

Education Never Ends

Agency: Kilian Community College

Program: Bridges Program

Service: A series of four levels of non-credit classes designed to help immigrants and refugees prepare for further college study or employment that requires high level skills in reading and writing American English.

Need: It is estimated that over 100 different languages and dialects are spoken by refugees and immigrants new to the Sioux Empire. A recent local survey of refugees and immigrants found language is the one issue causing the most difficulty in their lives upon arriving in the Sioux Empire.

Impact: 48 students participated in 2008. Participants increase their abilities to read, speak, write and understand American English. This results in additional opportunities to further education and/or employment.

Solomon's teenage years were filled with turmoil and uncertainty in his home country. One constant, however, was his strong belief in education. So much so, that after completing his own formal education, he became an elementary school teacher.

About his arrival in Sioux Falls, Solomon explains, "Everything here was different, and the language barrier made it difficult to seek out employment or an education."

"I knew my old life was over and I would have to work hard, but I wanted to attend college." With that goal in mind, Solomon enrolled in an English as a Second Language class and found it to be too basic for his English skills. A quick referral to Bridges was the perfect fit for his educational goals.

The Bridges Program, provided through Kilian Community College, fills the gap for refugee and immigrants who are eager to receive a college education, but not prepared with the required reading and writing skills. "The program opens the door to the future for those whose language skills are not ready for college," states Solomon about the program.

That door is opening for 48 students currently participating in the program, thanks to support from Sioux Empire United Way.

The classes Solomon participated in through Bridges helped him with his grammar, writing, reading and other skills. He also credits the program with helping him to adjust to life in America in general. And after graduating from the program, Solomon was easily able to transition into pursuing his Associate Degree in Liberal Arts through Kilian Community College, which he will receive in the spring of 2010.

"It's a big honor to receive my degree," continues Solomon. "I'm achieving my goals and my hopes are very strong for the future." And Solomon's future does look bright. In addition to his college studies, Solomon works full-time as an interpreter, helping people who are in the same place he was only a few years ago.

Solomon hopes to eventually work overseas, helping people, perhaps even in his home country. And after wearing the cap and gown this spring, his immediate plan is to pursue a degree in social work, because "education never ends."

