REFUGEE EXCITED FOR ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY AT FIVE STAR LAUNDRY

While many of us are settling in for the night, Charles Safari is just beginning his hour-long commute to his job at Five Star Laundry. Charles, a refugee from the Congo, leaves his home at 8 p.m. to ensure that he arrives early for his overnight shift, which ends at 6 a.m. the next morning.

Only three months after he arrived in the U.S., Charles secured his full-time job at Five Star Laundry. RefugeeOne helped him find the job thanks to Christine and Christopher Shaw and Dixie Downes, members of Luther Memorial Church of Chicago. They wanted to help refugees find work, and Christopher knew just the person to call—Edward Chen, President of Five Star Laundry.

After telling Ed about refugees’ resilience and strong desire to support their families, Christopher asked Ed to interview two refugees. Ed said, “Consider it done.” Five Star Laundry soon hired both refugees and has since hired 25 more, including Charles Safari.

Along with Five Star Laundry, RefugeeOne partners with more than 75 employers who give refugees a chance to prove themselves in their first American jobs. Hiring refugees not only helps these courageous individuals achieve self-reliance in the United States, it benefits employers who can claim a tax credit.

Alexandra Samis, Director of Sales at Five Star Laundry, says “It’s been wonderful working with RefugeeOne. Every time we’ve had a need or question, RefugeeOne’s employment team has been available and offered a solution. We couldn’t ask for a better partner!” At Five Star Laundry, Charles irons bed sheets for hotels. “It is not easy work,” he says, “but there is good collaboration between me and my coworkers. I’m happy to have gained experience. The most important thing to me is that there is no segregation. Although we are from many different backgrounds, my coworkers and I are all treated equally.”

As a member of a persecuted ethnic group in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Charles has experienced unequal treatment. Violence in the Congo forced Charles and his family to flee their home and settle in a Rwandan refugee camp in 1997.

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RefugeeOne’s Workforce Development program and English classes are possible thanks to the Chicago Tribune Charities – Holiday Campaign, a McCormick Foundation fund, federal grants, and individual donors like you!

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“The camp was terrible,” Charles says. “There were lots of people living in bad, dirty conditions. We stayed there for so many years because we had no other choice.”

After 17 years in the camp, Charles was elated to learn he would be resettled in the United States. In July 2014, he arrived in Chicago with his wife and children, ranging in age from one to 17.

Upon arrival, the main challenge Charles faced was the language barrier. Because he did not speak any English (his native language is Kinyamulenge), it was hard for him to express himself and navigate the city. RefugeeOne enrolled him in our on-site English language classes and helped him search for a job.

Despite the challenges of his job, Charles has no complaints and is proud to be nearing his one-year anniversary there. Though he is shy, a smile spreads across his face when he talks about his work and how it enables him to support his family.

“Things are different here in the U.S. from how they were in Rwanda,” he says. “There is more respect here, and I have more direction in my life. In America, I have the right to work and the right to improve my life.”

“My children are now getting a good education,” he adds. “They are speaking English, and I am able to pay my own rent.”

Charles will continue to work hard to support his family, making his evening commute and ironing bed sheets while many of us crawl into our own beds for a night’s rest. It is no surprise that Five Star Laundry continues to hire resilient refugees like Charles.

Charles (left) with his wife and children.

DID YOU KNOW?

Refugee Employment

- Refugees are fully authorized to work in the U.S. They are screened by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and have passed all background and drug tests.
- Most employers who hire refugees can qualify for the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit. Employers can claim a credit of 25-40% of the employee’s wages, up to $2,400 for their first 12 months.
- Common industries for RefugeeOne clients include manufacturing, hospitality, food service, healthcare, and retail.
- Many refugees are willing to accept non-traditional shifts that include overnight hours, holidays, and overtime.
- RefugeeOne partners with more than 75 employers. Currently, our top employers are Tyson Foods, Five Star Laundry, Rivers Casino, Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, and Resource Employment Solutions.
- During Fiscal Year 2015, 234 RefugeeOne clients found jobs. 92% remained at their job for at least 90 days, well above industry standards.

Charles is working hard to provide a better life for his children, including daughter, Nice (age 6, on left), shown here playing with her good friend.
At RefugeeOne, staff and volunteers work with refugees to help them gain what is arguably the most important employment skill in the United States—speaking English. Katie Seeley is one of these dedicated volunteers. She provides one-on-one tutoring to refugees once a week and serves as a substitute teacher for RefugeeOne’s English language classes.

As an instructor of composition at North Park University, Katie has experience working with students with diverse skill sets. However, she says that working with refugees is different because you don’t have a shared language.

To communicate with students who speak very little English, Katie says she basically does charades. “You have to let yourself be silly,” she says. “You have to act things out. So if you’re trying to explain what ‘jogging’ means, you might end up jogging around the classroom.”

“It comes down to showing and repeating something until you see their eyes light up with understanding,” she adds. “That’s the best. You can definitely tell when it’s clicking.”

