

Grand Forks Immigrant Integration Initiative

December 3, 2015

Attending: Bret Weber, Tim Schuh, Jessica Thorlacius, Lorelee Buelow, Katie Dachtler, Terri Keehr, Lynell Poposki, Vicotr Lieberman, Gary Spicer, Keith Reitmeier, Robin David, Mohamed Kahn, Cynthia Shabb, Terry Hanson, Pete Haga

Brief welcome and introduction by members.

Discussion of "Welcome meal and event". Gary Spicer, citizen, had contacted the Mayor's Office with an intent to showcase a night of culture with different populations represented at a picnic or other gathering where all community members would be invited and all cultures in the community would showcase their food, entertainment and other forms of culture.

The committee received the idea very well and also discussed some of the existing events that could be used/grown for this purpose such as World Refugee Day (June 18, 2016), the Global Friends Picnic (week after Potato Bowl), UND Feast of Nations and the UND International nights. Mr. Spicer agreed to stay in contact with the group and assist where he could, including potentially working with the Masons.

For all and any type of event like this, transportation was cited as the biggest barrier.

Update on Interpreter Training effort. Terri Keehr provided an update on the recent Interpreter Training effort. 23 people were trained, representing 8 countries and 12 languages/dialects. The training was provided by a certified training company, Arch Language Services, but those who participated are 'trained' and not 'certified', which is a higher level of training and testing. The participants received what is termed 'general community interpretation' but also touched on specific areas like medical and social services. The cost of the training was approximately \$10,850 and was covered by area donations/sponsorships and by a \$20 participant fee. There were also many volunteers who helped. Some of the participants included High School students. The participants were told they could make money providing services (Public Health rate is \$25/hr plus mileage) but that full-time work would be difficult.

There was further discussion that perhaps the community need has been met for interpreters and another training is not needed at this time – but will continually evaluate. It was suggested the interpreters would be very useful in a variety of regular community events/efforts including the recent Job Fair, specifically to assist with testing and completing applications. There was also discussion about how familiar are local organizations with their requirements to provide 'meaningful access' and that those trained could be used to assist the organizations meet those requirements. There was also discussion about making sure there is a list of available interpreters readily available for community members to use.

Workforce Training Efforts – Keith Reitmeier provided an overview of recent efforts to expand workforce training opportunities, targeting manufacturing jobs. To set the scene, he reported there were 2000 available jobs online (up 67 from a year ago) and a 1.6% unemployment rate in the Grand Forks area.

The discussions around establishing this training have involved many partners including representatives from NCTC, ND Job Service, Global Friends Coalition, The Chamber, GF Region EDC, MN state workforce (?), the City of GF, Kelly Temp Services and several private companies. (Brian Huschle from NCTC was unable to attend but did provide information in advance and coordinated with Reitmeier and Shabb on this report.)

Employers are interested in workforce and have been showing up for meetings. They are interested particularly a little higher skilled manufacturing and he cited some of the companies such as LM Windpower, Simplot, Cirrus, Marvin Windows and Crystal Sugar.

The training builds on the existing NCTC Adult Basic Education (ABE) language and culture course at NCTC. The goal is a training program that builds manufacturing skills and would potentially result in a certificate that would be considered as work experience by employers. It would provide upward movement for current workers or new workers to the area, as well as then opening other lower level positions for others.

There are two committees currently at work on different priorities: Pipeline (or making sure there are participants) and curriculum (making sure the skills taught are what is most needed by local companies.)

NCTC has received a Department of Labor grant for beginning manufacturing skills. These are higher paying jobs, ones that can support families. The tentative plan is start in mid Spring with about 20 individuals and hopefully ramp up to 100.

There was discussion that further grant assistance may be available, including the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act.

The training is an excellent opportunity for New Americans but is not limited to any single population.

Discussion concluded with a caution that transportation again will be a challenge, as will childcare and with an official 'hat's off' to NCTC and those who have been working on this program.

Current resettlement was discussed in general with 107 individuals (Bhutanese and Somali) being resettled in 2015. That equals about 2 families a month being resettled on average with the highest months around 20 individuals. Most of the Bhutanese are settled here as part of 'family reunification'.

There was discussion about creating a co-chair position as a way to increase the activity, representation and make it more of a dynamic committee. The city would retain one co-chair position with Council Member Weber. Cynthia Shabb from Global Friends is interested.

(by Pete Haga)