

California Department of Social Services

Refugee Programs Bureau

COLLECTION OF REFUGEE STORIES

JUNE 2017

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Message from the State Refugee Coordinator



Refugee Programs Bureau's Vision:

Empowering individuals to successfully transition and grow in California communities.

Mission:

It is the Refugee Programs Bureau's mission to provide state-level leadership and coordination of refugee programs and services to achieve successful refugee resettlement and self-sufficiency in California.

As the State Refugee Coordinator of California, it is an honor for me to be part of the Refugee Programs Bureau (RPB) along with its Refugee Resettlement Program networks and share with you our first Collection of Refugee Stories highlighting refugee successes and their contributions in our state. This past year was a good, exciting, interesting, and challenging one for our program which is filled with both accomplishments and opportunities to improve.

We have worked diligently and prudently in expending our limited funding and have strengthened partnerships with counties, refugee resettlement agencies, service providers and other stakeholders in order to deliver needed services to refugees, asylees, and other eligible populations with an expectation that they would be empowered to successfully transition and grow in California communities. When they fled their native country, these newcomers might have lost everything including family, friends, goals, and dreams. At their new home in California and with your help, we can show them paths to self-sufficiency and integration into American society so that those lost goals and dreams can be restored or new ones created.

California is a wonderful state in welcoming refugees and other immigrant populations. Since 1975, California has welcomed over 730,000 refugees, and I am one of them. The diversity and contributions that refugees bring to our state make California a better and stronger place to live, improving economic growth and bringing cultural richness. Together, no matter where we come from, we can make a better community for everyone and a difference in the lives of others.

I am very proud of the RPB team, all partners, and the refugee resettlement program in California which make it possible for newcomers to restart their lives. I appreciate all the hard work and time they took to help make this publication a reality. My sincere appreciation goes to all who contributed to this inaugural publication and the RPB staff for their continuing dedication to the vision and mission of our program.

Sysvanh Kabkeo
State Refugee Coordinator

An Interview of Success

MR. YANG LEE interviewed by TENG XIONG
AND KAREN YEE of the Refugee Programs Bureau

AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS IN REFUGEE
RESETTLEMENT
December 7, 2016



The Refugee Programs Bureau wanted to interview a member of the refugee community and share their refugee story.

Mr. Yang Lee is the Principal Program Budget Analyst for the State of California, Department of Finance in Sacramento. Yang is an example of someone who became successful through hard work and perseverance. He is an example of how California can partner with refugees to have a win/win situation.

Teng Xiong (TX) and Karen Yee (KY): Could you tell us about your background prior to arriving in the U.S.? What was your background as a refugee (circumstances, where you were born, and refugee camp conditions)?

Yang Lee (YL): "I was born in a refugee camp in Thailand where my parents had resided for three years. I do not recall my time at the refugee camp given that I immigrated to the U.S. with my family at two years old. Nevertheless, my father has told me about the refugee camp conditions. My father recounted an incident in which refugees were not getting enough rations. As one of the leaders of the clan, my father requested help and support from the camp officials to ease the burden of starvation. While my father was trying to explain the situation to one of the top officials, another official kept trying to interrupt and refute some of those claims.

The top official stopped the other official from interjecting and was kind enough to let my father speak about his concerns about the ration shortage. The next day, more rations were sent to the refugees, staving off starvation. My family settled in Portland, Oregon. We resided in Oregon for two years and then moved to Merced, California because the majority of our clansmen resided there. My family speaks the green Hmong dialect [white Hmong is the other dialect].

TX and KY: Who was the most influential person to you as a child? Do you recall any interesting stories or hopes at that time that inspired you? What inspires you today?

YL: "My father, Chang Lee, was the most influential person to me as a child. My father was the head of our clan and always worked. He wanted all his children to succeed in life, and

An Interview of Success (Continued)

he believes success stems from education. Although he did not receive a formal education, education was very important to him, and he stressed that importance to us on a daily basis. I am very grateful for my father and his support which keeps me motivated to do more.”

TX and KY: Did your struggles and challenges as a refugee provide you with strengths and accomplishments you may not have had otherwise? Please describe those strengths or accomplishments.

YL: “Yes. I learned to be independent at a very young age. My parents lacked a formal education and were not proficient in English. They did not understand the educational system. Thus, my parents were not able to assist my siblings and me throughout our educational experiences. I completed my schoolwork by myself while assisting my younger siblings with their schoolwork.

Although my parents could not assist us with our education, they were very encouraging and always made sure we had the basic necessities. Nevertheless, I am grateful for those struggles and difficult experiences. Due to those experiences, I have learned to overcome challenges, which have helped me grow and allowed me to persevere in order to reach my goals.”

TX and KY: What do you feel is your highest achievement and your definition of happiness?

YL: “My highest achievement is attaining a graduate degree. I’m the first in my family to attain a graduate degree. Due to my achievement, I have inspired my younger siblings and cousins to pursue and attain their graduate degree. Happiness to me is spending time with my daughter and wife and extended family. I enjoy family gatherings, the more people at the gatherings, the merrier.”

TX and KY: What do you see as the future of refugees in the U.S.? If you were to advise someone recently resettled in California, what would you say?

YL: “I am cautiously optimistic [about the future of refugees in the U.S.]. I believe the American people support refugees, and everything will be okay at the end of the day. The U.S. offers many opportunities for refugees. My advice to a recently resettled refugee is take advantage of the opportunities that are afforded to you, particularly attaining an education.”

TX and KY: What do you know about the refugee resettlement process and how would you improve the refugee resettlement process? What would you like to see change in the current political/social atmosphere?

An Interview of Success

(Continued)

YL: "I am not familiar with the refugee resettlement process. Therefore, I cannot speak to this issue. I am concerned about the possibility of the federal government blocking refugees' entry to the U.S. Refugees flee their native country to be free of persecution. I hope the President and Congress do not implement policies that will be detrimental to refugees."

TX and KY: Do you consider being a refugee a positive or negative life experience?

YL: "Being a refugee has been a positive experience for me. Although I have encountered many challenges as a refugee, I have also overcome those challenges."

TX and KY: Who do you most admire?

YL: "I admire my parents for all the challenges they have overcome. My father is an orphan with humble beginnings who persevered despite many obstacles. It is inspiring to see my father as a leader and respected member of the Hmong community."

TX and KY: How would you change the future if you could and how would you change the past if you could?

YL: "I would not change anything in my past. Every obstacle encountered has made me who I am today. As for the future, it's hard to say given it has yet to occur."

* * *

New Roots Sacramento

Submitted by International Rescue Committee
of Sacramento

In 2016, farmers from Sacramento's Nepali, Bhutanese, and Iraqi communities sowed the first seeds at the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) New Roots urban farm in West Sacramento. Currently in 15 cities across the U.S., the IRC's New Roots program creates opportunities for resettled refugees to grow produce in their new home cities through community gardens and urban farms.

Living primarily in apartment complexes after resettlement, many refugees mourn the loss of a connection to the land that has spanned generations. "Our kids were not understanding where food comes from," says Ram Khatiwoda, who came to Sacramento as a refugee in 2009 and now works as New Roots' market and garden specialist. "Where does milk come from?" I would ask. 'Milk comes from Walmart,' they would answer. We were alienated from the soil." After observing the high rates of diabetes and obesity in the U.S., Khatiwoda was also concerned about the nutritional value of the food his family was eating. "When I studied the food process here – engineered, test-verified, added chemicals – I didn't want that," he says. "I wanted to help my community produce good food."

In 2013, lacking the resources to start something on his own, Khatiwoda approached the IRC about his community's desire to farm their own food. "The IRC's motto is 'From Harm to Home'," said Khatiwoda. "We have a home here, but we are still not really *at* home. We want to show that we can make life better for ourselves and for others." The New Roots program was already active in multiple IRC sites across the U.S., and in late 2014 the Sacramento office secured a grant to launch the program for refugees living in the country's farm-to-fork capital. Within a year, land had been leased and the program manager and farm coordinator had been hired. Finally, in May of

2016, Khatiwoda saw his vision become a reality.

In its first six months in operation, the New Roots urban farm provided 34 families with their own 2,500 sq. ft. plots. Since planting began in May, farmers have transformed two acres of neglected land into rows of growing crops that will be harvested and taken home for the family dinner tables. In addition to reducing families' grocery bills, "the farm provides a space for refugees to grow crops important in their culture, but difficult to find locally," says Timothy Chapman, Sacramento's New Roots Farm Coordinator.

"It's creating a lot of joy in people to be able to grow stuff and get back to working the soil," Farm Coordinator Chapman said. He and Khatiwoda both underscore the mental health benefits of the farm. After years of upheaval, the integration process for refugees can be difficult. "Gardening can be therapeutic for refugees," said Chapman. "Through New Roots they can see and even eat the result of their labor. After working at the farm they are tired and return home for a good night's sleep. They have something to occupy their minds." The farm can also offer a new positive experience for refugees like Harka Chamlagai, who had never worked in agriculture before joining the farm and is now a regular participant. "When I come here my mind becomes fresh," she said.

Dhan Prasai, a refugee from Bhutan, resettled in Sacramento six years ago. In his first months of participating in the New Roots program, Dhan harvested traditional Bhutanese crops like chili peppers, squash, tomatoes, mustard greens, and potatoes. He uses the ingredients to prepare dal and various curries and chutneys for his family. Other crops like okra, mustard greens, and yard long beans, which are common in

New Roots Sacramento (Continued)

Bhutanese cuisine, can be found growing on several New Roots plots.

