

The Art of Community

*Creativity at the Crossroads
of Immigrant Cultures
and Social Services*

A Collaborative Publication of
The Institute for Cultural Partnerships
and Grantmakers Concerned
with Immigrants and Refugees



**I'm sometimes as an eagle . . .
I'm flying alone, I know where I am,
I take care of myself.
I'm smart enough to know what to do in important times
for me, the eagle . . .**

**But in this country, I'm a little bird against
big and tall buildings that are in my way.
For now I need help to fly and to live.
And that's good sometimes.**

**But one day I want to be big enough
to open my wings
and fly over those big and tall buildings,
but always with somebody,
with my flock.**

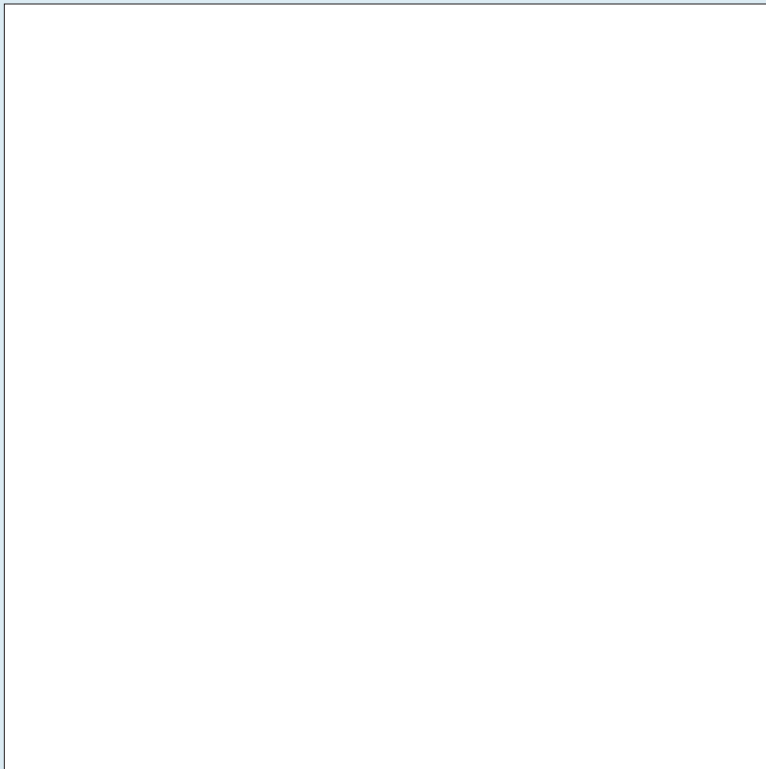
Pedro Gomez, age 17 from Peru

Opposite and pages 3 through 9:
Changing Worlds Newcomer Mural

This mural was created during the summer of 2000 by high school students at the Taft High School's International Newcomers Center in Chicago.

Working with ESL teacher, Esther Lieber and art teacher, Esther Charbit, the group selected the migrating bird motif to express their emotions about the huge changes in their worlds. They included painted designs and images, photographs, poetry, and other writing about their memories.

- Photos by Ed-Imaging,
Courtesy of Changing Worlds





Small text fragments and signatures are scattered throughout the artwork, including:

- Top right: "Carmel, California" and "Carmel, California" (repeated).
- Center-left (on blue bird): "Carmel, California" and "Carmel, California" (repeated).
- Center-right (on white bird): "Carmel, California" and "Carmel, California" (repeated).
- Bottom-left (on yellow bird): "Carmel, California" and "Carmel, California" (repeated).
- Bottom-right (on white bird): "Carmel, California" and "Carmel, California" (repeated).

The Art of Community:

Creativity at the Crossroads of Immigrant Cultures and Social Services

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This publication is an initiative of Building Cultural Bridges, a national, interdisciplinary project at the Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP). The project's goal is to bridge the arts and social services to support cultural continuity and artistic growth among refugees and immigrants in the United States. Community-based workshops and conference panel presentations bring the project to local, regional, and national audiences, providing tools and encouragement for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The Building Cultural Bridges national advisory task force includes: Joel Jacinto, executive director, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA) and program director, Kayamanan Ng Lahi Philippine Folk Arts; Bobby King, independent consultant and former executive director, Refugee Family Services; Max Niedzwiecki, executive management consultant, Asian American Justice Center; and Sandra Smith, community research and grants management officer, The Columbus Foundation and board member, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees.

Building Cultural Bridges is made possible with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Ford Foundation and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees have also provided critical funding for the production of *The Art of Community*.

In addition to this Building Cultural Bridges publication, ICP is issuing a revised edition of *Newcomer Arts: A Strategy for Successful Integration*, a practical guide for refugee and immigrant service providers and artists. For more information on other ICP resources, visit www.culturalpartnerships.org.

Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees has recently published *Investing in Our Communities: Strategies for Immigrant Integration*, which offers additional promising practices on cultural and artistic expression as a vehicle for immigrant integration. This publication also examines other pathways to integration including communitywide planning, language and education, health and well being, economic mobility, and citizenship and civic participation. For more information on other GCIR resources, go to www.gcir.org.

Art Direction and Design: Phillip Hunsaker
Printing: Ink and Images, Inc.



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The Institute for Cultural Partnerships and
Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees

Edited by Laura R. Marcus, in collaboration with Daranee Petsod and Amy E. Skillman

Acknowledgements

Collaboration is the heart of *The Art of Community* and of the larger Building Cultural Bridges project, of which this publication is a component. Drawing upon the multi-faceted resources and talents that make up any community, we feel fortunate and honored to work with a project team that brings so much to this publication.

