



IMMIGRANTS AND MINNESOTA'S WORKFORCE

APPENDIX A: CASE STUDIES OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN MINNESOTA

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ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA AND THE MAYO CLINIC: HIGH SKILLED IMMIGRANTS IN THE HEARTLAND

Among Minnesota cities, Rochester captures both the incredible potential of the 21st-century service economy and the obstacles and pitfalls on the road to success. Rochester's population has nearly doubled since 1980, its surge driven by the growth of the world-renowned Mayo Clinic and accompanying medical and biotechnological industries. A full 38 percent of the city's workforce is in the healthcare sector,¹ and this trend toward a healthcare-dominated economy is only likely to continue: the city recently announced the development of the Destination Medical Center (DMC), a \$6 billion, 20-year public-private partnership project to expand the Mayo Clinic's facilities.² Immigrants have an essential role to play in this ongoing growth.

Rochester's growing medical field has driven the city's development, and has considerable spillover effects for the rest of the regional economy. Above all, it demands an increase in highly-educated workers, particularly in a city whose lone four-year university, the University of Minnesota-Rochester, only opened in 2006 and enrolls fewer than 500 students.³ As a result, Rochester must import much of its talent for its highest-end jobs, and immigrants offer one such source. The global clientele at the Mayo Clinic also enhances the need for culturally competent employees, and immigrants can offer these skills.

Increasing numbers of immigrants in Rochester dates to the 1970s, when the city became home to a number of refugees fleeing conflicts in Southeast Asia. The immigrant population in schools has risen considerably in each of the past two decades, going from 9 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2000 and 31 percent in 2010.⁴ And while the main driver of immigration growth may come through jobs in high-demand medical fields, many other immigrants have no such credentials, and make their way into supporting positions. A study commissioned by the clinic estimates that its work creates over 70,000 jobs and injects \$9.6 billion into the statewide economy,⁵ and these interconnections require a coherent strategy for all changes in the community, as demand for local services will grow concurrently.

Navigating the Visa System

The demand for medical professionals in Minnesota is real, and will only grow upon completion of the DMC. Most sources project a shortfall of 800-2,000 physicians by 2020.⁶ Immigration offers an obvious solution to this gap, and while the current immigration system is comparatively favorable for large research institutions that seek to bring in workers from abroad, there is still considerable room for improvement. The most common method for such institutions to bring in immigrant employees is through the H-1B visa program, which provides a work visa for immigrants with a bachelor's degree or foreign equivalent, or a lesser degree with experience.

¹ Ruiz, Neil G., Jill H. Wilson, and Shyamali Choudhry. *The Search for Skills: Demand for H-1B Immigrant Workers in U.S. Metropolitan Areas*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, July 2012, p. 15.

² "What Is the DMC: The Facts." *Rochester Post-Bulletin*. 25 March 2016.

http://www.postbulletin.com/news/special_report/what-is-dmc-the-facts/article_eed354b2-e29d-556a-bbae-6c4e893c5297.html.

³ University of Minnesota Office of Institutional Research, 2016. <http://www.oir.umn.edu/student/enrollment>

⁴ "The Changing Face of Rochester." *KTTV*. 17 March 2011. <http://www.myfox47.com/story/14273998/the-changing-face-of-rochester>

⁵ *The Economic and Societal Impact of the Mayo Clinic and Mayo Health System*. Battelle Technology Partnership Practice, February 2010. <http://www.mayo.edu/pmts/mc2000-mc2099/mc2045-23.pdf>

⁶ "Task Force on Foreign-Trained Physicians: Report to the Minnesota Legislature 2015." Minnesota Department of Health. St. Paul, January 2015. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/iimg/finalrpt.pdf>

These immigrants must work in designated “specialty occupations,” including healthcare and physical sciences. There is no cap for the number of H-1B visas that research institutions such as the Mayo Clinic can receive.⁷

The Mayo Clinic uses its unlimited supply of visas to its advantage. It alone receives 250-300 certified H-1B visas annually, with the vast majority of those workers at its Rochester facility. According to reported data, nearly all workers had advanced degrees in either medical or STEM fields; most came from south Asia, with significant groups from Europe and Canada as well.⁸ The American Immigration Council lists the Mayo Clinic along with several research universities, large banks, and multinational corporations on a list of employers that apply for the most H-1B visas in the United States.⁹

Not every immigrant is fortunate enough to receive an H-1B visa, however, and eligibility requirements and limited allotments leave many outside of the existing system. While immigration reform to expand the program requires federal action, local employers, governments, and credentialing organizations can ease the path for those who are not directly lined up with an employer or otherwise unable to attain H-1B status. The credentials and medical training attained by workers in other countries may not align with U.S. standards, which forces immigrants to take aptitude tests at their own expense or repeat residencies even if they completed such requirements in their nations of origin.¹⁰

Credential Struggles

Many highly skilled immigrants discover that the degrees and credentials they obtained in their countries of origin do not translate smoothly to the U.S. Not knowing how to navigate a new system after supporting an entire family in a country of origin is “very demoralizing,” according to Michelle Eberhard of Arrive Ministries, one of Minnesota’s refugee resettlement agencies. “They come to the land of opportunity,” she says, but when confronted with a series of new credential requirements or regulatory hurdles, they are left wondering, “why do I have to do this again?” Failure to streamline processes will only leave more immigrants out of the Minnesota economy and on the margins.

