

## Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota

*Our mission is to help Somalis in Minnesota thrive while keeping their culture.*

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What most people know about Somalis is pretty limited. Our community began arriving in Minnesota in the early 1990s, after Somalia's civil war displaced millions of Somalis. The Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota was founded in 1994. We are the oldest Somali-run nonprofit that pulls together our community in order to provide support for resettlement and provide services to help Somalis understand and navigate life in Minnesota.

*Our core work is to help families thrive in terms of social and economic stability and success.*

Job training and placement is a key part of that success, but it's just one part of what's necessary. As you get older, employers expect you to have experience. Many young people don't have financial resources to get into career programs and jobs. We've expanded to support young people, ages 14-24 years old, in getting experience that can put them on track for future success. Our goal is to get kids into jobs that support them as they move into higher education and technology programs. It's hard for parents to help youth get education or employment experience when they are struggling with these same issues. Our services are focused on a broader nuclear family; we work with parents and grandparents to provide more supplemental programs to the family as a whole.

*We are caught in social and cultural currents, especially our youth, as we continue to balance new and old customs.*

There is a strong generational divide between youth and the older generation of parents and grandparents, and between men and women. For instance, there is still a strong pressure for young men to get jobs and work.

More men are coming through our job placement program while we see more women in our educational program partners. Honestly, we're not sure if that is cultural or internal bias in reflecting what is relevant to whom. We do want to create programming that is open to young women, open to youth. There are many opportunities for us to grow, and for our communities to grow.

*The needs are so deep that we struggle to keep up with our current number of individuals and families,* so we don't need to do a whole lot of outreach. At the same time, we've made a conscious effort to reach out to women, and to youth, through an intentional outreach strategy. When you have so many people with different needs, you have to wear different hats.

*When it comes to basic needs, we are here for the entire community and work with each of our community members individually.*

The employment placement program speaks for itself. Additional support services such as housing and transportation are coordinated. When it comes to long-term social economic status, we can see the progress but we don't have the capacity to measure it. Most often people need immediate assistance. We get immediate feedback to get a fit and coach people into how to adjust their schedules to make the employment match work. We solicit youth feedback as part of programs, and part of our intake process is designed to reflect their needs and interests.

We weren't ready for the extent of the need. We vowed to provide services. We show what we are doing and saying. It is evident. We put the time into it.