



# Refugee Services & Time Banking



An Exploration of the Partnership between  
Catholic Charities Maine Refugee & Immigration Services,  
Hour Exchange Portland and the Lewiston/Auburn Time Bank

By Sarah Davis, Refugee Services Liaison  
For the Time Bank Immersion Training, September 2010

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## Brief History of Partnership

Judith Southworth initiated the partnership between Hour Exchange Portland (HEP) and Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services (CCM RIS) in 2005. As the Elder Services Coordinator at CCM RIS and an active Hour Exchange member, she recognized the time bank's unique potential to help with the process of refugee integration<sup>1</sup>. After pursuing and receiving initial grant funding in 2006, Judith hired a part-time staff person to serve as Liaison between CCM RIS and the Hour Exchange in Portland. In 2008 she received additional funding to hire a second part-time Liaison for the Lewiston/Auburn (L/A) Time Bank. Since then, these organizations have collaborated in welcoming refugees as time bank members and facilitating service exchanges between refugee and native-born members.

## Current Initiatives in Portland or Lewiston

- **Directed outreach** to refugee members and additional support as they apply, join, receive training, and engage in exchanges through the time bank. In Lewiston we are creating **resource centers** in accessible, downtown locations for refugee members to receive culturally competent technological support.
- Developing partnerships between the time bank and **ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs)** to expand the time bank's reach in the refugee community and encourage refugee leadership in the time bank.
- Supporting partnerships with other **community-based organizations (CBOs)** such as neighborhood networks and student groups who have an active interest in refugee involvement through the time bank.
- Encouraging **reciprocal service exchange** in which refugee members not only receive but give services to other members. For example, an ECBO in Portland called ASERELA has begun offering **cultural competency workshops** to members.
- Facilitating weekly **English Conversation Circles** in Portland as a chance for refugee members and native-born members to gather for casual conversation and English practice.

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<sup>1</sup>A *refugee* is a person who has fled their country based on a well-founded fear of persecution. *Refugee integration* refers to the process through which refugees become full and active members of their new communities.

## Research Findings

During the 2009-2010 academic year, Sarah Davis conducted thesis research to explore the role of the L/A Time Bank in facilitating refugee integration. She found evidence that time bank exchanges facilitate refugee integration in several ways, not just for the practical, service-based benefits but for the social benefits as well.

- **Skill development.** Through the time bank, refugee members receive services that are challenging to receive through traditional providers and gain an outlet for their diverse skills and service offerings that may not be desired in the traditional cash economy.  
*“She has so many qualities. She doesn’t go much outside and talk to the neighbors or anything like that, because she...she feels like people are going to tell her... ‘You don’t know how to do all of that stuff.’ And now...it was like what she has been waiting for.” -- Interpreter for refugee member*
- **Positive social interaction** between refugee and native-born time bank members. Several members noted that before their time bank involvement they had never actually known someone from a different culture. Through regular interaction, members build trust and appreciation for each other.  
*“In a normal individual to individual [exchange], I don’t think trust takes very long. It takes two or three visits.” -- Refugee member*
- **Cross-cultural learning.** Through time bank exchanges, members learn about each other’s cultural customs in a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. First-hand experience allows members to address stereotypes and negative perceptions and gain respect for each other’s differences.  
*“It’s exciting. It shows how much somebody cares [about] your own culture and language.” -- Refugee member*
- **Relationship building.** When time bank members exchange services on a regular basis, they come to know each other as true friends and valuable community members. Time bank exchanges may start with a service goal in mind, but they often result in genuine friendships.  
*“I think that it helps at least make me feel more connected to the community and I hope that it makes [refugee members] feel more comfortable living here, knowing that there are people here who want to help and are friendly.” -- Native-born member*

### For more information:

Sarah Davis, Refugee Services/Time Bank Liaison  
sdavis@ccmaine.org, 207-523-2745

Judith Southworth, Elder Services Coordinator  
jsouthworth@ccmaine.org, 523-2793