Highly skilled immigrants and refugees are often slow to find positions that match their skills in Rochester. While workers have little trouble landing jobs, they are often seriously underemployed. For refugees who need to start paying rent in their second month in the U.S., it is nearly impossible to finish even basic training programs. Initially, at least, “their reality is Walmart,” says Kristina Hammell, the Director of Refugee Resettlement for Catholic Charities in Rochester.

Many people will eventually find their way into positions that better match their skills, but the pathways are rarely smooth, and populations that are familiar with the Western education system are often far more capable of navigating the necessary training and education. Hammell reports that she is unable to place refugees at the Mayo Clinic and other large organizations, as most of their job requirements have specific levels of expected training for even low-skill jobs such as janitorial work. Immigrants and refugees who lack these backgrounds are often screened out immediately, even if they are overqualified for a position.

⁷ Ruiz, Wilson, and Choudhry, 15.

⁸ <http://www.myvisajobs.com/Visa-Sponsor/Mayo-Clinic/344457.htm>

⁹ The H-1B Visa Program: A Primer on the Program and Its Impact on Jobs, Wages, and the Economy. Washington DC: American Immigration Council, 1 April 2016.

¹⁰ Baier, Elizabeth. “Minnesota Wants Foreign-Trained Doctors to Put their Expertise to Work.” *Duluth News Tribune* 26 February 2015. <http://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/health/3688600-minnesota-wants-foreign-trained-doctors-put-their-expertise-work>

The Minnesota Department of Health is aware of these barriers, and commissioned a task force to identify barriers encountered by immigrant International Medical Graduates (IMGs) and steps to improve their chances of becoming practicing physicians or fill other jobs for which they were trained in their countries of origin. Its initial report found that 83 percent of foreign-educated medical professionals failed to gain admission to a Minnesota residency program, compared to only 5 percent of U.S. medical school graduates.¹¹ Without implementation of the IMG's recommendations to certify past training, eliminate "recency" requirements for residencies, recognize foreign clinical experience, and bring down costs, this imbalance will continue. "We have seen good things," says Hammel. Obtaining jobs that match skills "is possible and it happens. It just takes time." But without a longer timeline of support, immigrants and refugees may get lost in the shuffle of this painstaking process.

Private and Nonprofit Support for Immigrants

Funding for refugee support services such as Catholic Charities often expires before new arrivals can put themselves on a clear career trajectory. In order to support immigrants over a longer period of time, other agencies such as Rochester's Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA) step in to fill the void. IMAA dates back to an earlier wave of refugee arrival in Rochester in 1984. IMAA assists about 250 immigrants and refugees per year, and, unlike resettlement agencies such as Catholic charities, can provide services for many years. IMAA gives its interpreters explicit training in medical terminology, which allows them to both assist clients with their immediate medical needs and serve resources for the area's major medical institutions. IMAA accepts immigrants referred by the County or nonprofits such as Catholic Charities to provide culturally appropriate services in the job-seeker's native language. Case workers employed by IMAA help immigrants with a variety of employment-related services, from job search details to life skills training to longer-term career planning. Another immigrant support organization, Project FINE (Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education), provides a variety of similar services, including translation in 23 different languages, information referrals, parent mentoring, and health programs. Project FINE also offers diversity training, sponsors several cultural projects, and a series of educational programs for children, including college connections and coding day camps.

Employers often prove supportive of highly skilled employees, but only when they already have a foot in the door. The Mayo Clinic, renowned for its collaborative working environment, has a series of Mayo Employee Resource Groups (MERGs) that provide services to groups oriented around ethnic or regional heritage, including such groups as Arab Heritage, India, Caribbean Heritage, and Somos Latinos.¹² However, unless prospective Mayo immigrant employees are directly sponsored for H-1B visas, they are unlikely to receive support from within the organization. Mayo's generic application for employment explicitly states that "it is not Mayo Clinic in Rochester's policy to assist foreign individuals in obtaining authorization from the U.S. immigration authorities for employment in certain job categories."¹³

Immigrants and a More Vibrant Rochester

Immigrants can also enrich the culture of a growing city that has, until now, revolved almost exclusively around a single hospital. That dynamic, however, is changing: Mayo's plans for the DMC call for a doubling of the local population, and city and hospital officials anticipate a need for a vibrant, creative culture that will enliven entertainment options and attract other employers for trailing spouses and others not involved in the medical

¹¹ Task Force on Foreign-Trained Physicians, 20-28.

