

**Promising Practices:**  
**The Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College (PSWBC)**  
Highline College

The Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College (PSWBC) in Highline College is a program that aids educated professionals recertify to work in the United States. Individuals educated internationally receive help on the pathway to return to their chosen career in Washington State. PSWBC started in 2008, initially serving healthcare professionals, but in 2014 expanded its services to assist professionals in other fields.

**Name of Community College:** Highline College  
(<https://www.highline.edu>)

**Title of Program:** The Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College (PSWBC)  
(<https://welcomeback.highline.edu/>)

**Type of Program:** Career Pathways

**Primary Department(s) involved:** English Language Career and Academic Preparation Department and Continuing Education Department

**Key Partners:** Other community colleges in the region, Refugee Resettlement Agencies, Immigrant and Refugee Serving CBOs, Licensing Entities

**1. Need for Program:**

When internationally educated professionals come to this country they are often told their degrees and experience are not transferrable in the U.S. That is not true. There are pathways to licensure that these professionals can follow to return to their chosen fields. This program gives these individuals more earning power and gets them back into the professional fields they love. It also keeps them from spending time and money "starting over". Additionally, it increases language and cultural diversity for professions in Washington State.

**2. Brief Description of Program:**

The Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College (PSWBC) helps internationally educated professionals recertify to work in the United States. It is one of ten Welcome Back Centers that make up the national Welcome Back Initiative (<https://www.wbcenters.org/>), which helps internationally trained healthcare professionals enter related careers.

PSWBC started in 2008, initially serving healthcare professionals, but in 2014 expanded its services to assist professionals in other fields as well. Professional Educational Case Managers meet one-on-one with internationally educated professionals to help them map out the pathway to return to their chosen career in Washington State. This often includes getting their transcripts evaluated by a professional entity. They may have to take a specific course if they are lacking certain credentials. It might involve taking a professional exam and the professional is given resources to prepare for the exam. They may be directed to sources

that can help with funding or job search while they are navigating the process.

### **3. Specific Population Served:**

Internationally educated, work authorized professionals who have a BA or higher.

### **4. Goals and Objectives:**

Goal: Increase the number of internationally educated professionals in Washington State who become licensed/certified to work in their chosen fields

Objectives:

- Relicensing/recertification processes for various professionals are clearly defined step-by-step;
- Internationally educated professionals are given one-on-one advising by professional educational case managers;
- Additional coursework when needed is available and test preparation materials for various professionals are available;
  - Costs for the various steps in relicensing process are clear and accurate and options for outside funding sources are given when available;
  - Affinity groups of like professions come together for support and encouragement.

Goal: The various licensing entities change rules and regulations that deny or discourage internationally educated professionals from obtaining license and certificates.

Objectives:

- WBC staff and participants provide feedback to various licensing entities about the experiences of internationally educated professionals during the relicensing process
- WBC staff and participants meet regularly with decision makers to keep lines of communication open.

### **5. Outcomes:**

Since its opening in 2008, PSWBC has served more than 1,200 healthcare professionals, including 726 internationally educated nurses (IENs). In 2014, when the center began assisting professionals in other fields, 230 in STEM and business fields, and 140 from a variety of other occupations, including 52 teachers, were provided services. In total, nearly 1,600 internationally trained professionals have been helped at the center.

A major outcome was around (IENs), which is one of the college's largest group of professionals. To be licensed as a RN in the U.S., all nurses must take the National Council Licensure Examination nursing exam (the NCLEX). The test is a very unusual, computer-generated, high stakes test. Domestic nursing programs in the US are judged by their first-time pass rates. IENs have their own pass rate. Nationally, it is in the low 30%, which is very low. When talking with the nursing licensing entity, a staff member there said it was because IENs were not as well prepared as domestic nurses. WBC staff knew that was not true. IENs had not had the opportunity to prepare specifically for this high stakes, unusual test. So, six years ago, the WBC started a six-month test prep program. The first time pass rates after completing the program is over 70%. The college is proud of that number. They want to improve it, but see the importance of working the real problem. They now have a test prep

program for the various engineering tests and are working on test prep programs for behavioral health and teaching.

## **6. Collaboration:**

Continuing Education Department at the college: created specific classes needed and offered at a reduced rate.

Other colleges in the region: referral source of professionals on their campuses and have offered specific courses needed.

Refugee and Immigrant serving Community-Based Organizations: referral sources and can provide job search and other support resources.

State Licensing Entities: clear guidelines for licensing legislature.

Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance and private foundations: funding for out-of-pocket expenses.

## **7. Success Factors:**

1. Make career plans step-by-step, including time frames and costs for various parts.
2. Tell the stories of internationally educated professionals all the time, or, better yet, create spaces for them to tell their stories.
3. Work the specific problem. If a professional needs to take a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), get them into a TOEFL preparation class, not English 101.
4. Work closely with licensing entities to see barriers in licensing processes. Often these barriers are not seen by these decision makers and can be changed.
5. Find champions

## **8. Challenges:**

One of the biggest challenges is keeping these professionals encouraged through this PROCESS and talking about it as a process. We talk about jobs in the U.S. as a series of boxes: the small box is their first survival job in the US. It is not what they want and not what we want for them but it pays the bills and gives them a local work history. The medium-sized box is, hopefully, a job more in their field: dentists can be dental assistants, engineers can be drafters, teachers can be para -educators, etc. This is in their field and can keep them going while they are getting relicensed into their fields. The big box is getting back fully into their chosen profession. Talking about it as a process keeps them encouraged.

COVID-19 has left many of our professionals OUT of their small and medium box jobs. This is very discouraging. We have tried to make resources available to them so they can continue preparing so they are in a different place when the economy turns around.

## **9. Funding and Sustainability:**

The PSWBC gets several forms of funding:  
State Legislature  
Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance

College General Funds  
Private Foundation

More information on the PSWBC program is included in [Working Toward An Equitable and Prosperous Future For All: How Community Colleges and Immigrants Are Changing America](#) (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). Also available on [Amazon](#).

**10. Contact Information:**

**Name:** Linda Faaren

**Title:** Director

**Organization:** Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College

**Email Address:** lfaaren@highline.edu

**Phone Number:** (206) 592-3670