



REFUGEE WOMEN'S SEWING CLASS

Program Type: Refugee Pre-Employment Program

Agency and Location: World Relief, Seattle, Washington

Population Served: Recently resettled refugee women with limited English skills.

Program Description: World Relief Seattle, in partnership with Hillside Church, offers a six-week sewing and vocational English language class for recently resettled refugee women. The classes are run by volunteers and begin with approximately 30 minutes of English vocabulary related to sewing and sewing techniques. During this class, the women learn and practice basic sewing techniques while building their English language skills. Many of the participants are illiterate in their native language and feel isolated when they come to the United States. This class helps them foster a community with other refugee women and non-refugee volunteers while also providing them with marketable skills.

Results: As of early 2018, the program has served 42 women since classes began in February 2017. Although none of the women envisioned working outside their home prior to the course, three participants now have full-time sewing related jobs, six women sew part time for a local Seattle clothing collective, six women are in child care jobs, and others have enrolled in higher level English classes after finishing the course. The wildly popular class now has a waiting list for enrollment.

Program Perspective:

“One of the main things that will stick with me is how women are women where ever they are from. Our life circumstances are vastly different but we have the same concerns – wanting to create a loving home for our families, wanting to provide for our kids, and the joy in being in a safe community, sharing with like-minded women.” -Debra Voelker, Sewing Class Volunteer

“It’s incredible how transformative this class is for each student and volunteer. At the beginning of every cohort everyone begins as strangers but they leave as friends. It goes beyond just gaining skills in sewing and English.” - Tahmina Martelly, Resiliency Programs Manager

“Every day, I come and I see my new friends and I learn to make many beautiful things.” – Mursal, sewing class participant

Federal Funding Streams Used: None. The program is part of the non-federal match required by the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s Matching Grant program.

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