

**Discussion with Employers with Experience Hiring Refugees and other Newcomers**

**January 26, 2023**

**I. Inputs from Employers**

<p><b>Husco</b> Waukesha County, WI</p>	<p>Mark Dreikosen <a href="mailto:Mark.Dreikosen@husco.com">Mark.Dreikosen@husco.com</a></p>
<p><b>Background on New Arrival Hiring</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Husco is a manufacturing plant that creates valves and car parts for GM, Chrysler, and other car companies. Mark and his team started hiring refugees in 2022 after being short staffed, he had to start thinking creatively about hiring efforts.</li> <li>• Through a close work connection with Manpower, Husco began working with Lutheran Social Services (LSS) to find and place new arrivals, especially Afghans, in some entry level positions at their plant. They started with 7 individuals in March 2022 by offering a tour of the facilities and 2 weeks later they were already working. This grew to 35 hires as a peak, and they continue to have around 35 staffed.</li> <li>• When hiring new refugees, they worked with a variety of employment backgrounds and use of automated equipment. Many started with no experience (such as farmers or market sellers) while others who have experience in more technical settings (such as work with the US military).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Any Specifics about the Hiring / On-boarding process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark has found success in hiring refugees by having interpretation/translation support especially for their first hires. When Husco started hiring refugees, they included several new hires who were fluent in English who assisted with those who didn't speak enough English to understand instructions and training. They work in teams of up to 10:1 people of no /limited English to fluent speakers so there was always one to assist if needed. They also use the interpretation hotline so there is never a gap in communication.</li> <li>• Having a strong team allowed for this to happen. Without a strong framework, it would be difficult to allow this to be as successful.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How's it going now</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently working on all three shifts now and have around 35 new arrivals working, Converted about 75% from contracts to full-time, direct hires.</li> <li>• Mark has seen firsthand how these individuals have grown to speak higher levels of English and learn on the job skills. One refugee was hired as an operations technician based on his past experiences and skillset. This person also assists Mark with translating work instructions for other refugees.</li> </ul>

<b>Lessons Learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were some cultural differences that came up when first hiring refugees. Husco spent time translating work documents and making sure it made sense to other languages who not only needed interpretations but also some formatting as they read right to left. Mark's advice is to be understanding and accommodating but be fair and consistent. There is a balance of expectations and fairness. Show everyone what is expected of them while also being flexible. The call for prayer and different holidays. Transportation issues: lots did not have driver's licenses. Worked with LSS and Manpower to establish transportation assistance – at one point passenger vans covered all three shifts. Now some employees have gotten transportation.</li> <li>• Strong partnerships allowed Husco to fill positions quickly and troubleshoot any issues that came up.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HUSCO has established relationship with Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) and have some individuals in classes for Automation and Controls programs. This partnership opens doors for automation technician positions that they have.</li> </ul>

<b>LeadingAge Wisconsin</b> Fox Valley, Brown Co., WI	Robin Wolzenburg, BSN, RN <a href="mailto:rwolzenburg@leadingagewi.org">rwolzenburg@leadingagewi.org</a>
<b>Background on New Arrival Hiring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LeadingAge Wisconsin is a long-term care advocacy association that represents over 500 long-term care organizations across the state including skilled nursing homes, assisted livings, adult family homes, and independent living. LeadingAge Wisconsin has worked closely with Forward Service Corporation (FSC) to hire refugees in their Fox Valley locations.</li> <li>• Long-term care facilities around the state need employees! <a href="#">Wisconsin's 2022 Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis Report</a> showed over 23,000 job openings in long-term care providers across the state. (Caregiver vacancies from 23.8% in 2020 to 27.8% in 2022)</li> <li>• Started hiring refugees through a pilot program in Fox Valley area (Oshkosh) for four long term care campuses. Worked closely with FSC and World Relief to find refugees who were looking for employment. Primary open positions include housekeeping, laundry, maintenance, dietary, nursing assistants</li> <li>• Found that most facilities had empty spaces so there are housing options for newcomers as well as vans for transportation. This program was unique because these facilities are a "home setting" and are very communal. One</li> </ul>

