SeVEDS Minutes

July 28th 3-4:30

* 3:00 Welcome - Wendy
* 3:05 June minutes approval – Meg moved and Keith seconded approval of the minutes from June 2022
* 3:07 SeVermont Leadership discussion – board has funding to send two. Discussion about interest and availability of board members to attend.
* 3:15 SeVEDS Award for Annual Meeting (we haven’t done this in the past two years):
  + **SoVermont Leadership Award for Excellence in Economic Development.** This award is presented annually in recognition of sustained and effective efforts to mobilize leadership in the development of programs and projects, planning and designing of new and creative economic development activities and deep commitment as a leader and advocate for economic development in Southern Vermont. Every year SeVEDS looks specifically for an individual or organization who has demonstrated consistent, exemplary performance in the economic development of our region, leading the execution of projects that have significant impact on revitalizing communities, and playing a major role in generating long-term growth and prosperity, improving the regions quality of life and sustaining its quality of place.
  + BDCC recommendations were emailed in advance. At boards June meeting discussion centered on awarding 2020, 21 and 22 awards. Meg moved to Award Stephanie Bonin the 2020 SLA for her work during the pandemic with Everyone Eats. Seconded by Gary Fox. Vote unanimous. Adam moved to award Curtiss Reed and Peter Elwell the 2021 SLA for their work on diversity, equity and inclusion. Seconded by Meg. Vote unanimous. Gary moved to award Chloe Leary the 2022 SLA for her work on Childcare and spearheading housing planning at the Austine Campus. Seconded by Avery. Vote unanimous.
* 3:40 Refugees Resettlement Updates with Jennifer Stromsten (see attached)
* 4:00 Co-Ops discussion
  + Flat Iron – Larisa Demos
  + Valley Alliance of Worker Coops – Adam Trott
  + BDCC employee ownership models history – Adam Grinold

Upcoming discussions:

* August: Co-ops Victor Morison
* Next Topics: Transportation, Housing
  + Field Trips: Winston Prouty Campus

Board meeting adjourned at 4:50 pm

**What is BDCC’s role with regards to the refugee resettlement efforts?**

**Strategic planning across the Southern Vermont Economic Zone – BDCC provides capacity**

*BDCC is a lead entity in a two county partnership to create a thriving regional economy, one which has identified the need for more people as a core objective. The other regional partners in this are the two planning commissions (WRCC and BCRC).*

* Reference: <https://www.sovermontzone.com/>
* BDCC Staff Lead: Laura Sibilia, Director of Strategies

**Refugee Resettlement – How BDCC got into the mix**

*Based on the strategic planning and objectives per above (#1 objective = more people), and the working communities mission outlined below (immigration support systems to increase in-migration) BDCC worked for several years on one specific strategy which was to identify a partner to help bring refugee resettlement to the region. In 2021, BDCC and ECDC formed a partnership that has led to the establishment of the MCC.*

* References: BDCC Blog History ([Example](https://brattleborodevelopment.com/reblog-brattleboro-refugee-resettlement-proposal-sparks-interest-questions/))
* BDCC Staff Lead: Adam Grinold, Executive Director

**Working Communities immigration systems building – BDCC is the backbone organization**

*BDCC spent the last 2.5 years creating a partnership that includes ECDC, CASP and SIT to seek and obtain funds through Working Communities, a Boston Fed initiative. The mission of this 3 year project is building systems to support a growth in immigration to southern Vermont. Alex Beck leads this system building, gap identification, coalition and partnership building initiative. Our goal is to increase immigration tenfold to this region over the next decade.*

* Reference: <https://www.bostonfed.org/workingplaces/communities-challenge/vermont.aspx#:~:text=The%20Working%20Communities%20Challenge%20advances,complex%20challenges%20facing%20their%20communities>.
* BDCC Staff Lead: Alex Beck, Welcoming Communities Manager