¹² <http://www.mayoclinic.org/about-mayo-clinic/office-diversity-inclusion/our-employees/mayo-employee-resource-groups-mergs>

¹³ "Mayo Clinic Employment Application." <http://www.mayo.edu/pmts/mc0500-mc0599/mc0540.pdf>

field. Rochester aspires to match the creative culture found in cities such as Madison, Wisconsin and Boulder, Colorado, and in order to do so, it needs more than a new medical campus.¹⁴

This vision for a more vibrant Rochester requires greater investment in the arts and entertainment, which provides an obvious opening for immigrant engagement. As of 2013, nearly 46 percent of arts and entertainment performers in Minnesota were immigrants, even though they only form about 8 percent of the population.¹⁵ The cultural richness provided by immigrants is an asset, and long-established arts organizations in Rochester can tap into this community for further energy. The arts are another category covered by H-1B visas, and can provide a pathway toward economic integration if there are support networks for immigrants seeking work in what can often be an unstable field.

Outreach Beyond Skilled Immigrants

Public health issues are particularly serious for Rochester's less skilled immigrants, and the Mayo Clinic and other local healthcare institutions target them for additional assistance. Many immigrants arrive in better shape than the white native-born population, but become more at risk for diabetes and diseases stemming from poor diet and lack of exercise. Lack of knowledge of exercise options, long work hours, and family commitments make exercise difficult for these populations, so outreach programs are essential. A variety of programs involving private, public, and nonprofit actors work in concert to enhance immigrant health outcomes in Rochester, Winona, and rural southeastern Minnesota.¹⁶

In its outreach to immigrants, the Mayo Clinic cooperates extensively with the Hawthorne School, the Rochester school district's community education facility. The Hawthorne School provides English and U.S. citizenship classes, and can provide enrollees with credentials necessary for employment in various fields. Its Pathways to College and Careers program, which has received recognition from Harvard's Kennedy School for its innovative approach, connects the Mayo Clinic, Hawthorne School, Rochester Community and Technical College, and several nonprofits to build career readiness education. The program directly connects its participants with careers in the medical field, in addition to opportunities in manufacturing and skilled trades.¹⁷ For immigrants to succeed in an economy that increasingly demands higher levels of education, these pathways are essential, and must grow.

Rochester as a Model City?

Rochester's rapid growth around the healthcare industry exemplifies many of the most encouraging trends in the 21st-century economy, as world-class services and innovations create well-paying jobs and provide essential services to an aging population. The city has an unusually strong global reach for a community of its size. However, a failure to recognize the potential of skilled immigrants in the community wastes valuable resources and threatens to exclude immigrants and refugees from ladders of opportunity. Streamlined systems for bringing credentials obtained abroad into the U.S., as outlined in the IMG's recommendations, would help resolve these issues. A more integrated immigrant workforce would not only fill gaps in the local economy, but enhance cultural vitality in a city that is looking to grow into a major metropolitan area.

¹⁴ Greenberg, Ilan. "Held Hostage by a Hospital." *The New Republic*, 24 July 2013.

¹⁵ Corrie, Bruce P. and Sarah Radosevich. *The Economic Contributions of Immigrants in Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and Minnesota Business Immigration Coalition, 2013, p. 28.

¹⁶ Baier, Elizabeth. "Mayo, Minnesota Communities Targeting Immigrant Health." *Minnesota Public Radio* 30 January 2012.

¹⁷ <http://www.rochesterce.org/hawthorne>

IMMIGRANTS AND ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION IN WORTHINGTON, MINNESOTA

A wave of new residents settles in a Minnesota town that sits over fifty miles from a large metropolitan area. While the new arrivals are not wealthy, there are jobs available, and paths toward eventual entrepreneurship. A system of programs is in place to assist the new arrivals as they settle in. The town is growing, and its downtown bustles with new businesses. This might sound like wishful pinning for a bygone era, but it is reality in Worthington, Minnesota. Thanks to the arrival of several waves of immigrants since 1990, the last twenty-five years of Worthington tell a story of renewal that, while not without its road bumps, has revitalized a Minnesota town.

For most of its history, Worthington was a typical rural farming community. Located in Nobles County in the southwestern part of the state, its population peaked at just over 10,000 residents in 1980. Over the next decade, it began to shrink as the population aged and residents moved away. Worthington could have easily gone down the stereotypical path of many towns on the plains, with boarded up downtowns and a shrinking, aging population. Instead, it has become emblematic of a state in which immigration trends are the direct cause of population growth, as the city now has over 13,000 residents.¹⁸

Worthington owes its growth almost entirely to an influx of immigrants. The city now has the highest percentage of Hispanic inhabitants of anywhere in Minnesota at 39 percent,¹⁹ and owes its rising birth rate to immigration.²⁰ While Hispanics are the largest immigrant group in Worthington, there is considerable diversity among the immigrant population. Laotians and Karen are also prominent in the city, and the Minnesota Department of Education tallies 21 different first languages spoken by families in the local school district. As of the 2015-2016 school year, 54 percent of the school-age population are English-language learners, a 17 percent rise in 10 years.²¹ In just a generation, the city has transformed completely.

