

REFUGEEWORKS

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

NEWSLETTER 27
HIDDEN JOBS

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HITTING THE PAVEMENT

By Rebecca Armstrong, *RefugeeWorks*

Do you have what it takes to be a job developer? In January 2008 refugee employment staff were put to the test in Minnesota's Twin Cities when *RefugeeWorks* trainers challenged them to hit the pavement on the coldest day of winter. Braving temperatures as low as -20 degrees Fahrenheit, 35 job developers came back with more than 100 new employer contacts and job openings from businesses interested in hiring refugees.

Job developers also learned something about themselves on that cold morning. "I'm more dedicated and motivated than I thought," one participant reflected. Another commented, "I can go out there and have the guts to talk to employers."

Participants gained insight into the power of experiential learning, a workshop challenge born of several phone conversations with Minnesota State Refugee Coordinator, Gus Avenido. Gus wanted to challenge refugee employment service providers to expand their business networks, while simultaneously addressing the abilities, interests and experiences of clients. He challenged providers to develop a curriculum that reinforced core job-development strategies. Several skill-building sessions and a stimulating field test resulted.



When I heard the weather forecaster predict the coldest day of winter, I wondered whether job developers would be up to Gus's challenge. But despite reservations, everyone put on their hats and gloves and headed out the door.

Participants returned two hours later with stacks of business cards and a great sense of accomplishment. "There is power in working together," one participant commented. "If

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CONSULTANT'S CORNER: Jonathan Lucus



Hello, everyone. As I sit down to write about the subject of job development, I reflect on the root of the term—namely, *to develop*. What does this really mean? One definition I came across was "to bring out the capabilities or

possibilities of." This is an accurate description of what a job developer does. He or she empowers, promotes growth and creates opportunities for the refugees being served. But how should a job developer go about doing this?

In the *Art of War*, Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu wrote that to enter battle unafraid, one needs to know three things: oneself, one's opponent and one's terrain. I would argue that

this applies to job development as well. It is crucial to hone one's strengths in areas such as marketing and networking. It is equally essential to understand who else is vying for the positions that refugees are trying to fill. Educating oneself on the current economic situation and sectors of job growth helps a job developer master the local landscape.

It is vital to remember that job sources come from people who know you. So in essence, it is important to spend time building relationships. We hope that this issue of the *RefugeeWorks* newsletter will provide you with some battle strategies in the difficult art of uncovering hidden jobs for your clients.

Jonathan Lucus
Senior Consultant and National Coordinator

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USING GOOGLE MAPS TO UNCOVER HIDDEN JOBS

By Rebecca Armstrong, RefugeeWorks



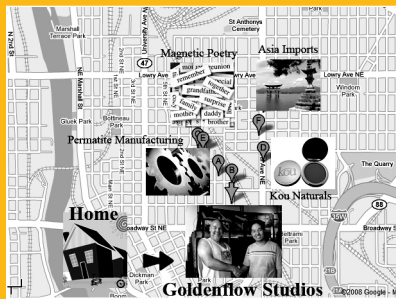
1 Kao Thao relocated to Minneapolis from Wat Tham Krabok refugee camp in Thailand in 2004. Before arriving in the United States he worked as a silversmith. With limited English skills and no U.S. work experience, Kao sought help from the Hmong American Partnership during his job search.

Google Maps is becoming a popular tool for job developers across the country. Eric Bestrom, an employment specialist for the Hmong American Partnership in St. Paul, Minn., uses the application to search for businesses within a certain distance from a refugee's home. "Finding a job close to home is one way to solve transportation and childcare problems for refugees seeking work," said Eric in a recent interview. He also believes that this strategy helps to cultivate relationships with employers, leading them to call on their local job developer before placing a formal advertisement.



2 After completing an employment assessment and identifying Kao's career goals, employment specialist Eric Bestrom decided to do a geographical job search. "Kao's relatives agreed to drive him to any job within a reasonable distance," Eric recalls.

Follow the steps below to find out how Eric helped a silversmith from Thailand become a glassblower at Goldenflow Studios, one of the nation's leading manufacturers of 23k gold, hand-blown snow domes and a cornerstone of the Twin Cities arts community.



3 Eric used Google Maps to search for manufacturing businesses within Kao's zip code, beginning with the nearest business cluster. He found 60 possibilities and began making calls to introduce the Hmong American Partnership's services. Some businesses were suffering hard times or had a low turnover. But success came quickly. "We had three informal interviews and company visits before finding Goldenflow Studios—we were kind of lucky."



4 An interested business owner, Dan Mather of Goldenflow Studios, invited Kao for an interview. Impressed with Kao's attentiveness, Dan offered him a position as a finishing production assistant. This would require Kao to grind, drill, fill and seal the glass blanks that Dan would blow. Dan first met Kao during an interview session with a dozen other people who were interested in the job. "I could tell who was visually studying the shop and the processes as I explained them," Dan recalls. "Kao's curiosity told me he had an active mind and would make an excellent candidate for training."

