar.

We also in courage are employment specialists to kind of work with an immedatory (sic) or mediation setting for employers and clients right away. So that there is kind of a grace period for new employers to begin learning how to work with our new American populations and our refugees in the (families) that we serve.

We also try to think up (in a box). So we utilize a lot of pod method of hiring, where we hire in groups of individuals as opposed to trying to employ

singularly in each position. We found a lot of success in that, and we can touch on that a little bit later.

But we also try to make sure that there are classes available so that individuals can understand the different types of jobs, whether they be entry-level or a little bit higher. But also job classes that include things such as permit study groups.

So individuals who are looking to try and obtain their permit so that they can go on to get their driver's license. We want them to have that opportunity because we know that once somebody has that ability -- one, they gain just greater independence; and two, they're more able to look at different jobs and different opportunities.

We also are in the process of highlighting a micro loan program that is very senior or culturally focused for our clients in order to help a lot of individuals who may or may not be eligible for retirement benefits, for them to be able to make a little bit of income so that they can feel that they are a contributing member of their family or their community.

I just want to give you - that was pretty much just a very brief overview of some of the things that we're doing in North Dakota because I do think it's going to be really important that we get to kind of the question and answer part of the presentation today because I think that's what most people will find to be the most interesting and the most rewarding.

Louisa Jones: Great. Thank you, (Katherine). And we're going to turn it now over to (Tara Wilson), (Lisa Cooper) and (Toni Richardson) to discuss at what's going on in Idaho very quickly.

(Tara Wilson): Great, thank you Louisa. And (Katherine) it sounds like, and I think this is true with probably everybody listening in that we all have so much to learn from each other. And there's lots of great innovative practices across the country.

And I do look forward to answering questions, but then also dialogue after this call. I know that we work closely with the Colorado State Office to learn from them.

With that said, my name again is (Tara Wilson), and I'm with the Idaho Office for Refugees. IOR is a private initiative replacing the traditional state administered program for refugee assistance and services with statewide responsibility for the provision of the assistance in services to refugees.

Unlike North Dakota, we have four refugee resettlement agencies in Idaho, three in the Treasure Valley or the Boise area and then a fourth in Twin Falls. So we contract with the agencies and also an ESL provider for employment services, immigration assistance, language assistance and case management and social adjustment.

My role specifically for - at the Idaho Office for Refugee is employment and training. So for this webinar I kind of thought of what are the three interesting and innovative practices that you may not be doing and your state, or maybe you are, but something that could be shared across state boundaries.

And one is just we've developed an employment team, so between the leaves the agencies, we actually meet monthly where we share, exchange best practices, share job leads, collaborate on training.

And kind of a bigger than that we have a community plan. So within - and it's a now named neighbors united, which includes the city, state, state representative, the Department of Labor, school district and lots of other folks. Kind of anybody within the Treasure Valley region who touch on refugee resettlement are involved in that plan.

And we have lots of committees that do on the ground work in that plan, one of them being the employment committee. And out of that we've established a networking - employment and networking working group. And that group just meets quarterly. And again, it's a great way.

And we'll share kind of in the Q and A of ways that information is exchanged. And we all work together, kind of the rising tide that lifts all boats to support refugee resettlement in the region.

Another innovation that we've had over the past few years, we kind of looked at how we were training people. And we were - we discovered that some of the challenges when we were in training is that people were too stressed to learn.

They didn't know how they were going to earn an income. So we turn most of our training now into on the job training or subsidized employment where actually people are getting training and also earning an income while they're receiving that training. And that's been very effective in Idaho.

And last is a new workforce initiative we have, Global Talent Idaho. And it's - we've been struggling to how do we help people earn that higher wage. And Idaho is a very low wage state.

So one way is to help our refugees and other immigrants resettled in our state find pathways to hire level career. So, and (Toni Richardson) from the IRC is in the room. And she'll be answering questions that pertain to IRC and IRC's role in the employment network.

And then (Lisa Cooper), who is spearheading Global Talent Idaho. And we're all excited to share with you today and share our expertise in the things we know about. So thank you.

Louisa Jones: Wonderful. Thank you (Tara). Right out of the box, right before I go to our next poll question and we jump in the other questions and answers. I do have one question that came in for (Katherine) on the micro loan program.

What are some examples of projects for elderly refugees that have been funded by the micro loan program?

(Katherine Dachtler): Well we're still in the process of getting it off the ground. But I'm hoping within the next six months, maybe even shorter than that we'll actually be having it in placement.

