

Allegheny County has gained a reputation as an attractive place to live and work, bringing new people from other states, and other countries, to our area. As our population continues to change, DHS strives to ensure that our services and supports are accessible and culturally appropriate for everyone.

One of the ways that we are doing this is through the DHS Immigrants and Internationals Advisory Council. Established in 2008, the Council is a vehicle to educate the immigrant community on existing services and broaden access to, and cultural competency of, the human services at DHS and other community organizations. Council initiatives have included collaborations to provide career mentoring, on-going support for social service needs, access to translation and interpretation services, culturally appropriate child care, support of international youth, and projects that encourage entrepreneurship. One of the greatest benefits of the Council has been the strong relationships and increased communication that have developed among members both with DHS and with the broader community. Learn more about two people who have formed life-changing relationships through the work of the Council in the stories that follow.

For more information about the Immigrants and Internationals Council, visit the DHS website at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/iiaac.aspx.



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DHS MAKING AN IMPACT

Immigrants & Internationals



Jinnie

When her husband’s job moved her to Pittsburgh from South Korea, Jinnie immediately began to find ways to help others.

“I think I am a social worker by nature. If I see a problem, I want to help.”

One of her friends saw her work in the Asian communities and suggested that she join the DHS Immigrants and Internationals Advisory Council.

“My friend told me that the Council would give me access to more resources so I could do better work in the community;” Jinnie recounted. After that conversation, she was convinced that this was what she needed to do.

Through her work with the Council, Jinnie has been able to meet a wide variety of people and organizations that help her to improve the quality of life for Asian immigrants in Pittsburgh.

Jinnie
continued:

“The Council has experts from so many directions: We’ve had speakers from many DHS programs as well as on citizenship, mental health, law enforcement, education, housing, and transportation. More importantly, I have been able to form relationships with other cultural groups and immigrant serving organizations in the area. When I go out in my community and someone says ‘I have this kind of problem,’ I say “OK, let me look into it and try to figure something out.’ I can go to the Council and let other members know about the problems that I find, and someone will have an answer.”

In addition to finding resources that she can share with her community, Jinnie herself is a resource for local agencies. She has taught workshops on culturally appropriate behaviors for DHS and other organizations and even worked on a video used to teach the police how to interact with Korean women who are dealing with domestic violence.

“When working with immigrants, cultural competency is extremely important. These people are in a new culture with a new language – they don’t know the system. It’s a different way of thinking, and agencies need to understand how these cultural differences can affect their work with immigrants.”

Although her schedule is hectic – she serves on the Council in addition to her full-time job as director of development for a local nonprofit – and her work with the Council is unpaid, Jinnie continues to provide her contact information to churches and organizations, searching for ways to continue to help her community.

“I do this work because I know the work of the Council is important. The Council promotes peace and understanding by bringing immigrants and locals together. By bring everybody together, the Council is contributing to making our society a more livable place for all.”

Abo jasim

Living in Baghdad, Iraq, Abo jasim never thought that he would end up in Pittsburgh; however, after three attempts on his life because of his work with an American company, he knew that he needed to relocate – for himself and his pregnant wife. His boss recommended him for the Special Immigrant Visa, and on July 14, 2009, Abo jasim and his wife began life in Pittsburgh.

Last year, Abo jasim heard about the Immigrants and Internationals

Council’s Refugee Career Mentoring Program. At the time, he was working long hours at a low wage job not utilizing his education and experience, and thought that this could be a way to find a career with a future that would give him more time with his family.

Through the Council, he was matched with an American mentor, Sabrina, who taught him the importance of eye contact during an interview, how to write a concise

résumé, and how to network – several things that were very different from obtaining employment in Iraq. In addition to weekly one-on-one meetings with Sabrina at a local coffee shop, Abo jasim would attend monthly group sessions with other immigrants and their mentors to learn job seeking skills and discuss their experiences.

“Day after day, I knew this would work. I learned US systems and I learned the importance of seeing my cup as half-full and not half-empty. If I go to an interview, there is a chance I won’t get a job. It’s happened. But I don’t think that the world is going to end. I just work hard and try more. I keep trying.”

Abo jasim’s perseverance and relationship with Sabrina paid off. One day, Sabrina scheduled a meeting for him to have coffee with one of her friends who worked for a bank.

Although the coffee meeting was casual, they did discuss Abo jasim’s experience in accounting. When an accounting service representative position opened at the bank, Abo jasim was interviewed and hired.

Even though Abo jasim has reached his goal of finding a career that he enjoys, he continues to support the work of the Council.

“I tell the Council members that if there is any program, I’d still want to come, even now that I have a job. I believe if this program didn’t exist, I wouldn’t have been able to get this job that I like. For me, I am thankful for this program.”