

## From Talk to Action on Adult Learning as a Pathway to Change

By **Kerri Provost**, May 16, 2012 6:49 am

Pushpins pierced over twenty countries on a world map, showing the diverse origins of those participating in or just stopping by to learn about the community dialogues on adult education. Among those represented: Nepal, Russia, Germany, Sudan, and Colombia. A range of experience was represented, from those who were born in the United States, to those making the move as children, to those uprooted as refugees. In Hartford, this kind of diversity is not out of the ordinary.

The grant funding these forums intends **"to give immigrants a specific sense of belonging in America, and experience as active community participants and future civic-minded individuals."** This project — "Creating a Vibrant Hartford: Adult Learning as a Pathway to Change" — allowed participants, immigrants and native-born alike, to participate in a democratic process. One participant described how her group's facilitator helped empower her to take a more active role in the discussions. Another said she had the opportunity to implement one of her group's action ideas by referring someone she knows to "culturally appropriate addiction, trauma, and domestic violence services" in that person's native language.

Celebrating the end to one phase of the dialogue groups, facilitators and participants presented their action ideas on Tuesday evening at the library; these ideas were divided into four themes, which community members will have the opportunity to work on further.

To improve on the adult learning experience in Hartford, barriers to access, accreditation and licensing, coordination of services, and support for networks would need to be addressed.

Though many of these ideas, like providing more affordable learning opportunities and improving transportation, seemed obvious, others, like working on a way for accreditation/education from other countries to be recognized here might be less so. Ensuring that the type of training offered matches jobs and skills sought by employers is an action idea certain to resonate with many who have lost their jobs and were pushed into programs that gave them nothing beyond certificates of completion.

As for coordination of services, participants thought that having a network of service providers and a comprehensive directory of services would make adult education easier to navigate. The Connecticut State Department of Education, for example, has adult education information on its website, but it is far from comprehensive. In its directory, Hartford Adult Education on Washington Street is the only adult education provider listed for the city; the website listed for this one site is incorrect. A virtual dead-end can be discouraging. A participant who is a refugee said the one thing really needed by immigrants like himself was encouragement and support, as the process of beginning a new life is extremely stressful.

Ajit Gopalakrishnan of the CT Department of Education echoed this, saying "our students have potential" but they are always being told that they "lack" something. He said, "sometimes it's good to have energy and pressure from groups like yourself," to push the government to take action more quickly.

The next step is for community members to join action groups and develop strategies. Anyone interested in knowing more can contact [imls@hplct.org](mailto:imls@hplct.org) or 860.695.6294.