But what we're going to be focusing on our small knitting projects such as child size sweaters, scarves, mittens, hats. We live in North Dakota, so that's a pretty big seller year around unfortunately, and not just in the summertime.

But then also focusing on beading or basket weaving for a lot of our Bhutanese clients to sewing for some of our Iraqi, Somali clients as well. We're going to be starting the program fairly small. Piloting it in two cities, one in Grand Forks and one in Fargo, with ten individuals selected kind of on a first come, first serve basis. And then see where to go from there.

The horizon goal that we have for that micro loan program is to be able to open it up to a larger population than just the elderly community. We would like to be able to do small business loans eventually for young people, upstart entrepreneurs as well. But certainly I would be happy to share that information with the employment community as we move forward with it.

Louisa Jones: Great. Thank you so much. So we're going to quickly go to our second poll question and then we're going to jump into some other questions and answers. We would like to know what are the key challenges or barriers that you face in supporting refugees in transitioning to the American workplace.

You have a number of options here. I'll give you about two minutes to answer this question. So you have a number of different options. And then I'll go over those for those who are attending by audio only. Give us about five more seconds and see what's coming in.

All right, so it looks like the Top 3 challenges or barriers (as we're) going here, the first one is engaging employers to hire refugees. The second one is supporting refugees in English language and learning while also obtaining work experience. And then also housing, transportation and childcare.

And a kind of fourth runner up is helping employers better communicate with non-native English speakers to gain cultural competence. So it doesn't look like we have any key challenges around mental health needs or working to address gender norm, but I'm sure that there still may be some barriers, but not your key barriers.

Okay. And we actually have a comment from one of our participants that another key challenge that they have found is that employers are willing to

hire refugees for short-term employment through temporary agencies. But then they do not hire them for full-time when their term ends.

I've got two other questions. I'm going to lead those in as we go. So (Katherine) and (Tara) and (Toni) and (Lisa), the first question I really wanted to ask is very similar to this one. What is - what are the key challenges or barriers facing refugees in transitioning to work in your respective states and local areas?

(Tara Wilson): I would say they mirror what the group mentioned in the poll. And we, you know, overcoming those barriers is often a challenge. And I often say if there was a silver bullet, give it to me. But I don't think there's a silver bullet, and I'm not just saying that because I'm coming from Idaho, for any of these challenges.

But to kind of - back to the on the job training program where we've really looked at our low skilled folks. So folks who come with very little work experience outside the home, low or no English, sometimes pre-literate in their own language.

The one the job training program has been an excellent path to them. So we've kind of tried to ride out their cash assistance as long as possible so they could participate in English language training, stabilize their lives. And when they've gone into an OJT or a subsidized employment program, they have - we've embedded, in some instances we try and put an English language path at this site as well. And that's been very effective.

So they're working. They're learning. The employer, mostly social enterprise for folks at those levels are supporting them. The English language instructor

is encouraging the employer to reinforce what's being taught in the class. And that's been very helpful as a way to overcome language barriers.

(Katherine Dachtler): I think in North Dakota, I agree, you know, in foreseeing and helping clients gain that English ability is huge. I know in our Fargo site, they work with a hotel that has taken a huge responsibility in a way by allowing clients to access Rosetta Stone English material before or after their working, a lot of their housekeepers. And I know that clients take advantage of that so that they can continue practicing as they're working.

I guess, you know, we have RCA refugee cash assistance through the (Wilson Fish), which is a program that allows us to provide financial assistance for eight months - up to eight months of a client arriving into the United States, which is unique and isn't in every place. And so, you know, we recognize that.

But we also focus on trying to get people working within the first 120 days because we do believe that employment is probably one of the best ways for clients to gain some English, but then also to feel that they have a little bit more control in their life.

We certainly have also seen some of the issues where people feel overwhelmed right away with that kind of a timeline. But that's where our employment specialists really step in and provide that ongoing support for the client, but then also for the employers as well.

Just circling back to engaging employers to work with refugees. We, in North Dakota, we're a pretty small state compared to some of the others. And there's a large focus on the relationship that is built between an employment specialist or the staff and the employer.

Certainly it's important for the client to build a positive relationship. But if the trust basically hasn't been built between the employer and the staff, it is more difficult for people to be able to kind of step outside of their comfort zone and employ.