Building Cultural Bridges National Task Force members—Joel Jacinto, Bobby King, Max Niedzwiecki, and Sandra Smith—have lent their expertise and input to the content, framework, and editing of *The Art of Community*.

From their diverse professional perspectives, authors Patty Haller, Bobby King, Victoria Patterson, Amy Skillman, and William Westerman vividly illustrate the successful merging of arts and culture with the social services through their project profiles. Changing Worlds founder Kay Berkson and Executive Director Mark Rodriguez, *My Journey Yours* project coordinators Gwylene Gallimard and Jean-Marie Mauclet, and Indian *Bharatanatyam* and *Kuchipudi* dancer Ramaa Bharadvaj have generously contributed consultation and photographs to this publication. We are grateful to Ed-Imaging of Chicago, Illinois for images on pages 1 through 9.

Designer Phillip Hunsaker has captured the spirit of *The Art of Community*, bringing the profiles to life through his dynamic and thoughtful artwork. Kristie Peterson and Bernadette Chavez of Ink and Images, Inc. of Albuquerque, New Mexico have shepherded the publication through the printing phase, taking the project from idea and design to the printed page.

The Art of Community and the Building Cultural Bridges project emanated, in part, from a series of Fund for Folk Culture gatherings on building support for refugee and immigrant arts. To the Fund and Executive Director Betsy Peterson, we extend our appreciation for continued encouragement of this project.

Through their generous support, our funders, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford Foundation, have made possible the sharing of stories that we hope will inspire others to tap their own creativity and communities, and undertake collaborative refugee and immigrant arts initiatives.

Through this project, our two organizations have had the privilege of learning about one another's work and have greatly appreciated the opportunity to collaborate. Although we have distinctly different missions, the cross-learning experience has deeply enriched our respective work, and we look forward to future collaborations with one another.

Finally, we wish to thank Laura Marcus, the driving force behind *The Art of Community*. She played a central role in conceptualizing the project. Her passion, expertise, and attention to detail made this publication such a rich resource and important contribution to the field.

**Institute for Cultural
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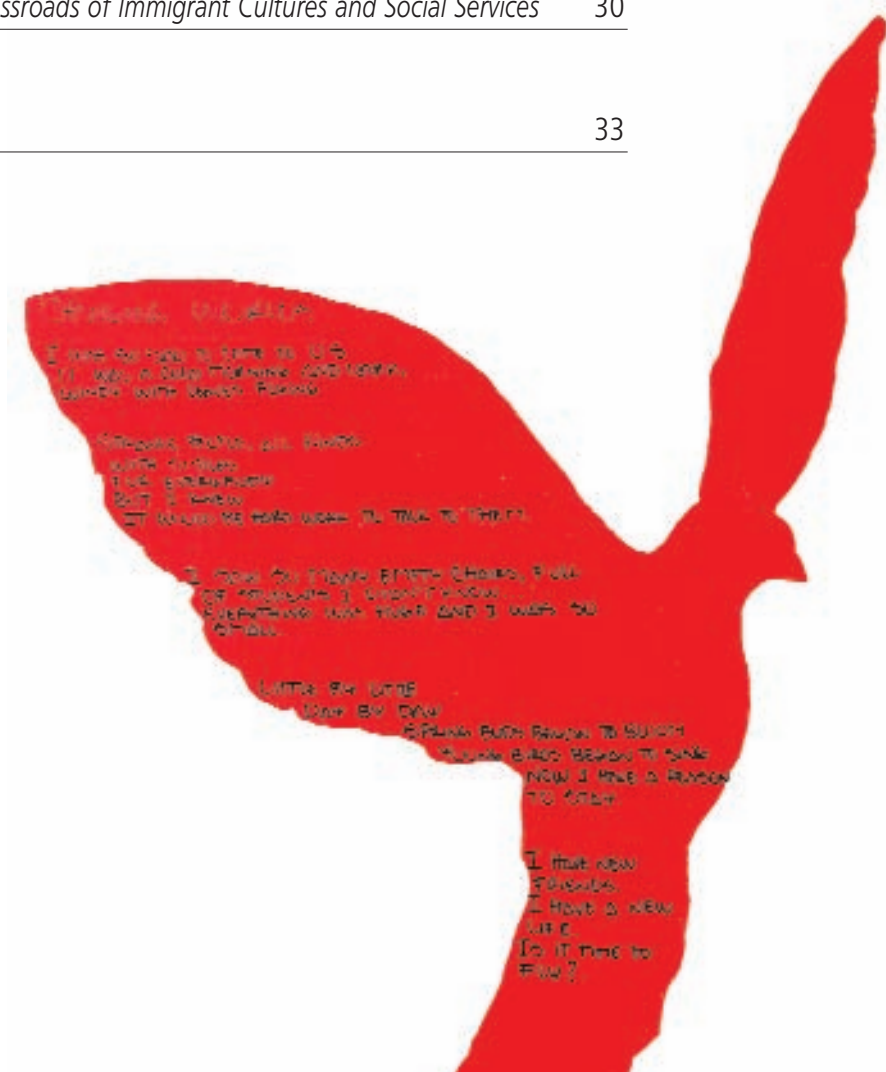
**Grantmakers Concerned with
Immigrants and Refugees**



**NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS**

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The Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP) facilitates opportunities for understanding among cultures and communities. Now in its eleventh year, ICP works locally, across Pennsylvania, in the mid-Atlantic region, and nationally, to improve the quality of inter-group relations and to work with communities and institutions to overcome barriers rooted in misunderstanding, prejudice, and cultural difference.

