WORKING TO MAKE A LIFE—NOT JUST A LIVING
WeWork partners with RefugeeOne to help refugees thrive

When Mohamed fled his home at the age of 14, he left in search of a means to make a living.

But as a Rohingya person in Burma, he couldn’t legally work to support his parents and siblings. “There weren’t any opportunities,” he said. “I was denied citizenship from the day I was born, so I left.”

Today, nearly 20 years later, Mohamed says he no longer works just to make a living—he’s working to make a life. That’s the motto at WeWork, the shared-workspace provider where he’s been employed since May 2017.

Mohamed is one of more than 150 refugees hired nationwide (including 5 RefugeeOne clients) through WeWork’s Refugee Initiative, piloted in early 2017 to provide recently-resettled refugees with employment opportunities. Since then, the company has committed to hiring 1,500 refugees over the next 5 years.

“We started seeing the benefits of hiring refugees right away,” said Mo Al-Shawaf, WeWork’s Director of Partnerships and Special Projects, Public Affairs. “We were seeing tangible business success—from higher retention rates to improved performance on teams where we had refugees.”

Their observations were confirmed in a recent report on refugee employment*, which found that the turnover rate for refugees was up to 15% lower than employees overall. Higher retention rates also mean increased savings for employers.

But for WeWork, the benefits of hiring refugees go far beyond the bottom line: they also found inherent value in hiring talented individuals from non-traditional backgrounds like Mohamed.

“It’s really important to recognize the contributions of refugees—they’re not just making our business stronger, they’re making our communities stronger, too,” said Mo.

Refugees like Mohamed strengthen our communities in many ways, from paying taxes to purchasing homes—which Mohamed is already saving to do. But his journey to self-reliance in the U.S. did not come without difficulty.

Less than a year after fleeing home, as the humanitarian crisis in Burma continued to escalate, Mohamed’s father passed away. Before he could return home, his village was burned by the violent Burmese military regime, leaving his mother and siblings displaced in a refugee camp.

With no place to call home and little opportunity available to him in Burma, Mohamed spent the next 6 months working long hours in a clothing factory in Yangon to save enough money to make the difficult journey to Malaysia.

Even in Malaysia, where Mohamed met his wife and they had their first two children, life was challenging. Without proper...

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*Refugees as Employees: Good Retention, Strong Recruitment."—TENT, Fiscal Policy Institute
documented, they weren’t able to legally work or send their children to school. “My dream has always been to take care of my family,” said Mohamed. “When my wife and I had the chance to be resettled in the U.S., I knew we had to for the future of our children.”

Mohamed and his family arrived in Chicago on September 15, 2014 after a series of rigorous background checks. Refugees are screened more carefully than any other travelers to the U.S.

Within a week of arrival, Mohamed was enrolled in English classes at RefugeeOne.

“The first thing I wanted to do when I arrived was learn English so I could work hard and progress,” he said. “Learning English as a second language and learning about a new culture was hard, but I had to do it for my family.”

After only 6 weeks in Chicago, Mohamed found his first job working as a janitor at a local business on the night shift. Every morning as he was leaving work, he drove straight to his English classes, which started at 8:30 a.m.

Carli, Mohamed’s supervisor at WeWork, says Mohamed’s dedication is contagious. “He is so humble and hardworking. He comes to work with a smile on his face every day.”

He continued working that difficult schedule while RefugeeOne helped him find another janitorial job at WeWork with better hours, wages, and benefits. “Our goal is to help our employees improve their lives in every way,” said Carli Maione, Mohamed’s supervisor at WeWork.

For example, when Mohamed’s wife was hired at another WeWork location, the company coordinated their schedules so one of them could be home with their children at all times.

Recently, Mohamed asked to be switched back to the evening shift. When Carli asked why, he said he wanted to sacrifice his day shift so he could go back to school.

“He’s not just creating an impact in the refugee community,” said Carli. “He’s impacting everyone around him. He’s really making a huge mark in America.”

For more information about hiring refugees, contact Helen at hsweitzer@refugeeone.org

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**WHY HIRE REFUGEES?**

- **AUTHORIZED TO WORK**
  Refugees are fully authorized to work in the U.S. They are highly screened by the Department of Homeland Security and have passed all background and drug tests.

- **SKILLED, EXPERIENCED, LONG-TERM**
  Refugees have a varied work experience, education, and specialized skills. They also attend our English and Job Readiness classes to prepare them for the workforce.

- **EXCELLENT WORK ETHIC**
  After losing everything, refugees are extremely resilient and possess a strong drive to regain self-sufficiency and economic stability for their families.

- **AVAILABLE ON SHORT NOTICE**
  With new refugees arriving each month, we can help fill job vacancies immediately.

