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Chinese delegation shares concepts with career center

Jewish Family and Children Services 1 of 6 city locations visited by group

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By Tina Calabro



Pam Panchak/Post-Gazette

Huang Linnan of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations looks over information at the Jewish Family and Children's Services Career Development Center during a visit Friday.

One day last month, Jewish Family and Children Services got an unexpected call from the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, based in Washington, D.C.

The caller said he was impressed by what he had read online about the JF&CS Career Development Center and asked: Could he send a delegation composed primarily of career counselors from Chinese universities to the Squirrel Hill center to find out more?

When the 12-member Chinese delegation arrived Friday with an escort and translator, nearly 20 JF&CS administrators, staff and volunteers enthusiastically hosted a two-hour meeting and reception.

In opening remarks, JF&CS Executive Director Aryeh Sherman expressed thanks for the opportunity to share information with the Chinese professionals and to learn from them as well.

"To help people find jobs is our common goal," added Linda Ehrenreich, associate director of JF&CS, a 70-year-old nonprofit, nonsectarian organization that provides social services.

JF&CS's Career Development Center provides help to those who are seeking work or changing careers. In addition to working with people across all age groups and educational levels, the center offers specialized services to people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees.

The National Committee on U.S.-China Relations is a nonprofit group that sponsors an exchange program on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education and the Chinese Ministry of Education.

The visit to JF&CS was one of six locations the Chinese delegation visited in Pittsburgh, and one of only two social service agencies the group visited in the United States during its 14-day visit.

The other Pittsburgh sites the delegation visited were Carnegie Mellon's Career Center and Society of Women Engineers; the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board; the University of Pittsburgh engineering school; and Alcoa.

Salt Lake City, San Francisco and Washington were the other cities on the delegation's trip.

Staff members from the JF&CS center explained the various components of their work, which has grown considerably since the center's founding in 1984 to help workers who had been displaced by the collapse of the steel industry.

Thanks to the help of Yue Tang, a volunteer with the Welcome Center for Immigrants and Internationals, name tags and several presentation materials had Mandarin Chinese translations.

Ms. Tang also provided staff with cultural sensitivity training on such topics as how to present and receive business cards (with two hands) and the custom of seating the visitors so they face the door of the room.

One of the lighter portions of the visit was provided by Jordann Friedman, a young member of the center staff, who explained how social networking is used in a job search and warned that students must be told to avoid posting items that may come back to haunt them when prospective employers see them online.

Members of the delegation said 50 to 70 percent of university graduates obtain jobs or go on for further study in China or in other countries. As in the United States, college is not free in China. Many students borrow money for tuition.

Chen Yongli, career center director from Peking University, said he would take back information about how the nonprofit agency works in conjunction with the government to achieve its goals.

The cross-cultural exchange was a unexpected pleasure for the Career Development Center as it celebrates its 25th anniversary, said Julie Marx, the center's new director.

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