The Institute focuses on helping people understand their own culture, understand others, develop positive inter-group relations, and build strong communities.

ICP activities concentrate in the areas of:

- 1) *arts and heritage*, recognizing that the arts and cultural traditions provide a window of understanding into a community;
- 2) *community programs*, building the capacity of newcomer and minority communities to live to their fullest potential; and
- 3) *diversity training* and awareness in schools, workplaces, and community settings to reduce prejudice and build positive community responses to hate activity.

ICP has produced a number of products and services that reflect these goals.

- *Refugee Arts*—a manual for refugee service workers and refugee artists, provides guidance and practical information on how to work with refugee artists or tradition bearers in order to enhance the resettlement process.
- *What's Your Name?*—a study guide based on our On Tour Recording Series offers standards-based instructional resources that use traditional arts to advance student learning while increasing awareness of cultural diversity in Pennsylvania.
- *Does it Run in the Family?*—a non-medical toolkit that uses oral history and cultural awareness to assist families in collecting their health history and empowering them to better communicate with their health care providers.
- *Folk Arts of Newcomers*—a youth oriented series of webpages designed to engage children in exploring diversity in their communities through the arts and culture of their neighbors.
- *GAIN (Greater Access to Independence for Newcomers)*—an innovative job coaching program using both staff, volunteer, and business resources to prepare eligible refugees for available employment opportunities.

Since 1983, ICP has developed and maintained the Pennsylvania Folklife Archives, a collection of photos, taped interviews, and other documentation of traditional arts, cultural communities, and folklife in the Commonwealth. The Archive provides a wealth of information on the arts and cultural heritage of Pennsylvania.

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About five years ago, I was sitting around a picnic table with eight or ten women from all over the world who had re-made their homes in central Pennsylvania. Among them, they represented every continent on the planet. We had gathered to talk about ways to address the challenges of leaving home for good and moving to a new country. At one point, I asked them, “What do you feel is the most important traditional artform you have brought with you to this country?” In unison, they replied, “Our food!” I was impressed by this response, first because they recognized their food as an important tradition and second because they thought of it as art.

As we talked, the stories began to flow: tearfully funny stories about trying to get used to American food; stories about driving for hours to reach the nearest shop that sells the spices they need; and painful stories of how a child’s rejection of her mother’s food is like a rejection of her mother’s culture. As I listened, it became clear that holding onto one’s traditions is as important to one’s survival in a new land as gaining access to clothing, employment and shelter.

So, when Laura Marcus came to us at the Institute for Cultural Partnerships to talk about developing a publication that provides tangible examples of the impact of arts and culture on the resettlement process, it took all of about five minutes to say yes. In 1995, ICP had presented a national conference on the powerful role that cultural traditions and the arts play in the resettlement process. Many artists attended the conference and shared their own stories. We heard about how gang activity among Illinois’ Cambodian youth was not present in the one community that had a youth arts program. We heard about the

elder Kurdish embroiderer who came out of her isolation and loneliness when presented with the supplies to begin creating her embroidered clothing again. And we heard about the Bosnian women suffering from chronic pain for over a year who finally began to see relief after starting a weekly traditional dance night.

As a result of that conference and these stories, we published in 1998 *Refugee Arts: A Strategy for Successful Resettlement*. Designed as a manual for refugee resettlement workers, the publication offers guidelines for identifying practitioners of cultural and artistic traditions and strategies for connecting them to the resources that might enable them to continue their artforms. The manual was distributed in 1998 to refugee resettlement offices and folk arts programs around the country. An updated, revised edition of the manual is available as a companion to this publication.

Reflecting back, the one piece missing from that first publication are the stories, the case studies that give wings to our belief that respect for one’s own artistic traditions is critical to the acculturation process. This new publication does that. The essays contained here offer clear and shining examples of how paying attention to culture and creativity can build self-confidence, nurture a productive and valuable citizenry, and even save a life. Through these stories, we begin to see that encouraging the practice of cultural traditions and participation in arts activities will help newcomers spread their wings and fly.

- Amy E. Skillman, *Director of Arts and Heritage Programs*
Institute for Cultural Partnerships



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Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) seeks to move the philanthropic field to advance the contributions and address the needs of the world's growing and increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee populations. With a core focus on the United States, GCIR provides grantmakers with opportunities for learning, networking, and collaboration, as well as information resources that:

- Enhance philanthropy's awareness of issues affecting immigrants and refugees.
- Deepen the field's understanding of how these issues are integral to community building in today's dynamic social, economic, and political environment.
- Increase philanthropic support for both broad and immigrant/refugee-focused strategies that benefit newcomer populations and strengthen the larger society.

Given immigrants' growing numbers and their expanding role in the economic, social, and cultural life of nations around the globe, GCIR has become an invaluable resource to many foundations, whether they have immigrant-specific funding initiatives or wish to incorporate the immigrant and refugee dimension into their core grant-making programs. GCIR provides members the opportunity to connect with diverse colleagues, build new skills, increase knowledge, and become part of a dynamic movement to fully integrate immigrants into U.S. society. Our resources include:

- A one-stop center for high-quality Web-based and printed information, including in-depth issue reports that help funders quickly grasp the substance of specific topic areas and learn about proven grantmaking strategies.
- Substantive opportunities to learn about emerging trends and share experiences and strategies through member-driven national and regional programs, learning circles, and national convenings.
- Technical assistance and consultation to members wishing to incorporate immigrant and refugee issues into their portfolios or seeking to expand or redirect their immigrant-related grantmaking.

