

# Case Study:

## How Rhode Island Is Making the Most of Skilled Immigrants

*Long before “immigrant integration” was a common phrase, a small New England nonprofit bolstered economic vitality in its state by productively incorporating skilled workers.*

*Based in the nonprofit adult education center Dorcas Place, the Rhode Island Welcome Back Center serves **90 internationally trained health professionals** each year.*

### RHODE ISLAND’S WELCOME BACK CENTER: Achieving a Nonprofit Mission through Businesslike Goals

#### Advocacy Accomplishments:

- **Convened key stakeholders** to identify innovative ways to meet the needs of local immigrant professionals
- **Conducted barrier analysis** to understand licensing and regulatory issues
- Director of WBC was appointed as community representative on Board of Nursing
- Presented position paper on barriers to licensure to Board of Nursing; **board voted in favor of clarifying the process** for international applicants

#### Direct Service Accomplishments:

- **Contextualized English classes** prepare participants for the US healthcare workplace
- **In-depth educational case management** provides job, licensure, and educational pathways tailored to the individual

#### By the Numbers since program inception in 2008

- Average 318% salary increase after completing the program
- 103 participants have re-entered the health care field
- 72 professionals have improved their English proficiency
- 19 professionals have passed licensing exams

#### WHAT RHODE ISLAND LEADERS ARE SAYING:

**“This fits with our broader strategic plan** of using workforce development to grow the economy.”

— *Nancy Olson, Rhode Island Governor’s Workforce Board*

**“Helping highly qualified nurses, dentists, and others enter practice is a boon to both consumers and employers.”**

— *Ruth Ricciarelli, Rhode Island Center for Health Professions and the Hospital Association of Rhode Island*

**“Providing direct services to internationally-trained professionals is essential to both**



**our workforce and the community as a whole. But this doesn’t change the fact that the most lasting impact** to the greatest number flows from identifying and adopting key changes to legislative and regulatory processes.”

— *Dr. Manuela Raposo, Director of RI Welcome Back Center*

**For more information, contact Dr. Manuela Raposo  
Rhode Island Welcome Back Center at Dorcas Place, 401-273-8866 [www.dorcasplace.org](http://www.dorcasplace.org)**

## FOUNDING & GROWING Rhode Island's Welcome Back Center

- **2006:** The Rhode Island Latino Professional Association convenes skilled immigrants and local healthcare and government leaders, who identify state labor needs in healthcare, and a potential labor supply — skilled immigrants
- **2007:** State Department of Education funds Dorcas Place to become host organization for the Welcome Back ([welcomebackinitiative.org](http://welcomebackinitiative.org)) program model, which provides advising and credentialing of internationally-trained healthcare professionals
- **2008:** Establishment of the Rhode Island Welcome Back Advisory Council [see *Faces of Leadership*], with subcommittees on Participant Services, Fund Development, and Public Policy & Advocacy
- **2008-Present:** Relationship cultivation and Council development; joined state Nursing Board and state health care exchange working group. Delivery of strong program outcomes [see *By the Numbers*]
- **2011:** The national Welcome Back Initiative wins the E Pluribus Unum prize for immigrant integration
- **2012:** Approval of new language in Rhode Island nursing regulations, giving Board more control over choice of credentialing organizations and testing methods used in the state [see *Advocacy Spotlight*].

### ADVOCACY AT WORK: An Example from Nursing

1. Gather info about barriers to career integration



2. Get key stakeholders to the table:  
-e.g. RI State Nurses Association (RISNA)



3. Define and implement a strategy:

- Join Board of Nursing
- Write white paper on desired reform
- RISNA presents proposal to Board
- Conduct education campaign (e.g. unions, nursing faculty)



4. Achieve regulatory change. *Result: More skilled nurses become licensed.*



### FACES OF LEADERSHIP: THE WBC's ADVISORY COUNCIL

More than 40 leaders advise the Welcome Back Center in Rhode Island, including:

- Governor's workforce board
- Community college, university and nursing schools
- State hospital association
- Healthcare providers—hospitals, clinics, home care
- State department of health
- Professional associations
- Workforce development entities
- Community-based organizations
- United Way



### IMPRINT: AN EXPERT NATIONAL WORKFORCE RESOURCE

IMPRINT is a national network of nonprofit groups specializing in the integration of skilled immigrants.

The IMPRINT publication *Time to Grow* has 20 recommendations for states and localities to better integrate the skilled immigrants among them. Contact IMPRINT Director Jennifer Brennan at 847-796-0076 or [jennifer@imprintproject.org](mailto:jennifer@imprintproject.org) or visit us at [www.imprintproject.org](http://www.imprintproject.org) to learn more.