So our employment specialists really work on giving each employer kind of tailored support systems. It's not to say that we don't also, you know, hold employers accountable for also learning some of these things and understanding that, you know, they will probably need to figure out a way to procure interpretation on an as needed basis if they're going to continue hiring a large population of LEP individuals.

But also right away we're going to be there with the interpreters that we have on staff to help ease that transition. And what we've seen that has really helped employers feel like they can take a risk in some ways. And hire groups of individuals at a time that may have a wide range of English skills.

Maybe and that kind of goes back to the pod method for us of trying to hire maybe one individual who has high English skills, and then maybe two other individuals with middle level English skills, and then maybe one or two other individual with little to no English skills.

And when they hire in a pod like that the clients themselves can provide support for one another. And then also help with the training that maybe a newer employer would struggle a little bit more with employees that have less English.

And when that is successful, and generally it is, you know, when it is successful, then the employer also feels like they are able to, in the future,

take on another group of individuals as the same because already then they have a workforce that has been training, that knows the language and that has proven themselves for the person. And then the employment specialist, also having done that footwork beforehand to gain the trust of the employer.

Louisa Jones: Great. Thank you both. I have some questions that have been coming in. I'm going to kind of (match) in to some of the questions that we're going along with right now.

One of the questions is, and you both the just touched a little bit on this so I wanted to see if you could add anything. What are some benefits you site to employers on why they should hire refugees?

((Crosstalk))

(Katherine Dachtler): When we talk about benefits of hiring the refugee population, we point to other relationships that we've already created. Often times our population, they stay in jobs much longer. It isn't as necessarily as much of a revolving door, especially for those entry level jobs.

For individuals who may be have a lower level of English, they may stay in that position for two years before feeling comfortable enough to want to move somewhere else or they may not. But it does provide that continuity that may be someone, you know, in the restaurant industry does not get to experience very often for a dish machine operator or dishwasher position.

And then we also emphasize the fact that often times when refugees leave a position, they are more apt to have somebody already at the helm waiting to take over their position that they would recommend. And did - the employer

has built the trust with the employee by that point, so they feel that they can fill that position a little bit easier.

And then also we emphasize the fact that they can get a tax cut, the WTOC credit for hiring this certain population because often times our clients are accessing social services, such as TANF or EBT SNAP benefits or childcare assistance or things like that. And if they're a large corporate organization or company that can add up quite quickly for them in dollar amounts.

(Tara Wilson): So I'm going to turn this over because that's - we use a lot of those same things (Katherine). And there were some new things as well. So it's great to learn from you.

And we're trying to turn this into how do we do this for higher skilled folks, especially some of the folks coming from Iraq who are coming with immense amount of talent. So I'm just going to turn it over to (Lisa) to - so she can share what she's been doing with Global Talent Idaho.

(Lisa Cooper): Thanks (Tara). We started about I guess five months ago developing a program for higher skilled refugees. And by higher skilled, we need people who have an equivalent of a US Bachelor's degree, a couple years of professional work experience and what we're calling at least functional English.

So, so far we have about 30 people in our sort of pilot pool. And they are largely engineers and doctors and accountants and teachers who have significant work histories from their home countries.

And (unintelligible) in Idaho, most of those people have ended up, when they arrived, working in lower skilled jobs. And many of them have gotten stuck

there. And there is history to the immigrant experience in America that, you know, that sort of fits that.

So we've been developing a series of interventions to help with that. But certainly first - one of the first things we're starting to do is engage with employers. And it really is a different conversation.

I love the pod concept that you're talking about (Katherine). And there's certainly some of that that happens in Boise. That doesn't really work at a higher skilled level.

So you're talking about individuals, but highly skilled individuals. And I think the Number 1 benefit to employers, especially as the economy changes and growth kicks up is based around job demand. You know, looking at the pockets of unmet job demand.

And we have here a small but thriving sort of tech community. And we have some very visible CEOs who are out there saying, you know what? Our schools in this community are not - we're not seeing graduates who have the skills we need, largely again around (the scope).

And, you know, real opportunities in things like software engineering and advanced manufacturing and food processing. And so we are trying to match some of our folks with that job demand. And, you know, it's a great way to open the conversation, a win/win.

And I think that we couldn't have done that five years ago, but we're getting traction with that now. The other messages that we're also getting traction with, particularly with publically traded corporations, we can talk about why that's true, but is around corporate social responsibility and diversity,

especially in a state like Idaho and I'm guessing North Dakota and maybe some listeners around some of these states that have a real lack of diversity in their workforce.

