

DANCING TO A NEW TUNE

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



MEMBER PROFILES

This is an example of a community in the process of living out the practice of immigrant inclusion in partnership with Welcoming America. Each effort – from small scale events to large scale policy changes – makes a community more welcoming, as evidenced by the change detailed in this story.

Nashville is a city that made a decision to embrace New Americans and invest in their community as a vibrant, international hub. The results are music to many people's ears.

In December of 2014 Nashville was recognized as a beacon of hope for the nation by the President. Nashville has not only embraced its rapidly growing immigrant population, it has also thrived as a result of its transformation.



**BELIEVE THAT
PRODUCTIVITY IS
POSITIVELY
IMPACTED BY THE
ROLE OF IMMIGRANTS
IN THE NASHVILLE
ECONOMY**

force in this transformation was Welcoming Tennessee, a project of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) and the inspiration for all subsequent welcoming initiatives and Welcoming America. Welcoming Tennessee recognized that the demographics of Tennessee, like much of America, were changing quickly and that long-time residents needed to meet and understand their new immigrant neighbors. They undertook an initiative that mobilized local leaders, promoted a positive message about newcomers, and brought communities together to build relationships – three techniques that have since become the hallmarks of the receiving communities approach.

In 2009, after this groundwork was laid, Nashville faced an extraordinary test when a referendum was brought to local residents that could have made it the largest city in the country to pass an English-only law. Due to the continued work of a diverse coalition of actors that included Welcoming Tennessee, the referendum was soundly defeated. Set on a new course, Nashville was able to position itself as a global city, attract and retain international investment and talent, and create a flourishing cultural scene that celebrates

Between 2006 and 2009, Nashville's climate for immigrants was transformed from a particularly toxic one to one that embraces immigrants, and the city and its residents have reaped the economic benefits. This transformation was due to the work of numerous actors from the business, immigrant, and religious communities, among others. A leading

both the old and the new. Thanks in large part to its global positioning, Nashville led the country in job growth in 2012 and attracted significant corporate investment and entrepreneurial start-ups.

While many factors have contributed to Nashville's growing economic strength, civic and business leaders have made it clear that Nashville's ascendancy could not have been possible without a deliberate shift toward a more welcoming climate. Data from a survey of business leaders conducted by the Nashville Chamber of Commerce and commissioned by Welcoming America affirms that the business community today values the role of immigrants as a source of prosperity for the city. According to survey results, over 70% of respondents believe that productivity is positively impacted by the role of immigrants in the Nashville economy, and a majority of respondents felt that most industries were "very positively" impacted by the role of immigrants in the Nashville area.

Today, the city has seen a proliferation of immigrant integration efforts across the community, such as a partnership with USCIS to share citizenship information in a free setting and a Parent Ambassadors program, which pairs New Americans navigating the school system with long-time residents who speak the same language and come from a similar background. Local government programs like MyCity Academy, a model now being replicated nationwide, empowers New Americans to understand and participate in Nashville's government. "When immigrants pick your city, that is a great honor," says Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, who opened an Office of New Americans to continue the city's efforts to integrate newcomers during 2014 National Welcoming Week.