An Industry Anchor

Worthington's shift was driven largely by economic necessity. Its economy revolves heavily around a pork plant run by JBS Swift, a multinational food packing conglomerate that bought out an American-based predecessor, Swift and Company, in 2007. The JBS plant is by far the largest employer in the city, with approximately 2,400 employees, the majority of them immigrants. With the native-born population in decline, JBS turned to immigrants to fill the void. Those immigrants, first largely Hispanic but now spanning a range of ethnicities, have settled in Worthington and made it their home. The spillover effects of the JBS plant for the Worthington region are considerable, as the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates it creates 15,000 additional jobs in southwestern Minnesota.²²

The pork plant has occasionally had a choppy relationship with immigrants and its employees in general. A 2006 raid by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) led to the arrest of 230 undocumented immigrant

¹⁸ American Community Survey, 2014.

¹⁹ American Community Survey, 2014.

²⁰ Venzler, Tad. "Worthington, Minn., Was Dying. Then, Enter the Immigrants." *Pioneer Press*, 11 November 2015. <http://www.twincities.com/2011/09/17/worthington-minn-was-dying-then-enter-the-immigrants/>

²¹ MDE student-level data

²² McGaughey, Ryan. "50 Years and Counting: JBS Plant Continues to Make Strong Impact on Local Economy." *Worthington Daily Globe*, 30 December 2014. <http://www.dglobe.com/news/business/3644892-50-years-and-counting-jbs-plant-continues-make-strong-impact-local-economy>

workers at the meat packing plant, then still under the ownership of Swift.²³ Labor negotiations can also prove contentious at times, as JBS employees in Worthington authorized a strike in 2014 before ultimately coming to a resolution with their employer.²⁴ Working conditions in pork plants are notoriously difficult, with long hours, risk of injury, and a willingness to hire undocumented immigrants who are less likely to report poor standards due to fears of deportation.²⁵

Despite this legacy, JBS's reputation in Worthington has improved in recent years, creating a somewhat more stable environment for immigrants. The plant has the lowest turnover rate of any of JBS's U.S. operations,²⁶ and Darlene Macklin, the Executive Director of the Worthington Area Chamber of Commerce, cited it as a positive partner that has been willing to welcome in community groups seeking to connect with its employees. In recent years, it has increased transparency about organizational practices. A partnership grant from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) trained JBS workers to maintain machines at the plant, with curriculum designed by Minnesota West Community and Technical College.²⁷ These training sessions open doors for some upward mobility into positions that require technical skills, and provide a blueprint for JBS's role as a strong community partner. Expanded, culturally specific training offers an avenue for immigrant advancement that can keep immigrants from lifelong drudgery in low-skilled, low-paying jobs.

Immigrant Business Development

Immigrant entrepreneurship is alive and well in Worthington, as the downtown is filled with Mexican and Southeast Asian restaurants and businesses. The Worthington Area Chamber of Commerce is currently conducting a door-to-door survey of businesses owned by immigrants to learn of their successes, the barriers they face, and to offer assistance in ensuring they are properly incorporated. According to Macklin, on-the-ground engagement is the only successful method for getting genuine input from these businesses. This outreach effort to immigrant businesses aims to demonstrate the community's commitment to its newest residents and build community trust.

Despite the cordial atmosphere, some barriers remain. The Chamber of Commerce seeks to better inform immigrant entrepreneurs of official protocols, as immigrants will often open businesses without going through necessary permitting procedures. Past outreach efforts such as a Hispanic Business Committee struggled to attract participants, and spreading the word about events proves difficult. Language, says Macklin, "remains the number one barrier" to meaningful interaction between immigrants and native-born residents of Worthington. In its outreach efforts, the Chamber of Commerce explains the benefits of multilingual signage on businesses, which can help draw people in. Churches, Macklin adds, have also played a "vital role" in bringing immigrants and native-born groups together.

²³ "Meat Packing Plant Loses Workers to Immigration Raid." *Minnesota Public Radio*, 13 December 2006.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6620724>

²⁴ Buntjer, Julie. "Ready to Strike." *Worthington Daily Globe*, 6 May 2014. <http://www.dglobe.com/content/ready-strike>

²⁵ Genoways, Ted. "'I Felt Like a Piece of Trash' - Life Inside America's Food Processing Plants." *The Guardian*, 20 December 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/21/life-inside-america-food-processing-plants-cheap-meat>; Stull, Donald D. and Michael J. Broadway. 2013. *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

²⁶ McGahey.

²⁷ Beal, Dave. "Immigration Reform: Minnesota's Changing Face of Labor." *Minnpost* 7 August 2013.

