



New Americans

An occasional letter from the Maryland Office of Refugees and Asylees

Centers Celebrate World Refugee Day

Each year the United Nations declares World Refugee Day on June 20. Although this year that date fell on a Monday, the Baltimore Resettlement Center (BRC) and the Suburban Washington Resettlement Center (SWRC) marked the occasion with weekend events.

World Refugee Day came to Baltimore's Creative Alliance on the evening of June 24th with a performance of *AFTERMATH*, a dramatic rendering of the experiences of individual Iraqis displaced from their homeland by the devastation of war. Quoting directly from 2008 interviews with Iraqi refugees in Jordan, actors told the personal stories in Arabic and English. Local Palestinian singer and oud player Huda Asfour opened the night. A "Talk Back" session engaging the audience with actors



Photo: The Creative Alliance

A family celebrates World Refugee Day at the Creative Alliance on June 24th.

and local Iraqi refugees closed the evening.

Two days later, the SWRC screened *The Last Survivor* at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Silver Spring. This film follows the lives of individuals who survived the genocides of the

Holocaust, Rwanda, Darfur and Congo, and

depicts how they return to "normal" through family

***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.**

Photo: The Creative Alliance



Visitors often engaged in a discussion of the issues raised during the evening.

and work, and especially through their efforts to aid other genocide survivors. These inspiring stories deeply moved many in the audience. After the screening, a panel of three refugees engaged the audience in discussion, fielding difficult questions with honest answers.



Photo: The Creative Alliance

Local oud player Huda Asfour opened the night before an appreciative crowd.

Pat Hatch Retires from MORA

This spring, MORA Program Manager Pat Hatch retired after thirteen years of passionate service to Maryland's refugee and asylee communities. Pat came to MORA after sixteen years as director of the Foreign-born Information Referral Network (FIRN) in Howard County. Pat actually founded FIRN after living with her husband in Korea for two years and knowing what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land.

Pat opened FIRN in 1981 as a place where immigrants could ask questions "without feeling stupid." She was the lone staff member. By the time she departed, FIRN had become a multi-service nonprofit with several staff members, dozens of volunteers and hundreds of clients.

Pat's accomplishments at MORA are too many to catalogue here (and she'd be annoyed with us for doing so!) Through her tireless "interventions" on behalf of vulnerable refugees, Pat directly helped hundreds of families get back on their feet again. As chief liaison to staff at our one-stop resettlement centers and MORA's expert on the intersection of social services and the foreign-born, Pat made an indelible mark on refugee advocacy in Maryland.

Her colleagues at MORA—as well as Maryland's entire resettlement network—will sorely miss Pat Hatch for her passionate and informed advocacy on behalf of refugees, asylees and other immigrants. Fortunately, for us all, although no longer "working," Pat is still engaged. Should friends wish to contact her, she may be reached at:

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Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA

Pat Hatch received recognition from the State of Maryland for her 13 years of outstanding service.

Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA



Pat Hatch with son Eric (l) and husband David (r) at retirement ceremony.

RYP Visits International Family Day at the Walters Art Museum



Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA

Children and youths were encouraged to explore costumes and fantasy roles.

On June 12, the Refugee Youth Project (RYP), Education Based Latino Outreach (EBLO) and the Walters Art Museum presented the annual International Family Day at the Walters Art Museum, an event designed to celebrate the end of another successful year of partnerships.

This year Family Day highlighted the visual arts with an exhibit of paintings by children from the RYP and EBLO and photographs by refugee students at Patterson High School who have been mentored by the nonprofit *Vision Workshops*.

The day also featured “On One Field,” a documentary film about friendships based on soccer between refugees and immigrants in Baltimore and a youth talent show, which included Student Immigrant Storytellers from Patterson High School in partnership with the Jewish Museum of Maryland.

Among the many partnerships highlighted is the special relationship between the Walters and the RYP. Over the past several years, through monthly trips to the Walters refugee children have been exposed to the



Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA

Hands-on activities were the norm at the Walter's Refugee Day celebration.

museum's collection as they have interacted with staff. The kids have developed social and academic skills. In turn, the Walter's staff have benefited from their interaction with the children, honing their own cross-cultural skills.