In 2005, more than 1,500 grantmakers took advantage of our information resources and another 1,000 participated in our programs. For more information, visit www.gcir.org or contact the GCIR office at info@gcir.org or 707.824.4374.

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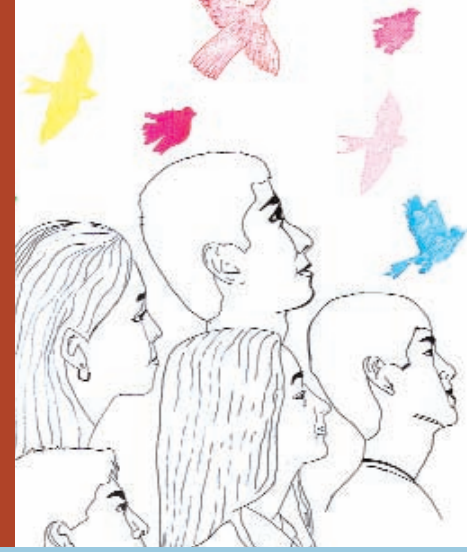
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"It's like a tree. The history of my people, the traditions, my parents are the roots, they make me who I am. Reaching out through the branches, others can understand me, know who I am, not just what I do. And I need to understand their roots, everything behind them in order to know them. Expression through art is a way of attracting people, pulling them together and opening up the connection. It starts with the relationships, then they are empowered to move to common actions."

• Shelly Cha, Hmong organizer of the Tamejavi immigrant cultural exchange festival, Fresno, California



GCIR has always been proud of our organization's focus on "tough" issues. Of course, anything having to do with immigration has been tough in the United States over the past two decades—and is arguably getting tougher by the minute.

Since our founding in 1990, GCIR has channeled resources to encourage foundations to address some of the thorniest challenges facing newcomers and our broader society: health care, education, employment, human rights, social, economic and racial justice.

In our work to inform funders on these issues over the past six years, we've regularly used film, photography, and visual and performing arts to put a human face on the immigrant and refugee experience. In the process, we have deepened our appreciation of the communication value of art and culture and the importance of artistic and cultural expression in building strong, healthy communities.

The case studies in this publication illustrate the fundamental role art and culture play in the lives of newcomers, particularly as they and their new communities negotiate the mutual process of integration. Cultural expression and exchange connect us. They create opportunities for newcomers to interact across cultures and generations, stripping away preconceived notions and stereotypes. And they lay the foundation for newcomers

and the receiving society to develop mutual understanding and respect, find common ground, and work together to build vibrant communities in which everyone has a stake.

This publication offers models to catalyze dialogue and inspire readers to learn more about the artistic and cultural traditions of immigrants and refugees within their own communities. We encourage foundations already active in arts grantmaking to consider supporting nascent and exemplary arts and cultural projects involving the newest community members. And we invite foundations funding programs serving immigrant and refugee populations to consider supporting efforts that integrate arts and culture into social services and civic participation initiatives.

Philanthropic support of initiatives like those profiled in these pages will reap benefits not just for newcomers but for our society as a whole.

• Sandra Smith, *Board Member*

Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees
Community Research and Grants Management Officer,
The Columbus Foundation

• Daranee Petsod, *Executive Director*

Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees

My Journey Yours

Sharing Cultures Through Art

By Bobby King, Independent Consultant
and former Executive Director
Refugee Family Services
Clarkston, Georgia



A Bag of Life

Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five,
Four, three, two, one, zero, dive!

Wait! Wait! I can't jump over the brink
My bag is heavy, may I fall and sink

My bag is full of trashes and iron scraps
I've passed a minefield, so many traps

I need to trade the scraps for bread,
Imagine your kids being hunger-dead
My bag is ugly, but I truly love it
Imagine my misery if I don't have it

My bag is the nest of hope and pride
Every day, I play with it "Seek and Hide"

When pride is hidden,
When hope is obscure
My grievance is sharp, striking, pure

When pride is hiding,
When hope runs away,
"My bag is there, I will catch them," I say.

Sakhidad Hatif,
Afghan refugee and poet



Bringing the Arts to Refugee Family Services

Refugee Family Services (RFS) is a multi-service agency serving primarily refugees and some immigrants in DeKalb County, Georgia, near Atlanta. In 2002, artists Gwylene Gallimard and Jean-Marie Mauclet and ESL instructor Rebekah Stone approached RFS about conducting a project that would integrate arts into RFS programs to better understand how America is perceived by non-natives and how Americans perceive themselves and others. The goal was to promote commonality among RFS staff, their clients, and collaborating organizations—as well as an appreciation for refugee and immigrant cultural traditions.

In 2002, RFS was reeling from the effects of September 11, 2001. Community feelings ranged from suspicion to outright xenophobia toward immigrants and refugees. Drastic cuts in federal funding, the primary source of support for refugee-serving agencies, resulted in huge budget cutbacks and staff reductions, with no decrease in the demands for their services. Responding to these changes, the immediate priorities of almost every refugee-serving organization focused on obtaining jobs and affordable healthcare for clients, providing English instruction, and meeting other basic needs.

In this climate, an already over-worked RFS staff and management team were skeptical about taking on an art project which might further drain time and resources. Because of their close and trusting relationships with their clients, RFS staff would be indispensable to the project's success. Even with additional funding and personnel, existing staff would clearly have to "volunteer" their time to the project.

