

Overcoming Poverty and Raising Wages: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's "New American Cities" Program

Report explores workforce development program that connects immigrants to meaningful employment while supporting employer needs and bolstering local tax bases

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Approximately 60% of those who completed Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's [New American Cities](#) pilot program have secured jobs with wages high enough to lift them and their families above the federal poverty line, according to a [new report](#). New American Cities is a workforce development initiative focused on moving refugee and immigrant workers into family-sustaining jobs so that they can achieve economic self-sufficiency and career advancement.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service workforce development program, New American Cities, connects immigrants to meaningful employment while supporting employer needs and bolstering local tax bases

Of those who entered the program unemployed, job placements resulted in average hourly wages of \$19.63. Those who entered employed but earning less than the federal poverty line saw their average hourly wages increase by 41%, from \$13.56 to \$19.08. Finally, those who entered the program earning more than the federal poverty line saw average hourly wages increase by 19%, from \$19.84 to \$23.53.

The Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (LZC) developed the report with support from LIRS, Walmart, and ICONIQ Impact. The report also provides a community-level portrait of program sites in Baltimore, MD; Denver, CO; Fayetteville, AR; Jacksonville, FL; and Utica, NY; outlines components of the program's model that add value to workforce programs and cities; and calculates New American Cities' return on investment to participants and communities.

"Settling in a new country is a challenge in itself for New Americans, but only having access to

low-wage, entry-level jobs where they are underutilized makes the process of rebuilding their lives even more daunting,” said Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. “The goal of this program is to dismantle structural barriers preventing refugees and immigrants from achieving economic and career mobility, and in doing so, connect employers to much-needed talent and stimulate local economies and tax bases.”

Many refugees and immigrants bring a wealth of education and job skills with them to the United States, but tend to be under-employed due to refugee employment programs that have historically lacked the resources and infrastructure to provide career advancement opportunities. In 2021, LIRS sought to address this issue by launching a two-year pilot program to enhance collaboration between local governments, workforce centers, employers, and resettlement agencies.

Each New American Cities site hired from within refugee and immigrant communities or ensured staff members were multi-lingual and culturally sensitive to better serve clients. Program staff assisted participants with tailoring their resumes for specific positions and hiring managers, and prepared them for interviews. Additionally, staff helped clients access transportation and childcare, which are two common obstacles to maintaining jobs. LIRS estimates that more than 600 New Americans have received assistance, and countless families and communities near program sites have benefited indirectly from the initiative.

“The evidence coming from the New American Cities pilot demonstrates that investing in refugee and immigrant careers benefits entire communities,” said Dr. Jessica Santos, Director of the Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research. “The underemployment of skilled immigrants costs the U.S. economy billions of dollars annually. This program does the opposite, creating new skills, networks, and resources. It’s time for cities to zoom out, away from a scarcity perspective of policymaking, to create pathways for economic security and hope for all.”

The report also estimated the tax contributions that participants would make towards their city after 1 year and over 10 years. On average, participant tax contributions after one year equal \$6,700 per person more than they would have without the program. Over 10 years, assuming standard cost of living adjustment increases, the average tax contributions going back to the city equal \$86,706 per program participant.

[About Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service \(LIRS\)](#)

Founded in 1939, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) is the largest faith-based national nonprofit dedicated exclusively to serving refugees, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable immigrant communities in the United States. Through more than 80 years of service and advocacy, LIRS has helped over 750,000 migrants and refugees rebuild their lives in America.

Timothy Young
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

+1 443-257-6310

tyoung@lirs.org

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