A NEW PARADIGM FOR REFUGEE JOB DEVELOPMENT

By Jonathan Lucas, *RefugeeWorks*

In the last decade we have seen manufacturing jobs increasingly move overseas, refugee arrivals become more diverse and the U.S. economy transform itself. Yet, we continue to approach refugee employment services with the same methodologies we used 10 years ago, when jobs were plentiful and caseloads were more homogeneous.

In a 2004 case study, Peter Ilmolelian concluded that refugees in the United Kingdom who had studied health care, education, social science and business were more likely to find employment than those who had studied computing and information technology. In essence, those who had more success had studied in areas where job growth was occurring. Ilmolelian's research also showed that finding employment was easier for refugees who had received educational grants. Acquiring a grant was a sure sign that a refugee had gained the language and networking skills necessary to succeed in his or her new place of residence. This kind of integration is a big issue in the refugee resettlement world. Through education, training opportunities and funding support, adjustment to cultural and societal norms can be accelerated.

In the United States we have seen significant changes in job availability in the last few years. As the shift toward service employment accelerates, we see more openings in the hospitality industry and fewer in manufacturing, for example. In this new economic environment, job developers need to carefully study forecasts of future job growth.



A systematic approach will have to take place to equip refugees with the skill sets they will need in tomorrow's workforce.

In a 2007 *Washington Post* article, the American Medical Association stated that underserved regions are currently in need of 16,000 doctors. In a recent *RefugeeWorks* survey, 76 percent of job developers indicated that they have physicians in their caseload. This concrete example illustrates where specific training programs could help refugees acquire recertification to fill a widening gap in the healthcare industry.

Ilmolelian recommends that we do more than merely provide funding for education and training. We should give refugees the earliest opportunity to study and obtain certification in an employment field that is in high demand, combined with intensive English training. To fill the jobs that are emerging in the 21st century workforce, the refugee resettlement network must strategize aggressively.



5 Two years later, Kao is a packager, machine operator and glassblower. And Kao's glassblowing skills have given Dan more time to focus on sales and account maintenance. Reliability has been Kao's biggest contribution. "I don't have to worry if he'll show up, and I don't have to worry about him doing the job correctly," Dan says. "While I worried there would be some language barriers to training, Kao has impressed me by proving himself better able to understand and execute instructions than many of the native English speakers I've attempted to train in years past."

TALKING POINT

JOB DEVELOPER'S TOOLBOX: GENERATING HIGH-YIELD EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS

An interview with World Relief Employment Counselor Dan Imbody

By Daniel Sturm, *RefugeeWorks*

Helping refugees while simultaneously maintaining trusting relationships with employers is a balancing act. In this interview, World Relief job developer, Dan Imbody, explains his method of developing employer partnerships. When Dan first started the job in 2005, he used marketing and sales principles to generate several hundred new employer partnerships. "This was a new experimental position, in that I was focusing exclusively on producing job leads, with almost no interactions with refugees." Dan has recently taken a new position as a refugee employment counselor. He still utilizes the relationships he built during his time as a full-time job developer.

REFUGEEWORKS: Can you explain the concept of "high-yield" employer partnerships?

IMBODY: Most agencies take a shotgun approach to job development, and consequently there's a lot of martyrdom. One idea is to get a higher percentage of job placements by targeting multiple employers at once. Secondly, smaller companies are taking a much larger risk hiring refugees. So why not negotiate a partnership with a much larger company? It's a lot more effective for us.

REFUGEEWORKS: Can you give me an example?

IMBODY: Over a short period of time we placed 100 clients with two large companies. That's only two relationships we have to maintain. This high-yield approach allows us to reduce the number of trips for drug screening and orientation sessions. By the time our clients show up for work, we have helped them fill out I-9 and new-hire application forms. And we've saved the company hundreds of thousands of dollars.

REFUGEEWORKS: How do you approach these larger companies?

Do You Have a Creative Solution?

In the "Job Developer's Toolbox," *RefugeeWorks* will highlight ideas and creative solutions from job developers across the country. Do you have something you'd like to share? Send a summary of your creative solution for refugee employment to Daniel Sturm at dsturm@refugeeworks.org.



IMBODY: During the initial meeting with human resources, I tell them that our clients are drug-free and work-authorized, that they are extremely reliable workers and that their job retention is high. We use statistics to support this claim and demonstrate that the company is going to get better people compared to working with a staffing agency.

REFUGEEWORKS: When you were a full-time job developer, how did you organize your schedule?

IMBODY: I was, in a sense, protected from the sometimes chaotic and rapidly changing schedule of employment counseling and was able to fill up my calendar with appointments at promising new companies—a luxury that employment counselors don't always have time for. It took me two years to build a binder packed with information on 300 companies, and we were able to place clients at 60 of those companies.

