

Community News

Finding Employment for Refugees Completes the American Dream

By Karen Brodsky

One of the most difficult tasks for HIAS NC is finding employment for its refugee clients. It is also one of the most crucial services HIAS NC provides.

HIAS NC's primary mission is to assist employable refugees to obtain a first job as early as possible after arrival in the U.S. The goal is to bring the refugee family closer to economic self-sufficiency. Through HIAS NC, refugees are eligible to receive employment services for up to five years after arrival in the U.S.

Even during these unstable economic times with high unemployment, HIAS NC has been successful in placing many of the refugees who can and want to work. HIAS NC's employment staff, Paul Porcelli and Weh Ksor, have nurtured relationships with local employers, who find their refugee employees to be hard-working, reliable, and eager to learn.

Charles Boorman, staffing

manager for DMSI Staffing, Charlotte, has worked with many of HIAS NC's refugee clients to place them at a packing and distribution center. "In my experience," he said, "they are very willing and very able to work. They have a strong work ethic. They've been through a lot and are perseverant. We're happy to provide the opportunity for them to better themselves."

Boorman also said they tend to be better workers than many other employees, even in these tough economic times, "if you can believe it." Some Charlotteans think that these refugees are taking jobs from others who need them. However, often they are the only population who agrees to take these types of positions. Employers need to fill these jobs, and they need a reliable work force.

"From the moment they set foot in the U.S., they have guaranteed that their lives will have meaning,

a focus and a future plan, rather than merely subsisting and surviving day to day," said Paul Porcelli, employment manager for HIAS NC.

"Their version of the American dream is not so different from ours — to have a good job, good and safe housing, and food for their families. They push their children to succeed in school and stay in school so they are prepared to be the heirs of their hard work. They have this immigrant mentality to succeed, which is not so different from our grandparents."

After an employment intake to determine what skills these refugees possess and how they can translate to employment in Charlotte, the employment staff coaches them, helps them complete applications, and takes them to interviews. Porcelli is vigilant about making sure they have the proper shoes, clothing, and papers in order to go to the interview.

The refugees are also required to attend English as a Second Language classes throughout the process. HIAS NC provides classes convenient to each work shift and supplements the English they

learn on the job. ESL teaches the language surrounding work safety.

Many refugees are employed in factories, packing and distribution centers, and manufacturing plants. A large number currently work in a poultry processing and packing plant south of Charlotte, which operates with high safety standards and provides good benefits for workers.

Porcelli and Ksor spend many hours seeking out employers, gaining their trust, and following up on refugee hires, so "HIAS stays in the loop," said Porcelli. "We also try to upgrade them once they are employed and their English language skills have improved. We encourage their participation in HIAS NC's ESL and English language programs CPCC offers."

Phil Heileman, human resources manager for Metrolina Greenhouses in Huntersville, said, "Paul has delivered really nice people, many good people, and they are all considered in the mix of who we interview. They have a really good work ethic. We're very comfortable with the association we have with HIAS NC."

One of the biggest obstacles faced by refugees is the lack of good, consistent public transportation. First shift employees cannot get to work via bus because CATS busses do not run early enough. Porcelli said, "Not only is this a problem for refugees, it is a problem for the poor in general. Our people have [among] the lowest incomes in Charlotte but many manage to buy a car, and they network among each other to form carpools."

HIAS NC clients are dedicated and reliable workers, and we look to the community to provide us with other employment opportunities.

The agency provides refugees with furnished apartments, food, access to services from agencies throughout Charlotte, ESL, in addition to employment services. HIAS NC accepts cash donations to provide more and better services. Furniture and house wares donations are always welcomed. Please call Ellen Dubin or Paul Porcelli if you have jobs available for refugees at 704-535-8803 or e-mail Ellen.dubin@hias.org. ✪

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Happy Tenth Birthday, Camp Mindy

Camp Mindy, the traditional day camp of the Levine JCC, celebrated ten years of fun, friendship and memories on Sunday, April 25. In a brief ceremony, Levine JCC staff thanked founding donors Lori and Eric Sklut for all that they have done for Camp Mindy over the years. Philip Berman, Levine JCC CEO, cited Lori and Eric's commitment to ensure that facilities, staff and resources are available and remain focused on Camp Mindy's mission: to provide all campers with a terrific Jewish camp experience.

Dana Kapustin and her daughter, Danielle, represented the many loyal volunteers who support Camp Mindy as they presented the Sklut and Levine families with beautiful memory books. The

books commemorate ten years of wonderful camp memories in pictures. The crowd was treated to a slide show, a magic show, lunch, cake and children's activities.

With some help from Eric, camp staff managed to surprise Lori with the naming of the Recreation Hall in her honor. Camp Mindy was founded by the Skluts in memory of Lori's sister, Mindy Ellen Levine, and its success is due largely to Lori's tireless energy and dedication.

Each year more than 600 campers, ages preschool to teen, enjoy all that Camp Mindy has to offer. For further information, please call 704-944-6728. ✪



Lori and Eric Sklut



Here the Levine family takes part in the celebration.

"FRIENDS" Are Available to Support Victims of Domestic Violence

Does your partner: belittle, humiliate, bully you? Does s/he control the finances, demand unwanted sex, isolate you from family and friends, destroy your belongings, hurt your pets, threaten or injure you?

It may be abuse. Come to us for help.

Most people don't know they are in abusive relationships, especially if they are Jewish. But it is happening — today — in about one in five of our Jewish homes here in Greater Charlotte.

"FRIENDS" are volunteers who have been trained to help people recognize if what they are experiencing is abuse. For those who are victims or survivors, they are here to support, to help, to listen, to answer questions and to provide resource information.

If you are in a volatile domestic situation, your one-on-one FRIEND is here to help while respecting your privacy and the right to make your own decisions. All contacts are held in the strictest confidence. If you or

someone you know needs our kind of "FRIEND," call Carol at 704-609-3120 or Marsha at 704-756-9209 or email info@shalombayit-nc.org. Carol is also the contact person for the Shalom Bayit support group for women who are currently in or have survived a domestic abuse situation.

Both FRIENDS and the support group are free services of Shalom Bayit-NC and are supported by the agencies of the Greater Charlotte Jewish community. ✪