- **FLEXIBLE**
  Refugees are often willing to accept non-traditional shifts, including overnight hours, holidays, and overtime.

- **EMPLOYER TAX CREDIT INCENTIVES**
  By employing refugees, you could qualify for significant tax credits and subsidized training opportunities.

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RefugeeOne’s Workforce Development and English classes are possible thanks to The Albert and Anne Mansfield Foundation, Conant Family Foundation, Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, McCormick Foundation Communities Matching Fund, a McCormick Foundation fund, Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, Rivers Casino, and donors like you!
When RefugeeOne launched its new employment mentoring initiative for refugees, Robert was one of the first to enroll.

“Robert is a really goal-oriented person,” said Sarah, the volunteer mentor who RefugeeOne paired with him. “Especially considering he came to a new country so recently and at such a young age.”

Although Sarah was born in Chicago—“a true Chicagoan, through and through,” she says—her family came to the U.S. from D.R. Congo nearly 30 years ago. That’s part of the reason she wanted to volunteer with refugees like Robert.

In August 2018, Robert and his family arrived in Chicago from Namibia, 11 years after they’d fled their home country of D.R. Congo because of persecution. Even at the young age of 18, Robert was determined to make the most of the opportunities available to him from the moment he arrived here.

Within two weeks, Robert found a job at Norm’s Car Wash with the help of RefugeeOne’s employment team. Norm’s Car Wash is one of 77 local businesses that partner with RefugeeOne to hire recently-arrived refugees.

For Robert, working at Norm’s gives him the time, flexibility and resources to work on achieving his personal goals, which include finishing his GED and enrolling in an architectural certificate program.

“I want to study—study really hard—so one day I can do something big,” he said. “Not only for my family but for this place we call home, as well.”

Sarah says her priority is to help Robert achieve those goals in any way she can. They’ve been meeting once a week at coffee shops and the library since last November.

“In the beginning, we worked on resumé building,” she said. “We also talked about his presence on LinkedIn and the importance of networking to broaden your career opportunities.” Since then, they’ve gone on to resource and money management, including opening Robert’s first bank account, setting him up for direct deposit, and building a habit around saving part of each paycheck.

“We’ve also been looking at community colleges together,” said Sarah. “Especially ones that are accessible via public transportation and offer subjects that really interest him.”

Sarah says working with Robert has also helped her appreciate and understand her own cultural background. Growing up in Chicago, she often felt like her family members were the only foreigners in the neighborhoods where she lived.

“I always thought certain traits my family had were just strange things, but when I met Robert I started to realize some of those things were cultural.” For example, when either of their families have guests, it’s very common to give them a lot of food. Sarah noticed this when she visited Robert and his family in their home on their first Thanksgiving in the U.S.

“I showed up with a bunch of soul food,” she said. “And that’s the one thing Robert knew about Thanksgiving—that we’re supposed to eat a lot!”

Sarah says she believes Robert will succeed at whatever he does in life because he’s so focused on the goals he has for himself.

“Being in Chicago has been a life-changing experience,” said Robert. “It’s a privilege. I can say that I’ve been using my time here to do the best I can,” he said.

Want to volunteer? Apply at refugeeone.org/volunteer and attend our orientation to learn about different ways you can help.

RefugeeOne’s Sewing Studio is open and ready for business! We’re looking to partner with local businesses and people like you to commission new projects. Our sewing studio provides refugees with vocational job training and a chance to earn additional income. Bring all your design ideas to life while supporting local refugee women and their families. For more information, contact Annie at akaufman@refugeeone.org.
Dear friends,

As people who care about refugees, you know the incredible impact they have in the communities where they live. You've seen their commitment to family, their dedication in the workplace, and their determination to make the most of the opportunities available to them.

One critical step in pursuing those opportunities is finding a job—something we strive to help refugees achieve in their first few months here.

In this newsletter, you'll read about two hard-working refugees who are committed to building a better future for themselves and their families. Although Mohamed and Robert are from different countries, they are both very driven, goal-oriented, and resilient—qualities that are sure to help them succeed in the U.S.

They also share a desire to use their employment opportunities to improve themselves and their lives. But the relationship between refugees and employers is mutually beneficial. Recent reports have found that refugees have qualities of ideal employees, including extremely low turnover rates and high labor force participation.

Their success is made possible in part by people like you. Your support as generous donors, dedicated volunteers, and fierce advocates opens a world of opportunity for new Americans like Mohamed and Robert.

Thank you for making Chicago—and the United States—a place where refugees can succeed.

I hope to see you at our gala on April 27!

– Melineh Kano

SATURDAY, APRIL 27, 2019 | RADISSON BLU AQUA HOTEL, CHICAGO | RefugeeOne.org/gala