



Co-Location with Two American Job Centers

Catholic Charities, Migration and Refugee Services (CCMRS) in Arlington, Virginia

Overview

Catholic Charities, Migration and Refugee Services (CCMRS) in Arlington, VA has created a symbiotic relationship with two Northern Virginia American Job Centers (AJC). Although the partnership has existed for many years, well-established systems and relationships provide a strong foundation for continued innovation and client benefits.

Program Partners

CCMRS has two Employment Specialists housed in American Job Centers. Eppy Nduhe-Kyanya works at the Annandale Skillsource Center, one of six such organizations around Northern Virginia. Peter Kereztes works at the Alexandria city-sponsored Workforce Development Center (WDC).

“Having a CCMRS employee located in a workforce center helps reach a different client demographic. I think it is good for Catholic Charities to be here,” says Nduhe-Kyanya, “We are able to help the Skillsource Center, not compete with them. Since we have specialized information about a type of client, we are a resource for the center.”

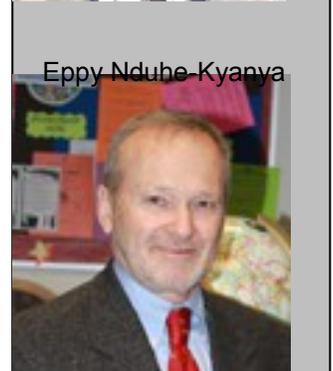
Fairfax County Skillsource Center Manager, Myra Mobley explains it this way: “According to the requirements of certification by the Virginia Workforce Development Board, workforce centers are encouraged to form partnerships and collaborate with other community organizations. We are happy to be able to partner with Catholic Charities because it provides additional resources to our clients.”

While these partnerships were initiated many years ago, their success is apparent today. The relationship is based in the not-so-revolutionary idea that proximity enhances services. By sharing the same office space, CCMRS employment specialists are familiar with workforce center initiatives, upcoming events and the expertise of individual workforce center employees.

Nduhe-Kyanya and Kereztes work three to four days a week at workforce centers and go to the CCMRS office one to two days a week for staff meetings and to catch up on administrative work. This allows them to inform other CCMRS employees about opportunities for refugees at the workforce centers. Nduhe-Kyanya and Kereztes can also inform workforce center colleagues about the needs of current refugee populations.



Eppy Nduhe-Kyanya



Peter Kereztes

Challenges & Solutions

One of the potential challenges of working on site at the workforce center is a tendency for Nduhe-Kyanya and Keresztes become the “go-to” people for every foreign-born job seeker that walks into the center. To prevent this, both men work to educate workforce center colleagues on the differences between foreign-born immigrants and refugees who are eligible for CCMRS services. If Nduhe-Kyanya and Keresztes meet with a potential client who does not prove eligible for refugee services they offer a simple explanation of the differences between CCMRS and AJC and set up a meeting with an AJC employee.

Keresztes says, “Few county employees are initially familiar with refugee issues; many don’t know the distinctions between asylees, refugees and Special Immigrant Visa holders. I work one-on-one with the county employees to explain these differences and educate them about where our clients come from and why they are here.”

Confidentiality poses another challenge to working in the centers. Nduhe-Kyanya reports his placement statistics monthly to Mobely, but technology compatibility and confidentiality policies prevent sharing much of a client’s data. Depending on what services a client receives, both agencies may collect data about the client that they cannot share with the other. While this challenge is significant, both partners are working to identify solutions that would protect client privacy and improve efficiency.

Why the Relationship Works

Both Nduhe-Kyanya and Keresztes carry a caseload of about 125 clients, only about 10% of whom initiated services as workforce center walk-ins. The majority are CCMRS clients assigned to Nduhe-Kyanya or Keresztes.

Ten percent may seem like a small number of clients who receive direct assistance from CCMRS staff in workforce centers. Nduhe-Kyanya feels differently. “Being in the workforce centers helps our clients know they have access to free community services. They learn how to use mainstream workforce services so they can become one resource to help refugees achieve their long-term career goals. The workforce centers have more resources than resettlement agencies. For example, if our clients attend a resume writing workshop, it frees up CCMRS staff time to spend on other aspects of resettlement.”