	<p>facility has hired 6 refugees (Congolese, Somalis, and Afghans).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English as a Second Language (ESL) classes have been hosted at work facilities for easier access. The UW system has also gotten involved by providing cultural classes. They also opened a store at one of the campuses with extra goods for employees and residents.</li> <li>• One campus in Milwaukee also provides a daycare for employees on site.</li> <li>• Facility can pay for nursing assistant education as well as additional further education related to the medical field. (<a href="#">WisCaregiver Careers</a>).</li> <li>• Came up with helpful resourced including a “cheat sheet” with information about different jobs, shifts, and bonus amenities such as transportation or housing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Any Specifics about the Hiring / On-boarding process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being flexible and inclusive by using partnerships and interpreters to communicate with new hires. Saw a need for potential employees and an ability for facilities to assist. Due to hiring issues, many campuses could no longer fill their facilities. This allowed empty assisted living facilities to be open for employees.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How’s it going now</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot program has been very positive, LeadingAge Wisconsin is now hoping to hire refugees at other locations around the state. Partnership between resettlement agencies, FSC, and other local resources have allowed this program to become very successful!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lessons Learned</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation continues to be an obstacle, but luckily facilities have been able to use vans and/or assist with transportation while new hires figure out vehicles and driver’s licenses.</li> <li>• English language has continued to be hurdle but the Oshkosh facility as utilized the resettlement agency and has found success. So far, Google translation apps have been working well for staff to communicate with non-English speaking staff. Pivoting by adding signs in Swahili above laundry units, kitchen appliances, etc.</li> <li>• Currently expanding to new areas; meeting with FSC in Madison to start hiring for those facilities.</li> <li>• Robin was inspired by a news story in Florida about care facilities that hired 60 Afghan refugees and have great community engagement including giving away 60 bikes. Learning from this organization to create collaboration and teamwork to help refugees and gain employees.</li> <li>• This is a statewide organization and could benefit from hiring any population of refugees. As Ukrainians are coming in, they plan to continue to support refugee populations around the state. LeadingAge Wisconsin has</li> </ul>

	mission driven facilities located throughout the state that look to give back to their communities.
<b>Other Comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LeadingAge Wisconsin is now looking to kickoff efforts with care facilities in Madison and develop a similar effort with facilities in Milwaukee County with the eventual goal of expanding these collaboratives throughout the state and into rural areas as well.</li> </ul>

<b>Great Lakes Cheese</b> Marathon County, WI	Paul Herold <a href="mailto:Paul.Herold@Greatlakescheese.com">Paul.Herold@Greatlakescheese.com</a>
<b>Background on New Arrival Hiring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great Lakes Cheese is a family-owned business that was founded by a Swiss immigrant. Currently have over 500 employees, including employing 7 full-time refugees, one part-time, and one offer is pending.</li> <li>Of the eight working, five are doing general labor roles and three have advanced into semi-skilled/skilled operator roles. The three that have advanced are further along in their English skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Any Specifics about the Hiring / On-boarding process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initially leveraged an off-site resource (via Zoom) to assist with orientation and basic training.</li> <li>Those that are multi-lingual have assisted the others in the day-to-day needs.</li> <li>Transportation has proven to be a hurdle, as the process of being transportation self-sufficient requires both personal growth [the ability to pass the written &amp; road test] and resources for a vehicle.</li> <li>Although Great Lakes employs a diverse group of employees, they've never had a request to enable prayer during breaks. They have expanded the use of a separate space [previously a nursing room for mothers] to offer privacy for prayer].</li> </ul>
<b>How's it going now</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great Lakes Cheese has a group of new employee-owners who are actively working and are reliable. In what was a tight labor market, they have proven to be a benefit to the facility and community labor needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Lessons Learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get involved early and let others know you're interested in offering employment [e.g., participation in early group calls, expressing interest through the Chamber of Commerce, toured, and discussed potential to assist with local State representatives].</li> <li>Identify roles for those with varied communication skills.</li> <li>When there is employment interest, invite both the candidate and the sponsor team members for an overview and tour. Collaboration with Sponsors is critical to on-boarding and sustained employment.</li> <li>Pair new hires with existing employees who will offer on-the-job support.</li> </ul>

<b>Other Comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have not done anything unique or extraordinary for these new arrivals. Great lakes are a multi-cultural environment, with more than 50% speaking English as a 2nd language. We have employee-owners from SE Asia, South &amp; Central America, Africa, and the Middle East. We tend to focus more on what we all have in common, versus what makes us different.</li> </ul>
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## **II. Issues / Questions Raised**

**1. Sponsorship partnerships in Wausau:** Paul (Great Lakes Cheese) First point of contact was the sponsor family which lead Paul to have an outstanding experience with refugees that he hired. Want them to feel comfortable. Work with sponsors to help with cultural acclimation. Worked closely with Becky from Ethiopian Community Development Council - Multicultural Community Center (ECDC) which uses community members that volunteered to be a part of this process for up to 9 months. Some help with employment, some with housing, medical, etc. Having these sponsorship families assists with acclimation. ECDC leans on these community members to help in addition to their provided services. Many have great connections that help new arrivals on a variety of topics. Not everyone has a co-sponsorship team.

**2. Question from Ric Ybarra (MAXIMUS) – Employers, how does the workforce system assist in their efforts? Example: HUSCO works with the local Workforce Development Board.**

Mark (HUSCO) – the opportunity for advancement has been critical. One individual was a trader and came in and saw robots and thought he couldn't work there. He gave it a try and has done excellent with some training. Another hire, worked with the US military and had an advanced IT degree from Kabul. Day two: he fixed a fault all by himself. Quickly realized he has an advanced skill set. Onboarded him as a hire within a few weeks at a higher position. His degree was useful. He is enrolled and taking courses to further his education.

Ric – another resource is local “one-stop” systems like the local workforce organizations. Can provide additional systems and resources for employees and employers.

