

Supporting Refugees with the Workforce Development System

A Case Study of Collaboration between Adult Education and Job Training
Programs in a Local Workforce Area



Afghanistan

- The United States withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021
- High-pressure situation as families and individuals had to adapt
- News reports about the impact on the area and the future

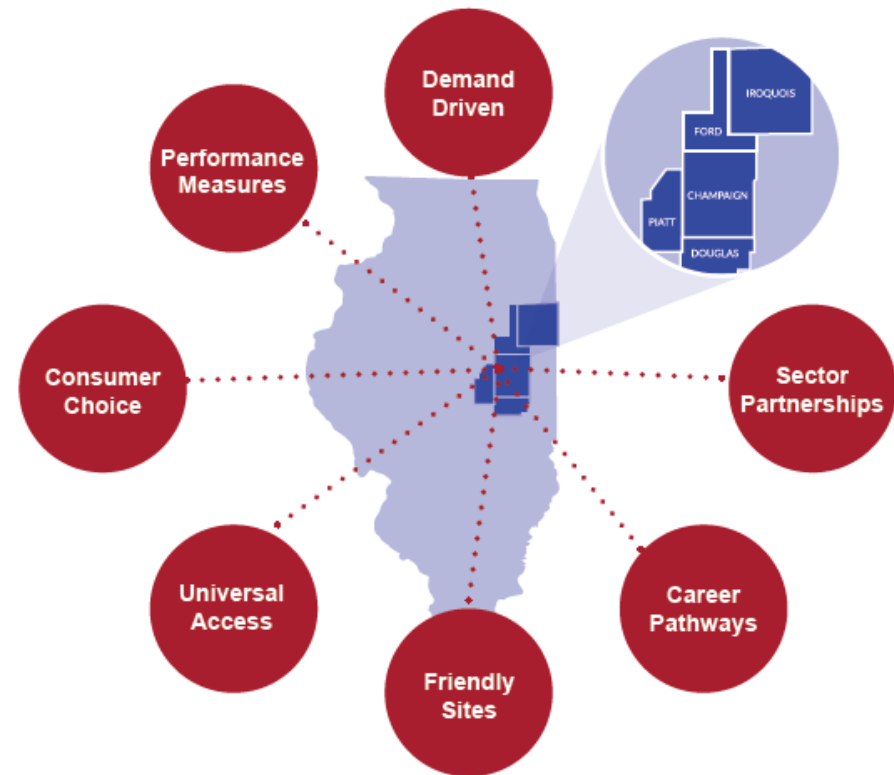
State of Illinois

- State departments engaged with local workforce areas
- State departments advised local service-providers to anticipate refugees
- The State asked local areas to think about how to serve this population



Local Workforce Area

- Staff from adult education and job training programs had a prior relationship
- Both programs were open to exploring the challenges and supporting each other
- The outcome: 15 refugees were supported in employment



Adult Education and Job Training Programs



CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
REGIONAL PLANNING
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Supporting Refugees with the Workforce Development System

Positive Relationships

Open Investigation

Project Design

Staff Involvement

Making Adjustments

Reflection

Positive Relationships

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One-stop System

- Monthly Partner Meetings
- Annual MOU Negotiations
- Drop-ins and Emails

Workforce Board

- Engaged employer who had worked with the community college and job training program before
- The employer was a Workforce Board member, so she was familiar with the local workforce system
- The employer reached out and asked if local partners had any thoughts on how to serve refugees

First Meeting

- Staff from the job training and adult education programs came together in February 2022
- We knew there were things we didn't know and that we would do things we may not have done before
- We were willing to listen to each other, learn about program services and participant needs, and support each other

Open Investigation

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Sharing Information

- Staff from local adult education and job training met to discuss general programs and services, and customizable, employer-led, work-based learning projects.
- Staff talked about eligibility and documentation requirements, how services are typically delivered, and the environment for service delivery.
- Staff asked each other questions about how to enroll, cost of services to an employer, and what would be needed by participants.