You know, many companies come here and say we intentionally, we very much want to build that diversity in our workplace. And to the extent that they can have someone at a higher skilled, more high profile position, you know, it's inspiring on all fronts. Good for the company and great for the communities, you know, ethnicities that those folks represent.

And it also opens up the lower skilled job opportunities that they might otherwise have filled. (Tara), do you want to add anything to that?

(Tara Wilson): No.

(Lisa Cooper): Okay. Thanks.

Louisa Jones: Okay. Great. And (Katherine) I have a very quick question for you. What are the primary populations you resettle in North Dakota?

(Katherine Dachtler): The primary populations in North Dakota that we resettle are the Bhutanese and then also Somali. But we do have an expanding and growing Iraqi community, Congolese, (Artrain), Ethiopian, Afghani and a handful of other populations as well. But our primary are Somali and Bhutanese.

Louisa Jones: Great. And have - has - north - (Katherine) and (Tara) and North Dakota, have you seen - have you had any significant success just to getting refugees hired at major chains like Walmart, Target, Costco, that type of thing?

(Tara Wilson): Walmart is our top employer in Idaho. And we're grateful for the opportunities they give, but they tend to be low wage and not quite full-time. So, but yes, it is our top employer.

Louisa Jones: Okay.

(Katherine Dachtler): I would say that large corporate organizations are probably our bread and butter for employment in North Dakota. Certainly we work with smaller locally owned business as well. But there just aren't as many jobs available for large groups of people.

And (Tara) is absolutely right. They typically are a little bit lower wage and start off part-time. Fortunately for us in North Dakota, we are one of the only the state I think in the US that are not necessarily experiencing a job shortage, but rather we're experiencing a worker shortage.

So there are a lot of employers that have had to look pretty realistically at the wages that they're offering and that have, in a lot of instances, upped their wages to deal with the competition of other big box employers or other chain restaurants so that they are competitive in the wage field.

But that's not to say that we don't have our fair share of minimum wage jobs. We certainly do. But our clients have been fortunate enough to basically benefit from the worker shortage here in North Dakota.

Louisa Jones: That's great. And before I jump on to a conversation about partners and collaboration for both states, (Lisa), we have a follow up question for you. Out of the 30 high skilled refugees, how many have been placed in jobs that align with their interest or experience?

(Lisa Cooper): I would love to say all of them. But we're not there yet. We've had- right now we are working with the Boise School District with four teachers who we hope will be placed in jobs within the next week or two. So that's a pocket of sort of success.

We've had one physician who is - we've placed in a job that's very much in line with his goals. And that he faced barriers around communication and culture, largely communication and largely due to accent and working on the phone. That was not a successful relationship. We're trying to turn it into one and keep him on his path. We've learned a lot from that.

And we have a number of accountants who are actively working with mentors to open up those pathways. And by mentors, I mean people who have, well it is the accountants in town who are helping to provide networks and opportunities for people. The cultural barriers to looking for professional jobs are pretty big.

And then we have very recently worked with the Idaho Department of Labor on a grant that we did win too. It's a National Emergency Grant to provide Workforce Investment Act funds for a series of internships and other job training opportunities for, specifically for high skilled refugees.

And we're just opening up those pathways. And we've got a couple of internships in the works. And a couple of those are with those tech companies that I talked about.

You know, (Katherine) you said that, you know, people - the employers often want to hire people for short-term opportunities. And I think that's true. But there's also a hesitation to open the doors to someone high skilled because of the, you know, the obvious challenges again around language and culture.

And so we've got a couple of Idaho's top employers, the fastest growing tech company willing to help us create those internships with the support of the Department of Labor. So that's been really exciting.

And then the last thing that we're doing is we're putting together a class, specifically a six-week training program specifically to address the barriers that high skilled folks are facing. And that's everything from, you know, from job search techniques to how you use telephones in a professional setting, to perhaps most important of all, how you network in this culture. And how you navigate through the professional landscape.

And again, the mentor model is going to play a big role in that. We're hoping to launch that in January.

Louisa Jones: Okay great. Okay, I actually do have one more follow up question that is very related to the high skilled refugees. So I'm going to go ahead and ask those so it's partnered.

How do we help refugees with higher levels of education, but their (unintelligible) diplomas have not been accepted by the state or federal government in the US? How do you help them?

Woman: That's a great question. And I think we're, you know, just learning about that piece of things too. So, you know, if you're looking at diplomas to prove to an employer, a perspective employer, we've found that having credential evaluation for (more) education service or other services like that is powerful. And at least in our experience so far that's typically been sufficient.