<https://www.minnpost.com/twin-cities-business/2013/08/immigration-reform-minnesotas-changing-face-labor>

Trust and Social Cohesion

One of the most effective means of guiding immigrants on to a pathway for success is also among the most straightforward: providing them with a supportive environment in their new home. “We don’t even see color here,” says Macklin. The positive reception, she explains, stems from the welcoming atmosphere of the community and the personal connections that residents are able to make. While outsiders may be surprised by the dramatic demographic shift, Worthington boasts a remarkably low crime rate and little in the way of inter-ethnic conflict.

Several community members cited an engaged, culturally sensitive police force as a positive asset, and said its efforts to be proactive with immigrant outreach have been important steps in building community trust. The police force has partnered with a Hispanic community group, *Manos Unidas*, to provide immigrants with information on the U.S. legal system, ways to report suspicious activity, and directions on what to do in the event of a traffic stop.²⁸ “It has been many years since I have seen any blatant racially motivated resistance to our changing demographics,” says Sharon Johnson, the Director of Community Education for Independent School District 518, which serves the Worthington area.

Tight community networks help to support immigrants upon arrival in Worthington. ISD 518 and the Southwest Minnesota Opportunity Council collaborate to run the Community Connector program, which utilizes existing bilingual residents of the area to provide immigrants with connections to jobs and other services necessary for a stable existence in the United States. This program, Johnson says, is one of Worthington’s success stories due to its ability to offer support through a wide range of connections, from housing to legal services to managing finances.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1161, which successfully lobbied on behalf of JBS employees in the 2014 contract dispute, may also be a resource. Unions are often “instrumental” in alerting employers to the need for integrative practices, and union training and education funds are “the best kept secret in workforce development.”²⁹ Johnson adds that UFCW has organized several prayer vigils and marches to bring attention to immigrants’ situations, and while she says they have not led to significant change, they do “increase awareness of topics of concern.”

Education as a Key

For all its efforts to integrate immigrants, Worthington often runs up against a basic reality in a rural agricultural community: there simply is not a plethora of high-paying jobs available. As a result, social mobility is often a generational phenomenon, as immigrants seek to set their children on a path toward college and well-paying jobs. Success is not guaranteed, however, and immigrants often need support from their communities in order to avoid falling into self-reinforcing cycles of poverty. The influx of new populations has created a number of challenges for the Worthington public schools, but the district has responded with a wide range of programs to engage immigrants and provide them on pathways toward academic success.

Many of the programs confront the language barrier that immigrants encounter in Worthington. According to Johnson, ISD 518 hires three full-time interpreter/translators, and has a team of 28 English language instructors in the K-12 system. The district provides interpreters for parent-teacher conferences, and schedules them during both daytime and evening hours to avoid conflicting with parents’ work schedules. All high school freshmen are

²⁸ Rickers, Beth. “Manos Unidas: Hispanic Community Works to Build Trust, Relationships.” *Worthington Daily Globe*, 13 December 2015. <http://www.dglobe.com/news/3903016-manos-unidas-hispanic-community-works-build-trust-relationships>.

²⁹ Enchautegui, Maria E. *Engaging Employers in Immigrant Integration*. Los Angeles: The Urban Institute, August 2015, p. 21.

required to take a career class, with an optional second class available for upperclassmen. Additional academic assistance is available before and after school and during summers, with transportation and meals provided. A school readiness program for children who speak other languages has received a four-star rating from Parent Aware, an organization that measures the success of pre-K programs.

The Worthington district has also spearheaded a county-wide project to proactively address some of the barriers that can emerge in diverse communities. The Nobles County Integration Collaborative (NCIC) works with six school districts around the county to create programming to assist students from diverse backgrounds. NCIC programs include cultural events, leadership training, college readiness lessons, cultural competence exercises, and service learning opportunities. The Collaborative provides immigrant students with opportunities for extracurricular activities, in which they are often otherwise underrepresented, and also trains mentors for youth and provides parenting classes in Spanish. The explicit focus on integration makes NCIC a unique partnership across school districts, and provides a model for other parts of the state.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes are also an important resource for immigrants, particularly through the language classes they offer. Approximately 900 adult students use ABE services per year. Johnson ranks the language barrier as “the second greatest barrier to immigrant economic success,” second only to the lack of high-paying jobs. ISD 518 also coaches parents on the U.S. education system through a two-month bilingual and bicultural course named Parents Advocating for Student Success (PASS). Leaders in Worthington seek to foster a commitment to education across generations.

The challenges facing educators in Worthington are significant, and an achievement gap persists between immigrant and native-born children. “Rather than using excuses,” says Johnson, “the school district persistently reevaluates its strategies and implements best practices.”

A New Lease on Vitality

Worthington’s sudden surge in immigrants gives the town a tremendous opportunity. Instead of fading away as its native-born population shrinks, the town has renewed the old promise of immigrants seeking better fortunes on the rolling hills of southwestern Minnesota. However, the economic success and integration of its new arrivals is by no means guaranteed. Immigrant integration requires constant culturally aware outreach efforts, an ongoing commitment to education, and pathways to successful careers instead of dead-end jobs in the pork plant or in agriculture. Leaders in Worthington are aware of the challenges they face and have made important steps toward creating a welcoming environment for immigrants, but success depends on an ongoing, thorough commitment.

