



New Americans

An occasional letter from the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees

New Americans, Winter 2012, Volume 7, Number 1

Suburban Washington Resettlement Center Finds a New Home

The SWRC has moved!

Since opening in 2006, the Suburban Washington Resettlement Center (SWRC) in Silver Spring has helped almost 3,000 refugees resettle in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, Maryland's largest jurisdictions. One of two "one-stop" refugee service centers in the state, the SWRC offers refugees an impressive mix of services, including case management, English instruction, employment services and cultural orientation, just to name a few.



Photo credit: J. Augustyniak for MORA

Dagim Ali, David Godstedt and Erica Marcus show off the new SWRC offices.

Partnership has been the key to SWRC success. This year the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) has joined the SWRC as a full resident partner. Growth has prompted a move to expanded offices on the third floor of the

Medix Building at 8719 Colesville Road in Silver Spring. In addition to ECDC, the new site houses staff from the International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Social Services, Baltimore City Community College and Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services.

Having created an open environment conducive to collaboration, as well as a space where refugees and asylees feel welcome, the

SWRC will invite friends, families, partners and community members to an Open House in March.

The *New Americans* is an e-newsletter intended as an occasional companion to the *MORA Memo*. It features brief news items on refugee resettlement and immigration issues in the region.

Martin Luther King Jr. “Day of Service”

Throughout the United States, refugee resettlement depends on the good will of local communities and the contributions of volunteers. On January 16th, the IRC joined Montgomery County community groups, non-profits and government agencies for a “Day of

Service” to honor the memory of Martin Luther King. Held at the Marriott Hotel in Bethesda, the event promoted volunteerism and drew more than 2,000 attendees. Participating groups provided information on a wide range of service projects, ranging from making blankets for the

Montgomery Hospice Center to decorating placemats for homeless shelters in the county. At the IRC’s table, people created welcome signs and cards to greet refugees to their new homes. Greetings were offered in English, Nepali, Arabic, Burmese and other refugee langu-

ages. IRC staff now have beautifully decorated placards to use when picking up refugees from the airport, as well as personalized cards bearing greetings for the new arrivals.



At the IRC’s table, kids created materials in English, French, Swahili, Farsi, Arabic, Tigrinya, Amharic, Nepali and Burmese.



Their creative skills opened the door to entrepreneurship for these Bhutanese women.

Bhutanese Women Market Crafts

The US Refugee Resettlement Program is premised on refugees becoming self-sufficient as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States. In many cases, a single family must have multiple bread winners. Because so many refugees come from countries where women rarely work out of the home, this can be a challenge. Staff from resettlement agencies help refugee women pursue many paths to self-sufficiency.

Just before Thanksgiving, ten women refugees from Bhutan together earned more than five hundred dollars selling homemade knitted and crochet items. Stitch DC, a knitting shop in the District of Columbia, graciously opened its doors, allowing the women to sell their products on-site. This was the women's first opportunity to display their crafts

since coming to the United States. Over the past eight months, IRC's Bhutanese Community Program has collected donations of yarn and sewing items as startup materials. Using techniques learned in Nepal and Bhutan, the women knitted scarves, hats, and baby clothes. They plan to refine their skills and create new products. Any donations (yarn, sewing needles, looms) would be appreciated.

Those interested in donating or in purchasing products should contact Megan Lind at Megan.Lind@rescue.org, Hanako Kubori at Hanako.Kubori@rescue.org, or call the IRC at 301-562-8633 ext. 202. Donations may be sent to the following address: International Rescue Committee, c/o Hanako Kubori, 8719 Colesville Road, 3rd Floor, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

“Filling the Gaps in Resettlement”— MORA Hosts Training

On December 7th, MORA held an all-day training at Anne Arundel Community College for its provider network. The purpose of the training was three-fold: to familiarize staff with new program requirements from the Office of Refugee Resettlement; to enhance collaboration among old partners; and to build relationships with outside agencies. Agencies represented were:

- Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR);
- Department of Rehabilitation Services (DOR);
- Maryland’s One-Stop Career Centers;
- Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MTAP); and

- Baltimore City Homeless Emergency Environmental Services (HEESU).

Tammy Ditzel, from Inesse Consulting, provided strategies for working with difficult clients. Rodrique Vital, New American Workforce Coordinator for DLLR, spoke of Maryland’s innovative efforts to help foreign-born professionals obtain licensing, credentialing and other supports. Planned and hosted by MORA Program Manager Janice Stucke, the event was another in MORA’s ongoing effort to provide useful resources for the Maryland resettlement network.



Photo credit: J. Augustyniak for MORA

Jessica Hawes, (DORS); Rodrique Vital, and Sara Muempfer, (both DLLR) spoke at the MORA training.

IRC Honors Employment Partners



Photo credit: The IRC, Silver Spring

Corner Bakery employees Layth Baheej, Jamie Byerly, and Ibrahima Fall accept the Employer of the Year award from David Godsted and Phil Bailey of the Silver Spring IRC.

The IRC in Baltimore and Silver Spring each honored their employment partners recently with recognition lunches. Both events expressed the IRC's appreciation for the outstanding companies and organizations that employ and support refugee and asylee clients.