For licensing boards, and that's a whole other webinar. But those requirements are often tougher. So those credential evaluations may or may not be sufficient.

And then for higher education purposes, somebody wants to go back to school and do a, you know, have the Bachelor's degree, wants to do a Master's degree or wants to do a second Bachelor's degree or a bridge program, We found that the universities here, and particularly Boise State University, is very willing to look at those transcripts if people have them, one-on-one.

Now, if someone does not have any access to their transcript that is a big barrier. And that one we have not figured out the solution to that yet. So most of our folks do indeed have at least their own paper copies of their transcripts. And that's been enormously helpful. Do you want add anything to this (Toni)?

Louisa Jones: Great. I'm going to jump on this (in collaboration) question. But there's plenty of other questions coming in, so I'm going to do my best to kind of keep incorporating other questions as we go.

For both states, who are some of your partners in your state that help you support refugees in navigating and accessing employment and career pathway opportunities?

(Toni Richardson): This is (Toni) over in Idaho. Touching on something that (Tara) had mentioned earlier. We have some great partners that assist us in kind of on the job training and also skills training here in Boise.

One of them is a culinary training program. And they take people through the process of working in a kitchen. Everything from dishwashing on up to food

prep, which has been very successful. And we try to gear that towards people who are - who have experience in and want to work in the restaurant industry.

And also we have one that is a subsidized employment that has been very helpful to me in some of my clients. And it's an organization that takes wine bottles and makes them into drinking glasses basically.

And so it's - they are the ones that actually produce the product. And in the past they've included English classes. And really good skills training on how to get to work on time, how to log your hours, any skill that you will need in the American workplace, they are pretty much there.

And in the end they provide them with their letter of recommendation, which has been a very good tool for me to help my clients get work. There are other kind of social enterprises in town that give similar type of on the job training.

And also we have educational programs also that take people who have maybe - who want to become nurses, nurse's aids and who have experience in the medical field. And we are able to create a training class that is meant for people who have English as a second language.

And they're able to - all of my clients have been very successful in the class. And graduate and go on to get a job as a CNA and then (nursing) school, which has been very helpful.

So we have these really good pay training programs and through the College of Western Idaho also, these kinds of professional training programs that have been very helpful.

Woman: And all that we've found really helpful is embedding. And again, we didn't invent this. We copied this from Washington State. But in the CNA class we've been able to embed an ESL instructor.

So we've been able to let people who have as low as fourth grade English, reading and writing. They've also adapted their textbook. That was a little simpler English. So that's been a great model that we copied from Washington State.

Woman: And the placements rates out of that program have been very high.

Woman: Yes. If you get through the program, you get a job.

Woman: That's been a very popular program for us.

Woman: And it's been exciting to watch the young folks who may - come out of high school, not yet having the skills to go to college, but it's - it gives them a boost. It helps their English. And a lot of those young people have told me their goal is to go to nursing school. So I'm rooting for them. And I think that they'll find their path there.

Woman: Absolutely.

(Katherine Dachtler): We've also experienced a lot of people wanting to go into nursing as well. It's a very popular profession. And so our - one of our community colleges here in town actually has taken it upon themselves to do a CNA focused certification class for EL population.

But they also created a pre-CNA class targeted towards the EL population for individuals who had very much a lower level of English. And so they - in the

pre-CNA class, they actually just focus on learning the English words that they'll need to understand once they get into the class and start talking about actual procedures and whatnot.

And that has been very helpful for a lot of students so that they're not paying for a (test) that they're going to ultimately fail because they don't understand just the basic vocabulary of what's needed.

You don't know. They may be able to demonstrate the procedure. We've also paired with our Job Service of North Dakota, which is a federally funded job service essentially. They provide computer classes to the greater public. They have a straight communication line with us in Grand Forks to our employment specialist so that if there are questions, they know that they can always call.

They also come to our cultural orientations and do a short presentation for newly arrived clients to talk about their programs and put a name to a face. And that seems to have helped immensely.

And then certainly, for the secondary population that we serve we've seen an increasing number of individuals coming in for services from out-of-state. And Job Services of North Dakota has been extremely helpful in assisting with them.

Louisa Jones: Okay...

((Crosstalk))

Louisa Jones: Go ahead.