Parsu Rai, a Bhutanese refugee in his seventies, visits the farm almost every morning, swaps his cane out for a shovel, and sings while tending to his plot. In addition to finding a sense of purpose and fulfillment at the farm, many elders also use the farm as an opportunity to pass their knowledge of and passion for farming down to the younger generation growing up in an urban, American environment. IRC client Uma Prasai, for example, was a farmer for forty years in Bhutan and is now passing on her knowledge to her sons, who help her maintain her New Roots plot.

In addition to providing land and tools, New Roots also holds workshops every other week, teaching skills like tractor operation and vegetable washing techniques. In the coming year New Roots plans to start helping farmers sell their produce at pop-up stands and local farmers markets. The program also has a partnership with Sellands Family Restaurants to provide food for some of Sacramento's farm-to-fork restaurants. Support and donations, like the wash station that was built by a team from University of California, Davis and a shipping container that is being converted into a refrigerator, play important roles in equipping New Roots to achieve its goals in the coming year. "It's only going to get

better," Khatiwoda says.

Some of the families also grow flowers like marigolds and globe amaranth for use in cultural and religious ceremonies. When I visited the farm at the end of October the farmers were harvesting globe amaranth for Diwali. The pink flower is auspicious for the festival and is often hard to find in California. There was even a buyer driving up from Oakland to purchase a hundred garlands. "If you pick it when it's colorful, it will stay this color," Ram said, indicating a harvested bundle of bright pink amaranth. "We have a saying that these flowers do not wilt for a long time, so our relationship will also continue like this. If I give you this flower and welcome you like a brother or sister, whatever our relationship, it will stay longer."

Like amaranth, the New Roots farm is a symbol of welcome, and helps refugees build lasting relationships both with the soil and with their community.



* * *

Mommy and Me Program

Submitted by International Rescue Committee
of Sacramento

Being a woman and a mother is a huge responsibility in every society and under all different circumstances, but as a displaced person -- a refugee woman and mom carries much more weight to a regular mom's role in a family.

Traditionally, in the culture's where the International Rescue Committee (IRC) resettled refugee women come from, it is just natural for a mom to stay home and take care of the family while the husband goes to work and earns the wages. Now with a new life in their new home country, refugee women are in a position where they are expected to not only stay home, but become proactive and fully independent; however, they are faced with many obstacles, some of them being the language, childcare, and transportation.

A group of IRC volunteer enthusiasts identified some major barriers for refugee moms to join regular English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) community classes, and came up with an excellent idea to organize an out-of-the box ESL class that would offer both ESL for moms and childcare for their kids. That's how Mommy and Me was launched in January 2015 - to accommodate the needs of refugee women to learn English with the childcare and transportation barriers being overcome.

At the beginning of the program, classes were held at a public library, and then IRC received a generous offer from the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer on Marconi Avenue to use their facilities. Classes are held twice a week, and the program has grown to an ESL school that focuses on everyday life language aimed to equip the students with basic language skills necessary for running errands, going to appointments, and functioning

independently.

Our ladies learn in a safe and comfortable environment, while their kids are in childcare



with Mommy and Me volunteers who developed a comprehensive and engaging program that prepares kids for preschool. Through very-well planned monthly themes, daily routine, arts and crafts, and songs, the kids engage in interactive and hands-on activities that help develop early academic, social, and fine motor skills.

Mommy and Me is not only a class where learning happens, but it is also a place that nurtures sharing positive experiences, values, and traditions of the American society through extracurricular and acculturation activities. Our Mommy and Me volunteers help students learn more about American culture, tradition, holidays, and family life.

"With a little help from our friends" and a grant from Sierra Health Foundation, the program has overcome many challenges.

Mommy and Me Program (Continued)

The program is now able to administer testing and track progress, as well as provide bus training and bus passes to our students.

We are so proud to see our Mommy and Me program grow and expand to a new location, which is closer to where most of the refugee families live.

IRC is proud of its partnership with the Unitarian Universalists Society of Sacramento (UUSS), whose wonderful volunteers organized a Refugee Support Leadership Team to welcome newcomers in the community. IRC is now enrolling students in Mommy and Me classes at UUSS, where we are using the nursery and ESL classroom, and where our refugee moms and kids are simply wrapped in warmth and generosity of the UUSS community that is now a part of IRC volunteer corps. Classes started on November 10th and are held twice a week.

Our IRC volunteers play a special role in the Mommy and Me program, and without them nothing would have been possible. They help our moms and kids feel welcome and accepted while learning and adjusting to the new environment.

“Working for Mommy and Me was an amazing experience. It was inspiring to see the ladies progress from having only little knowledge of the English alphabet to being able to hold conversations in English. For the ladies, Mommy and Me is more than a pure language class. It is a place where they have the opportunity to exchange their

stories with the teachers and other students. I felt very fortunate to be part of this exchange.”

Jasmin Kosydar, former IRC intern

“The Mommy and Me program makes me feel wanted and needed and rewards me with smiles and giggles from children for whom I help teach the English language and other preschool skills. As a retired person, there is nothing that could make me feel more useful and give me greater rewards than the opportunity to help women who are new to this country which is so foreign to them. The mothers really appreciate the help we give them and I'm delighted with the trust they have in me to teach and take good care of their precious children.”

Joan Rubenson, UUSS IRC Volunteer



* * *

Refugee Profile: Haji and Family

Submitted by World Relief Modesto

Haji is a refugee from Afghanistan, specifically a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) case. An SIV is given to qualifying persons who aided the U.S. government or military in Afghanistan or Iraq. These individuals also go through the rigorous refugee screening process. For Haji, he worked with the U.S. Marine Corps of Engineering as an interpreter and cultural advisor, having learned English in school. He and his family were resettled in Modesto in August 2014. A World Relief staff recently caught up with the family and asked about their first 18 months.

Biggest Trial in Moving...

Haji had a family tie when he and his family were resettled in Modesto—his brother lives in Northern California, and he has another brother who is in the U.S. military. Haji and his wife Najera moved here with three daughters and one son, but his wife was pregnant with their fourth daughter. The baby came early—45 days early. His wife and new daughter were taken to Stanford, so Haji was forced to split his time between his four other children in Modesto and his wife and new baby in the Bay Area. It was a stressful time, but mom and baby were able to come home much sooner than anyone expected.

Best and Worst Moments of the Last Year...

Najera: Their youngest daughter, Armagan, was Najera's best and worst moment. The doctors told her any mistake during the end of the pregnancy and the baby would die. She was grieved over the possible burial, but when her daughter was born and Najera was able to hug her tiny baby, "that was the best moment," she said. Najera said she is incredibly thankful for the hospital and doctors who helped her daughter come into the world.

Wais: Haji's son Wais said his best moment was when he made his first friend in school—an American boy in his class invited him to play soccer. His worst moment—math. "Math is hard!" he exclaimed.

(At one point during the time together, Wais came bounding out of the bedroom waving a book—"I'm a published author!" he said. During his first year in school in Modesto his teacher had all the students write stories, and then the teacher made each student a book of the class' stories. It was endearing to see the joy that radiated from this boy's face as he had written a story in English and had it typed and bound in a real book. It was also comical to see his older sister tease him about it—sibling rivalry exists in all cultures, and says that "to do math" is her favorite thing. She learned English within six months of resettling, and TV helped quite a bit!)

Khatara: Haji's oldest daughter, Khatara, will start high school next year. Her first day of school in 2014 was her best moment—a new school, a new country. "I saw my nice teachers," she said. The worst thing was being bullied by students over her head scarf, but Khatara says she has used it as an opportunity to educate other people at school. She is currently in the eighth grade, has lots of friends, and loves to run in PE—her best mile time is 7:15.

The Struggle of Living Away from Family...

Haji is very concerned about his mother who is back in Afghanistan. Before he and his family left the country, a suicide bomber hit a convoy, and his mother was unable to reach any of her sons. All of their phones happened to be off. The worry was so great, his mother suffered a stroke. He and his family are safer here, but he worries

Refugee Profile: Haji and Family (Continued)

about her health.

Optimistic Future...

Haji is optimistic about his family's future here in Modesto. He is happy his daughters will have a better education here than in their home country, and he is hopeful his wife will soon get her driver's license so she can have more freedom. In Afghanistan, women aren't allowed to drive or be educated due to Taliban rule. Najela now has her permit and is learning to drive—she and Haji go out late at night to practice when the streets are empty!

Cultural Adjustment...

Haji and his family arrived in the fall and were adjusting to American culture when Halloween arrived. The kids' first Halloween was pretty scary as they saw groups of American children wandering the streets dressed like zombies, princesses, ninjas, and even characters from American

cartoons. Their next Halloween was different, however, as a couple of the kids had fun dressing up and participating in the holiday. Khatara went trick or treating with friends and dressed up as SpongeBob.

During his time here Haji has become a sort of father to the refugees. He has been a faithful volunteer with World Relief when he isn't driving back and forth to his job in security in the Bay Area, translating for our caseworkers, and providing meals to newly arriving.

* * *

A Refugee Story

Submitted by Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services

Hello, my name is Sayed. I am thirty years old and married to my wife, Makai with three adorable children. I worked for the U.S. government in Afghanistan for eight good years under the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of State. My main duty for half of that period was to interpret for the security department, translate training materials for Afghan National Police and help interpret in convoy runs. I also assisted the Site Coordinators to run the support section by getting promoted to Maintenance Supervisor and later to Operation and Maintenance Manager. I served in a five-hundred man camp which later expanded to eight hundred.

Life as we see in the media is not so easy in the war-torn and traditional countries. I remember being shot at in the convoy runs and even experienced rocket propelled grenade attack and threats at our camp while we all were on duty. In mid-2012, we were laid off as DOD decided to shut down operations in our camp. The U.S. decided to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan by 2014. We were all exposed to the mercy of Taliban revenge. I had two choices to make, stay back and accept the risks or make an attempt to save my family.