FAITH AND IMMIGRANTS IN MINNESOTA'S WORKFORCE

While the other two case studies in this series focused on specific cities, this case study highlights several organizations that work beyond the boundaries of any political jurisdiction to address the range of challenges facing immigrants as they settle in Minnesota. As a complete program to integrate immigrants into the Minnesota economy requires cooperation across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, this case study focuses on the work of religious nonprofits in providing support to immigrants in job acquisition, training, and resolution of workplace disputes. This full spectrum of services can assist immigrants at all stages of their journeys through employment, and can offer models for other organizations seeking to help them. Religious organizations have long played an important role in the incorporation of immigrants into the United States. Religious observance among recent immigrants tends to rise, as new arrivals seek both a common community and spiritual guidance in a time of drastic change.³⁰ Founding a house of worship is often the first act of a new group in the United States, and an immigrant church, so defined by its tendency to use languages and religious practices of the country of origin, is often limited to a single ethnic group. These churches, while providing a familiar community for immigrants, can seem to act as an alternative to “mainstream” American culture, at times leading to conflict with native-born groups. Islam in particular has become a politically charged topic, as some observers question the ability of Muslims to integrate; some communities—including a high-profile incident in the Minneapolis suburb of St. Anthony—seek to restrict the construction of mosques. Faith-based organizations, whether run by U.S. natives welcoming new arrivals or immigrants seeking to empower themselves, are an integral part of the immigrant economic experience.

Nonprofits and Churches Fill a Void

The power of religious organizations in immigrants' lives goes far beyond their spiritual needs. Houses of worship provide an important foundation for a community, and build social capital for residents. Religious organizations are among the first and most significant providers of services that immigrants encounter, and are especially well-suited to deliver information in culturally relevant ways. Churches can provide immigrants with easier access to services, particularly when associated with a larger religious institution that has considerable resources and established support networks for people in need. Religious practice can also connect residents with native-born members of a similar faith, though such bridging ties will likely take more time than the initial service delivery.³¹

The role of nonprofits is especially important in the United States, which does not have a national approach to immigrant integration. The U.S.'s integration approach is therefore piecemeal, but the small organizations can also be more nimble and respond quickly. Small-scale nonprofit work avoids heavy-handed, one-size-fits-all policies imposed in countries such as France, where the government has sought to limit means of expression, particularly of Muslim immigrants, in the name of national solidarity. This approach can be problematic in communities of limited means or capacity to deliver services, but even the smallest nonprofits and church communities can do crucial work, and Minnesota is fortunate to have a very robust network. In situations in which collective action is necessary but government support is minimal, nonprofits and churches offer an excellent vehicle for support.

The role of religious organizations working to improve immigrants' economic prospects extends beyond the faith to which an immigrant may belong. Minnesota's faith-based charities are particularly well-established, and this

³⁰ Hirschman, Charles. “The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States.” *International Migration Review* 38(3): 2004, p. 1207.

³¹ Ley, David. “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub.” *Urban Studies* 45(10): 2008, p. 2058.

support network allows refugees who settle in Minnesota to stay in the state.³² Four of the five refugee resettlement agencies operating in Minnesota (Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services the Minnesota Council of Churches, and Arrive Ministries) are faith-based.³³ Despite clear orientations, these groups work across faiths, and whether they are long-established organizations or created by recent immigrants themselves, they all draw on tenets of faith and seek to foster or defend the religious beliefs of new arrivals in Minnesota.

Faith-Based Refugee Resettlement Agencies

Minnesota's four faith-based refugee resettlement agencies have been assisting refugees since large inflows of Southeast Asians began in the late 1970s. Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services (LSS), two longstanding charitable groups, were among the early leaders in working to address the needs of refugees in Minnesota. The Minnesota Council of Churches (MCC), which unites 25 largely, but not exclusively, Protestant Christian denominations in a coalition committed to shared ideals of service, began operating in the mid-1980s. Richfield-based Arrive Ministries formed in 1998 as World Relief Minnesota, a branch of a national Evangelical nonprofit to which it maintains an affiliation.

While there are some particularities, most of the agencies offer a similar range of services and assist several hundred refugees per year. They all operate primarily in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, though several have branch offices in places such as Rochester and Mankato, and will occasionally make "remote" settlements in more distant communities. All seek to offer job placement assistance using in-house counselors immediately upon arrival, and a federally funded Refugee Cash Assistance Program provides some initial support as refugees look to begin new lives in the U.S. MCC participates in a state-funded initiative through the Office of Refugee and Employment Services, which serves refugees who have been in the country for one to five years. Broader services include assistance with the immigration system, employment services, cash assistance, and family reunification. Federal and state funding gives the resettlement agencies crucial resources, but can also be tied to timelines that limit their ability to serve clients over long periods of time.

