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International Institute joins SPCLC, broadening range of refugee services

International Institute of Minnesota, which provides a continuum of essential services for refugees and immigrants, has joined SPCLC as a member agency. "We are excited to welcome the Institute," said SPCLC Chair Kara Schommer. "Their focus on refugee resettlement, including a very successful Medical Careers Pathway, seems like an excellent fit with our mission."

Jane Graupman, Executive Director of the Institute, concurs: **"We thought it was a good match for us to be part of the St. Paul consortium, which includes many agencies providing important services in our community.** A lot of times we have referred our clients to SPCLC member organizations, wishing we knew more about them to enhance our referral process." She added that membership will strengthen knowledge and ties between all members.



Jane noted that the Institute will also be able to access ABE funding for their Medical Careers classes, which have a proven and highly success-

ful record in training and placing New Americans as Certified Nursing Assistants.

"I want St. Paul to be a good provider of quality workforce programs," she said. "This will help us all come together to collaborate, rather than being territorial." St. Paul learners from the refugee community will have easier access to a range of wrap-around, ABE, and career preparation services.

The Institute also plans to start two basic level ESL classes. These time-limited classes, providing a maximum six months of basic ESL, will then feed new arrivals into ongoing classes at other SPCLC sites. "We're very excited to have classes on site for newly arriving refugees – it will be a huge support to our clients," noted Jane. "I think that orientation to life in the United States will be more comprehensive than it was in the past."



Tenzing Wangmo, a student from Tibet (above), and William Odame from Ghana (upper right), participate in the Medical Careers Pathway at the Institute.

The classes will provide a venue for the Institute to teach the English and related skills needed to access public transit, learn about library services, and understand other available services. The Institute sees value in getting new arrivals out of their homes and into the larger community quickly, helping them better adjust to their new lives and to begin learning English. In addition, new arrivals will be able to observe refugees who arrived earlier successfully participating in intensive CNA classes, helping them to realize there are viable career options available to them even as first-generation refugees.

The Institute, founded in 1919, provides immigration and resettlement services, medical careers training, citizenship services (700 New Americans became citizens last year through the Institute), and related services, as well as public education and advocacy regarding new arrivals and immigration issues.

"Our mission sums up our purpose – to provide self-sufficiency and full membership in American life," said Jane. "It benefits individuals, helping them to feel they are a part of the system in this country, and that there is a place for them."

Digital Literacy Assessment modules piloted

Five of the six Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment modules have been completed and are being piloted. The sixth and final module is in the design phase. Once all piloting is complete, the modules will be available freely on the web. In addition, organizations can choose to become certified sponsor sites, enabling them to award the Northstar Digital Literacy Certificates to users who successfully complete the online modules with a score of 85% or better.

"We hope the Certificate will provide a valuable skill set to our learners when they apply for jobs, as well as a teaching resource," said project coordinator Tom Cytron-Hysom. "Individual reports will be available to all individuals who complete modules, letting them know what skills they have mastered as well as the areas in which they need work."

Teachers will be able to focus instruction on the areas in which users need improvement, so learners can later successfully pass the assessments and gain the credential.

Legislative News

Several bills benefitting ABE were passed through the recent legislative session:

- **A Service Disruption Bill** provides a hold-harmless clause to protect programs or consortia that experience a significant decrease in contact hours due to a natural disaster or other unavoidable disaster.
- **A data matching bill** will facilitate follow-up information on federally mandated ABE learner outcome.
- **A clause in the Education Omnibus bill** offers the same graduation math test protection to Adult Diploma learners as is provided to regular high school students.

SPCLC Website updated

The SPCLC website, www.spclc.org, has been updated and reorganized to better provide information to both member agencies and the larger community. The site includes an overview of SPCLC, including programs and initiatives, a member section, teaching and curricula resources, ABE information and advocacy, and a regularly updated news section.

Light rail construction begins

Light rail construction on the eastern portion of University Avenue has begun, affecting a number of SPCLC member agencies. The Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning, Hmong Cultural Center, Hmong American Partnership, Lao Family Community, and Vietnamese Social Services all have offices along University Avenue.

There is a great deal of concern regarding how construction will affect learner ability to attend classes, given construction barriers and parking limitations. Agencies are working on strategies to help their students access classes during construction.