Fortunately, my services and hard work paid off. The U.S. government accepted our case and we selected California as our new home. We did go through a hard, risky long and stressful two year Visa process. But, we got lucky and now we are safe in our new home. However, many men and women who worked like me were not that lucky as some still undergo administrative processing in the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program and many have lost their lives waiting. Upon our arrival in Sacramento we

experienced the unexpected: a warm welcome from the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services' (SFBFS) crew. Our children were given gifts and toys. Our luggage was carried in the vans and we



forgot the tiredness of an almost ten hour flight. We were immediately escorted and taken to our new apartment which we still live in. Yes, I admit we were hungry, but our fridge was filled with food and fruits.

SFBFS had also arranged for us to have beds, furniture and even pots and pans, things a new family can't live without. In addition, we were provided free transportation and given cultural orientation classes.

U.S. culture was not something I was new to due to almost a decade of work with Americans, but it sure was new to my wife and kids. Everything was amazing with kind people, good weather, great place! We were assisted in any way we could have possibly imagined by our assigned agency (SFBFS). They went out of their way to help

A Refugee Story (Continued)

us solve any problems we faced and not only for the 90 days which was required, but even now, almost two years since we moved in. My wife, my children and I won't forget this kindness. We did our part and continue to do so.

As soon as our legal documentations were processed, I attempted to find a job and I succeeded. I now work for a huge Tech Company and have been promoted twice during my first year. My wife takes English-as-a-Second Language classes and plans to continue her studies. Our children are going to school and we practice good citizen morals. Are we 100% self-sufficient now? No. Like many other citizens, we are not.

We again thank the U.S. government and Sacramento County for standing by their core values and helping us achieve 100% self-sufficiency.

We dream the American dream. We now have a reliable car, a job and working to buy a house which will take countless effort. Afghanistan is where I come from and know

the culture. War is not what our culture allows and encourages. It has been forced on us for almost four decades now. I even personally remember getting in trouble for learning the English language during the brutal Taliban regime when I was just a kid. Now, the world knows where the Taliban comes from and who backs them up. I do not need to explain but all I can say is that it is definitely not an Afghan ideology and culture.

I appreciate those who read, understand and care.

Thank you U.S. government. Thank you Sacramento County. Thank you SFBFS. Thank you American people!

* * *

Refugees Give Back to their New Community

Submitted by World Relief Modesto

Father and son Jamil and Aqeel have lived in Modesto with their wife and mother since 2014 when they were resettled here from Iraq due to religious persecution. For many refugees, spending their first year of resettlement securing employment, learning English, and navigating the various nuances of American culture is more than enough to handle, but Jamil and Aqeel also find themselves immersed in finding ways to give back to their new community.

In Iraq, Jamil drove for the fire department and you would always find him helping others during his time off. In fact, he won many awards for volunteering in Baghdad. He would be part of keeping the streets and parks clean in his district and due to all of his tireless work, the governor awarded him passes to all of the city attractions. He was also awarded a medal for gardening the city's festival of flowers. As serving was such a large part of his life, he naturally looked for ways to volunteer when he was resettled here in Modesto.

He constantly asked his new

English-as-a-Second-Language tutors for things he could do, and they helped him get involved with a group who cleans up the Tuolumne River. He has also served at the Modesto Marathon, passing out water to runners and directing cars around the race.

His son Aqeel has the same heart as his father and desires to help where needed and has become one of the most faithful translators in addition to working two jobs to help support his family. Every week he walks to a local church near his home, and though he is not a member of this church, he volunteers by helping to clean the church, both on the inside and out. "I like helping whoever needs people to help," Jamil said.

* * *

A Friendly Place to Transition

Submitted by World Relief Modesto

To the right of the home a little sign reads, “Friendship House.” Trimmed in blue, the door opens into a small dwelling that is fulfilling a big dream.

Ta Mike’s Friendship House, as it is known officially, started as the property of Mike Tittle, a Modesto resident, now deceased, who was known as Ta Mike (Grandfather Mike) in the Thai community. He had wished to renovate the home and use it for family.

Reading the paper one day following the initial news of the Syrian Refugee Crisis, Tittle’s sister, Dianne de Laet, looked at her husband in tears over the plight of so many men, women, and children in limbo and said, “We have to do something.”

The couple has further ties to the crisis owning property in Greece and having many friends there who reach out to fleeing refugees. “I feel that somehow, in the smallest of ways, each and every one of us has to defend our humanity at a time like this,” de Laet said. It was then that the idea of the Friendship House was reborn. After renovations and connecting with World Relief, de Laet decided to offer the home as transitional housing for refugee families just arriving in Modesto.

We welcomed our first family into the home in January. The house opens onto a small orchard that de Laet hopes can one day be used as a garden for the residents and a gathering place, possibly for some of refugee women’s teas or other events. She continues to update the property with small changes—a fence, an olive tree—always keeping in mind the idea of creating a beautiful, welcoming space for our new friends that will enter the Friendship House.



* * *

Open Hearts - Open Home

Submitted by Carol, Raul, Carlos, Elias and
Andres Ramirez via the Sacramento Food Bank and
Family Services

There was little question once we heard the plight of people around the world in desperate need of refuge, safety, and most urgently- temporary housing upon arrival to Sacramento. Their home country was Iran but they were on refugee status in Turkey for 3 years, awaiting approval to arrive in the U.S. as the vetting system is very rigorous.

Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services' Refugee Resettlement Services' Parish Liaison, Candace – spoke briefly after mass about the need for emergency housing for refugees while the agency located affordable apartments. She inquired if parishioners could assist in some way, maybe they had an empty apartment which could be utilized, or furniture folks wanted to donate, or a bit of time to volunteer a few hours a week.

During her talk, my teenage son, Carlos, who was sitting beside me in the pew looked my way and gave a slight nod and seconds after, my husband turned his head and lifted his eyebrows. This call for help resonated with us given my own story of being a political refugee and my memory of a family who offered to house us temporarily. My son prompted us to ensure we were committed to following through.

After mass, we walked to the back of the church, and submitted our name; however, our vision was not to offer volunteer hours, although this too is very needed, but rather our home. We connected with the Refugee Resettlement Manager, Rocio, who quickly mobilized to provide us information. Before we knew it, we set an appointment for a visit to evaluate our home and the space we could offer for emergency housing. We have a small in law quarters with a full bath but no kitchen. That was not a barrier. We would share our kitchen in our house and open our home and hearts to a family in need.

A few days later, we found ourselves at a local live scan agency getting our background checks. Our sons were running around helping

to transform the back house from their teen cave to a family living space. We reached out to friends who graciously offered to provide items needed, not just for their arrival but things they would need to furnish an apartment. We received confirmation that the family would be arriving in a few days. We anxiously awaited their arrival.

The day and time had come; the family was on their way from the airport and would soon be approaching our street. We ran outside and waited on the sidewalk, all the while vigilantly checking the time. In a few moments, Mary (we will call her) opened the car door, slowly turned her body to get out of the car, lifted her head and glanced our way with the humblest and gentlest eyes. She came out of the car and immediately extended her arms. She approached me with such a sincere embrace, kissed me on both cheeks and said with an accent and loving, soft tone, "Thank you so much."

I was so taken by her and her husband's depth of gratitude, that I immediately teared up. At that moment, we realized the incredible connection we have as human beings, that we are given this incredible gift called empathy and compassion—a gift which quickly transcends barriers.

After the introductions, we showed our family around the house and helped them settle in. Their case worker, translator, friend and our family sat around discussing their 30-day plan.

We were overwhelmed with emotion as we learned about the journey ahead of them. This family had just arrived from across the world with a few possessions to their name. They will have to quickly adjust to another culture and life, learn English, find housing, secure a job, develop a different skill if their license or vocation does not apply in the

Open Hearts - Open Home (Continued)

U.S. and more than likely encounter discrimination. But they were so thankful.

They only focused on the opportunities. "When can we sign up for English classes? Is there employment assistance? How quickly can one find a job? Is there affordable apartments so we do not burden the Ramirez family?" They were so motivated, so solution focused, so resilient and so grateful. During our short time together, we showed them the Capitol, walked around the Farm to Fork festival and took them shopping for some necessities. We even gardened together in the back yard on a sunny afternoon. We communicated and shared stories through lots of funny gestures and the help of our iPhone Farsi/English translator.

We were reminded that as people, we have so much more in common than differences. We share similar dreams, hopes, fears, losses regardless of where we are born, what religion we are and the language we speak. We shared several meals together listening to music, talking and laughing as we tried to communicate. The car finally approached, stopped and parallel parked in front of our home. There was one meal however, which was different.

As we ate, there was an instance when we all strangely and simultaneously stopped talking and eating and found ourselves silent. We glanced at one another and our eyes swelled up with tears. There was a moment of intense connection, our hearts filled with emotion as we felt a profound sense of understanding and empathy for one another. We felt their pain, loss and fear and they too felt our emotions which had surfaced during that moment. It is a reminder how sitting with others and breaking bread, does bring us together—we are sharing life.

This honor and experience confirms that we

have an intrinsic need and responsibility to not stand on the side lines watching the plight of others, to not fear those we do not yet know. That putting our thoughts, words and faith into action has such a high return on investment—emotionally, spiritually and socially. It takes more energy to contemplate our desire to help than actually doing it. Trust me, we are so much better off because of it!

