

SPARROW: Store offers retraining, life skills

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If you're a refugee in the Salem-Keizer area, Luke Glaze might have an answer: Sparrow Furniture, the new social business he manages on Broadway Street.

"We hire refugees who are being resettled in Salem and give them the opportunity to work in an environment that's much more conducive to settling in a new place," Glaze said. "So we provide language training and some cultural acquisition, so they can get on their feet while they're providing for their family."

Sparrow Furniture is dedicated to hiring and training refugees in woodworking and customer service skills. Glaze, who also manages Broadway Coffeehouse in Salem, took on the Sparrow Furniture initiative two years ago because he believes people who come to the U.S. as refugees deserve a second chance at success.

Sparrow Furniture's soft opening took place on Friday, July 20, with a grand opening planned for September. The woodworking workshop has been operational for six months, and over the course of that time the business has hired five refugees from five countries: Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Pakistan, and Syria.

The furniture they work on is often donated, and much of the work is refinishing, but the employees also work on original designs as well. Now that the showroom is operational, employees are also getting experience in customer service as showroom managers, interacting with customers and making sales.

In addition to work skills, Sparrow employees receive English lessons from Mid-Valley Literacy Center, driving lessons in the delivery van, and will soon begin job development classes in resume building and

interview skills with ResCare. Sparrow Furniture pays its employees for their time in these classes, so they can build the necessary skills to move on to other employment opportunities 12 to 24 months after starting at Sparrow.

The Sparrow Furniture model is designed to be temporary, but in a way that facilitates future success at the end of that one- to two-year period.

Glaze's approach to Sparrow Furniture is influenced by his time managing a different social business in Jordan. "I think the biggest part was the model we tried to do in Jordan was also to have people come through and use it as a launching pad, and what happened is we created a great place to work, so a lot of people didn't want to leave. This was finding ways to incentivize that process and make it known from day one that that's our goal," Glaze said. "We're not looking for just a clean break, but maybe they're moving into an internship to start, so they could still be working here while they're getting familiar with another company and then transition. We've kept our wages at a specific place because we want them to know there's more out there." For more information about how Glaze's past work in the Middle East has influenced his current work with Sparrow, see sidebar.

Blandine has worked at Sparrow Furniture for one month. She's a refugee from Ivory Coast, a country wracked by land disputes and a brief civil war back in 2011. She left her country five years ago and stayed in Togo, also in West



KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald
Inside the Sparrow workshop where furniture is refurbished and original artwork is assembled.

Africa, before being resettled in the United States.

In West Africa, she was a businesswoman and entrepreneur.

"I did things like clothing, jewelry, things like that," she said. "I love business and I just want to be a businesswoman here in the United States."

She gestures toward a wall full of woodworking projects, painted in bright colors.

"I can make this. I never did this in my life. I've just been here for a month and I can make this, and I love it," she said. She added: "I feel like I'm just happy, because they are so ready to help us to learn more."

Glaze speaks highly of Blandine, her creativity and ambition. But as far as Sparrow Furniture's employees go, Blandine is unique. Other Sparrow employees have other challenges and barriers to employment aside from their refugee status.

"We didn't start with the easiest refugee candidates. When we were first doing our initial round of hiring, we looked and we were like, 'Guys, if we choose who we want to choose, we think this is going to be really hard,'" he said. For example: "One of our employees is deaf, we have another employee who experienced homelessness for a number of years after he resettled here in the U.S."

But the adaptivity of the Sparrow model means the business can help people for whom the deck is stacked in the wrong direction.

"This is a business that can help Blandine who speaks pretty good English already, is an entrepreneur, will find a way to make an income here in this country, but it also helps someone when there's probably no other place for them other than Sparrow," Glaze said.

To get involved, visit sparrowfurniture.org.



KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald
Luke Glaze (right), manager of Sparrow Furniture discusses a potential sale with a customer. Glaze grew up in Keizer and graduated from McNary High School.

McNary alum leads Salem social business

By CASEY CHAFFIN
Keizertimes intern

Luke Glaze, a 2003 McNary High School graduate, spent several years managing a social business centered around recycling in Jordan. His time there has informed his approaches to working with the refugee community at Sparrow Furniture, sometimes in ways he didn't expect.

For example, language barriers are difficult in working with people who come from somewhere else. One might think the conversational Arabic Glaze picked up in the Middle East would come in handy—but it ended up being a bit more complicated than that.

"Unfortunately, one of our employees that comes from a region that has the same Arabic that I speak is deaf," Luke said. "I'll speak to him in Arabic often and he'll read my lips, so that's helpful in communica-

tion." That employee is in the process of learning how to read and write in English, as well as learning American Sign Language.

But Glaze's interest in cross-cultural exchange goes beyond even his years spent in Jordan.

"Most of my life I was always drawn to the differences

in culture. That was always exciting to meet someone who had a different background. In high school, I knew I wanted to work overseas, so that's when I started traveling a lot,

in summers I spent a lot of time in Mexico, the Dominican Republic," he said. After his experiences in high school, he studied cultural anthropology in college.

But he didn't always have to travel to find cross-cultural experiences.

"I always like to say, especially in Salem and Keizer, diversity is everywhere, you just

have to look for it. Even at McNary, you could go through the halls and miss it, but if you paid attention you could easily make connections." He cites the area's Russian population, as well as its growing Hispanic and Pacific Islander communities as examples of hidden diversity.

"They're there, but often we stay somewhat segregated in our community, and that's one thing that's important to me is desegregating that," he said.

And now, that's a key goal in welcoming refugees to Salem: not just allowing them to live in the community, but integrating them into the fabric of the community.

"It doesn't matter what their political beliefs are, if you really think about it you can have a political view of immigration or refugee resettlement that wants to limit it, but once they're here in our community, you'd be foolish to not want to accept them and love them and make them part of the community, because it would just ostracize them if you don't," Glaze said.

"Often we stay somewhat segregated."

— Luke Glaze

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