Notes Kursten Pickup, Coordinator for the Refugee Youth Project, "This event allows the children to express themselves through art, music and dance. It helps build their confidence and provides a safe place for them to be proud of who they are and where they came from. It's one of my favorite days of the year!"



Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA

Group activities generated excitement and energy all through the day.

Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA



Sisters Agut Odolla, 15, (l) and Achol Odolla, 13, (r) refugees from Ethiopia, show off their homemade skirts at International Day.

BRC Joins the Highlandtown Farmers' Market

The Highlandtown Farmers' Market opened on June 9 with the participation of the Baltimore Resettlement Center (BRC). The BRC staffed three tents as BRC Director of Communications Holly Leon-Lierman, and Danielle McKinney, Outreach and Support Specialist at Lutheran Social Services (LSS), answered questions about refugee resettlement at the general information booth. Also at the booth was Elsabet Ademe, a BRC client from Ethiopia, who has started a personal beauty business and was giving free demonstrations..

As the afternoon heat subsided just a bit, a drumming circle slowly worked up a sweat. Organized by Rafi Wartanian, Volunteer Coordinator at the Baltimore International Rescue Committee (IRC), drummers young and old pounded out rhythms on a wide assortment of instruments. Onlookers and dancers enjoyed the exciting pace. Adrienne Atlee, Program Manager for Health at the Baltimore IRC, kept everyone refreshed with free cups of ice water.

The third BRC tent was staffed by Peter Kahura and Richard Mugabo, who were selling African toys, clothes, printed cloth and other items. Peter, who owns an import business, came to America as an immigrant from Kenya twenty years ago and hopes to return in two years. Richard, an asylee from Rwanda and client of the BRC, manages the business, and hopes to take it over when Peter moves back to Africa.

The connection between the Market and the BRC is an easy one. "Having already forged relationships with BRC staff, we invited them into our Farmers' Market

Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA



Holly Leon-Lierman of the IRC and Danielle McKinney of the LSS staffed the BRC booth.

committee meetings and it was a natural fit!" notes Kari Snyder, Director of Neighborhood Development at the

Southeast Community Development Corporation, a long-time friend and partner of the BRC.

Of course, the BRC brings far more to the community than just its participation in the Farmer's Market. As Ms. Snyder puts it, "Aside from being good Eastern Avenue neighbors, BRC opens a window to new cultures that residents may not know about, or have the opportunity to explore."

The Highlandtown Farmer's Market will be held every Thursday from 4 to 8 PM until October 13, and the BRC plans to participate at each event. Vendors accept debit cards and Independence Cards.

Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA



Elsabet Ademe, BRC client, and business owner, demonstrates her beauty skills on Holly Leon-Lierman. Notes Elsabet enthusiastically, "The IRC people are so nice! They've really helped me at starting my own business."

Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA



Rafi Wartanian (white shirt) watches dancers enjoy the rhythm of the drum circle.

Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA



Peter Kahura, an immigrant and businessman from Kenya, shows off some of his many colorful wares.

RYP Youths Bring Art Skills and Life Stories to Highlandtown Mural

How to communicate personal stories of such extreme emotion that few around you can understand? And how to express the highs and lows of your feelings when the language is so new to you? That's the challenge children from the Refugee Youth Project (RYP) took on recently in Highlandtown, Baltimore. Their solution in bold,

vivid colors was to bypass language almost entirely and appeal to the common vocabulary of the visual image.

On the corner of Conkling Street and Eastern Avenue, a striking mural fills the side of a building which once housed a jewelry store, but recently became an annex to the Baltimore

Resettlement Center (BRC). The mural depicts the emotional and physical journey young refugees have taken from their distressed homelands to America in hopes of finding peace and safety. Using powerful visual images, the students convey the flow of time and life. In the first panel, a gun shoots a dove against

the backdrop of a flowing river. The second panel portrays flight from chaos across a vast physical and emotional space and contains the only word in the mural — "Welcome." Finally, the last panels depict a hope-filled resolution to the first two panels.