The day "our" family left, we were saddened. They had touched us so deeply. As we parted, they said, with assistance from the Farsi translator, "We have no way to pay you for your kindness and generosity, but we promise that one day, we will help someone the way you helped us." It is a beautiful testament about how kindness and compassion promotes more kindness and compassion!

Three days later, I received this text which I will leave unedited, "Hi carol how are you? Sorry if I didn't call because you know we can't talk English. thank you for everything you did and your family did for us. we never will forget! we will contact you when our English is better. Your family are always in our heart ."

This message brought us all to tears once more... Maybe you have room in your heart or home to help change lives...yours and someone else's!



The American Dream

Submitted by Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services

In partnership with the Diocese of Sacramento, Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services (SFBFS) recently began offering Refugee Resettlement Services. U.S. policy allows refugees of special humanitarian concern entrance into our country, reflecting our core values and our tradition of being a safe haven for the oppressed.

Through this partnership, SFBFS provides refugee families with the opportunity to improve their lives and support them on their journey to self-sufficiency.

Nematullah Savary, 29 grew up in Mavari Sharif, the third largest city in Afghanistan. After graduating high school he attended law school and went on to work for a company providing translation and support services for the armed forces in Afghanistan. After the American troops returned to the U.S., Nematullah was laid off from his position. While on temporary assignment helping support European police missions in Afghanistan, he received his Special Immigrant Visa (SIV). In January 2015, Nematullah, his wife and their two children arrived in Sacramento through SFBFS Refugee Resettlement Services.

The American dream was a driving force of what led Nematullah and his young family to the U.S. That coupled with the fact he was forced out of his homeland of Afghanistan due to persecution. When Nematullah first arrived at the Sacramento Airport with his wife, Khatera, and their two young daughters, Hadia (meaning gift), age two and Zuhai (meaning Saturn planet), age four, he didn't know what to expect. "I was worried no one would be there to greet us, we wouldn't know where to go," remembers Nematullah. "But SFBFS was there. A large group of smiling faces greeted us and gave me hope. I didn't feel alone anymore."

After being escorted to his new place of residence, reality began to set in. "I felt a huge sense of culture shock," describes Nematullah. "While I was being introduced to a variety of different services through SFBFS, I felt cut off from my family back home. It was hard. My daughters expressed their want to go back home, but I knew I had to press on and make a life here in Sacramento for my family.

After only two months of arriving in Sacramento, Nematullah began volunteering at SFBFS, the very organization that gave him and his family



their new start in the U.S. "I had an overwhelming sense of needing to give back," remembers Nematullah. Even though he himself was still new to the U.S. and many hurdles of his own to climb, Nematullah selflessly gave his time to help out in SFBFS' Refugee Resettlement Services."

Nematullah was a large help," recalls Rocio, SFBFS' Refugee Resettlement Manager. He helped connect clients with resources, notified them about free phone eligibility, helped guide them through Social Security applications and more. A huge advantage? He spoke the languages, many in fact. Nematullah speaks Dari, Pashto, Uzbek and Farsi, languages spoken both in Afghanistan

The American Dream (Continued)

and Iran.

All newly arriving refugees going through SFBFS' Refugee Resettlement Services are required to participate in a 4-week long cultural orientation course. Nematullah was instrumental in supporting new refugees on their journey toward becoming a U.S. citizen. "I think it's easier hearing it from someone who has been in your shoes and can speak to you in your native language," explains Nematullah. "I just want to give these refugees the same opportunities that were so generously afforded to me and my family through SFBFS.

Now, almost two years after arriving in the U.S., Nematullah and his family can happily say that Sacramento is home. After volunteering with SFBFS for several months, Nematullah was offered a permanent position as SFBFS' Refugee Resettlement Assistant.

In his new role, Nematullah supports and tracks new refugee arrivals, attends airport pickups, approves and denies applications based on capacity and assists in apartment set ups with SFBFS' volunteers and staff. He also serves as a Case Manager for families with extended case management needs.

Khatera and the children have also settled in nicely. Khatera enrolled in English-as-a-Second Language courses at SFBFS and his older girl is now attending school.

What advice might Nematullah give to newly arriving refugee families? "Expect challenges, but never give up. It will take

time, but don't be discouraged. The American dream is alive and well." Both Nematullah and his wife are focusing on continuing their education. Nematullah would like to pursue a career in the legal sector becoming a paralegal or immigration attorney and his wife plans to pursue a Bachelor's degree.

When asked what the most memorable part of moving to the U.S. was, Nematullah replied, "Every single moment from arriving in the U.S. until now is memorable and I hope one day I can pay that forward to others in the community."



* * *

Client Spotlight - Taj and Family

Submitted by Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services

Many refugees and their families have fled their countries of origin and meet the United Nations' criteria of having a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

On February 4, 2016, the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services (SFBFS) welcomed one such family. The Mehry family, which consists of a mother (Meena), father (Taj) and three children (Arsalan - 9 yrs, Aryan - 19 yrs, Zahra - 12 yrs). The family came to the U.S. from Kabul, Afghanistan where Taj worked as a Security Engineering Technician for the U.S. Embassy for more than eight years. Thanks to a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), awarded to those who are direct hires of the federal government or the Department of State, the Mehry family received the good news that they would be moving to the U.S.

Upon arriving, the family was greeted at the airport by SFBFS' Refugee Resettlement Assistant, Nematullah. As a former refugee entering the U.S. through SFBFS' program, Nematullah was instrumental in assisting the family at arrival especially in the area of translation. Unfortunately for the family, housing was not available in time for their arrival, so SFBFS arranged for a week-long hotel stay for the family until their apartment became available.

In the next week or so, SFBFS staff and volunteers set up the apartment with donated items like couches, chairs, tables and living furniture. Now settled in their new home, the task of becoming integrated into Sacramento began. Through the support of SFBFS, the Mehry family attended Cultural

Orientation courses (required of all new refugees coming through SFBFS' service) and became familiar with Sacramento, U.S. customs, local transportation options and more. Both sons quickly began attending English-as-a-second Language (ESL) courses at SFBFS and now speak quite fluently. Meena is also attending ESL courses and continues to learn.

Both Arsalan and Zahra started school recently and have really been enjoying it. "It's fun!" shared Zahra. "I love math." "I love learning science," shared Arsalan. "I want to be a doctor someday." Father Taj recently secured a job and is looking forward to providing for his family in their new home.

SFBFS is proud to support families in need both here in Sacramento and abroad.



* * *

The Tiyya Foundation Strives to Empower

Photo Credit: Abu Original



The Tiyya Foundation strives to empower our youth and uplift the community through positive imagery. We've seen the greatest success from pairing clients with family mentors from similar professional backgrounds.

For example, we have an Afghan client that was a civil engineer in Afghanistan who was paired with a family mentor that is also an engineer who immigrated here 30+ years ago from India. His family mentor helped him find a very high paying engineering position through his networks. We were especially excited about this because the Afghan client has a daughter that is very ill and he now has great medical coverage from his new job.

Mario is a 48 year old male from Cuba. He arrived in the U.S. in 2015 and has been working hard to be self-sufficient. He says the U.S. took him in and gave him the opportunity to grow.

Mario is a Refugee Cash Assistance client, which means that as a refugee, in order to receive any financial assistance from the government he must meet requirements related to learning English and gaining employment.

When Mario arrived from Cuba, he first focused on improving his English. He took Vocational English-as-a-Second Language (VESL) classes at Tiyya and then transferred to ESL classes closer to his home. Once he had a stronger foundation in English, he was paired with a Tiyya Family Mentor named Drew. Drew helped

The Tiyya Foundation

(Continued)

Mario practice English and become familiar with the employment process in the U.S., building a resume, searching for a job, and interviewing for a position. Mario says working with Drew was a good experience.

Back in Cuba, Mario studied hospitality. He worked at a hotel where he had different roles. He said he enjoyed it because he never got bored. Based on her knowledge of Mario's previous work experience, Jasmine (Mario's case manager at Tiyya) referred him to Acrobat Sourcing - a staffing agency. Shortly after, Mario was interviewed and hired to work at Residence Inn by Marriott.

Now, months later, Mario is excited to know that Residence Inn plans to make him a permanent direct hire. He is working full-time and soon will get a pay increase and benefits. Mario says he is happy with his job.

Although Mario says his current job position is enough to support himself, he currently

lives with a friend to save money to bring his wife and two kids to the U.S. Getting hired as a permanent employee at Residence Inn will help him towards this goal, but Mario wants to continue moving up in position because he knows he needs to earn more in order to provide for his family.

Although Mario was admitted into the U.S., he would not be where he is today without support. Tiyya is happy to have been able to provide educational and employment opportunities to Mario. Although he is no longer receiving cash assistance from the government, he still likes to be part of Tiyya and Tiyya is happy when he can come back and attend events.

The photo on the previous page was taken at Tiyya's 2016 Annual Back to School Celebration. The upcoming back to school event will be held on August 12, 2017.

* * *

Love Never Lets Go

Submitted by Catholic Charities Santa Clara

Written by Adelene Gallego Ramos

This story is all about love. Diana and David Pohle had a beautiful family, with a young daughter and a teenage son. They volunteered year after year for various programs at Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County. They also attended mass regularly at Saint Leo the Great in San Jose. Yet, when they heard about the children in Syria, their hearts broke.

"There were little ones who needed the love of a family right now," they thought, so they called Claire Collins, the Refugee Foster Care (RFC) Outreach Coordinator at Catholic Charities. Claire invited them to an Information Session where they learned about the agency's RFC program, which is the only foster care program in northern California for refugee children.

