



How WIOA Helps: Immigrant Success Stories

While skills and workforce development has not emerged as a main dispute in the turmoil over fiscal year 2018 appropriations, the final determination of spending levels for programs under the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA) will have a significant impact on our employers and the labor market.

WIOA is the primary funding source for initiatives that [assist](#) job seekers, including immigrants, with accessing employment, education, training and support services they need to meet employers' requirements and to succeed in the U.S. labor market. It is the most comprehensive and important skills and workforce development bill with bipartisan support in Congress. Two parts of WIOA serve immigrants in particular: Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth; and Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA).

As the final budget discussion deadline looms, the following success stories highlight the positive impacts of WIOA on the nation's economy and society. They feature a few of the many immigrants who have benefited from the programs WIOA funds.

Reducing Job Shortages

The U.S. is experiencing health personnel shortages as a result of its aging population, making people like Omari more essential than ever to the workforce.

Omari came to America in May 2015 from Ethiopia, where he worked as a nurse. In April 2016, he enrolled in the [Health Workforce for the Future](#) (HWF) program under [Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County](#), which helps to build the health care workforce in Seattle-King County. With the assistance of his HWF navigator, Omari enrolled in nursing assistant training, which he successfully completed exactly a year after his arrival to the U.S. A month later, he passed the Nursing Assistant, Certified (NAC) licensing exam, received his state license, and connected with an HWF business services representative to identify and apply for available jobs in the area.

In July 2016, Omari began working as a nursing assistant at a facility serving Alzheimer's and dementia patients, where he assists about 20 residents with daily living activities such as bathing, feeding, grooming and dressing, walking, reminding people to take their medication, and monitoring vitals. Omari continues to work closely with his HWF navigator and Welcome Back Center staff to prepare for the next step in his career — the National Nursing Credentialing Exam

(NCLEX). His navigator and the center's staff provide him with guidance and assistance necessary to navigate the complex process of articulating his training and experience in Ethiopia to the U.S. workforce. With counseling and financial support from HWF, Omari hopes to be a registered nurse licensed to work in Washington state by the beginning of 2018.

The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration [estimated](#) that by 2025, Washington state will face a shortage of about 7,000 nurses, one of the highest expected shortages in the U.S. Programs that allow individuals like Omari to become a nurse are important in ensuring that the U.S. has sufficient health care professionals in the future.

Dedicated Employee

WIOA programs can help immigrants who come to our country with the willingness to work hard and achieve the American dream. [Suleyman](#) is a former refugee from Eritrea who came to the U.S. in 2011. To escape the violence of his home country's long and complicated conflict with Ethiopia, Suleyman decided to take a risk, dropping out of school and leaving his country with hope for a better life abroad. For three days, he walked at night and slept during the day until he reached the border and surrendered to the Ethiopian military. He then lived in a United Nations refugee camp for years and finally made his way to the United States.

In 2014, three years after his arrival, Suleyman enrolled in English classes at the [Immigrant Learning Center](#) (ILC) in Malden, Massachusetts. A dedicated employee at Whole Foods, he was promoted from dishwasher to cook to deli customer service worker as his English improved. After taking an ILC citizenship class, Suleyman became a U.S. citizen on Oct. 13, 2016.

Giving Back

[Curlea](#) was born and raised in the island country of St. Lucia, where she was educated and gained her first work experience. Immediately after moving to the United States, she started to look for a job, but she soon realized how difficult it would be given that her references and employment history were in a different country. Curlea sought help at the [Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians](#), which receives WIOA funds. The center's [employment services](#) program staff assisted Curlea with her job search skills, helping her better understand work environments in America and providing her with tips on interviewing and résumé writing.

With the program's help, Curlea landed a job at a women's clothing store. She was later able to secure a job in a nursing home, which allowed her to save money and eventually enroll in a full-time bachelor's degree program at Temple University.

With her passion for helping people, Curlea started to volunteer with the Welcoming Center, helping other immigrants during mock interviews and résumé writing workshops. Curlea is scheduled to graduate with a bachelor's degree in human resources in 2018.

Need for Increased WIOA Funding

The above examples illustrate just a small fraction of the benefits that WIOA-funded programs bring to communities across the U.S. As Congress finalizes next year's budget, it should recognize these benefits and, at minimum, provide the same level of funding for WIOA in 2018. However, with [broadening](#) skills gaps and increasing job shortages, we need a considerable boost in WIOA funding. Congress should increase WIOA funding — if not this year, then in future years, to help secure the growth of our economy.