The organizations will also collaborate to better deliver services. Arrive operates a joint Refugee Employment Services program with Lutheran Social Services, and served 86 clients in August 2016 alone. The in-house job counselors hired through this program can assist refugees after the initial eight month assistance period ends, allowing for continuity in programs. When funding expires, the agencies refer their clients to other groups that have the resources to offer continued support, and aim to minimize drastic changes in refugees' experiences with support services. MCC makes interfaith collaborations one of its primary goals, and looks to build a broad coalition for refugee support.

Successful Initiatives

One of Arrive Ministries' most successful initiatives, according to Director of Refugee Services Michelle Eberhard, is Refugee Life Ministries, its church engagement program. Through this program, a 12- to 15-person team from a congregation makes a year-long commitment to supporting a refugee family, and seeks to welcome and build strong relationships beginning from the moment the family arrives at the airport. While some immigrants are at first skeptical of being welcomed in by members of a church that is not their own, they quickly warm up to their support network. "You can never have too many friends," says Eberhard of the immigrant experience.

³² DeRusha, Jason. "Why Did Somalis Locate Here?" *WCCO*. 19 January 2011.

<http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2011/01/19/good-question-why-did-somalis-locate-here/>

³³ The fifth refugee resettlement agency, the Minnesota International Center, is not affiliated with any religious groups.

Arrive also works with community-based organizations such as the Karen Organization of Minnesota. In recent years, the Karen Organization has steadily taken the lead in working with more recent Karen arrivals, which Eberhard calls an “awesome development,” as the Karen community demonstrates growing self-sufficiency and faces few cultural barriers in reaching out to new arrivals. Arrive regularly sends staff to the Karen Organization’s offices in St. Paul to assist with immigration paperwork, as they are more accessible for most Karen refugees than Arrive’s offices in Richfield.

MCC opened a second office in Mankato four years ago, and has succeeded in fostering a welcoming environment. Ben Walen, Director of Refugee Services at MCC, cites community engagement efforts in Mankato “since day one,” through a series of facilitated discussions between refugees and native-born residents, as a strong reason why the community has seen broad acceptance of refugees. These sessions on topics such as parenting, transportation options, and job-seeking have led to a “dramatic change” in interactions between newcomers and native-born populations. Walen also applauds MCC’s leadership in providing health-related services that many refugees need in order to enter the workforce. Whether they suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or are in poor physical health after many years in refugee camps, refugees are often in need of heavy support.

Some of the most important supports for refugees occur behind the scenes. June Jordan of Catholic Charities emphasized her organization’s strong network, from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to parish communities. Connections with local colleges furnish Catholic Charities with interns who do valuable work, and strong internal leadership allows the organization to best leverage its limited dollars. Still, there is always room for greater engagement, and Jordan believes current rhetoric tends to emphasize the things refugees lack, rather than their potential contributions. “It is our job to help...shift people’s perception of refugees by defining them less by their struggles and more by their triumphs,” she says.

Barriers

Representatives from resettlement agencies give a range of answers when asked about major barriers to refugee economic integration, demonstrating the range of challenges they face. Several note the limiting time frames they have to work with refugees, and language barriers, predictably, loom large. Eberhard speaks of a conflict between job duties and English lessons; immigrants occasionally face a paradox in which they need to attain greater levels of English fluency, but would have to miss work that provides vital income in order to attend classes. Greater attention to immigrants’ schedules and classes at a variety of times to avoid work conflicts can help alleviate these problems.

Economic integration depends on more than the simple existence of jobs, and Eberhard emphasizes transportation as a key barrier to success. Arrive’s counselors are careful to take immigrants’ transportation limitations into account during the job search process. Due to the limited time frame that refugee support programs are funded, follow-up with families can prove difficult. Housing, Walen adds, is a serious concern due to the lack of affordable homes; while refugee resettlement programs secure housing when refugees arrive, they do little to guarantee the new arrivals’ long-term ability to pay for the housing. Jordan concurs, saying the 90-day period of assistance is far too short, and that “it is not unusual for some of these folks to end up in homeless shelters.”

The political climate also poses an increasing challenge for refugee resettlement agencies. LSS also recognizes that immigrant integration requires education in cultural understanding for the native-born population, and produces literature and curriculum for children on the basic tenets of Islam. In individual instances of intolerance or crime, MCC provides case management and can connect refugees with law enforcement or legal help. After many years of enjoying broad political support, recent political scrutiny has brought MCC’s refugee

resettlement efforts into public debate over the past two years. Walen explains that MCC responds by being more open about its messaging, and remaining proud and welcoming for the refugees it services. MCC, he says, taps into the “desire we have as humans, as Christians...to serve and welcome people to Minnesota. It’s the least we can do.”