As they sat there, Diana began to feel overwhelmed about the process of becoming a RFC parent. That's when David turned to her and said, "I'm in." And when a staff member told them about two boys from Eritrea, a small country in North East Africa, "All doubt left me and I claimed them in my heart as our children. I prayed for them every day. I still do," said Diana. The Pohle family prepared for both refugee children, 17 year-old boys who were not related, but became best friends in the refugee camp and did not want to be separated. In the end, only one boy was placed with them.

Their story does not end there. Over the course of the year, their family grew again, and then again, and yet again. The Pohle family made room in their home and in their hearts for four— yes four—teenage boys from Eritrea.

And the son that Diana claimed in her heart

that was not originally placed with them...he finally joined them!

As with all families, there are challenges. For this diverse family of eight, language can be a barrier. School is also challenging because the boys' education was interrupted in the refugee camps.

There also has to be a commitment to time management. Laundry and dishes always need to be done, too. "Challenges are what make a family real. They bring us together. They make us grow." said Diana.

For Diana's birthday, one of her sons gave her a plaque that sits on the fireplace. It reads, "Love never lets go." Diana explains, "We may not be held together by blood but we are holding onto each other with love, and always will."

What advice would Diana and David give to people who are considering becoming RFC parents? "Come into this with an open mind for others but hold high expectations of yourself. Expect to be patient. Expect to not understand what your child needs sometimes. Expect to love with all your heart, and expect to be there for this child for always." This family's story starts with love... and will continue to grow because of love.

To learn more about Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County's RFC Program, please visit www.catholiccharitiesscc.org/refugee-foster-care.

* * *

The Language Institute in Modesto

Submitted by the County of Stanislaus

The Language Institute was established in Modesto City School in 2009. This specialized program serves all immigrant, refugee and asylum seeking high school students living within the school attendance boundaries.

By bussing these students to one campus, the program is able to provide individualized instruction which meets the specific needs of each student. For example, it is not uncommon for refugee students to enroll after years of having no formal education in their native nation or the country in which they were awaiting resettlement.

In rare cases the Language Institute has also received female students from war torn countries, that due to their gender, were denied access to education entirely and arrive illiterate in their primary language.

The Language Institute is designed to take students from the very beginning stages of language acquisition, mastery of the Roman alphabet, to full literacy. Due to the multiple levels in the program, and the use of data to monitor and increase rigor when justified, even students entering with a strong background of education and pre-existent English ability are able to be challenged and supported in their journey to read, write, speak, and listen in English at a level comparable to their native born peers.

Serving this demographic of students also means education and support to the entire family. The Language Institute makes a concerted effort to provide opportunity for parents to learn about and participate in the

American education system as much as possible.

Whether it be field trips to a college campus, night classes about college entrance requirements, awards ceremonies of student growth and success, or one on one family meetings to address questions or concerns, the Language Institute staff firmly believe that meeting the needs of the "whole child" includes inclusion of the entire family unit.

With the California Governor placing a fiscal priority on meeting the needs of English learners and low income students through the Local Control Funding Formula, now is the time to ensure our immigrant youth are receiving the foundational linguistic and academic education they need in order to be contributing and productive members of their new nation.

The Language Institute is proving that when this student demographic is made a priority, and their needs are met, they are capable of greatness. As our graduates transition into college and careers, it is obvious they are already making our community a better place.

* * *

One More Great Story

Submitted by World Relief Modesto

"I want my children to have a safe place to live and a good future," Abdulhamid Al Jawabra said, through a translator. A family of seven originally from Syria, the Al Jawabras are one of our newest refugee families to be resettled in Modesto. They arrived two weeks ago and are quickly getting adjusted to their new home.

With the Syrian refugee crisis still in the news and still on the hearts of many, this story shows how the local church and community has come alongside just one of several Syrian families resettled in Modesto.

To qualify for refugee status, a person must be unable to return to their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. The Al Jawabra family initially fled Syria in 2013 due to medical concerns, frustration, and a fear of something happening to their family at night due to ongoing war. They headed to Jordan, having a family connection there, for what was supposed to be a temporary, two-month stay. The temporary turned permanent, however, when they learned their city had been burned, and their home and 25-year old voice production studio business had been bombed. They had no other options but to stay put in Jordan where conditions were harsh and apply for refugee status with the United Nations.

"I wanted to leave Syria and Jordan," Abdulhamid said, "and go anywhere else. Bill Zoslocki, a local businessman and member of the Modesto City Council, had already been thinking of what he could do to respond to the refugee crisis when he met the executive director of World Relief at a local prayer meeting. He is involved with an apartment complex and had already talked with the residential manager about renting to

newly arriving refugee families. The connection was perfect timing as our caseworkers were actively searching for a home for the Al Jawabras. He paved the way for a fast move-in process. "It's an opportunity to share who we are and what we believe in and what God has been to us," Zoslocki said. With an apartment locked down, the next need for the family was a place to stay for two nights before they could move in. A local hotel owner heard about the need and offered to host the large family free of charge in adjoining rooms at his hotel.

The Christian Arabic Church of Stockton provided a hot meal for the family's first night in Modesto, and another World Relief volunteer brought a meal and snacks the following day. On move-in day, a team of volunteers from two different churches helped staff unload and arrange furniture, set up beds, and stock the kitchen with groceries.

The mission at World Relief is to empower the local church, and as you can see from the story of the Al Jawabra family, many volunteers are needed to walk beside refugees as they adjust to life in Modesto. It is a joy to see the local church rise up to stand with our new neighbors!



* * *

Yves and Aman

Submitted by Survivors of Torture, International

Yves* is a lover of knowledge. He has studied in Burundi, Belgium, and the U.S. He loves movies, dancing, and his family. He is also survivor of torture. Yves's family had a farm and could afford to send him to Belgium for a degree in marketing and business administration. While there, a civil war and genocide broke out in his home country of Burundi.

His family members were insistent that he stay in Belgium to finish his studies. During that time most of his family members were killed because of their ethnicity. After obtaining his degree and returning to Burundi, he was imprisoned, tortured, and saw his brother murdered. Due to the extreme trauma, he experienced severe mental health symptoms.

Yves traveled to the U.S. to seek political asylum. Once Yves had made it to San Diego, he was referred to Survivors of Torture, International. This began a long supportive relationship. During the initial assessment, Yves described losing weight due to no appetite, anxiety, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, unstable housing, and a diminished interest in the things he once loved. He was diagnosed with complex post traumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder.

From the beginning, Yves utilized his love of learning as a way to cope with the trauma he experienced. After several years of individual therapy, psychiatry, and intensive case management Yves was granted asylum, finished his course work at Grossmont College, and transferred to the University of California, Berkeley. At UC Berkeley, he was honored with a full scholarship plus board and room. This was achieved because of his determination and resilience, and the healing services

facilitated by the clinicians at Survivors.

Now, Yves uses his life experiences to direct his academic efforts towards a post-graduate degree in peace and conflict studies, concentrating on human rights. He hopes that his past trauma and new triumphs can lead towards work in protecting international human rights so that others will not know violence and torture in their lives, wherever they reside.

Aman* is a college age man from a country in Africa. He was tortured because the ruling government didn't agree with his political views. His father was murdered by the government for the same reason, his body dumped where Aman's family and community would clearly see it. Shortly after, government agents kidnapped and imprisoned Aman. Every day, after each meal (which consisted of about 3 tablespoons of rice and a cup of dirty water), Aman was interrogated and beaten. He was later transferred to another prison where he was detained for several years and repeatedly tortured in many brutal ways. Aman's family bribed one of the guards into letting him go and he fled his country for San Diego.

When he arrived he did not trust anyone. He didn't speak much English and did not like strangers. He also couldn't sleep because of intense nightmares reminding him of what happened to him. This made him irritable during the day, so he did not feel motivated to apply for a job. He also didn't like taking public transportation because of the density of people which increased his anxiety, so he barely left his home. One day a neighbor told him about Survivors of Torture, International. He agreed to see if the services there could help him.

Yves and Aman (Continued)

At Survivors, Aman began to heal. A psychiatrist helped him sleep again without nightmares. The Medical Case Manager assisted him with having the wounds he sustained from the beatings in prison treated. Among the services he received at Survivors, his favorite was the Men's Story Group – a group where adult male torture survivors share their stories, challenges and successes.

Recently, with support from Survivors, Aman opened his own small design business. He is meeting new people every day and building up his clientele. After having rebuilt his trust in other people he is finally able to rebuild his own life. In fact, he is so excited about his business that he brings advertisements to Survivors' office just to show the staff his designs!

*The names of the individuals in these stories have been changed to maintain their confidentiality.

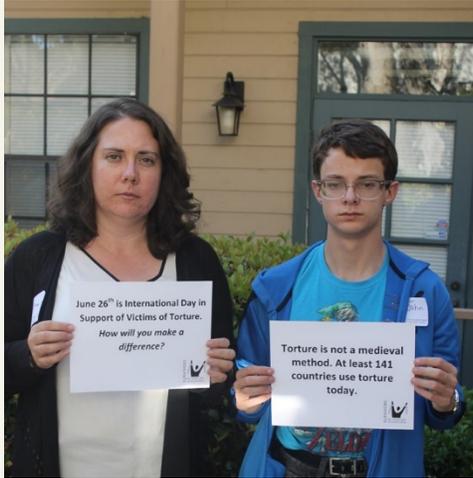
Community groups, such as schools, churches, and businesses conduct school supply drives for the clients of Survivors of Torture, International.

Survivors clinical staff poses with hygiene items collected for torture survivors at a community "hygiene item drive." SURVIVORS' Staff holds messages of solidarity in honor of June 26, the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.



Photographs

Submitted by Survivors of Torture, International
(Continued)



June 26th is International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

Let's create a safe haven.



