

## **Summary report of Impact100 Philadelphia operating grant**

HIAS Pennsylvania (HIAS PA) is pleased to submit this summary report of how the operating grant of \$14,000 received in July 2014 from Impact100 Philadelphia was used. The entirety of this funding was allocated to the Refugee Department within HIAS PA. While we were unable to launch the proposed English as a Second Language (ESL) program for parents who stay home to care for young children, this funding did enable us to maintain essential ESL programs and the expanded orientation services offered to vulnerable refugees.

With a small individual contribution in 2014, HIAS PA was able to launch a pilot on-site ESL program for newly arrived adult refugees. Prior to this effort, many of these adults waited weeks to begin participating in an English class. Now, it is a matter of days and this difference has proven to be essential. Classes are offered twice a week at our main offices. In addition to enabling HIAS PA to hire an ESL instructor to plan and implement the classes, we were also able to purchase the materials and text books needed, as well as provide tokens for each participant to travel to and from class. The grant funding from Impact100 Philadelphia enabled us to maintain these classes beyond the 5 months that were initially planned.

Over the 9 months that this program has now been operating, a total of 56 refugees and asylees have been served. Not only do these classes help participants develop the language skills necessary to obtain employment, integrate and succeed in the United States, it is also an opportunity for newly arrived and more established refugees to interact with one another, learn together, and find kinship. One of the wonderful outcomes of this program has been the cross-cultural sharing and bonding that has occurred. Of the 56 served, 9 different nationalities were represented (Bhutan, Burma, Eritrea, Iraq, Russia, Ukraine, Haiti, Afghanistan, and Central African Republic). In observing classes, you can see the friendly competition and bonding that has developed. Participants break away from being isolated in their own ethnic community and have a unique opportunity to learn and interact with other refugees from very different parts of the world.

This program primarily reaches adults who have just arrived and who are intending to obtain employment. On average, participants attend 8 classes before moving on to other programs or to work. Of those who have completed their time in the HIAS PA classes, 8 went directly to work, 20 went on to a job program that offers ESL along with job searching support, 3 were high school age and started school, 2 others moved to classes closer to their homes, and 7 gained enough skill to enroll in a more advanced ESL program. Beyond ensuring that newly arrived refugees had access to these classes immediately upon arrival, this program has proven to quickly advance the language skills of refugees so that they are better positioned for long-term success.

With the support of the Impact100 Philadelphia grant, since classes were continued past the originally funded time, the instructor has been able to have TESOL students join her as instructors. This gives them the field experience to complete their school requirements and offers flexibility in the program operations. Quite significant has been our ability to adapt and shift with the ever changing composition of participants. At any time, refugees may arrive who are pre-literate (unable to read or write in their native language thus making it more challenging

to learn a new one). This program maintains the flexibility to shift classes (at times completely splitting the participants into two groups based upon learning level) and enables the instructors to focus the curriculum and teaching strategies to best serve each level. Muneer, a young man from Iraq, after just 10 pre-literate level classes, had begun to read and write in English. His dedication to participating and studying has been incredible. While most of the pre-literate refugees moved on to other programs and work, Muneer (also working) has continued to come to the classes at HIAS PA. He now participates actively in the basic level class twice a week when he gets out of work.

Even when able to overcome the complex barriers to maneuvering in a city like Philadelphia, many refugees need intensive support to understand the US financial systems. Financial knowledge is not just a convenience but an essential survival tool. Without an appreciation of money concepts and a baseline understanding of financial options, people are likely to make poor financial choices. Refugees resettled from developing countries are also at elevated risk of food insecurity because they initially face high levels of underemployment or unemployment, language barriers, shopping difficulties, and a tremendous shift in the budget and management of household resources.

In addition to supporting the on-site ESL classes, the funding from Impact100 Philadelphia was utilized to support the position of Refugee Orientation & Community Resource Coordinator. This Coordinator is responsible for maintaining an integrated orientation program through which HIAS PA offers financial literacy and nutritional education. In this integrated program, families learn out how to use their public benefits and purchase foods that are culturally appropriate.

From July 2014 through December 2014 a total of 26 families participated in a 3-session financial literacy program. During these sessions, the Coordinator teaches refugees how to develop a household budget, takes them to open a bank account, teaches them how to write checks and mail an envelope, how to read and understand their utility bills and lease, and more. Additionally, during this period, a total of 14 families were taken by the Coordinator on a food shopping trip to farmers markets and grocery stores for a nutrition orientation. During this time, staff talks about where to find fresh fruits and vegetables, how to compare prices of items, where to find culturally relevant foods, and how to meet the nutritional needs of their family using foods readily available in their new neighborhood. HIAS PA is registered as a Community Distribution Partner for the Food Trust's Philly Food Bucks vouchers. These vouchers are for fresh food from farmers markets, and each refugee who joins the market tours is given these vouchers to use that same day. Additionally, they are informed of the unique benefit that for every \$5 in SNAP funds that they spend at a farmer's market, they receive an additional Food Bucks voucher that values \$2. As a result of these outings, families gain personalized information on how to use their SNAP benefits, and what foods can be purchased with their WIC checks.

With ESL, financial literacy and nutritional education, all enhanced by the Impact100 Philadelphia operating grant, the refugees served learned essential life skills and improved their nutrition/health, thereby advancing towards independence and self-sufficiency.