**Refugee Resettlement – BDCC provides capacity-building, direct workforce programming, and employer interface and support in the Windham Region and Capacity-building to Bennington**

*BDCC is committed to ensuring this region can secure the resources, build the partnerships, and develop the capacity needed for successful rural resettlement. This day-to-day work, paired with the working communities system-building approach outlined above, leads us to both engage directly each day and also to step back in order to assess where gaps will create barriers to immigration at scale. On a daily basis, we are helping local employers rise to the new workforce opportunity, providing training and support, leveraging our knowledge and relationships as the region’s lead economic development agency. BDCC is uniquely positioned in SE Vermont, as a convener of workforce development network. We are committed to ensuring these partners fully engage, deploy, and level up to serve new Vermonters. We are good at operationalizing new ideas in order to create innovative programming in response to emerging needs. We are also good at supporting partners including those in Bennington as they create locally appropriate solutions.*

* Reference: <https://brattleborodevelopment.com/workforce/welcoming-workplaces-new-americans/>
* BDCC Staff Lead: Jen Stromsten, Director of Programs

**Vermont Department of Labor July 2022: BDCC Progress Report Overview**

**Staffing**: Amir Samar and Jennifer Stromsten at BDCC provide employment services to refugees in the Windham Region, in coordination with workforce development partners serving this region and the state. Since March, BDCC has been building systems to manage and track employment-related processes. In June, ECDC (Ethiopian Community Development Council, the Brattleboro based refugee resettlement agency) hired Ebrahim Mussavi as an Employment Services Case Manager. This has dramatically expanded the ability to serve this community, and enhanced coordination between BDCC & ECDC. This new staffing will enable BDCC to transition employment case management duties back to ECDC.

**Partnerships:** BDCC & ECDC Participate regularly in partner activities to ensure coordination and leverage the broader workforce development network as fully as possible:

* State refugee system: Coordinator Tracy Dolan is leading employment related checkins to prioritize workforce retention. This is an opportunity for SE VT to learn from experienced refugee partners, and for all stakeholders to identify needs for the refugee workforce.
* VDOL: ECDC & BDCC Staff work routinely with VDOL local case management and supervision
* Tech: ECDC / VDOL / BDCC are coordinating on technology training, devices, and funding, with BDCC organizing first round of training and setting up tracking for allocation of devices
* Volunteers: BDCC leads a volunteer meeting every 3 weeks for coordination and information sharing regarding employment, respond to volunteer queries re employment
* Bennington: BDCC has been facilitating provider / volunteer employment connections, participates in checkins with Bennington providers and refugee volunteers
* Bennington: VDOL Subgrant to BCRC to increase employer engagement in Bennington
* Referrals: BDCC & ECDC are making referrals to other programs for employment-related support such as Reach Ahead and HireAbility
* In addition to the work being done by ECDC & BDCC staff, there is a committed cadre of volunteers who help with resume development and other job support. We are also engaging all of the region’s workforce development partners, from VSAC, VTP, WRCC and CCV as well as GCC in Franklin County. Through VDOL staff, refugees are accessing credentials and training resources that cannot be delivered in region.

**The Numbers:** As of July 2022, 57 people have been assisted through this grant.

* 57 people have gone through an initial intake to identify skills, goals, language proficiency and other key factors relating to employment and training
* 54 people have participated in career readiness training and coaching sessions
* 51 people are enrolled in WIOA
* 40 people are currently employed (all but 2 working full time or more)
* 2 have been terminated and are seeking new employment
* 2 not working FT because they are actively seeking credentials (IT, LNA)
* 2 have left the region
* 9 newcomers finishing orientation, beginning job tours and applications

**Current Employers of Refugees**:

* Commonwealth Dairy
* Cersossimo Lumber
* Vermont Plank Flooring
* Against the Grain
* ECDC Multicultural Center
* BDCC
* SIT World Learning
* DMI Paving
* Laura Zindel Pottery
* Sidehill Farm
* Mack Molding (Bennington)
* Market 32 Pricechopper