REFUGEEWORKS: How has the economic recession affected your success in finding jobs for your clients?

IMBODY: It has definitely made our work more challenging. Luckily, we recently hired a new job developer who is doing what you have to do in times of crisis: hitting the road. We basically beefed up our sales front. Another strategy to counteract the economic crisis is to identify recession-proof industries. For example, we recently placed some clients with a company that's producing carpet padding. Its products are in high demand due to global warming.

(Dan Imbody can be reached at DImbody@wr.org)

World Relief, Aurora, Ill.
URL: <http://aurora.wr.org/>



A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL RECLAIMS HER CAREER

By Kerry Foley, Somali Community Center of Nashville

Mariam is a Somali refugee who came to America in 1999 with her husband and six children. After some prodding by her daughter, last year Mariam decided to seek career counseling from the Somali Community Center of Nashville (SCCN). She was finally ready to talk about reclaiming her career.

Mariam had received her medical degree from the University of Rome, La Sapienza. She then returned to Somalia, where she was a pediatrician at a Mogadishu hospital and a private clinic. To escape civil unrest she fled with her family to Cairo. As a refugee, Mariam volunteered for a community organization, helping Somalis during their medical appointments.

After arriving in the United States, Mariam experienced

vision problems and was diagnosed with retinal detachment. It took a few years to improve her vision to the point where she could begin working again. But without a license to practice medicine in the United States, Mariam had not worked since her arrival. Mariam had become desperate enough that she had begun to consider returning home to Somalia to work, even though it was unsafe.

As SCCN’s program coordinator for an ORR-funded Ethnic Community Self-Help project, I helped Mariam return to the medical field. I talked with her about what type of job she wanted and helped her create a résumé. Mariam had a passion for medicine and wanted a job in the medical field even though she could no longer work as a physician. So I helped her look into job opportunities at Vanderbilt Medical Center and Hospital. One hurdle remained, however: she wasn’t confident about her English abilities. SCCN held mock interviews to familiarize Mariam with key terms, practice delivering her answers and increase her self-confidence.

In August 2007 SCCN met representatives from Vine Hill Community Clinic (a Vanderbilt-affiliated medical clinic in Nashville) to talk about a birthing program they had set up for Somali refugees. This meeting marked the beginning of a collaboration. The clinic was looking for a medical assistant and a lab technician and was excited by the prospect of hiring native speakers. Mariam and another client, a Sudanese lab technician, were hired. Mariam is now working as a medical assistant at the Vine Hill Clinic. She is happy to be using her medical knowledge once again and is grateful that the Somali Community Center of Nashville has helped her find a job that provides medical insurance for her family.

The Somali Community Center of Nashville
URL: <http://www.sccnashville.org/>

HITTING THE PAVEMENT <<1

I was by myself, in my office, I wouldn’t have gone out today to make new contacts.”

Below are strategies you can use to develop your own job-hunt field expedition:

- Before setting out, spend some time practicing essential job-development skills.
- Consider collaborating with other agencies in your area.
- Map your target businesses and neighborhoods in advance.
- Be flexible about your plans.
- Let employers do the talking. Ask about their needs.
- Focus on promoting your agency’s employment services.

RefugeeWorks
URL: www.refugeeworks.org

- Set a date for follow-up phone calls or face-to-face meetings with each employer.
- Don’t rule out employers who cannot hire for certain jobs.
- Do neighborhood-centered, door-to-door canvassing in commercial or industrial zones.
- Cultivate relationships with employers so they will feel comfortable contacting you first when they have job openings.

What Are Hidden Jobs?
1. Jobs that are not advertised (75 percent, according to jobhunt.org);
2. Jobs that do not match a client’s perceived skills but do match skills uncovered through a complete assessment of work history and life accomplishments.

PEER ESL TEACHING: KID-TO-KID MENTORING IN TENNESSEE

By Inga E. Treitler with Marco Eres

Marco, Irakoze, Kubura and Emmanuel were hanging out in the park, kicking a soccer ball back and forth. Each time someone trapped the ball, Marco would call that child's name and then yell, "Kick! Jump! Pass!" It was a simple and energetic activity, and it did the trick of letting the guys relax with each other as boys do all over the world—with a soccer ball and a loud voice. They had some good laughs, got to feel each other out socially and practiced some basic communication skills. It was ESL, lesson one. And the beauty of this mentoring and teaching method? The kids made it up themselves—kids do tend to know how to get along, even with no shared language.