At the annual Ice Cream Social in honor of Torture Awareness Month (June) SURVIVORS staff, volunteers, and community members pose with signs advocating for the rights of torture survivors and the abolition of torture.

Photographs

Submitted by Survivors of Torture, International
(Continued)

Clients, staff, interpreters, and volunteers visited a nearby pumpkin patch to learn about fall traditions in the United States.



Then, they decorated pumpkins together.



Survivors' clients, staff, volunteers, interpreters, and a local community partner celebrated June 26, the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture with a picnic at the beach and music therapy.



Poetry 1 (Anonymous)

Submitted by Survivors of Torture, International

Those who have not been tortured,
it is the worst ordeal one could experience.

Thank God you have not.

A lot has been done.

A lot is being done.

A lot must be done to maintain that peace.

You can walk around without fearing who is next.

You can speak and give opinion without fearing who is listening.

You can praise and believe in whatever you want without fear of intimidation.

You can choose and give opinion without fear of discrimination.

You can get the basic needs without conditions.

You can get education without limitations.

Thank you America for advocating human rights,

world's peace, and end of torture.

Those who are still being torture,
it is the worst ordeal one could experience.

Don't give up; you can get out of it.

A lot has been done.

A lot is being done.

A lot must be done to stop torture.

Poor girl-child who succumbs to genital mutilation,

just because she is a girl.

Poor woman who gives in to HIV-positive husband,

just because she is a woman.

Poor journalist and writers who succumb to detentions without trial,

just because they have no freedom of expression and press.

Poor human rights activist who succumb to assassinations and premature deaths,

just because they give their political opinions.

Poor religious folks who succumb to detention without trial, rape and assassination,

just because of their religion.

Poor innocent folks who succumb to bombs from terrorists,

just because they belong to certain race, religion or nation.

Thank you United Nations for being aware of Human torture and putting effort to bring it to a halt.

Those who have been tortured,
it is the worst ordeal one could experience

Don't give up, you can be healed.

A lot has been done.

A lot is being done.

Poetry 1 (Anonymous)
(Continued)

A lot will be done to help you heal.

There are people with human hearts, who
can listen to you,

if you thought everybody was out to criticize
you.

There are people with human hearts, who
can treat you,

if you thought everybody was out to hurt
you.

There are people with human hearts, who
can give you shelter,

if you thought everybody was out to make
you homeless.

There are people with human hearts, who
can clothe you,

if you thought everybody was out to strip
you naked.

There are people with human hearts, who
can give you sense of living and meaning of
life,

if you thought everybody was your enemy.

There are people with human hearts, who
can make you smile and give you hope,

if you thought you could never be happy
again.

Thank you Survivors of Torture,
International,

for healing mental, social, physical, financial,
and spiritual sickness,

of the surviving victims of torture.

Long live to Kathi Anderson, Dr. David
Gangsei, Crystal, Beatrice, Dory...

everybody who has made Survivors of
Torture, International,

a home and hope for the surviving victims of
torture.

* * *

Poetry 2 (Anonymous) – I Have A Dream
Submitted by Survivors of Torture, International

I have a dream
Across the world
A feeling that, my heart treasure most
I will pilot a plane
So high in the sky
Through the clouds I will reach my world
A peaceful world
So far from the sound of the crowd
No rule is there
No one to rule
It is a fantasy, I keep it secretly
I have a dream
Across the universe
So up above, I will live it always
With well and smart
I will fly through
Like an angel with wings
I will fly naturally, it is a passion my brain
invested
I will calculate so accurate
With no enmity, I will always fly with the
angels
I have a dream, so beautiful

* * *

Poetry 3 (Anonymous)

Submitted by Survivors of Torture, International

Let it be a red light for torture.
Never to turn to green—ever.
Let it be buried, never to grow again.
Eyes to see, ears to hear,
Noses to smell the sweetness of freedom,
Tongues to speak the truth without fear,
Hands to work with happiness and joy,
Legs to walk in the land of freedom,
To jump, to run, to dance with my nation,
To understand the reality of life
From my birth until my death,
To glorify my creator in each moment.

BUT – but how somebody interrupted my
life,
Using his power, selfishness, intelligence,
His administration, his weapons,
Stand for his own, neglecting others,
He pretends that he respects my freedom,
But there is no sign of this.
Robbing my human rights, the gift of God,
My happiness, my joy, my smile,
My freedom, life with my nation,
They pursue me unto death.
I say, “No Way!” This is not for me.

The equality of nature is for everybody,
Leave my nation alone, let them sing,
The song of freedom,
The song of prosperity and equality,
Oh lord, why have you forsaken me?
Oh lord, why have you forsaken me?
For somebody who robbed my freedom
For somebody who robbed my humanity?

I say “No! to torture: Stop your evil-doing!”
Respect the equality of human beings.
Let me jump and be happy and dance in my
land,
Let the birds sing with me,
Let all nature share happiness,
The rivers, mountains, trees, sun and moon,
Whom shall I call and whom shall I leave?
Let no one be left behind,

Let all of nature come with me,
To show their happiness, joy and freedom.
Let the sun shine in the darkness,
Let the darkness of torture stop forever.
Is there really life beyond torture?
Is there really freedom beyond bondage?
Is there really freedom beyond persecution?
Is there really renewal beyond
disappearance?
Is there somebody who can understand my
words?
To check my heartbeat, whether I am alive
not dead?

But still I need freedom,
To breathe freedom’s air.
Thank God there is one body,
Who understand my language,
Who cries with me when I am crying,
Who dances with me when I am happy,
Who suffers with me when I am suffering.

Survivors of Torture, International,
You are my witness,
Let your sound not stop,
Let it ring throughout the world,
From east to west,
From north to south,
Let your sound ring for humanity,
Let it cross the borderline,
To bring freedom and peace.

Oh Lord don’t keep quiet,
When your creation suffers,
To keep the equality of human beings.
Oh Lord don’t turn heaven to hell,
Oh Lord don’t turn light to darkness,
The spark of light to dim.
Keep us in peace, freedom and equality.

* * *

Multi - Lingual Job Club helps Refugees Achieve Job Success



In 2014, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) asked the County's Office of Education (LACOE) to provide Job Club classes to participants who speak non-threshold languages. As a result, LACOE piloted the first Multi-Lingual Job Club class, similar to the one offered in San Diego County.

The format of the class differs slightly from traditional Job Club classes. There is one instructor who speaks English, and translators are present based on the languages referred to this Job Club class. The translators speak to their respective group of participants, conveying the information from the instructor. They also voice any questions or comments to the instructor. Most refugee multi-lingual participants speak either Arabic or Farsi.

Job Club sessions offer valuable skill-building classes, such as how to complete applications, writing resumes, effective job search strategies, interviewing and test taking skills, life and soft skills training, contacting potential employers, and much more. As a result of the success of the pilot classes, LACOE now offers Multi-Lingual Job Club classes on a regular basis at the Chatsworth and Glendale Job Club sites locations, where most of the refugee

population in Los Angeles County reside. According to LACOE, job placement for

each Job Club averaged between 50% and 100%.

Mrs. Afsaneh, a recent refugee from Iran, entered LACOE's Multi-lingual Job Club Class in October 2014. In Iran, Mrs. Afsaneh was a clothing designer and owned a high-end clothing manufacturing business, as well as a school, where she taught design and dressmaking. Mrs. Afsaneh had to seek refuge from her country, leaving her businesses and her family behind to avoid religious persecution. She had been in the U.S. only for a few short months when she started Job Club. Although there were many new challenges, Mrs. Afsaneh remained positive and hopeful.

She successfully completed her Multi-lingual Job Club and soon thereafter enrolled in LACOE's Culinary Arts Short-Term Training program offered at Los Angeles Mission College. She graduated from the program in Spring 2015. Even though Mrs. Afsaneh completed the LACOE courses a year prior, her facilitator came across a job lead that was tailor made for her, and urged her to apply. Mrs. Afsaneh acted on the job lead and is now employed by the renowned fashion designer Michael Costello as a designer/dressmaker.

Mrs. Afsaneh has continued to stay in touch with her facilitator, keeping her informed about her successes and how grateful she is for her involvement in the programs offered by LACOE and the Greater Avenues for Independence program.

Mrs. Afsaneh adds, "LACOE has given me hope and support to start my fabulous new and successful life in the United States."

* * *

Honoring Refugee Leadership

Submitted by the Refugee Forum of Los Angeles and
Refugee Program Bureau Staff

On September 15, 2016, the White House honored nine refugee leaders, lifting up the stories of these individuals who are contributing to the country and the communities that have welcomed them. The event showcased the welcoming spirit that is thriving in America and highlighted who refugees are, artists, entrepreneurs, youth leaders, community volunteers, and more -- and the contributions and vitality they add to our cultural, social and economic fabric. Ms. Biljana Debogovic was one of them.

Biljana is a former refugee from Bosnia & Herzegovina, who has recently marked her 20th work anniversary at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Los Angeles, one of the members of the Refugee Forum of Los Angeles (RFLA). Biljana was resettled in Los Angeles by IRC in 1994 and has worked with the agency since 1996. Today she directs their immigration department. "Los Angeles gave us a chance to create a new home and very quickly I knew I wanted to become a U.S. citizen, which I did in 2001. It was thrilling to vote for the first time and serve on a jury for the first time. But my greatest satisfaction was having my children become U.S. citizens, to graduate from college as Americans, to live in freedom, to carry on this country's long immigrant tradition of integration," says Biljana.

In April 2017, Mary Jennings, an RPB staff member, interviewed Biljana to expand upon the RFLA story:

Mary: What are the accomplishments the White House honored you for and for which you have received other awards?