In November, the IRC Silver Spring hosted Celebrating Partnership. The event honored both long-time and new partners, ranging from businesses giving refugees their very first jobs, to StreetWise Partner, a non-profit

organization which works with volunteers from the business world to help low-income individuals overcome employment barriers through mentorship and coaching, and Empowered Women International (EWI), which helps immigrant and refugee women develop entrepreneurial skills, career plans and goals. Congratulations to Buca di Beppo restaurant and Corner Bakery for sharing Business Partner of the Year honors.

In January, IRC Baltimore held its annual Employer Appreciation

Luncheon. Baltimore business owner and Employer of the Year Harry Brigham spoke with passion about his experience employing refugees, and two refugees, Raju Budhatoki (Bhutan) and Sadoon Sadoon (Iraq), told their stories about their first job in the U.S. Attendees also heard a WYPR radio story by Sarah Richards ("[First Jobs For Refugees Restarting in Baltimore](#)") on Mon Rani and Parshu Rai, who found work at Greater Baltimore Medical Center.

The IRC Sponsors a New Soccer Team

Each Sunday from May through November of last year, IRC clients gathered at the Riverdale Recreation Center near Hyattsville for informal soccer scrimmages and practice. Soon, the IRC Soccer Club was born.

As word of the team grew, so did donations: three soccer balls became thirty, sneakers became cleats, shins found guards, and eventually, the entire team was sharply suited in black and yellow jerseys. Properly outfitted, the team began to compete, often against teams with far more experience, and often from across the US and even the world.

Although the team plays no winter games, they hope to enter a league in the spring. Plans to raise funds for league fees are in motion, and the team captain is already running practices and motivating players for league play. Though always working hard, players are dedicated to improvement. And as the team increases its popularity, the IRC looks to leverage its network of volunteers to help expand operations in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

(If you'd like to help the IRC team by volunteering, please contact Dana Henderson at VolunteerSilverSpring@Rescue.org.)



Though new to the area, the IRC soccer club has already begun building a strong reputation.

Key Provider Positions Funded and Filled

New Refugee Mental Health Coordinator in Place

Refugees are no strangers to trauma. Having been driven from their home countries and exposed to violence, many experience depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. A major challenge in helping refugees adjust to new lives is meeting their mental health needs. To meet these needs in Maryland, the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement recently funded a request from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for a Refugee Mental Health Coordinator.

Amy Greensfelder is the first person to fill this position. Amy has extensive experience working with refugees both domestically, as an Immigration Services Coordinator with Church World Service in Durham, NC, and internationally, as a Case Worker at the Refugee Support Center in Nairobi, Kenya. Amy will spend the next several months establishing mental health care protocols for Maryland's two resettlement centers. She will coordinate mental health referrals, adjustment groups, and training, working closely with the Health Programs staff at each of the centers. Well aware of the lack of services available to refugees and their extreme need, Amy views the new job as a "perfect opportunity." Maryland's resettlement network warmly welcomes Amy to our community!



Amy Greensfelder will bring much needed relief in the mental health area.

Refugee Recertification Program Launched

Many of Maryland's recent refugee arrivals have advanced degrees and professional credentials. Foreign-trained educators, physicians, nurses, engineers, and others wish to renew their old jobs, but their skills do not immediately translate into appropriate positions. They sometimes need to have college transcripts evaluated or licenses and professional certificates assessed before they can hope to reclaim their careers. This fiscal year, MORA has been awarded an ORR Targeted Assistance Program discretionary grant for the Refugee Recertification Program. We have

contracted with Lutheran Social Services (LSS) to assist highly-skilled refugees to overcome employment barriers and move towards careers that more fully use their advanced educations. LSS recently hired Florence Muregi to coordinate the program. Muregi holds bachelor's and master's degrees in Education from the Kenyatta University in Kenya and has a wealth of practical experience from jobs with the U.S. Peace Corps, the Teachers Service Commission in Kenya, and since 2007, with Baltimore City Community College, as a trainer for the Refugee Employment Training Program.

Quick Links

Links to other recent articles of interest and importance in the Maryland refugee and asylee community.

“Refugees from Bhutan Face Strange New World of Maryland Suburbs”
([Washington Post](#))

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has developed an excellent “[Refugee 101](#)” learning module for student groups, community groups, or anyone just starting to learn about refugees.

“Arabic Teacher Makes Difficult Journey from Iraq to Baltimore Classroom”
([Baltimore Sun](#))

“My Brother’s Love for Iraq” ([International Rescue Committee](#))

“Immigrants Learn English with their Children”
([Voice of America](#))

“Hopkins Program Reaches Out to Pregnant Refugees” ([WYPR radio](#))

A small charter school brings together refugee children from war-torn countries all over the world and teaches them alongside local American children. The film [A Place In The World](#) follows three families, a teacher, and the school’s principal as they adapt to, and learn from, this diverse and complex social environment.

[Soccer Without Borders](#) has been active in Baltimore City since the Fall of 2009. Currently there are two teams, who are all refugees or political asylees. Both teams compete in the Central Maryland Soccer Association (CMSA)

league, playing in the fall and spring seasons.

Acknowledgments

The *New Americans* would like to acknowledge the following people for providing stories and/or assistance in putting this edition together: Erica Marcus, Holly Leon-Lierman, Matthew Fortier, and Dipti Shah.

Thanks!



The Maryland Department of Human Resources
Martin O’Malley, Governor
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
Theodore Dallas, Secretary
311 West Saratoga Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201

