



Testimony

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Adam Grinold, BDCC Executive Director, Chair SWDB

Jennifer Stromsten, BDCC Director of Programs

BDCC Immigration Work Has Layers

- Leadership on Long Term Strategic goals through Southern Vermont CEDS & Zone
- Backbone and staffing for immigration system building through Working Communities
- Building up partners and partnerships serving new Vermonters in southern VT
- Co-delivering employment services (see slide at the end)
- Ad hoc convening, researching, problem-solving, gap-identifying, red-flagging, project managing...

Our region
has been
focused and
learning
since for a
decade.

- **2012-14 SeVEDS led research and grassroots development of 2014 CEDS**
 - **Data** Key finding -Southern VT among hardest hit by demographic decline, aging and shrinking population.
 - **Strategies**
 - Retain Youth - formed Young Professionals, launched high school program (P3)
 - Immigration - ready to begin in 2016 but put on pause after election
- **2015 Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone** Designated by legislature, in recognition of economic distress 2nd only to NEK
- **2020 federal leadership changes = resumed push for immigration to Southern VT**
- **2022 – SoVT Team gets Working Communities funds to build immigration systems**
 - WC project did not anticipate refugee arrivals 2022, so we are building the plane while flying it.
 - Important side-note –work on refugee resettlement started with BDCC funded staffing, to keep the ball moving after WC application was rejected, an example of how a little **capacity** at the right time made all the difference.

So what's the problem?

- **Direct service** to individuals has funding sources and the partners in SoVT are doing a great job.
- **No Capacity** exists to fix and build a comprehensive immigration system is lacking.
- **Risk:** a reactive, case by case approach, driven by siloed needs, rather than acting strategically, in coordination across regional, state and national partnerships. This undermines the potential for rural immigration to succeed.

Future success in welcoming new Vermonters will require ongoing focus and intention.

- **The immigration landscape is evolving.**
 - Community Asylum Seekers Project formed 5 years ago, ECDC established field office in 2021
 - Just last week a new **White House Launch of Welcome Corps** - Cosponsorship groups enabled through federal direct program. This will generate new needs in terms of coordination that we can't even see yet.
- **System Building is critical, but slow-going in rural southern VT.**
 - Turnover in local agencies, many have small footprint in this area.
 - Little history of immigration = less experience among providers and employers in serving diverse populations but they are learning fast!.
 - We are starting nearly from scratch, but partners to the north were also gutted and need support - SoVT relies upon Burlington region for leadership, models, expertise and services.
- **Building networks & collaborations across the region & state is necessary. It takes time and effort and is worth it.**
 - Unique needs arise from being rural - We lack a big employer experienced with hiring immigrants. who will just hire every newcomer.
 - But this is leading to model practices to work with small employers hiring new Vermonters, employers who have little to no HR team.
- **Knowledge building around a new model of rural resettlement will be critical to the Vermont's path forward on immigration.**
 - We must commit to learning and seeking model practices and resources from outside VT (WES), and facilitating learning across regional orgs.
 - Vermont's path forward on welcoming immigration - replicating the successes and overcoming the challenges based on the southern Vermont experience

Examples

Examples of work we do that becomes invisible once we step away...

- CDL Drivers License
- VDOL and WIOA enrollment
- Regional Transportation
- Employment onboarding
- Aligning ELL & Local Vocational Pathways (Childcare)

...it all requires capacity, someone to focus on the problem and follow through until a solution is built.

Goals

We need sufficient capacity to think and plan long term for the region, to coordinate, to set our sights on having the best possible approach to refugees and immigration.

- **Responding to New Challenges**
- **Generating Knowledge and Strategies**
- **Capacity Building and Connections**
- **Building for the future**
- **Increasing Regional Resources**

Direct Service:
BDCC provides
Refugee
Employment
Services in
coordination
with local
partners

Partners: Cosponsors and volunteers, ECDC, CASP, VDOL, Hireability, CCV, VSAC, CTE, and others.

Examples of system-level projects In the works – need Capacity to keep going!

- With Moover - Microtransit for 2nd shift workers – summer 2023
- Launching a tech-enabled user-driven workforce project – January-February 2023 in partnership with Green River Software and Skillab
- Vocational pathways / ELL for specific fields (Childcare, CDL, Health Careers, Construction) with SIT / World LEarning

Employment Highlights from Refugees and Asylum Seekers being assisted

- 75 refugees through initial employment intake to identify skills, goals, language proficiency and other key factors relating to employment and training
- 4 in the process of job seeking, beginning job tours and applications
- 66 refugees participated in career readiness training and coaching sessions
- 45-70 refugees enrolled in WIOA with VDOL, facilitated by BDCC and ECDC
- 63 are employed (most FT, some more)
- 20 received help to validate educational credentials via World Education Service
- 10 actively seeking new credentials
- 10 enrolled in degree-granting institutions

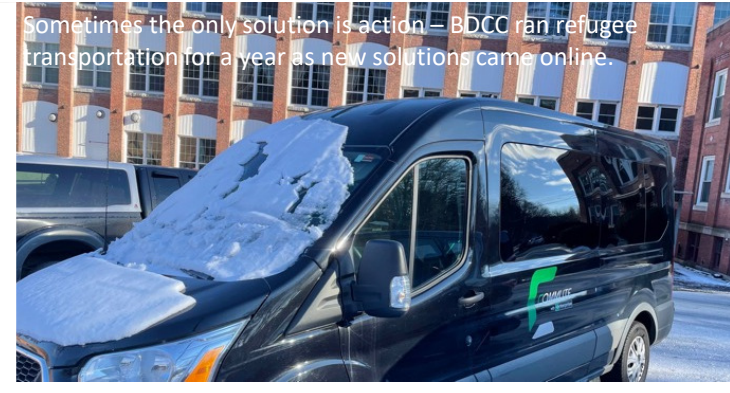
2022 activities made possible through funding from VDOL, State Refugee Office, and BDCC



Against the Grain employs 10+ refugees and asylum seekers



Talented New Vermonters are themselves key partners in building Welcoming Communities



Sometimes the only solution is action – BDCC ran refugee transportation for a year as new solutions came online.



Some of the Working Communities Core Team at the Boston Fed Summit



Community building is as important to welcome and retention as jobs and housing.

Thank you!