Biljana: I was honored by the White House for the leadership in promoting the advancement of refugee and immigrant communities in Los Angeles. I received the

recognition from Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti for 20 years of service with the International Rescue Committee, helping refugees and immigrants integrate into the American society.

Mary: Can you share about your background prior to arriving in the U.S.?

Biljana: I was born in a small town near the city of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia & Herzegovina, where I lived, graduated from university and worked as an architect until April 1992, when the war that brought about the break-up of Yugoslavia came to my hometown. As shells started falling on Sarajevo, I fled with my two young children on the last train to Croatia before the siege of Sarajevo began.

Stuck in a country where I wasn't allowed to work and support my children, and unable to return home, I received refugee status from the United Nations and in November 1994 applied to be resettled under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. We were resettled to Los Angeles by the International Rescue Committee and in August 1996, I started working at the IRC as a receptionist for what was supposed to be a two-week fill-in job. It ended up being the beginning of 20 year career at the IRC in Los Angeles, where I'm the long-time Immigration Program Coordinator.

Mary: What did you learn from being a refugee that has benefited you most in life?

Biljana: Nothing happens overnight and it takes time for things to settle down.

Mary: What are one to two things you would recommend to newly arrived refugees about building a life in California?

Biljana: Be persistent, have a hope that

Honoring Refugee Leadership (Continued)

things will get better.



Then Nearly after Two Decades, Everything Changed

Submitted by International Rescue Committee
San Diego

Until last year, Line had spent almost her entire life in a refugee camp.

Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, her family fled when she was just one year old. They made their way East and reached Nyarugusu camp in Tanzania, now one of the world's oldest and largest refugee camps. For the next 19 years, that is where Line, her two sisters and her brother grew up.

Then, nearly two decades after they arrived at Nyarugusu, everything changed. The family was finally resettled to the U.S. and Line and her parents, siblings, and grandmother arrived in San Diego in November 2015. Line was pregnant when they made the journey, and in December of that year she gave birth to a daughter.

Typical of her confident, outgoing personality, Line enrolled in the International Rescue Committee (IRC) of San Diego's Vocational English-as-a-Second Language (VESL) program just four months after arriving in the U.S., and with a new baby at home. With her father unable to work due to a health condition, she was eager to improve her English and get a job to help support her family.

She arrived to class each day upbeat and ready to work, not only on her own lessons, but also helping other students in her class. Growing up in Nyarugusu camp, Line had the opportunity to go to school which gave her an advantage and in fact, English is her fifth language after four others including Swahili and French.

The VESL program is designed to provide intensive training not only to bring students' English skills up to the level necessary for



employment, but also to provide training on all aspects of working in the U.S., including employer expectations, public transportation, financial and computer literacy, and more. Students go on field trips to learn bus routes and visit grocery stores, and spend time working on resumes and interview skills.

Just four weeks after beginning the class, Line got an interview for a housekeeping position at a local resort. She spent days with her teachers and employment specialist preparing for her interview, and her practice paid off – she got the job!

Before her first day, IRC staff helped Line prepare, taking her to Walmart to get the appropriate shirt, pants and shoes and accompanying her on a sample bus/trolley ride to make sure she knew the right public transportation routes to take. Finally, an Employment Specialist attended her on-the-

Then Nearly after Two Decades, Everything Changed (Continued)

job orientation with her to make sure her first day went smoothly.

Recently, Line stopped by class on her day off to visit her teachers and fellow students, and to proudly show off her first paycheck. She was able to show her classmates how working full time allowed her to provide income for her family and her mother is able to earn a small amount each month as well caring for Line's daughter.

For some, life as a refugee begins with giving up everything – homes, careers, and plans for the future. For others like Line, it is the only life they have ever known. Now for

the first time, Line has a secure home and the ability to choose where her future will take her. We have no doubt that this bright young woman will succeed at whatever she puts her mind to.

For now, she hopes to further improve her English, get her GED, and continue to contribute to the success of her family in their new home.

* * *

Local Businessman Employs Refugees

Submitted by World Relief Modesto

Craig Flory started volunteering with World Relief a few years ago picking up arriving refugees at the airport, doing apartment set-ups, and driving refugees to appointments. Through his experiences he learned more of the difficulties refugees can face when transitioning to their new homes, and as opportunities arose, he decided to help where he could.

"I knew that job placement is a challenge for refugees, and we had a need coming up," he said. Flory oversees a shipping warehouse, and he contacted a World Relief caseworker for applicants. Last Fall, one refugee started as temp and was hired on in December. Another refugee started work with Flory's company earlier this year. He says both men are doing very well, despite occasional obstacles that arise.

"The other day we had a forklift training and a test afterwards," Flory explained. The refugee men needed help with some of the concepts on the test, and Flory was happy to walk them through the language barrier. Overall, he said the men are doing well understanding the work requirements and he would recommend others consider refugees when looking to hire new employees.

* * *

Refugee Simulation Experience

Submitted by World Relief Modesto

In order to understand the refugee experience, it is necessary to feel and know what they go through.

Imagine today you will take the bus for the first time. You walk out your front door to the nearby bus stop and wait for the bus to pull in, exhaling as it stops. You climb in, fishing your ticket out of your pocket to pay the fare. You stumble down the aisle, dropping in a seat as the bus takes off again. Eventually you reach your intended stop, and you step off the bus onto the sidewalk.

Now imagine doing all of that blindfolded with native Arabic and Farsi speakers seated all around you. It's a little more difficult, right?

This is a bit of what it's like for a refugee to learn to navigate public transportation in Modesto. They aren't blindfolded, but even with a tiny grasp of the English language, understanding the basic rules of taking the bus are extremely foreign.

This is where MOVE Stanislaus comes in. MOVE is a non-profit organization dedicated to connecting the residents of Stanislaus County with transportation options to access the community. Their local Travel Training program offers a free service available to Stanislaus County residents who are interested in learning how to use public transit. For more information regarding MOVE and the Travel Training program, as well as access to a refugee simulation video, visit World Relief Modesto's website at www.worldreliefmodesto.org.



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Art for Humanity: Refugee Art Exhibition

Submitted by International Rescue Committee
Sacramento

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Sacramento was proud to host its second annual Art for Humanity Refugee Art Exhibition event in September 2016.

The event was held at the Warehouse Artists Lofts in downtown Sacramento and featured six refugee artists, as well as refugee musicians, authors, and restaurants. Attended by 200 guests, the event enabled refugee artists to display and sell their work while raising awareness of the positive cultural impact that refugees have made in the Sacramento area.

While Sacramento is home to a diverse community of residents, refugees are a longstanding population of the city. Providing the opportunity for refugees to showcase their talent and contributions is one of the highlights of the IRC's event.

This year, artists from Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran, and Iraq were featured, in addition to a special exhibition by Hmong Story 40, which offered a rare and intimate look at the Hmong resettlement experience and artwork over the past four decades.

Ramsina Szanto, a Christian Assyrian pianist who fled Iran in her youth serenaded the crowd, while Disc Jockey, Ahmed Hashem, an Iraqi refugee, spun world music tracks for guests.

This year, the Art for Humanity event also featured refugee grown produce, harvested from the IRC's local five acre farm. The "New Roots" farm is worked by refugees with extensive agricultural experience from their home countries, who have resettled in the U.S. and are now selling vegetables and herbs to downtown farm-to-fork restaurants. Four refugee owned restaurants also donated food and drinks for the event,



making the food one of the highlights of the event.

As expressed by Lisa Welze, the Director of the IRC's Sacramento office, "We are honored to have such a warm and talented group of individuals to live amongst and work with on a daily basis. Refugees, as a population that Sacramento has welcomed and nurtured, have opened restaurants and businesses, and have become a fundamental part of our society. Experiencing the art, music, and food from around the world is simply the icing on the cake".

The following are samples of the artwork displayed during the Exhibition:

Art for Humanity: Refugee Art Exhibition (Continued)



Art for Humanity: Refugee Art Exhibition (Continued)



Art for Humanity: Refugee Art Exhibition (Continued)



Refugee Students are a Gift to the Entire Classroom

As a fourth-grade teacher in the Central Valley, one of the most important aspects of my job is to cultivate a classroom environment where diversity is celebrated and every student is welcome. I view the classroom as a place where people of different backgrounds can come together, share ideas and grow.

This year, one of my students is a refugee. They have brightened my classroom with an eagerness to learn, a curiosity for knowledge and an endless amount of perseverance. These are qualities I wish all of my students could share.

Their impact on my entire class has been transformational. It is a joy for me to watch the level of acceptance for diversity among all of my students.

I firmly believe my refugee student has taught me how to be a better, more patient and compassionate educator. They are a gift to my classroom and to the larger Turlock community.

I have worked tirelessly to welcome my refugee students into my classroom and prepare them with the best resources for success. I look forward to their bright future ahead. It is my hope the larger community reciprocates the same level of love and acceptance.

PAUL HAZELTON, TURLOCK

* * *

Los Angeles Welcoming Week event on September 15th, 2016



September is an important month for immigrant and refugee integration. Welcoming Week last year was celebrated from September 16, 2016 to September 25, 2016.

Hundreds of events took place across the country for Welcoming Week, celebrating the contributions of immigrants and refugees and the role communities play to foster greater welcome.

To launch Welcoming Week, the City of Los Angeles hosted a film screening and panel discussion of “Salam Neighbor” on September 15, 2016, in collaboration with the Refugee Forum of Los Angeles and producer Salam Darwaza. This documentary follows the stories of Syrian families by two American filmmakers in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. The well-attended screening was followed by a panel discussion that included producer Salam Darwaza, Martin Zogg from the International Rescue Committee in Los Angeles, Sara Tompkins from Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, Richard Estrada from Jovenes, Inc., Carolina Sheinfeld from Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles and Chair of the Refugee Forum of Los Angeles.