Woman: I just want to add just how important partnerships are within, you know, between the agencies. Within, you know, Health and Welfare has been a tremendous partner of ours, the Department of Labor and the more, Easter Seals, Goodwill.

I think just they're bringing those partners together, even though it's quarterly. Just yesterday I had jobs that I couldn't fill. We didn't want - they were short-term opportunities, and we just thought it wasn't long enough.

But I sent that job opening off to our partners list. And Easter Seals, Goodwill jumped on it within five minutes. And hopefully I'll, you know, probably shoot the - send an email to the woman and it just see how that turned out. But again, it keeps our employers happy.

And I always say what, you know, comes around goes around. And I think those partnerships really prove that.

Louisa Jones: Great. And for (unintelligible) you had mentioned kind of the partnerships with different state partners and different other employment partners. And how do you get beyond that where each department or agency is really focused on their own goals and their day to day operations?

How do you suggest for states and programs who are finding that obstacle, how do they kind of promote that interagency collaboration instead of just having people focus on their own siloed goals?

(Tara Wilson): And I'm going to hand this over to (Toni) because I, you know, I think she can answer this from real. She works for the International Refugee Committee.

She has a very heavy caseload. She's doing a lot of what people are doing on the call. And it's, you know, from one client to the next. So I think it's difficult to make time. And maybe (Toni) can address that.

(Toni Richardson): Well I, obviously I really don't know anything different. I became an employment specialist in Idaho with IRC with this partnership. So I really know nothing more than that.

But I have benefited from it as have my clients. It's been - it's increased my knowledge of what is available, where to look, how to think out of the box. I have my own mentors within my organization. But I feel like my partners in the employment team here in Boise have mentored me as well.

And it's been nothing but beneficial for my clients. I - it's really helped, like I said, it's helped me look outside of the box and not just focus on these typical service industry jobs. And working with (Tara) and looking at these big group hires that we've had in the past. As you can see, I can say nothing good - nothing but good things about it.

Louisa Jones: Okay great. I'm just going to actually jump to kind of a different question. Let's see, I'm going to try to combine one of my questions with one of the other questions.

All right, how do you prep refugees with low native literacy skills as well as low English skills? How do you prepare them for their job?

(Katherine Dachtler): I think in North Dakota what we've done as part of our classes that are employment specialist does called job readiness classes. And some of those classes are focused on specific entry level jobs.

And so for example, one classmate focus all on dishwashing. What are vocabulary words for that? What's typical of a dishwasher's day when they're working? It uses a lot of pictures.

And then we also utilize the services of an interpreter during that so that everyone can understand. And then also asked questions that can be answered at that time. And that kind of helps to fill the knowledge gap and not necessarily the experience, but the knowledge gap for individuals who may not know or have a lot of experience in a certain field so that they are somewhat prepared for what they're going to find.

But also our employment specialist has been known to go with on the first day just to help a little bit with the training and make sure that that employer or that client is going to be successful on their first day. So they have that pride from the first day to carry with them as they learn their new job.

They have the self-confidence to do that. And then also the employer right away receives support from the agency and it knows that we're not just talking about will give you support. No, were actually there, on the ground, giving support at the time that it's needed.

(Tara Wilson): So in, you know, we talked already about just our on-the-job training or subsidized employment program. And I would say we're funneling the majority of our low skilled folks, so folks who have had little opportunity in the workforce or low language through that program to gain the skills they need.

Woman: You know, I - it's interesting. I try to meet with my clients on - with - in a one-on-one basis without an interpreter. And really pushing the English

speaking. You know, I know that you're going to English class four times a week. Let's practice it now.

And again, also using vocabulary sheets with pictures. But I try to - if I don't absolutely need an interpreter, I don't include them in on meetings because I really want to promote that English speaking. What did you learn in English class? And they tell me and kind of expand it outside of the classroom.

Louisa Jones: Just to expand on kind of that same question. Have you been able to get ESL classes or English language learner classes started with employment partners? And if you were able to get it started with employment partners on the job, who pays the bill? Who footed the cost?

Woman: So we have, at our job training sites, or our on the job training sites. And we've currently paid for that English class. So...

Louisa Jones: Okay. Another, sorry, another question that kind of came in that's still related to this is that this person's experience has been that even if clients have some English, sorry, that if clients have some English, it's relatively easier to find a job.

But for clients with absolutely no English, this person's clients are (confirm it) challenging. What would you suggest that they do? So what's been your experience in this?