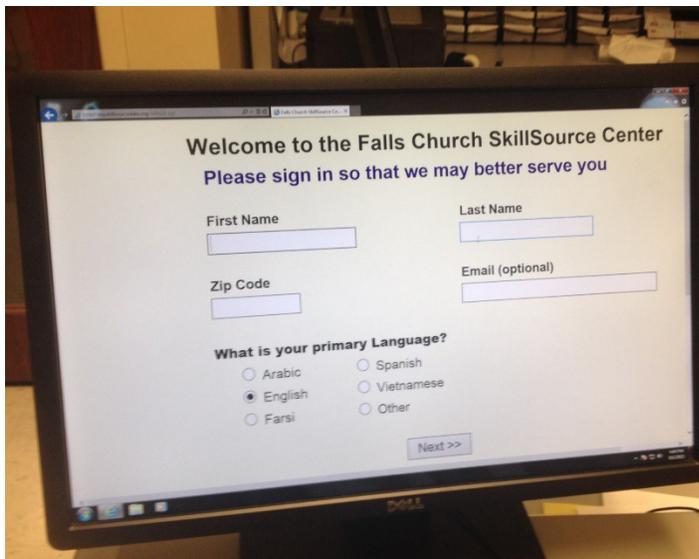


CCMRS encourages all clients to make use of workforce centers, whether their Employment Specialist is located there or not. Locating CCMRS employees there ensures a two-way flow of information. CCMRS staff emphasize upcoming programs, workforce center amenities, and additional staff assistance so all clients can benefit. “The infrastructure of the American Job Centers also contributes to their success,” stresses Nduhe-Kyanya. “In addition to the services that CCMRS provides, my clients have easy access to computers, printers, and training resources for resume writing or job interviewing.”

Coupling the workforce center resources with those that CCMRS provides gives clients more opportunities to learn. For example, CCMRS provides a monthly Pre-Employment Training class that educates clients on the job-culture in the U.S. While open to any client to take as many times as they like, most clients attend one time, in the first month or so of arrival. Partnering with a workforce center provides continued access to training, networking and center events.

Another benefit of these partnerships is that it allows CCMRS to expand their physical presence in the community without acquiring costly office space. Northern Virginia encompasses five counties and over 2,000 square miles. Transportation is always an issue for refugees, and Northern Virginia is no exception. Residents must often change buses and transfer from one bus system to another. All of these considerations make CCMRS satellite services indispensable to refugee clients who are able to choose to receive services in the more accessible location for them.

Services



“Coming to our office exposes refugee clients to resources beyond the ones Catholic Charities provides,” explains Mobley. “We can expose them to job fairs, networking events and job developers who are sharing job leads. Plus we can easily refer them down the hall to Family Services for additional supportive services like food, rental housing assistance and emergency assistance, all of which occupy this building.”

At the Annandale workforce center, any client, including refugees, asylees and SIV recipients, are eligible for a variety of services. The center has three tiers of services:

- Tier 1 “core” services are available to anyone with no screening process. These include access to equipment (e.g. phones, computers and office equipment), workshops on resume writing and interview preparation, invitations to networking events, and information about local employers and job opportunities.