Marco is 15. His "students" are 11, eight and six. These mentoring sessions started soon after Marco finished his freshman year of high school. It was through serendipity and a bit of institutional and parental planning that these four boys got together. My son, Marco, was looking for a way to spend some of his summer break involved in a service activity, giving back to his community. I learned that Bridge Refugee and Sponsorship Services was resettling Burundian and Iraqi families and helping them find jobs in Knoxville (the organization is connected with Episcopal Migration Ministries and Church World Service). My own family has had its share of disorienting experiences with relocation and learning second and third languages. So Marco and I were motivated to help make the transition easier for other families. After attending a brief orientation and training offered by Bridge, we were off and running.

We were introduced to a large Hutu family with three boys sandwiched in the middle—a perfect age spread for Marco to be part-pal and part-mentor. These kids were a healthy, rough-and-tumble bunch, like kids you might meet anywhere. But they had spent most of their short lives in a refugee camp in Tanzania. There they had had something of a normal life: going to school, playing with other kids, managing a small kitchen garden and looking after the little ones in their family. But although most of their life was spent in Tanzania, they were not Tanzanian and didn't speak Kiswahili, but Kirundi, the language of the Hutu tribe. They would never be able to return to Burundi, the country of their roots, however. So the family applied for and was granted resettlement by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. They were enthusiastically welcomed when they arrived in the United States. But the

children and their mother spoke barely a word of English. Only the parents spoke Kiswahili, a language more commonly found in the immigrant community in Knoxville. It was a heavy burden for the father to communicate for the entire family, all the while seeking work to meet their goal of self-sufficiency.

Marco and I met the family after they had been in Knoxville for about two months, a time during which they had been busy finding housing and enrolling in schools. Now school was out and the long summer

months had come. These relaxed summer months were a perfect time to settle into the community. Marco tutored the three boys during June and returned in August to help them with schoolwork and strengthen their budding friendship.

Inga E Treitler Ph.D. is a cultural anthropologist who consults with major corporations on product marketing and design.



Bridge Refugee and Sponsorship Services
URL: <http://www.discoveret.org/refugees/>

THE STORY BEHIND THE PICTURE

By Daniel Sturm, *RefugeeWorks*

The picture below is a favorite of mine from the “Refugees in the Workforce” photo contest. According to Rita Kantarowski, the International Rescue Committee’s regional resettlement director in Boston, it is also a popular image among IRC’s staff. “It’s so incredibly positive and friendly,” says Kantarowski.

The photo shows Mehmed Hadziahmetovic, an IRC client who came to America in 1994 as a refugee from Bosnia. Finding a job for him required a thorough assessment of his skills, networking and some employer education. Kantarowski recalls the context in which the picture was taken. At around the time her client was seeking a job, it happened that the IRC’s phone system was being replaced. Kantarowski thought it might be a good idea to introduce Hadziahmetovic, who had previously worked in the information technology field, to the owner of Datel Communications, the company that had been contracted to fix the phone system.

It was a match made in heaven. Hadziahmetovic’s skills were tested on the spot. He got the job and has now been working for the same company for more than 14 years. What an outstanding example of commitment and job retention!



A picture says a thousand words. Do you have any photos that illustrate the story of refugee employment? If so, contact Daniel at dsturm@refugeeworks.org, to submit one for publication. Don’t forget to include your name, phone number and a copy of the photo in your e-mail.

A JOB TO DO AT REFUGEEWORKS

By Linda Rabben, *RefugeeWorks*

When my grandparents fled to the United States from Russia around 1900, they were desperately poor—and stayed poor for most of their lives. But their sacrifices made it possible for their children—my parents, uncles and aunts—to become professionals and eventually prosper. My grandparents succeeded vicariously, through their native-born American offspring.

More than 100 years later, refugees are still arriving in the United States from societies in conflict. Many of the government and private programs that help them resettle are based on the assumption that they lack English proficiency, education and marketable skills. They receive help to learn English, develop skills and find jobs that will enable them to support their families. These jobs are often at the bottom of the occupational pyramid.

Some recent arrivals are well educated, highly skilled and already conversant in English. Even so, resettlement programs often can only funnel them into entry-level jobs. Meanwhile, refugee physicians, nurses, engineers, teachers, lawyers and other professionals discover that they must spend years and thousands of dollars to be recertified to practice the profession they trained to fill at home. Frustrations rise because it is difficult for them to find the time and financial resources to obtain recertification. Many become trapped on an underemployment treadmill.

As a writer and researcher for *RefugeeWorks*’ Recertification Project, I am interested in ways that service providers can help refugee professionals get off an underemployment treadmill. My work in the coming months will include writing a series of reports on recertification and related issues, and helping to organize a national conference on refugee professional recertification in Michigan in June 2009. I welcome your comments, suggestions and stories. Send me an e-mail at lrabben@refugeeworks.org.





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“Most agencies take a shotgun approach to job development, and consequently there’s a lot of martyrdom. So why not negotiate a partnership with a much larger company?”

*Dan Imbody, World Relief.
See “The Job Developer’s Toolbox,” p. 4*



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