(Katherine Dachtler): I guess in North Dakota that's when the relationship building with the employer comes into play for us. Long-standing relationships that we have with places such as Olive Garden or Target, the Hilton or (Kinat) Inn, which is a hotel chain from Canada.

You know, have that long-standing relationship. And so we've been able to place a lot of clients of varying levels of English in employment there. So it is less daunting for the employer then to meet an individual with maybe little to no English, or even lacking in experience to that specific job.

And see them as an individual who once trained will become a very, you know, vital piece or part of their employment gap. So cultivating that relationship beforehand, even though it does take a little bit more work sometimes, has in the end really benefitted us because the employers have now been able to create a culture of welcome as far as all types of diversity.

And then on top of that they also have trained their staff to be able to work with individuals from all different cultures and languages on levels of English to get them trained. And they don't see that anymore as a detriment to hiring them or something that would be a barrier, but just something else. You know, just a piece of the training that will have to be different.

Louisa Jones: Great. Thank you. I'm going to ask a few more questions and then we're going to be right on time to ask our final poll question and then wrap things up. So we're going to take another five or so minutes.

So if you have any more questions, please remember to go ahead and submit them to the question and answer box. And even if we don't get to them, we will work with the presenters to see if we can have them answer that post-webinar. And then we'll include that in the transcript once that's released.

So one more question, so this particular program, they have a matching grant program. So it requires your client to take the first job offer they get, even if it's something they don't necessarily want to do and it has inconvenient hours.

How have you all encouraged clients to keep that first job to get that needed work experience while things kind of work itself out or they get placed into a different position or career pathway?

(Tara Wilson): So I'll start this off, but then hand it off to (Toni) because she does direct client services. But one of the things we talk about a lot amongst the employment team is kind of working with the client to find that opportunity, you know, with an understanding of this is your first step, but trying to come to a place.

I think any time you try and force somebody to do something they really don't, it doesn't work out for the staff or the client. Things get really tough on both ends. So I don't know (Toni) if you have anything to add. (Toni) works on matching grant as well.

(Toni Richardson): I honestly, I'm sure it's coming. But I've never really had that experience where someone has been really reluctant taking their first job. But I think it's - I talk to my clients about it's your first job. It's not your only job in America. It's not going - don't make this define you.

And so far it's worked. I've never had anybody refuse a job in matching grants or been unhappy. But I have had people come back and say okay, now it's time for me to move on. And I gladly helped them move on to their next step. And that's been successful. But I'm sure the time's coming. That's a good question.

(Katherine Dachtler): I agree. You know, I think it's really about emphasizing the fact that your first job is just your first job. It's not meant to be your end job. If you love it, that's great. But don't think that you can't continue looking. You just need to

get some experience under your belt so that you can continue moving forward to pursue the job that you really want.

I always tell clients about my first job. I worked in a farm supply store. And you call can't see me and you don't know me, but that certainly was not my favorite job. I do not love it.

You know, and I'll tell a story about, you know, something that happened when I was at work. And that it wasn't my favorite, but I kept doing it so that I could move up the ladder basically for employment so I could find something that I really love.

And just putting it sometimes in those personal terms for clients helped a little bit. It's certainly not, you know, going to work for everyone. But to show that, you know, it's not just them that you're asking this of. You, yourself, has gone through the process sometimes helps to ease that blow to the ego a little bit.

(Tara Wilson): And I do think that communities look towards each other. So if people see the chemical engineer stuck in a janitorial job for the past, you know, years, they - that's what they think their life is going to be.

So again, we're working our way out of that through lots of things, including Global Talent Idaho. But I think, you know, the more we can have success, so if (Toni)'s clients can see other clients of hers being successful, the resistance is less.

(Toni Richardson): Yes. And I do use that. It's personal. My first job was washing dishes in the restaurant. And I actually kind of liked it. But I've been also using the success stories of other clients that this is where he started and this is where he is now always helps.

Louisa Jones: Okay great. I have a few more questions. And this one kind of goes into acclimating and for refugees and then also touches on mental health. How are you able to kind of capture - or how are you able to work with people and agencies and programs in your state to really understand the cultural perceptions and bias, that hindering refugee's acclimation process - processes into your states, particular when it's their mental health or things they've experienced as refugees or that made them refugees in the first place?

How do you help people in your state really understand what's going on with their culture and their background?

(Katherine Dachtler): Sorry, go ahead.

(Tara Wilson): You go first (Katherine).