On September 19, world leaders and civil society members gathered at the United Nations General Assembly to participate at the High Level Summit for Refugees and Migrants. The New York Declaration, a new deal for refugees, migrants and societies, was adopted unanimously on that date. Finally, on September 20, 2016, President Obama hosted the Leaders Summit on Refugees, which focused on managing solutions for refugees and migrants.

To learn more about Welcoming Week, please visit the following the Welcoming America website at www.welcomingamerica.org.

* * *

Abraham's Story

Submitted by Upwardly Global
San Francisco Written by Lana Radosavljevic

"It was challenging when I crossed. It was life and death, crossing in the dark alone with wild animals in front of you. You think your faith or your whole life will collapse." Abraham walked alone through the jungle for days in order to escape life under a dictatorship in Eritrea. Once in Ethiopia, he decided to apply to an Engineering Master's program in the United Kingdom. He was in his mid-20s and it was incredibly difficult for him, as he had never filled out an application, written a personal statement, or started a sentence highlighting an achievement with an "I."

Eritrea has been an embattled country many times in its young history, with the most recent war resulting in its independence from Ethiopia in 2000. It has been a dictatorship since, with the government choosing the life paths of its young citizens. Education is compulsory until the 12th grade, at which point students are forced to concurrently attend school and go to a military academy.

Education was Abraham's main solace through this time. He knew that if he scored high enough on his matriculation exams, he would be able to go to University, unlike many of his peers. He felt lucky when he learned he would be able to study engineering, unlike his brother, who has been forced to serve in the army since 1998.

"You don't own yourself. You are always under the government," he explains, adding that even his career choice was not his own. Arbitrary arrests and human rights violations were becoming increasingly common so Abraham chose to flee on foot to Eritrea. He successfully got into the masters program in the United Kingdom which he completed with honors. Within the year, he came to the U.S. for an engineering conference and decided to stay, earning the right to work within four months.

Some of Abraham's friends had immigrated to the U.S. before him, so he felt he understood the opportunities he would have and challenges he would face. The individualistic culture of the U.S. was hard to adjust to and he admits he felt very lost at times, especially when trying to find work. Politics and family back home were heavy, omnipresent topics of conversation between him and his friends, most of whom continued to live their lives as they had at home. Abraham began to feel that sheltering himself from the U.S. culture was becoming counterproductive. "You have to break that to excel here, to create a network, integrate with society, and to understand how people think and communicate," he says. He pushed himself into new social experiences and began to engage in lighthearted conversation, all while trying to preserve his ties to Eritrea and steady himself in the U.S.

Abraham delivered packages and worked as a busser while searching for a position as an engineer. He had heard about Upwardly Global, a nonprofit organization that helps highly skilled immigrants find employment through a friend. He participated in the virtual training and was assigned to a coach who helped him navigate job search in the U.S. "I would say I started from scratch," Abraham explains. Never having written a resume before, he found the help he got invaluable and would have his friends triple check his application documents before he sent them off.

Networking and interviews were wholly unfamiliar concepts, so Abraham attended mock interview events to strengthen his skills and make connections. He learned to "boast" and be forthright about his many achievements. Just two months after actively searching, Abraham found a full-time job as an Engineer in San Francisco. "Thanks to Upwardly Global, I made it through".

Abraham's Story (Continued)

Beaming, he expresses his gratitude for the opportunity he has been given and considers his employment in the U.S. one of his greatest personal achievements.

When asked what he misses most about home, Abraham simply echoes "home". He was part of a bustling household, with six siblings and two parents who lived together. Daily life was peaceful and communal, and he found beauty in its simplicity. "People would not even leave their family for a month," he says wistfully, missing the closeness and support. His family is now strewn throughout the world, his siblings in Eritrea, Switzerland, and Ethiopia. They are uncertain when they will see each other again but are establishing themselves and thriving in their new environments.

Abraham's local family is his close-knit group of friends from Eritrea. They have supported each other emotionally and financially for years and the group welcomed a new member eight months ago. They have been teaching him about the local customs and helping him settle into his new life. He, like Abraham, will do all he can to build a new life and contribute to a country he never thought he would see, much less call home.



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Exiled Voices

Submitted by Intrepid Theater Company



In November 2016, the staff of Intrepid Theatre Company in San Diego created a timely community outreach and education program called Exiled Voices: The Refugee Art Experience, in a response to the rise of violence, hate crimes and bullying in the San Diego school communities and broader communities.

Knowing that the arts can provide a direct pathway to increased education and empathy for the stories of others, Intrepid Producing Artistic Director Christy Yael-Cox and Communications Director Tiffany Tang wondered if a very specific arts project could promote understanding for populations that are the most vulnerable in our communities because they are the most misunderstood and often vilified.

In December 2016, Intrepid began seeking submissions from San Diego visual and performing artists who are leaders in their fields and interested in promoting the voices and stories of these vulnerable communities. From these

submissions, ten artists were selected from a variety of disciplines to participate in the project - painters, choreographers, playwrights, spoken word artists and songwriters.

Intrepid then partnered with SAY San Diego Crawford Community Connection, one of the pivotal resource organizations for refugee families in San Diego. Christy and Tiffany explained the proposal: pair ten refugee students with ten artists and give them room to get to know each other. The artists would then create artwork inspired by the students' stories about resettlement, their home countries, their dreams, which would then be performed by professional artists in a free community event. The goal of the performance would be to both educate the community, as well as move them into a deeper understanding of the resettlement experience.

In January 2017, Intrepid and our team of artists went to Crawford High School to meet with the refugee students and explain

Exiled Voices (Continued)

the project. Afterwards, the artists through an intensive sensitivity and cultural competency training to learn about the resettlement process, the cultures of the students and the strategies for navigating stories of trauma.

The next week, in the school cafeteria, everyone came together for the first time. Each refugee student was paired with an artist. Intrepid provided snacks and drinks and everyone gathered for a group warm up game and some theatre exercises. Because of the language challenges, it games focused around creating music were the most effective. After warm ups, the artist and student pairs would each find a table in the cafeteria and sit down for a 90-minute chat. This was done every Tuesday for two months.

As everyone began to get to know each other, magic began to happen in the room. As the artists learned about these students and their home cultures, they began to understand that many of the students had never set foot in their original home countries because they were born in refugee camps or moved there when they were very young. Over snacks of goldfish and juice boxes, the students taught their artists about the importance of soccer (football), the amazing musicians coming out of Tanzania and words in Swahili. But more importantly, the artists learned the personal stories of the students - about their families, their journeys to America, how many stops it took to get here, how many family members are still in Syria or Somalia or Tanzania, and how much they love San Diego. They also learned about the students' ambitions - many of them want to be spokespeople for their communities, United Nations ambassadors, doctors for their home countries, teachers of other refugees. Also, as they are also

teenagers, they want to play softball and go to dances and they giggle about music and playing the drums.

After each of these one-on-one meetings, the artists would go home and get to work to try to create something that would tell the stories of these children in a way that would honor them and also inspire a community. There were struggles to get it right. Christy and Tiffany oversaw the development of each piece of art and together, everyone worked to create something that represented and honored the students.

On March 12, 2017, Intrepid produced a free community event and public performance at the Horton Grand Theatre in downtown San Diego. The San Diego Refugee Forum provided information on the resettlement process to audience members and statistics for the program so that they would have some factual information about the refugee experience.

The students were the guests of honor. Staff from SAY San Diego coordinated a field trip for them to attend the performance and they all dressed up for the occasion. When the students were introduced during the opening speech, everyone in the audience cheered for them.

The performance itself was a massive success. With original dance pieces performed by San Diego's leading dance artists, spoken word poetry performances, original songwriting, three original plays performed by the city's lead actors and a six-foot scenic painting on display in the theatre lobby, the sold-out theatre rose to a standing ovation as the last refrains of "Black Boy Joy," a spoken word piece, written and performed by Gill Sotu and inspired by Espoir, rang out through the house and the students climbed on stage next to their artists for a final bow.

Exiled Voices (Continued)

Every art piece was introduced with video footage of the students themselves, in conversation with their artists, and it was impossible not to see each student in the artistic creation of their story.

The response from the audience was overwhelming. Many left with new information about the refugee resettlement process and increased compassion for this community. One month later, in April, Intrepid remounted the entire production at Crawford High School for the student body and the local community.

SAY San Diego will continue to work with Intrepid to develop the next phases of this project. Intrepid is currently building Exiled Voices into a school tour which will travel to public and private schools in Southern California. At the conclusion of the school tour, Exiled Voices will become a multimedia art installation that will live in cultural centers for one month at a time. This installation will include a short documentary on the development of the project, as well as video footage of the performance and will tour through Southern California, potentially travelling throughout the state.

The refugee students will be invited to accompany the school tour and attend art installation openings, participating in discussions with other students and cultural center visitors as they are interested and available. Intrepid will maintain an open dialogue with SAY San Diego and the refugee students throughout the lifespan of Exiled Voices, so that the students are connected with this project as long as it is in the public eye, and they can be as involved to whatever extent that they

feel comfortable.

Exiled Voices changed everyone involved. Christy and Tiffany state, "We all witnessed the power of live performance to sway hearts and minds. We saw the larger policy decisions taking place in Washington directly affecting these teenagers, their families, the staff who support them at Crawford High, and us as well, as we worked to create these stories. We are eager and excited to continue the lifespan of this project and share it with as many people as possible."

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