

## Sudanese find refuge, jobs in Anchorage - INCREASING: Community has grown to about 600 in two years.

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For hundreds of Sudanese civil war refugees, Anchorage has become a city of hope.

The word is spreading on the grapevine in the Lower 48 that Anchorage is a place where the refugees can find work.

Rebecca Kuon, a mother who fled pregnant from her village in southern **Sudan** after civil war broke out in the 1980s, arrived in Anchorage last year.

She washes dishes at a local hospital and hopes to start a second job soon.

Tor Gach, one of the first Sudanese refugees to move to Anchorage in 2006, has a college degree from the Lower 48. Now he's working on the North Slope.

Unlike some cities Outside where jobs are becoming scarce, Anchorage is still a good place to find work, according to these refugees.

In just two years, the Sudanese population in Anchorage has blossomed -- from a few who arrived in 2006 to a vibrant community now estimated at 600.

On Saturday, community leaders hosted a meeting for all Sudanese families at St. Anthony's Church on South Klewin Street to plan, eat pizza and socialize.

### OUTREACH

Many of the Sudanese -- who began arriving in the United States in the 1990s after fleeing a particularly vicious civil war in their home country -- work as janitors or dish washers. Some work on the Slope or in Dutch Harbor. But while many have job skills and a good education, others struggle to find jobs, don't speak English well and lack transportation.

"I have interviews every day," said Rith Jal, who moved to Anchorage last year after working as a janitor and machine operator in Minnesota.

So far, he has not gotten any calls back, he said.

Gach and Deng, who are fledgling leaders for the local Sudanese, recently launched a nonprofit to assist the other refugee families with an after-school youth program, family assistance, transportation and other needs.

A new nonprofit, the South Sudanese American Community Association, is modeled after similar nonprofits that have been established by Sudanese refugees in the Lower 48.

### DARFUR

At Saturday's meeting, women showed up wearing colorful dresses. Children played and munched on pizza while the men, most of them wearing suits, gathered at the front of the room and made short speeches.

Also attending the meeting: some refugees who arrived here in recent months from the war-torn Darfur region of western **Sudan** .

Though these Darfur refugees are from a distant region, the south **Sudan** community feels a kinship with them, Gach said.

"It's the same issue: Genocide," Gach said.

One of the Darfur emigres, Assim Toto, flew from Ghana to Alaska three months ago with his mother. Before seeking asylum in the United States, they had lived at a refugee camp.

Toto's father was murdered by the janjaweed, roving tribal militiamen who receive support from the Sudanese government, he said.

"They killed my father. They killed many people," he said. Estimates of the dead over the past few years range from 200,000 to 400,000 people.

#### FAR FROM HOME

Some Sudanese families are watching their own community grow in Anchorage, and though they are excited about the job opportunities here, they have some concerns.

Kuon is worried about housing. Though jobs are plentiful, affordable housing isn't, she said.

For three months, for example, she had 18 refugees staying in her home.

"There are not enough places to stay. More people are coming. You need to be ready for our people," she said.

Deng said the purpose of the nonprofit -- which still lacks staff and funds -- will be to help the Sudanese parents and children with youth programs, health education and transportation.

"The new people need help," he said.

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