In a leap of faith, RFS undertook the project, viewing it not as an organizational burden, but rather as a way for clients to express themselves and share their traditions through art. RFS staff anticipated that the project might help participants achieve cultural preservation and better cope with the difficult process of cultural integration into American society. Further, the public and collaborative aspects of the project offered opportunities to educate the community about the refugee experience and build positive cross-cultural relationships. In this spirit, the project was entitled, *My Journey Yours (MJY)*.



My Journey Yours

Over two years, Nigerian, Bosnian, Afghani, Vietnamese, French, and American-born artists in residence led or assisted in various stages of the project. Project participants were RFS clients from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq (primarily Kurds), Sudan, Somalia, and Vietnam, and were recruited by staff of the same ethnicity. The project directors communicated regularly with the RFS executive director and development consultant to schedule activities, work out logistics, and handle budgetary matters. The artists conferred with staff on scheduling, interpretation, and the appropriateness of activities.

A variety of mediums gave participants the widest possible means of self-expression. Participants, for example, carved their names or significant words from their native languages in stones small enough to be carried and displayed. One woman carved the word "Srebrnica, 1995" in memory of the thousands of Bosnians killed in that city during the Balkan conflict.

Painting and sculpting plywood were enthusiastically received as refugees of all ages created images on several large canvases. Another popular activity was the embroidering of a huge canvas with words, scenes, and representations of refugees' journeys. Flags, animals, a map of Afghanistan, outstretched hands, and personal images were stitched or painted onto the canvas.

In private story circles, refugee women shared stories—sad, joyous, often riveting and inspiring—of their homelands and personal journeys. By listening to the women share song and music in their own languages, one of the artists in residence created a beautiful song, a tapestry of words and melodies in different languages. The song was recorded onto a CD and became the unofficial theme song for *My Journey Yours*.

The project culminated in a large exhibit in downtown Atlanta's Youth Art Connection gallery. A large canvas painting, *Our Sky*, jolted out from the center of a wall, over a ramp, and down to the embroidery piece, *Our Island*. Knitting needles, thread, and other materials were displayed nearby, encouraging visitors to add their own touches to the piece. Along an 80-foot bridge spanning the gallery's perimeter, walking figures crafted by project participants from cloth and metal made their journey around the exhibit, navigating shelled-out sections and other obstacles. Three sound stations

allowed visitors to hear first-hand accounts of individual refugees' journeys to America. A small, colorful *MJY* catalog featuring images of the artwork, the project in-progress, and participants' quotations was distributed at the exhibit.

My Journey Yours included four roundtable discussions covering such topics as: "Using the Arts as an Alternative Approach in Dealing with Refugee Mental Health Issues," "The Impact of Art and Music in Refugee Communities," and "Developing Community Partnerships through the Arts." Led by knowledgeable volunteer professionals, these discussions attracted a diverse audience, including refugees, local citizens interested in art, staff from resettlement agencies and arts organizations, and university art students. The roundtables heightened people's awareness that traditional art forms are intertwined in the everyday life of many cultures, highlighting the arts as a vehicle for cross-cultural understanding.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

My Journey Yours was not without its problems and obstacles. Transportation was always a challenge, as few of the participants had cars. While most activities occupied less than four hours per month, they were conducted during business hours to accommodate the time RFS staff were available to lend interpretation and transportation support. Although administrative costs were covered by the project, the RFS executive director, administrative director, and development consultant spent significant time tracking costs, assuring grant compliance, and handling the inevitable unforeseen challenges that come with a large project.

A major consideration in undertaking *My Journey Yours* was the effect it might have on participating refugees. Overwhelmingly, participants came from war-torn countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam, where most had lost property, been separated from or lost family members, and had little hope of returning to their homelands. Some had been victims of torture or other war-related atrocities. Great care was taken not to push participants to take part in any component of the project that might be upsetting or might trigger unpleasant memories. While tears were shed during parts of the project, the activities seemed to provide a sense of community, as the women grew more comfortable with one

another. The project provided a means for participants to reconnect with and maintain their cultures, and to begin processing their issues, their past.

Benefits and Outcomes

Participants included more than 100 refugees and immigrants, 25 RFS staff, 12 artists in residence, and at least 20 volunteers. More than 1,300 people visited the exhibit at the Youth Art Connection, providing many occasions for positive interaction between refugee and immigrant participants and the general public. But it would be difficult to measure the impact or success of *My Journey Yours* simply in numbers.

The project's ripple effect exceeded RFS' expectations, resulting in numerous artistic collaborations, spin-offs, and relationships. Refugee women and an RFS employee who participated in the storytelling provided narrative information and consultation for the highly successful theatrical production of *Women and War* produced by Atlanta's Synchronicity Theater. After attending a roundtable discussion, Art Education majors from Georgia State University incorporated research on several refugee cultures into their coursework and volunteered with the Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta after-school children's arts program. Judith Kaine, an RFS volunteer and Emory University student working on an interdisciplinary community-building art project for refugee youth, secured the Youth Art Connection gallery for her exhibit, *Imaging Refugee Youth*.

The project's most lasting impact, however, was the formation of the RFS Sewing Circle, which pre-dated *MJY* but blossomed in attendance and commitment as a result of the project. The circle brought together a group of refugee women from different countries. Meeting on occasional Saturday mornings, these women forged enduring relationships with one another and with American volunteers. The circle has grown since its formation in 2002 and remains active today.

Looking Ahead

Would RFS do it again? Many thought the project was a big success. Some RFS staff were exhausted by the project, and it would take more than a little persuasion to engage them again. The program developers were exceptional collaborators, accommodating schedule changes, listening to concerns related to cultural sensitivity, and meeting regularly to iron out problems.