**3. Question from Colleen Larson (WTCS) – How could someone who works as a housekeeper now, potentially move towards a higher position, like a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) To upskill while they are working.**

Robin (LeadingAge) – Long-term care facilities have many partnerships WISCARE Careers. LeadingAge has free training to be a nurse aid, the facility pays for it. <https://wiscaregivercna.com/> Most nursing homes are a part of the WISCARE program. Which also bonuses for completion. Although the Written CNA exam can be difficult for second language speakers because written portion is only conducted in English. Robin is advocating for change on a state level.

**4. Question from Holly (Chippawa Valley Tech College) – Do any employers pay compensation for interpretations services?**

Paul (Great Lakes Cheese) – we believe that we all help each other. As we are a family and employee-owned company, we do not pay additional wages for interpretation but, do expect all personnel to assist each other when in need. Russ Brum (Catholic Charities Green Bay) resource on interpretation – one of the main employers in Green Bay, JBS, does hire additional interpreters for on the floor manufacturing positions. This helps train new employees without English language skills.

**5. Resource from Dave Armstrong on transportation** – In Barron County they have been working with Enterprise to help with ongoing transportation issues. They require that the employer provides driver while employees share portion of the cost with employer. So far, this program has been successful. Dave is also working on another partnership to help build a transportation system with one outside transportation company, key employers, and the county, and city offices.

Barron County also started connections with a program in 2018 called the PERM - Permit Replacement Program. Employer shows need, works through process with government on how many employees they can bring in. Started with long-term care employers but now have more companies involved. Process takes on average 18 mo. – 2 years. Contact: Bcedc@co.barron.wi.us

**6. Question from Stacy Steibl (DWD) – Any tips on serving refugees with limited English skills with only phone interpretation/google transportation? Sometimes there are limited resources in the community.**

Russ (Catholic Charities Green Bay) -experimented with phone interpreters, found that “Boostlingo” is very fast and consistent. They charge by the minute, so it is best used for short-term communication it is very beneficial.

**7. Question from Hilaire (MAXIMUS)– How do you match workplace rules / best practices to hire and maintain refugees as employees?**

Mark (Husco) – completed a lot of interviewing to understand what requests were needed. Did not change any rules, just tried to accommodate any request. Created a space to be used for prayer, yoga, meditation, that is inclusive for everyone. Provide break schedule and standard break times. Some employees come early to work so that they can pray and then start their normal work hours. Being open and honest has been beneficial in the hiring process with other cultures.

Paul (Great Lakes Cheese) – many new hires wanted 2nd shift so that they could also attend ESL classes. This was actually a positive for us. Another example is how we changed “nursing room” to “multicultural room”. Robin (LeadingAge)– similar to what was mentioned above. They provided a dedicated space for prayer and provided accommodation when needed. They do not allow extra breaks but attempts to be open when determining breaks to fit everyone’s schedules.

**8. Ashleigh (WI Literacy) a resource for ESL – WI literacy has 70 member agencies across the state. Urban to rural. Each program offers programming targeted at their area. Contact: [ashleigh@wisconsinliteracy.org](mailto:ashleigh@wisconsinliteracy.org)**

**9. Tom (DCF) – DCF will continue to compile information from employers. We want to speak to any employers that have experience hiring new arrivals – if you have this experience (or know of an employer in your area that does) then please consider sharing your experiences and lessons learned with the Bureau of Refugee Programs.**

Contact [tom.targos@wisconsin.gov](mailto:tom.targos@wisconsin.gov)

### **III. Attendees**

Among the 91 attendees:

Bobbi Miller - FVWDB  
Ewa Piotrowski  
Ilia Bordiugov  
Becky McElhaney  
Maureen Bruden – Fox Valley Workforce Development  
Chris Frakes, SWCAP  
Debra Dahlin  
Lisa LeGath – SSA Group  
Mark Tallman – WEDC  
Ric Ybarra - MAXIMUS  
Hutham Ababdulla  
Stacy Sheibl – DWD  
Francesca Johnson - DWD  
Shannon Mason Young  
American Job Center  
Jeff Westra  
Jess Lornson  
Johannes Dreisbach – DWD  
Diana Ruppier -  
Ribah Taha - FSC  
RJ Flowers  
Robin Wolzenburg  
Sarah Compillo  
Richard Schuhmacher – SDC Painting Company  
Anna Bierer – WI Literacy  
Randy McCarthy – Outpost Natural Foods  
Ashleigh Henrichs – WI Literacy  
Pete Snyder – Moraine Park Tech. College  
Jess Lornson – FSC  
Anothony Snyder – WWDA  
Nate Andrews – FSC  
Omar Mohamed – LSS  
Tara DeGrave – CCGB  
Amy Marshall – Manpower  
Millie Coby – Employ Milwaukee  
Kyle Hundt - EQUUS  
Alleigh Sellen - FSC  
Keli Poppe - MAXIMUS  
Kourosh Hassani - MPS