**Types of services**: BDCC & ECDC work with groups of people as well as individuals as soon as they arrive. Volunteers supplement these activities in some cases, particularly with regard to resume development and educational counseling. Services rendered included:

* Group intakes with new arrivals – at SIT campus
* Group trainings – at SIT campus
* Group & Individual WIOA enrollment
* Individual – planning (Internal)for  “self sufficiency”–outline education training options
* Individual job seeking – resume building (when appropriate)
* Individual job seeking – “matching” finding jobs / employers suitable to skills / language
* Individual training / education planning  –referrals to educational providers and / or WIOA case managers
* Individual training support – Interp. & translation (e.g. DOL facilitated RRP & EMP cert.)
* Individual tech support – Computer device allocation (BDCC / ECDC coordinate)
* Individual transport support – learners permits and drivers license setup, testing
* Individual retention support – troubleshooting with employer (attendance, ELL, training)
* Individual credential verification - BDCC has formed an official relationship with an agency that can validate educational credentials for refugees, and had two staffers trained**.** We will test, refine and then train additional people to use this system so that refugees can verify their degrees for employers of continuing educational need.
* Cohort job seeking – organizing group interviews and attending job fairs
* Cohort & Individual hiring support– interpretation during onboarding, training
* Cohort & Individual gear – ECDC / BDCC / VDOL help to acquire clothing, bikes
* Cohort & Individual ELL support – coordination with providers and employers
* Cohort transportation solutions – van, employer and third party transport
* Cohort translation of workplace materials- employee handbooks, training collateral
* Cohort retention – interpretation for employee evaluation and benefits reviews
* Cohort upskilling –  Seeking new opportunities as English skills improve to place people in settings where they can utilize / enhance skills, such as mechanics and metalworkers.
* Cohort tech training  - piloting a T4T training for 12-15 people to increase tech literacy
* Cohort driver training - working on solution for women who have not driven before
* Cohort pre-credential / upskilling support: working to emulate refugee training models from USCRI / AALV to pilot such as PCA1,2,LNA, Childcare worker, and CDL driver classes.

**Types of Services: Additional Engagement with Employers**

**As mentioned above, t**he DOL grant funds or subsidizes interpretation, and translation of employment materials, that enables the intake process, job site visits, applications and interviews, as well as onboarding and ongoing training. Without this support employers would be unable to navigate hiring refugees given the small number of people who yet have English language proficiency. BDCC is also providing additional trainings to help employers understand legal status of refugees, and deepen their DEI knowledge, with help from Vermont Community Foundation.

BDCC and ECDC staff engage directly with employers who wish to have refugee employees to explain the process, gather a basic employer intake that outlines wages / hours and other important details, and in many cases to conduct a job site visit in order to ensure case managers understand the workplace demands and that the HR team and supervisors have an opportunity to learn more about hiring and supporting refugee workers. Employer intakes new to this grant period:

* New Chapter\*
* Long Falls Paperboard\*
* Soundview / Marcal paper\* (Putney)
* Windham Windsor Housing Trust\*
* Subway
* C&S Wholesale\*
* CK Cleaning Service
* Brattleboro Subaru
* Swiss Precision\*
* Hinsdale Bridge (via consultant)
* Grateful Greens\*

*\* included job site visits*

Employer job site visits and intakes completed in the first grant period:

* True North Granola\*
* C&S Wholesale Grocers\*
* Mindel & Morse Construction\*
* GPI Construction
* Mocha Joes Roasting\*
* Community House \*(childcare)
* Costello, Valente, Gentry PC\*
* Brattleboro Food Coop\*
* Vermont Country Deli\*
* Stevens & Associates \*
* Sidehill Farm\* (value add food)
* Fulflex manufacturing\*
* Allard Lumber
* Mount Snow

*\* included job site visits*