Islam and the Workplace

In some cases, immigrant employees can encounter discrimination or unexpected barriers due to their faith, with consequences ranging from mild misunderstandings to conflicts that lead to termination. Islam has been at the center of numerous conflicts over religious issues, and in many of these cases, Minnesota’s chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has served as a mediator and, when necessary, pursued legal action. These conflicts are not infrequent, and Minnesota-based agribusiness giant Cargill, poultry producer GNP, and marketing consultant IWCO Direct have all been involved in high-profile cases that involved the dismissal of workers over prayer schedule disputes or other misunderstandings.³⁴ CAIR’s services are especially valuable for more recent immigrants, who may not be familiar with the American legal system or aware of their rights to free exercise of religion.

These incidents of religious discrimination coincide with a national uptick in discrimination claims by Muslim Americans since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.³⁵ In some circles, the practices of the entire faith are viewed with suspicion, opening a space for an advocate on behalf of Muslims. Anti-Muslim rhetoric makes CAIR’s work particularly delicate, and CAIR Executive Director Jaylani Hussein says there has “absolutely” been an uptick in incidents in the current political climate. CAIR does not share the names of organizations that prove highly successful at accommodating Muslims out of concern that they will receive negative reactions.

CAIR fields 150 to 200 cases of alleged discrimination a year, nearly half related to workplace incidents. Prayer schedules are a frequent source of conflict, as Muslims’ five daily prayers can conflict with work time, and prayer times shift with the calendar. Religious garb, most notably the hijab worn by Muslim women, can also run into company dress codes or the limitations existing safety equipment. Muslims can also face a language barrier; while many large employers now have bilingual staff who speak Spanish and can help train new employees in basic tasks, speakers of Arabic, Somali, and other languages may not have such support, and can lose out on jobs. Finally, Muslim immigrants often encounter a variety of barriers to employment in intense competition for low-skilled jobs, and struggle to find access to schooling or financial aid.

CAIR’s has a collaborative process for resolving disputes, and first aims first to find resolution between employers and employees without relying on legal action. Hussein explains that CAIR’s approach is gradual and non-confrontational, and begins with gathering as much information as possible about an alleged incident. Next, CAIR will send a letter to employers notifying them of the possibility of a violation of rights, and offer to provide training on best practices. In cases that are highly isolated or involve a single individual, this can resolve the issue. If the employer does not budge, CAIR’s letters will come to include greater threats of legal action, and the organization works with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to build leverage for a lawsuit. Many cases are resolved outside of court, but in a small amount—15 percent, according to Hussein’s estimate—CAIR hires a co-counsel to defray legal costs and brings a lawsuit. In most incidents, the case is so strong that the employer and employees reach a settlement out of court. In 2008,

³⁴ Clayton, Chris. “A Crisis of Faith for Muslims in the Workforce.” *Twin Cities Business Magazine*. 23 May 2016. <http://tcbmag.com/Industries/Human-Capital/A-Crisis-Of-Faith-For-Muslims-In-The-Workforce>

³⁵ Clayton.

for example, the EEOC mediated a settlement with Gold n' Plump Poultry Inc., a chicken processor with a plant in St. Cloud.³⁶

CAIR's approach does not fixate solely on employer violations, and also seeks to inform Muslims about their options and rights. It educates Muslims on the use of lab coats with hijabs and larger hairnets that cover hijabs, which offer simple means of avoiding conflict over religious headwear. CAIR also consistently pushes Muslims to advocate on their own behalf, and to be clear about their practices to their employers in advance to avoid any misunderstandings. Hussein consistently emphasizes "empowerment" as one of CAIR's main goals. "We don't need CAIR to be involved in everything," he says.

Many of these cases do not stem from instances of overt discrimination in the workplace. In the words of one IWCO human resources member, "when it comes to prayer breaks, we didn't know what we didn't know."³⁷ In many cases, the refusal to allow prayer breaks stems from a concern about the bottom line: employers believe breaks will disrupt workflows, particularly along assembly lines in processing or manufacturing plants, and cause financial loss. At times, employers simply do not understand the importance of a prayer schedule to Muslim employees, and therefore are oblivious to how much their strictures can effect lives. Basic education and understanding is usually enough to bring about a respectful status quo that allows employers to operate their businesses with minimal disruption and immigrant employees to work the jobs they need to build successful lives in the United States.

Nonprofits as Ongoing Supports

Faith-based nonprofits provide crucial supports for immigrants at many stages of their experience. Refugee resettlement agencies are on hand to welcome refugees as soon as they step off of planes in the U.S., and operate under tight funding timelines to deliver services to new arrivals. When possible, they try to provide continuous support that guides refugees on to career paths, instead of simply supplying them with the first available job. When immigrants encounter discrimination or other unexpected obstacles, advocacy groups such as CAIR can serve as their primary advocates. A strong civil society fills in the gaps between the public and private sectors, and is essential to ongoing immigrant support in Minnesota.

³⁶ Ibrahim, Mukhtar. "When Muslim Controversies Boil, Jaylani Hussein Gets the Call." *MPR News* 21 October 2015. <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/10/20/when-muslim-controversies-boil-jaylani-hussein-gets-the-call>

³⁷ Clayton.