



## Promising Practice

# Utah leverages TANF and Refugee Services partnership to provide refugees with integrated employment and education support

### State of Utah

Sisifo Taatiti, Program Manager, Workforce Development Division (WDD) Program and Training, Utah Department of Workforce Services, (866) 435-7414, [staatiti@utah.gov](mailto:staatiti@utah.gov)

Gerald Brown, Director, Refugee Services Office, Utah Department of Workforce Services, (801) 526-9787, [geraldbrown@utah.gov](mailto:geraldbrown@utah.gov)

The State of Utah supports refugees through a highly collaborative service model between the Department of Workforce Services/TANF (DWS) and the Refugee Services Office (Refugee Services). This integrated services approach provides refugees more streamlined case management as well as more rapid and effective connections to vital community partners.

### Background

Utah seeks to improve the lives of refugees by maximizing integration, coordinating refugee services, and managing Federal funding. As staff and programs are fully integrated, collaboration between DWS and Refugee Services is apparent at all levels of operation – from intake to service delivery to TANF exit strategies. At the intake stage, DWS and Refugee Services partner to conduct refugee eligibility and perform an initial employment strengths and barriers assessment. Utah houses DWS and Refugee Services staff at the same location to help facilitate collaboration. While resettlement center language interpreters are often called on to assist, the goal is to treat refugees the same as regular TANF participants.

Following intake, DWS connects refugees with the Asian Association of Utah, a nonprofit organization that coordinates case management as well as translation, housing, and employment training supports. The State is increasingly focused on assisting refugees to obtain sustainable employment and create successful transitions out of TANF. With this goal in mind, Utah designs refugee employment plans that emphasize transferable employment training, soft skills, and language instruction. The State sees English as a Second Language (ESL) as key to successful job placement and retention. Utah seeks to provide numerous ESL opportunities both during job training and, in partnership with employers, on the job site. The State also has a number of Refugee Services and DWS staff dedicated part-time to educate and coordinate with employers throughout Utah.

Utah focuses on connecting and linking community resources when assisting refugees, particularly those with significant and co-occurring barriers to employment. In addition to connecting the “hardest-to-serve” individuals with employment counselors, Utah collaborates with former refugees who now serve as DWS staff, volunteer mentors, translators, and other individuals helping the newly arrived families begin making connections within the local community. The State also has established partnerships and referral agreements with agencies in the fields of domestic violence and mental health – two areas of high need among Utah’s

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refugee population. The State also directs TANF resources to local domestic violence shelters and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) which assists with work readiness evaluation.

## Challenge

Utah is increasingly focused on training and work activities that lead to sustainable employment, particularly given the limited resources available to refugees after their five-year TANF time limit expires. This sustainable outcomes focus led the State to consider strategies for combining ESL learning opportunities while fulfilling TANF work requirements. For example, Utah currently offers tailored work experience programs that help refugees develop communicative and reading competency in English. As sustainable housing remains a significant challenge, the increased focus on sustainable employment is also an attempt to support refugees in finding improved housing stability.

## Innovation

**Establish close collaborative practices between DWS and Refugee Services at all levels.** DWS and Refugee Service integration begins with co-location – both agencies are located in the same office where frontline staff work side by side. Utah determines refugee benefits eligibility in-person at the DWS and Refugee Services offices which allows families to immediately connect with co-located employment specialists and job counselors.

**Build and strengthen community partnerships that optimize refugees' self-sufficiency outcomes.** DWS and Refugee Services work in close partnership with Utah's resettlement agencies to identify newly arrived refugee families and jointly discuss family needs and determine a service delivery approach. DWS also works in close collaboration with Utah's faith-based community – particularly the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) – to place refugees in work experience positions. The church community also helps refugees navigate some of the State's public assistance programs, such as explaining how to use Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) benefits.

## Impact

Integrated service delivery allows the State TANF office and Refugee Services to provide comprehensive case management while also increasing their ability to deliver employment and education/training services more effectively. Moving forward, Utah plans to enhance their successful partnership model by developing integrated career pathway programs for refugees.