(Katherine Dachtler): I think in North Dakota what we really tried to do is bring the conversation out into the public. The conversation - we have this thing in the Midwest that we call North Dakota or Minnesota Nice. We don't make waves regardless of what we think. We just go along with the flow. And then we go back home and actually say what we really think.

And so we know the conversations are being had about refugees in the community or refugee employment, all of these things. It's just about bringing them out into the open so that we can help be there to be the other voice so it's not just a cacophony of the same voices and same opinions, you know, moving forward sometimes with misinformation.

So we really try to, as an agency, be a support service to the community as a whole, not, you know, employment definitely but in general as well. So we're always trying to get that out into the community and with our stakeholders.

And we would love to, you know, give you in-service presentations or just educational materials that you want. Let's have a conversation about where you feel you need more information.

So lately for us, it's been a lot of conversations about the proper use of interpreters. Who is mandated by the federal government to provide interpretation and what does meaningful access mean?

For other's it's been a lot on we just want backgrounders. We want to understand, you know, the history of the Somali refugee population or the history of the Bhutanese refugee population because we just want to know the history.

But we don't necessarily want to put the spotlight or single out a person on our employment staff, you know, to tell us their whole life story because obviously that could have some issues with that.

But that's how we really try to address some of the (lack image) or some of the misunderstandings or misrepresentations of perhaps our refugee population in the city and for employers as well.

(Tara Wilson): And just to add to that, the Center for Applied Linguistics, those cultural backgrounders, we actually have a little employer handbook we give the folks where we have a link to those so people can learn about different cultures.

And I think training managers is really important, or a foreman or whoever because you can take - talk to HR and they, you know, smile and say this is great. But if the management, you know, people actually on the worksite don't get it, then I think everybody is challenged.

Louisa Jones: Great. I'm going to ask some rapid fire questions and try to wrap us up here. In regards to the cultural piece, have - how have you dealt with any clients who may not want a particular job because alcohol or pork is sold?

Woman: That's kind of the first question that we actually ask at our employment intake when we're doing the history or the employment background for each client because we want to make sure that their first job is as successful as possible.

And if they feel like they are, you know, violating religious (morals), that it's not going to be that way. So we want to make sure that we know about that right away.

And then look into the options that have been proven to be successful for those who follow some of those rules and restrictions. And then maybe even ask for input about what they think, you know, they would be able to do within the community.

Now obviously that depends on the level of education, the level of English, the level of experience in some ways. But we found that that helps people feel more comfortable right away to - and be more open to employment if we address that right away and we don't just tack that on at the end.

Woman: It's the same here. We ask the question and we kind of ask follow up questions about would you be okay working in a place - an establishment that sells pork and alcohol. Would you be okay wearing gloves if you're a

dishwasher washing dishes? So we ask those follow up questions. And some - and it's an individual preference.

Louisa Jones: Okay great. I'm actually going to stop us right there. But before we go to the final poll question and we close out, I just wanted to let everyone on this (conference) know that probably within a week or so we're going to be able to send out to all the participants and to those who registered as well the slides.

We're also going to include contact information for all four of our wonderful speakers today so that you can follow up with them if you have individual questions.

And I know that we mentioned the Center for Linguistics link. And we'll try to include that as well in the transcript so that people can have that link as well.

I just wanted to thank all four of our wonderful presenters in this (conference) today. And I also want to thank all of our participants on the phone who have been listening and asking a lot of different questions. It's been very engaging to kind of - to know that this is a very important topic for people.

And to kind of follow up very quickly on some of these questions and share with your peers what's going on. So thank you very much. We're going to go to our final poll question.

If there was a tool or a resource that would be most helpful in supporting refugees in their efforts to find work, what kind of tools or resources would you like to have developed?

So you have case studies highlighting best practices, tools to facilitate partnerships of workforce development services, tools to help engage potential employers and direct technical assistance. I'm just going to skip out 30 seconds here to keep filling this out, although there's a clear tool winner here.

All right, it looks like one of the most helpful tools or resources would be tools to help engage potential employers. So we will take that back and - as part of the bridges initiative. And think about ways how we can connect you to tools that other states and programs are using to engage potential employers or other ways we can connect you with those resources.

So with that, we would like to thank everyone for participating today. And thank you so much for all of your questions. And again, we'll be following up with you with the slides, contact information as well as a few additional links. Thank you and have a great afternoon.

Woman: Thank you.

Woman: Thank you.

Woman: Thank you.

Coordinator: This concludes today's conference. Participants you may disconnect at this time.

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