What would RFS recommend for others who wish to undertake a project of this scope?

- Consult with organizations that have done similar projects, particularly in overcoming obstacles.
- Consider running a two to three month pilot project to identify resources, gauge interest level, and recognize challenges.
- Recruit a professional volunteer or hire a program manager to run the project instead of relying solely on existing staff; this person would coordinate every phase of the project on the agency side (recruiting participants, scheduling, partnering in grant writing, budgeting, serving as a liaison between staff and artists, etc.).
- Be flexible and open to the challenges and opportunities that this type of project brings.
- Include in the project design a post-project survey to measure its impact.

Through the weekly Sewing Circle and the youth program, art continues to be an important component of RFS, driven by a positive organizational experience and continued interest in the community in promoting refugee and immigrant art. RFS staff hopes that new projects capturing the spirit of *My Journey Yours* will emerge and become integral to what receiving communities offer to enrich the refugee and immigrant resettlement experience and create stronger ties between the newcomers and their new communities.



Making these bags, doing this painting, sewing, talking in the circle—back home, this is not art; it is part of our daily life.

- Sudanese Sewing Circle participant

We are all on a journey, a concept that includes infinite manifestations—the trip from country of origin, current journeys of language acquisition, the journey of awareness and acceptance for long-term Clarkston residents who watch their neighborhoods and schools change in astounding ways, the journey of artists trying to make the arts relevant to today's world, the journey of this project.

- Gwylene Gallimard, Jean-Marie Mauclet, and Rebekah Stone, project creators and coordinators



A project like this builds community and relationships—something often overlooked in the resettlement process. It can't be quantitatively measured, but it's critical. What better way than to sit together and stitch for a couple of hours?

- Rebekah Stone, ESL instructor and project coordinator



Refugee Family Services

Mission

Refugee Family Services (RFS) helps refugee and immigrant women and children regain self-sufficiency through education, economic opportunities, and direct support.

Services include: workshops to help refugee women adapt to urban American life; health screening and education; job readiness training and employment services; English instruction; youth services; a school liaison program; and domestic violence education and intervention.

Context

Working in the metro Atlanta area but primarily DeKalb County, RFS serves more than 2,700 refugees a year from countries such as Somalia, Bosnia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Iraq, Congo, Ethiopia, and Vietnam. Clarkston, a community near Atlanta, is home to approximately 7,000 residents, roughly one-third of whom are refugees and immigrants.

My Journey Yours – Project Details

Cash: \$51,550: Includes: artists and project directors, \$21,900; materials, promotion, video, phone, tech support, \$11,600; RFS staff for interpretation and translation, recruitment, participation, \$5,643; travel, \$7,700 (the two primary project directors reside in Charleston, South Carolina and made numerous trips to the project site); and general administrative costs, \$4,707.

In-kind: Most hands-on activities took place at Refugee Family Services. Youth Art Connection, a program of Boys & Girls Club of Metro Atlanta, donated \$5,000 in gallery space for the exhibit, space for roundtable discussions and interactive activities, and staff time.

Time: Staff, 300 hours; artists, 600 hours; volunteers, 200 hours.

Collaborators: Jewish Family and Career Services and Youth Art Connection.

Funders: National Endowment for the Arts, Alternate ROOTS (with funding from the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts), Georgia Council for the Arts, French Cultural Services, Fast & French Inc., Avondale Mills, and the DeKalb Council for the Arts.

Contact Information

For general project information or to reach specific project participants or partners, contact **Bobby King** at **404.284.6634** • **bobbyaking48@yahoo.com**

For general information about **Refugee Family Services**, visit **www.refugeefamilyservices.org**



Changing Worlds

Immigrants and Oral History Across Generations

By William Westerman, Director
Cambodian American Heritage Museum
and Killing Fields Memorial
Chicago, Illinois



Bringing the Community into the Classroom

For ten years, Kay Berkson has cultivated a creative idea about immigrant students that has turned the conventional treatment of immigrants in the schools on its head. Rather than look at students as deficient in language and needing remedial attention, Berkson saw their heritage as a strength, and she dreamed of a way to bring this idea into the classroom.

The result was Changing Worlds, an innovative organization that develops oral history projects in schools with students as both the historians and the artists depicting their own lives. Berkson, a photographer by profession, suspected that “stories would spark more stories” and that teachers would need structured ways to use this material in the classroom. She first developed a photography and oral history project at the Hibbard School in Albany Park, a Chicago neighborhood known for its diversity of immigrant and refugee residents, including large Korean, Cambodian, Middle Eastern, East African, Guatemalan, Mexican, and Eastern European populations, among others. Students attending some Albany Park schools speak more than 40 different languages in their respective homes.

In the initial project, Berkson and two writers interviewed and photographed children, parents, and grandparents from 14 families. In 1999, the resulting exhibit—which included oral histories translated into twelve languages, photographs, drawings by students, and maps—was installed at Hibbard School, where it is still on display today. Next, Berkson developed a pilot project in which students became the interviewers, writers, and artists, telling their own stories.

Berkson and others saw the potential for this kind of exercise to reach more students, and for schools to incorporate these smaller projects into larger curricula. Expanding the program into a full-time organization was a natural next step. To this day, the focus of the project is basically the same, though it now involves 250 teachers and 10,000 students annually and the artistic media have expanded. “There’s much more to do with this,” says Berkson, “you can’t just stop.”

