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MAGAZINE

Keepers of the Seal
Presidential Appointments
Office Plays Unique Role

Environment Advocates
Eco-diplomacy Focus of
OBO Green Embassy Guide



Dance Outreach

Cultural program
uses dance to unite
Honduran youths



JOB CREATION

Employment advisors promote entrepreneurship

By Rachel Fredman, Presidential Management Fellow, formerly at the U.S. Embassy in Manama, Bahrain

The Department's Global Employment Initiative (GEI) doesn't just help family members find overseas employment; it also helps them create income streams through entrepreneurship.

GEI, a Family Liaison Office (FLO) program, has 17 regional Global Employment Advisors (GEAs) serving posts worldwide. They help family members of U.S. foreign affairs direct-hire employees explore employment and career options, provide onsite and online job coaching sessions, and provide training and career development services. GEAs also help family members strengthen job networking skills as they move from post to post; a February GEI webinar focused on networking. In 2013, GEAs had approximately 3,000 client meetings and provided training and information workshops to almost 1,000 family members.

Shawn Akard, the GEA based in Jordan, used the November 2013 Global Entrepreneurship Week organized by the U.S. Embassy in Manama both to expand family member employment opportunities in Bahrain and promote family members starting and running businesses there.

The embassy invited Akard to participate in the entrepreneurship events in Manama where she connected with Bahrain's growing business community to aid her outreach work. Akard lauded Management Officer Danny Stoian for seeing "the opportunity to expand potential family member employment opportunities."

Global Entrepreneurship Week began with a reception at the residence of Ambassador Thomas C. Krajewski attended by leading Bahraini employers. Akard met with the director of a consulting firm who in turn connected her with the director of the Bahrain Women's Business Association and the human capital manager of a major recruiting firm in Bahrain. Networking is crucial to helping family members find employment, especially in nations like Bahrain, which has a bilateral work agreement with the United States but where the business culture emphasizes face-to-face relationships. (FLO facilitates and monitors bilateral agreements and helps create awareness of host countries' work permit regulations.)

The GEI program gives family members information about employment prospects and local job search processes. Often, GEAs develop relationships with local American Chamber of Commerce representatives so that family members become comfortable using the organization as a networking resource.

Because many family members work in local schools while overseas, GEAs also make connections with the schools to ensure posts are aware

of local hiring mechanisms. While in Bahrain, Akard, with help from the Community Liaison Office, visited three schools and the American Chamber of Commerce. She will work with the post to compile the information from the meetings into a Post Employment Guide and Eligible Family Member (EFM) Questionnaire for incoming families.

But Akard, like many GEAs, emphasizes entrepreneurship. She attended a workshop on the topic given by Brown University Professor Danny Warshay, and learned "to think differently about starting a business." She tailored information from the workshop to fit her Portable Careers workshop for family members, who often struggle to find employment opportunities in host country economies. By using such strategies as telecommuting, creating home-based businesses and taking on consulting work, family members can build entrepreneurial careers overseas, she said.

Joy Fisher, a family member who attended Akard's Portable Careers workshop, said, "Shawn gave us specific examples of spouses who had developed successful consulting businesses, and helped me realize that the sky is really the limit in terms of employment. This really helped me picture myself working outside an EFM role and consider other possibilities." As with all GEA site visits, Akard conducted one-on-one sessions for clients in Manama and addressed questions about resumes, continuing education, career direction and working for the federal government upon return to the United States.

Akard's Manama visit demonstrates the synergy between embassy outreach events and GEAs' work to increase employment for family members. "The connections made through each Global Employment Advisor around the world are invaluable to meeting FLO's mission to improve the quality of life of direct-hire employees and their family members," FLO Director Susan Frost said. "We hope family members continue to take advantage of the many services FLO offers, and extend our appreciation to Embassy Manama for its support of family member employment at post."

Discover more about FLO online at state.gov/m/dghr/flo. GEI can be emailed at gei@state.gov. ■

Top Left: Local employer Nabeel A. Rahman Ajoor, director of A. Rahman & E. M. Ajoor & Co., meets with GEA Shawn Akard and Embassy Manama co-CLOs Karla Wilson and Nahreen Ure. *Photo by Rachel Fredman;* **Top Right:** Embassy Manama's Eligible Family Members gather at GEA Akard's workshop on portable careers. *Photo by Shawn Akard*