Photo: J. Augustyniak for MORA



Moira Fratanuono stands beside the RYP mural in Highlandtown.

The process of creating the mural was truly a team effort. As Jessica Wyatt, a graduate student at the Maryland Institute College of Art and an AmeriCorps volunteer with the Refugee Youth Program explains:

A few months ago IRC Volunteer Coordinator Raffi Wartanian approached RYP Coordinator Kursten Pickup, RYP Volunteer Specialist Moira Fratanuono and me about the possibility of doing a mural on the side of the Resettlement Center where there were several large blank panels. The four of us collaborated not only with each other but with staff from the BRC to facilitate a series of mural-making workshops with a group of 18 high school-age refugees. We received Grant funding from the Division of Student Affairs at MICA where they offer grant opportunities for students who are interested in co-curricular community service or community art making.

Throughout the sessions, the students worked together and explored their shared experiences as refugees while gaining drawing and painting skills. The execution of the final mural was an empowering experience for the group. They now realize they have created awareness of refugee resettlement in the Baltimore community and helped their neighbors better understand the refugees' journey.

Maryland Resettlement Centers Welcome New Directors

Both Maryland resettlement centers recently welcomed new Executive Directors. **Frances Tinsley** stepped into the position for the Baltimore Resettlement Center this spring, just as David Godsted was doing the same for the Suburban Washington Resettlement Center.

Tinsley joined the IRC in Baltimore as the new executive director on April 11th. With nineteen years

of experience in the refugee field, Frances has worked on almost every aspect of resettlement here and abroad. Before joining the IRC, she worked as the Associate Director for Domestic Programs and previously as Director of the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) in Ghana with Church World Service. During her time in Ghana, she oversaw the processing of 14,000 African refugee applicants in eighteen countries. She also served as a consultant for the IRC in 2005, working with the OPE start-up team in Thailand. Frances was born and raised in Baltimore, and says she is happy to be a part of the wonderful team at the BRC.

David Godsted has almost twenty years of director-level leadership in non-profits both in the US and overseas.

Photo: International Rescue Committee



Frances Tinsley, new Executive Director of the BRC.

Most recently, he was based in Cairo as Country Director for AMIDEAST, an American non-profit engaged in international education, training and development activities in the Middle East and North Africa. There he had significant success managing organizational expansion and growth, managing a sizeable senior team and an overall field office of over ninety staff. Before that, David directed a non-profit promoting adult literacy in New Mexico, and directed financial literacy programming for Indiana State University. David has considerable experience with

MORA Hosts Training

Photo: M. Ford for MORA



On June 3, MORA sponsored an in-service training for Maryland’s resettlement network. More than 90 staff from various programs came to Anne Arundel Community College to catch up on the latest methods in cultural orientation, case management and job readiness training. Seated, front row (l-r): Jacob Freeman, Danielle McKinney and Alfred Montseray all from Lutheran Social Services.

developing strategic and collaborative partnerships, and has engaged successfully in numerous advocacy efforts. In addition, David has testified before state and federal legislatures. He speaks Yemeni and Egyptian Arabic, and has a working knowledge of Spanish. David’s first day as Executive Director of IRC Silver Spring was June 6.

In Memoriam: Tuong Phung

It is with deepest sadness and fond memories that the Refugee and Immigrant Services department of the Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSS/NCA) announces the passing of **Mr. Tuong Phung**. “Mr. Tuong,” as he was affectionately called, worked with LSS/NCA from 1997 – 2011 and served as Data and Intake Administrator, Employment Team Leader, and the Maryland Employment Program Coordinator over the years. His generous service to

Photo: Lutheran Social Services



refugees and asylees touched many lives and he is missed.

Acknowledgements

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RYP MURAL

Here are the first and second panels of the Highlandtown mural painted by the students from the Refugee Youth Project.



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