Though every refugee is unique, Katie says they have one thing in common: They all want to learn. Recently, Katie worked with Say Mo, a Burmese refugee and single mother, to help her prepare for a job interview. “Helping refugees prepare for interviews can be challenging because you have to practice different phrasing of the questions,” Katie says. “For example, an interviewer might ask, ‘What was your last job?’ or ‘Where did you last work?’ For a native speaker, we know this is the same question. But for a refugee who is just beginning to learn English, these can seem like totally different questions.”

Katie helps refugees learn common vocabulary for interviews, practices responses, and helps build their confidence. A common question she helps refugees answer is, “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” Because many refugees do not use the words “strengths” and “weaknesses” in everyday conversation, Katie explains the meaning of these words and models appropriate responses.

She also helps refugees brainstorm what their strengths are. Many refugees come to the U.S. with experience working in a variety of industries from cleaning and child care to food service and construction. Some refugees were mechanics, shop owners, or even lawyers or doctors in their home countries.

In Say Mo’s case, the interview preparation and confidence-building paid off. After working with Katie, she secured a full-time job at a local manufacturer.

Since Katie started volunteering, she has seen other students succeed as well. Many of the students she’s worked with began in Level 1 English class at RefugeeOne and have since found employment or progressed to more advanced levels, including classes at nearby Truman College.

“Teaching English to refugees is a sort of journey,” Katie says. “You need to first figure out what their background knowledge is and how that can lead to understanding. I love to see my students every week. It’s amazing how much they progress.”

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**Curious about starting a refugee ministry? Want to renew one? Have advice to share? Join us!**

**WELCOMING REFUGEES:**

**A Workshop for Congregations**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2015**

**9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.**

**ST. LUKE’S LUTHERAN CHURCH, PARK RIDGE, IL**

Join RefugeeOne for our first annual congregational gathering. Hear a refugee’s story about coming to Chicago, attend workshops to learn how your congregation can help people fleeing war and persecution, and enjoy a global lunch prepared by refugee chefs. Leave inspired to engage your church, synagogue, or mosque in this important work. For more information and to register, visit www.refugeeone.org/WelcomingRefugees or contact Kim Snoddy at 773-423-9834.

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**HELP WITH OUR WINTER CLOTHING DRIVE**

Although it’s still summer in Chicago, winter is closer than some of us might like. Many refugees arrive during the colder months with no winter clothing. From now until November 1, we will collect clean and gently-used outerwear, coats, gloves, boots, scarves, and hats for all ages and genders.

Organize a collection with your neighbors, coworkers, school, congregation, or book group! Deliver items to RefugeeOne (4753 North Broadway, Suite 401, Chicago, IL 60640) Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. before November 1.
Dear friends,

It’s a joy finding old acquaintances when you least expect it. RefugeeOne is always seeking employers to hire hardworking refugees, so our friends from Luther Memorial Church connected us to Five Star Laundry, a 250-employee company in Chicago’s Goose Island neighborhood.

Imagine our surprise when a supervisor there said that she and her sister were Bosnian refugees resettled by RefugeeOne in 1999. Mediha and Meliha got their first jobs at Five Star Laundry and worked their way into management. Recently, these sisters celebrated their 15th anniversary with the company!

Employers make all the difference in the lives of our clients. They give refugees a chance to prove themselves, to provide for their families, and to reestablish their pride and dignity. If you know good employers in the Chicago area, encourage them to reach out to our Workforce Development team at 773-989-5647.

Thank you for connecting us with employers who give motivated refugees a chance to secure a better future for themselves and their families.

RefugeeOne makes sure each client is ready to work by teaching them English, coordinating interviews, interpreting at on-the-job training, outfitting refugees with uniforms, and providing ongoing support to employers.

In this newsletter, you’ll meet Charles, one of the newest refugee employees at Five Star Laundry. You’ll meet volunteer Katie Seeley, who helps clients practice English and job interview skills. And you’ll meet two clients ready for their first jobs in Chicago — maybe they’ll be your next great employees?

Let us introduce you to your next great employees!

RefugeeOne
4753 North Broadway
Suite 401
Chicago, Illinois 60640

Maryam
Originally From: Iran
Arrived in U.S.: June 17, 2015
Work History: Sales manager for export/import company, beautician, radiology technician
Education: College degree focused on residential engineering
Languages: Farsi, Turkish, some English
Looking For: Hospitality positions or anywhere willing to give her an opportunity to shine

Pascal
Originally From: The Democratic Republic of the Congo
Arrived in U.S.: May 7, 2015
Work History: Senior trainer with software company (Uganda), logistician with Doctors Without Borders (Uganda), coordinator with National Civilian Society (Congo)
Education: Bachelor’s degree in Project Planning and Management, plus 1 year software engineering
Languages: English, French, Swahili, Lingala, Nanday, Luganda
Looking For: Logistician positions, not-for-profit work, any place he can use his talents to assist others

For more information about these candidates, or dozens of others ready to work, contact Carmen Fleming at cfleming@refugeeone.org or 773-989-9827.