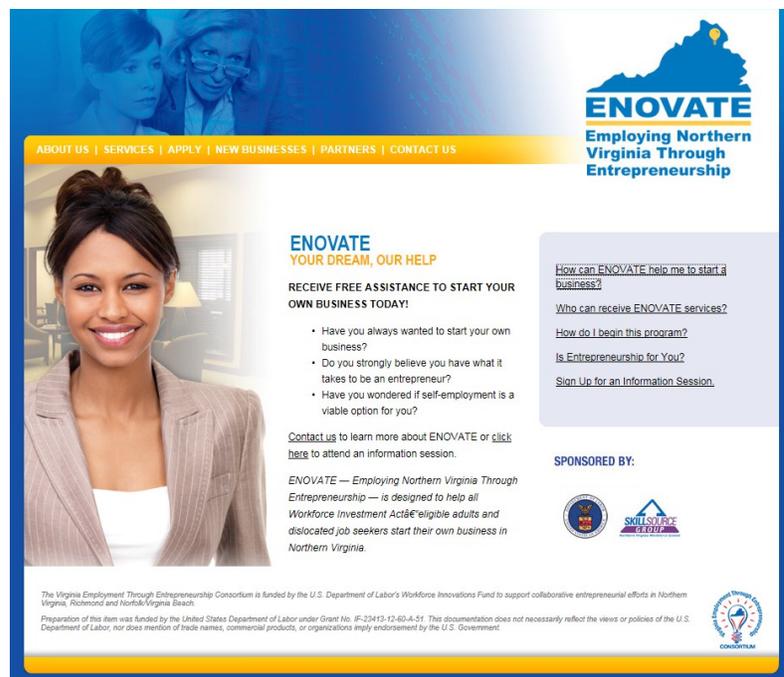
- Tier 2 includes “intensive” services that are available to clients who meet additional program-specific eligibility requirements. These services include career assessments, individual employment plans, career counseling and literacy activities.
- Tier 3 is training services including occupational skills training, skills upgrading and on-the-job training (OJT).

Access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 services varies by program, based on a client’s income level or special population status, like veterans, disabled or displaced workers. Refugees may be eligible for some of these services. Workforce center colleagues are valuable resources for explaining the nuanced requirements for the various programs.

While workforce centers offer a range of employment and training programs, entrepreneurs can also benefit. The Skillsource Center offers the ENOVATE program specifically designed for current or aspiring entrepreneurs. Nduhe-Kyanya has referred a few clients to the ENOVATE program, one of whom is in the process of starting his own insurance business through Allstate Insurance. It would be difficult for a refugee resettlement agency to sustain this type of program with their own in-house resources.

Collaborative Efforts

Each year Nduhe-Kyanya works with the center to produce a conference for foreign-trained professionals. The conference includes guest speakers and a job fair. One of Nduhe-Kyanya’s favorite success stories from this event is how Emmanuel Turay (name changed for confidentiality), a foreign-trained architect, has been able to pursue re-entry into his professional field. Nduhe-Kyanya and a Skillsource Case Manager connected Turay with an architect who spoke at the conference. As a result, the client gained a mentor. The workforce center was able to provide access to some of the architectural training suggested by the mentor. Turay is now working as an architect. “I love this story because it shows how Skillsource and CCMRS can work together simply through communication and from being in the same location”, Nduhe-Kyanya says.



Learn more about ENOVATE at <http://enovatenow.org/services.html>

Mobley anticipates that the elimination of a requirement to sequence services in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) will shorten the timeframe on providing services to all

clients, including refugees. No longer do clients need to access employment resources by going through a progression of services that must be delivered in a certain order. Now, for example, if a client needs English classes or a U.S. skill certification in order to obtain employment, the center is able to offer them that service without requiring additional steps.

How to Connect with Your Workforce Center

Building relationships with workforce centers can be a great supplement to the services refugee resettlement agencies already provide. Many workforce centers have a quality assurance board comprised of community partners that use their services. For example, in Virginia, workforce centers are certified annually by the state Workforce Development Board. In order to pass an annual certification process, all workforce centers must demonstrate community partnership.

One way the Virginia centers accomplish this is through bi-monthly meetings of a Continuous Quality Improvement Board. The meetings provide an opportunity to share information, suggest improvements and increase communication. They are also a great venue to educate community partners on refugee issues and the assistance provided by resettlement agencies. Consider attending or volunteering to join a similar board in your area.



Erin Voorheis worked for Catholic Charities, Migration & Refugee Services in Arlington, VA and implemented their Skills Training for Earning Potential (STEP) program. This program helped refugees with professional experience discover similar career paths in the United States. Erin is a freelance writer in Leesburg, VA.