I am consistently amazed at the beauty, richness, and investment demonstrated in these projects that reach past text book knowledge to put students and families at the center of the learning process.

I love learning new ways to create meaningful connections with my students and to promote global citizenship with students and my peers.

• Amy Vecchioni, teacher

Being a minority in America is not as easy as people might think. We have to start from scratch.

• Lonhak Orch, 2006
Cambodian American student
University of Illinois at Chicago



The Power of Story

Changing Worlds' Executive Director Mark Rodriguez has been instrumental in the program's continued development and refinement. The project's expansion arose, in part, from the affirmation that people's stories are important to themselves and others, and they have the power to bring people together.

The capacity of storytelling and art to engage learners provides the experience with more depth and a long-lasting impact. In one project, for example, students illustrated their oral histories by constructing *retablos*—the post-colonial Mexican tradition of painting images of saints on small pieces tin, zinc, wood, or copper for use in home altars—using pressed foil, writing, and drawing. The teacher stressed the historical and cultural dimensions of the tradition, rather than its religious aspects. Other teachers, in consultation with Changing Worlds staff, have helped students make quilts, masks, and puppets. The lesson always includes instruction in how the art forms are used in different cultures. The artistic techniques involved are also used to train teachers, making the process fun and not too daunting, while expanding their pedagogical repertoire in the process.

Collaboration at the Heart of Learning

Key to Changing Worlds' successful relationships with schools are its collaborative and innovative approaches that integrate its practices and strategies into the standard curriculum and align them with state teaching and testing requirements.

This process has enabled teachers and schools alike to work with an external partner to build more arts and cultural instruction into the school day. As Changing Worlds has grown, Berkson and her colleagues have worked together with schools to develop new methods and curricula that help educators meet their goals while incorporating oral history and artwork into the teaching of culture and history. Changing Worlds educators initially partner with teachers, with the intention that the teachers will ultimately build these materials into their own classrooms in the future.

Changing Worlds Programs and Initiatives

• Literacy and Cultural Connections

Over time, Changing Worlds has developed three areas of focus. The program's core remains its classroom partnerships, with children from all backgrounds interviewing family members and presenting their stories through writing and visual arts. Over the course of a year, 15 in-class sessions provide instruction in interviewing, organizing materials, and writing. This is accompanied by professional development for teachers, covering such topics as diversity, oral history, multicultural library materials, and using culture in the classroom. Currently, training and curriculum are available for grades three through six, with plans to develop seventh and eighth grade programs over the next two years. The existing programs focus on grade-specific topics, from self-identity and community in the third grade, to world cultures—tying in to both their social studies and language arts curricula—in the sixth.

• Professional Development for Educators

A second area of focus is teacher professional development through Saturday seminars and weeklong summer institutes. In the workshops teachers go through the same activities as they would with the students, including hands-on artistic activities, as well as discussion on how to illustrate oral histories in creative and instructive ways. Changing Worlds workshops provide educators with strategies for using oral history, writing, and art to improve literacy instruction and build community in the classroom. The summer institutes have yearly themes, such as "Traditions and Transitions" and "The Power of Story," and serve 40-50 teachers a year. Saturday workshops involve a broader audience and build a network of teachers who use Changing Worlds strategies.

• Reaching the Public

Finally, Changing Worlds reaches out to the general public through traveling exhibits, education series, and programming. Its exhibits have been shown at schools and colleges, town halls, state buildings, libraries, medical centers, even the prestigious Field Museum of Natural History. "The exhibits are good

for adults for the same reason they are appealing to the kids,” Berkson notes. “Since our eyes and hearts are opened by the stories told by children, parents, and grandparents—people you often meet but don’t know much about personally.”

The new Immigrant and Refugee Contributions Awards and Education Series was launched in 2005 to combat stereotypes about immigration through showing strong contributions by recent immigrants in such fields as education and the arts, civic and community leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Understanding Commonality through Difference

Critics might suggest that such an emphasis on family heritage could divide students and alienate them from one another. But, in fact, the opposite is the case. Changing Worlds staff and teachers point out that this method of instruction deepens knowledge of one’s own culture, but also builds bridges among students of different backgrounds. The commonality that students experience comes not from sameness, but from an understanding that all of their classmates have histories, migration stories, culture, arts, and holidays, and that each of these is expressed differently. The art and writing projects

are vessels that may have different contents, but that touch on themes and issues affecting everyone in one way or another. Through “the power of story and the richness of Chicago’s diversity,” the community is brought together by its youngest ambassadors. Berkson sees “a whole world to learn,” with “tremendous experiences and wisdom” brought into the classroom by the students every day.

This wisdom is expressed through both words and images. Students write summaries of their interviews, excerpts are posted in traveling exhibits, and art projects such as quilts, paintings, plays, and collages round out the words by adding a visual and tactile dimension to the words. A visit to a school affiliated with Changing Worlds or to the organization’s office is like a walk through a children’s art gallery of the highest caliber. The passion and interest of the students in their work—and in their own immigrant heritage—are proudly and confidently displayed in their colorful products. For the students this goes beyond fulfilling an assignment and becomes a way of viewing, capturing, and displaying their world.



Lonhak Orch

In my country, we lived half in the city, half in the country, near Thailand. We went to the outdoor market. Everything was fresh. My mom knows how to cook better than any restaurant.

We had to leave Cambodia. It was do or die. To get away, we had to run across the jungle. We had to pay a stranger who knew the way. There was a tiger. We had to make a fire to keep the tiger away because we were sleeping outside.

