

Program Spotlight: Sewing Success!

Last fall, in partnership with several other Greensboro community based organizations, Reading Connections began a new grant-funded initiative to train and secure employment for locally-

resettled refugees and immigrants in the regional sewing industry. This two-part program provides ESOL literacy instruction alongside sewing machine operator training in short but intensive 6 week instructional cycles. Participants are referred from partnership agencies like Montagnard Dega Association, Church World Service, African Services Coalition, New Arrivals Institute, and The Center for New North Carolinians.



The students start their day at 8 am at Industries of the Blind where they receive sewing machine instruction from Liana Adrong, an Administrative Coordinator and Vocational Instructor at Montagnard Dega Association. At 11 am they break for lunch before walking down the street to the Eagle's Nest at Grace Community Church where Erik Hill, Reading Connections' Integrated Education and Training Coordinator, furnishes ESOL literacy instruction highly-contextualized to the industrial sewing workplace. In addition to comprehensive industrial sewing vocabulary,



this unique ESOL curriculum focuses on preparedness and effective communication in the sewing workplace, the navigation of forms, time management, and the resolution of conflicts. Successful participants attend classes four days a week in two different instructional settings and accrue roughly 140 hours of class time in the process. This has proven to be enough time for many unskilled but highly-motivated students to acquire all of the skills that they needed to secure long-term employment at local manufacturers like Industries of the Blind (GSO), CULP (High Point), HBD (Greensboro), and Insect Shield (Greensboro). These manufacturers have diverse



labor forces, and they treat their employees with the kind of respect that those of us who work closely with refugees and immigrants would hope for. Thus far, program participants have included women and men from countries such as Sudan, Myanmar, Iraq, Syria, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, and Brazil. Reading Connections is proud to be a key player in this endeavor, which was established to help new-arrivals acquire the vocational- and work-related skills they need to gain long-lasting employment in a strong and resilient industry like textiles & sewing.