

ments in Omaha, handled her case.

Haqi first came to Lutheran Family Services for help filing an application to be reunited with her husband, whose asylum request had been denied. Soon she began volunteering with Lutheran Family Services, helping with clerical work and locating job opportunities for refugees.

Lutheran Family Services helped Haqi obtain certification through College of St. Mary to do medical interpretation, and she now translates Arabic at Creighton clinics.

In Iraq, Haqi taught English as a secondary language at a private elementary school, but her degree is not recognized here. Through Lutheran Family Services, Haqi met with Omaha Public Schools officials and applied for a para-professional position in the ESL department and now works at Northwest High School.

Celeste Mitchell of Lutheran Family Services went with Haqi to meet with UNO officials who evaluated her degree and determined the classes she needs to take to receive her elementary education degree. She's applied for financial aid at Metropolitan Community College, where Haqi plans to take basic classes before going to UNO for teaching courses.

"It seems it will take a long time. I will stay as a para and take some night classes and I will do it. No problem," says Haqi, who's also enrolled in Omaha Housing Authority's self-sufficiency program. It helps that her kids – now 19, 15 and 10 — are settled and happy in school. The youngest will enter middle school this fall, one is in high school and the oldest daughter is studying pre-med at UNO.

"When you are in your own country, you have many friends," Haqi says. "Here where I have sad or bad moments or happy moments, I call Lutheran Family Services to share with me. They are my sweet home, sweet home," Haqi says.

Agencies Helping Immigrants

Numerous agencies in the Omaha area provide services for immigrants to help them make the transition to life in a new country. These programs include:

Legal Aid of Nebraska – In addition to an attorney who works with clients at the International Center of the Heartland, Legal Aid provides domestic violence representation on issues such as protection orders, child custody, divorce and housing issues. Several staff members are bi-lingual. The agency also provides financial literacy and housing counseling training. A staff member goes out into the community to talk about financial topics and teach immigrants about their rights and responsibilities as tenants or help them with purchasing a home.

Justice for Our Neighbors – Most of Justice for Our Neighbors' programming is in the area of domestic violence, says Christy Nicolaisen, executive director. "If there is a domestic violence situation, or they are

Project Bridge Assists Internationally Trained Health Workers

As the United States becomes more diverse, one of the challenges facing the health sector is the lack of culturally and linguistically varied healthcare workers. Doctors, surgeons, nurses and physical therapists trained in other countries legally are unable to work in their fields in the U.S. "Instead, they are working as custodians, driving school buses and working in fast food restaurants," says Stacey Ocander, Ed.D., dean of health and public services at Metropolitan Community College. "We have a healthcare worker shortage, but at the same time have an excess of un-utilized talent."

On June 1, Metropolitan Community College launched Project Bridge in partnership with United Way of the Midlands, Douglas County Health Department, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Nebraska Department of Labor and Lutheran Family Services. Project Bridge provides consultation services, referrals to evaluation services, one-on-one case management, referrals to educational programs, assistance in the licensure process and identification of options — at little or no fee — to help these individuals pave a career path through further studies or a change of careers within the healthcare field.

Most of the program's participants so far are physicians who face spending at least \$3,000 for an evaluation examination to determine where they fall into the sys-

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is an immigrant?

Officially, an immigrant is a foreign-born individual admitted to reside permanently in the United States as a Lawful Permanent Resident. Unofficially, the term is also used to describe any foreign-born individual, regardless of whether he or she is legally present in the U.S. or whether he or she intends to be in the U.S. temporarily.

What is a refugee?

Refugees are people who legally enter the United States because they cannot return to their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

What is an asylee?

An asylee fears persecution based on race, religion, nationality or political opinion, but has already entered the U.S. and, fearing persecution if he or she returns to his or her homeland, applies for and is granted asylum in the U.S.

Source: Lutheran Family Services

and counseling are available. Metropolitan Community College offers GED classes, and the Literacy Center of the Midlands provides ESL classes.

Exercise, nutrition and parenting classes also are offered, among others.

"Many of them are used to accepting domestic violence and come for two or three months to different classes and will never say anything until they find themselves in a particular situation," Barrios says.

Catholic Charities – In addition to housing the Latina Resource Center, Catholic Charities also provides Immigration Legal Assistance Services and has a Microbusiness Training and Development Center.

The Microbusiness Center's eight-week training program teaches participants basic skills needed to open a business. After completing a business plan, they can apply for microloans of up to \$3,500 to start or expand a business. "We help them become bankable," says Adriana Zambrano, program director. After completing the program, clients can continue coming to the center for support and to use the computer lab.

About 60 percent of the participants are women, Zambrano says. "For the loans, we have had the experience that women are more responsible in paying back." Most participants open businesses in the areas of cleaning, hair styling, sewing or food services.

Immigration Legal Assistance Services represents clients in immigration related matters. The program specializes in assisting clients in becoming U.S. citizens, helping refugees apply for their permanent residency after being in the U.S. for one year, helping family members petition their relatives to immigrate to the U.S., and assisting domestic violence victims who are eligible for an immigration benefit due to their victimization and cooperation with law enforcement. Last year, Catholic Charities obtained approval of U-Visas for 43 women.

Midlands Latino Community Development Program – The Childcare Development is a 10-week program that provides participants with the

tools to start a licensed child care facility. Last year, 55 women were enrolled in the "How to Start a Family Childcare Program." Fifteen women started a licensed childcare, and 13 started their child care without a license. Additionally, women from 58 child cares attended monthly educational and networking opportunities. "We are making an important contribution by lowering the level of poverty of the population living in the South Omaha area," says Marta Sonia Londoño Mejia, executive director. "Women who have started child cares are able to stay home with their children. At the same time, they help their families by contributing to the economic support of the family."

Latino Center of the Midlands – The Latino Center of the Midlands promotes the self-sufficiency and self-determination of Latino families by providing social, educational, emotional, public health and advocacy services. The Adult Education Resource Center has a computer training center and provides classes such as English as a Second Language, basic skills, Spanish GED and driver's education.

Salvation Army's Citadel Program – The Citadel Program is helping Sudanese teens assimilate to the American culture. "We are trying to teach them how to exist in a multi-racial, multi-cultural community, to be respectful of others, but also to embrace their own culture," says Captain Ken Shiels, corps officer for the program. "Sudanese mothers and fathers want their daughters to be successful," he says. "The young ladies have to choose that. If they choose to excel at school, that is excellent. If they choose not to, that is acceptable in the family."

The program provides participants with opportunities they wouldn't have otherwise – trips, camps, music enrichment. Advisory board member Anne Baxter recently facilitated a personal skills development workshop to teach proper dress, table manners and polite behaviors in social situations. "We talked about leveling the playing field. These are very intelligent students, but they will do better in life if they know the rules of life here in this country, how people converse, what people ask about and don't ask about," Baxter says.

For links to more information on these programs and agencies, go to www.womensfundofomaha.org and select *Today's Omaha Woman* under Media Room **W**