Asking Questions

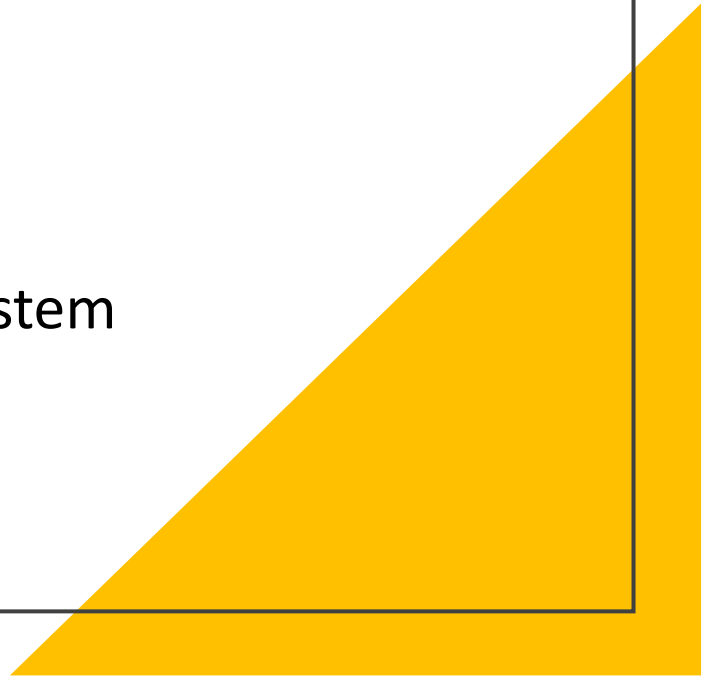
- Staff from adult education and job training program were open to ask each other questions to better understand capacity and expectations.
- The discussion had by staff allow members to appreciate each other's strengths and limitations.
- Staff from both programs had to talk through how to engage additional community partners and how to coordinate the workforce system with the employer.

Getting Answers

- Staff from adult education and job training programs had to research local and state policies, and engage state departments.
- Staff from local programs also had to work within their own organizations to talk-through organizational requirements for contracts and MOUs.
- Staff from both programs had to identify allowable costs for staffing, training, and supportive services.

Project Design

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On-the-Job Training

- OJT Program – Paying wages, supporting employees, working with employers
- RPC worked with local employer to develop training plans keeping in mind language barriers
- RPC created multiple training plans specific to various occupations at the company
- Parkland provided ESL classes at employer, moved to employee's mosque to accommodate employees.

Customized Training

- Parkland Adult Education provided onsite ESL instruction.
 - Instruction was provided in English with support from a tutor fluent in Pashto.
 - Four domains: reading, writing, listening and speaking.
 - Instructional plans adjusted frequently based on feedback from students and partners.
 - Students were made aware of additional ESL class offerings at the college including an evening offering of family literacy services.

Community Partner

- Parkland and RPC worked with the Refugee Center.
- The Center helped us coordinate efforts with refugees to obtain documents needed for eligibility (ID, SS card, lease), and to get to participants work and receive services.
- The Center provided an interpreter and transportation for pre-enrollment activities, and helped organize housing.
- The local One-stop became more aware of the Center's work and started making referrals to the Center.

Staff

Involvement

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Enrolling Participants

- Sought guidance from the State on how to conduct the assessment portion with refugees who were unable to read, write, or comprehend English.
- Most of the refugees were not formally educated in their home country and did not read or write in their native language.
- Thorough verbal assessments were allowed with the help of an interpreter.
- We offered Saturday enrollment to accommodate employer, community partner, and refugees.

Employer Connection

- Employer was proactive within the local workforce area. This was extremely important!
- Employer attended enrollment meeting and supported partners.
- Employer provided needed documentation and additional resources:
 - Company information (hire letters, employee handbook, company policies) in language of refugees
 - Steel toe boots and yellow safety vests

Monthly Meetings

- Parkland and RPC stayed in contact with each other, the employer, and the Center
- RPC facilitated monthly meetings with interpreter and refugees
- Partners problem-solved employment-related issues

Making Adjustments

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Transportation

- Employer initially provided transportation, this wasn't feasible in the long run.
- Job Training's "Supportive Service" funding covered the cost of bicycles, helmets so that the participants could get back and forth to work.
- Several refugees now have their Illinois driver's license and provide a carpool service to those without licenses.

Cultural Differences

- Learning about and respecting cultural norms of these new citizens while also providing them with insights about how to be successful in the community and workforce.
- The employer did this as well, and refugees were given leeway with calling in due to the language barrier.
- The interpreter, Refugee Center, and RPC Career Coach were in contact with HR when an absence occurred.

Long-term Pathways

- Discussing the vision for a long-term pathway that includes adult education and stackable credentials.
- Being open to discussions that some participants may not want to stay in manufacturing, and providing career exploration services.
- Encouraging participants to pursue a certificate or degree in a preferred sector and intentionally build a career.
- Our interpreter – a good role model
 - Was a refugee who didn't know English, didn't have a car or housing, and lacked experience and credentials to compete in the labor market.
 - Took ESL classes, stayed at a job, got a car and stable housing, pursued a certificate in a field, has a good-paying job in a field he enjoys.

Reflection

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Accepting Limitations

- Seeing a group of people come in without appropriate clothing, not speaking the language, war stories, families left behind – it was difficult
- This was a crisis-point intervention and we couldn't do everything
- Do what we could do well, and looking for additional answers and solutions

Continuous Improvement

- Collaboration, flexibility, and adaptation is key to serving refugees
- Developing a workshop at the Refugee Center to cover basic workforce etiquette, expectations, and money management
- Identifying local refugee populations and developing adult education / job training programs around those populations

Basic Need

- It is vital to engage key stakeholders on the challenges and urgency of meeting the literacy needs of immigrants and refugees



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