We got to a refugee camp at the border with Thailand. We went to school there. It was peaceful. Thai soldiers around the camp patrolled it.

My dad found bamboo and built the cabin. He made a special porch swing. We had a big pot outside for water and a private place for a shower. We had a banana tree, too. It was the best house in camp. There was a hole in the kitchen. People said it was haunted, but other people said it was good luck because we got to come to America.

I’m going to the Art Institute for free this summer. I’m going because I’m good at shading. You know who I like? Rembrandt, he’s my hero. I like light and shadow.

I want to be a chemical engineer. When I grow up, I’ll go to college. Then I would go back to my country for a year. I would go back to my country if there was peace there. I would work for the U.N.



I like living in Chicago—kind of. But I don’t like the way my family is treated. Life would be better if my dad could find work. It’s hard to find work. If I were big, I would take my family and buy a big house. That’s my dream—to buy a car and have a garden about five miles long and grow mint and garlic.

Story, photo, and map excerpted from the exhibit, *Changing Worlds: From Around the World to a Chicago Neighborhood: Stories and Portraits*



The Orch Family

The Orch family survived war and hardship under the ruthless government of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. They escaped in 1984 to a refugee camp in Thailand and stayed there until 1992 when they were accepted as refugees to the United States. Lonhak, his parents, and his grandmother told their stories in May 1997, when Lonhak was 13 years old.

Changing Worlds

Mission

Changing Worlds is an educational arts organization whose mission is to foster inclusive communities through oral history, writing, and art programs that improve student learning, affirm identity, and enhance cross-cultural understanding.

Context

Through its programs and outreach initiatives, Changing Worlds reaches over 15,000 Chicago-area residents annually. Its programs serve a diverse audience that is 45 percent African or African-American, 35 percent Latino, 10 percent Caucasian, 9 percent Asian Pacific Islander, and 1 percent Native American. Over 85 percent of the students come from low-income households.

Literacy and Cultural Connections (LCC) – Project Details *Per school for one year*

Cash: \$13,000: Includes: contractual school facilitator, \$5,000; artist-in-residence salary, \$1,000 per school; program director salary and administrative cost, \$2,000 per school; art and program supplies, \$3,000; teacher professional development associated costs, \$1,000; and refreshments for meetings and community events, \$1,000.

In-kind: Partnering schools contribute \$5,000 to the program in staff time, substitute teachers, art and laminating supplies, photocopying, and space.

Time: School facilitators, 45 hours; teachers, 45 hours; artists, 22 hours; in-class volunteers, 15-30 hours; and administrative support, 15 hours.

Collaborators: Participating schools.

Primary LLC Funders: McCormick Tribune Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation, and the Staples Foundation.

General Operating and Program Support: The Chicago Community Trust, Landau Family Foundation, Lohengrin Family Foundation, Peace Development Fund, Rosenthal Family Foundation, and the Rothman Family Foundation. All of Changing Worlds' programs receive generous support from individual donors.

For project details of other programs, please contact Changing Worlds.

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Growing Community Roots

The Boise Refugee Community Garden Project

By Patty Haller, Assistant Director
Idaho Office for Refugees
Boise, Idaho



*I went to the garden to grow my food;
instead I grew a friend.*

• Saliha, Afghanistan

*Here I can plant my garden and
know I will see the harvest.*

• Bosnian Gardener

*Gardening requires lots of water—
most of it in the form of perspiration.*

• Lou Erikson





The Boise Refugee Community Garden Project

The Boise Refugee Community Garden Project began as part of a larger effort to encourage social integration among older refugees. Refugee seniors are less likely to seek employment and thus often feel disconnected from the world outside their immediate homes and families. Increasing opportunities for refugees to garden was seen as a way to reduce isolation, teach basic English in a comfortable environment, and improve the physical and mental health of the participants.

Launched in 2004, the project supports two gardens, with a third in development. The gardens serve 40 refugee families, including the original targeted seniors, from Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia, Ukraine, Bosnia, and Sudan. Participants were recruited through the English Language Center, which provides language classes for most Boise-area refugees. Because they live in apartments, participants would not otherwise have the opportunity to garden. The gardens are organic and focus mostly on food crops such as cabbage, corn, peppers, tomatoes, squashes, onions, and some herbs.

Key participants in the project are Boise's four refugee service agencies working with two landowners, the Ahavath Beth Israel Congregation and the Girl Scouts of the Silver Sage. Since Boise did not have existing community plots to accommodate refugee gardeners, several organizations partnered to develop new gardens, which came to life through the dedicated support of volunteers and a part-time staff person. The staff person established relationships and negotiated agreements with landowners, recruited over 60 volunteers, found interpreters, and problem-solved with gardeners and landowners throughout the season. Today, the staff person coordinates the project's volunteers, who do everything from collecting donations to building plots and repairing irrigation systems. Both staff and volunteers also work side by side to help gardeners learn about growing conditions and techniques for the Boise area.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The challenges and benefits of community gardens far exceeded our original understanding. The most difficult challenges related to soil, water, and weeds. The need for manual labor and materials to maintain the garden

spaces consumed a great deal of time and energy, as well as expertise that the refugee service agencies did not have. This forced us to develop new community partners, a major unforeseen benefit of the project. We found help from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), local agribusinesses, building contractors, greenhouses, schools, master gardeners, private foundations, and community service organizations.

Since many refugees gardened or farmed in their home countries, we wrongly assumed they would be prepared to garden in Boise. During the first season, gardeners grew only the plants that were donated, and many had no idea what to do with their crops. In the second season, gardeners became more selective about what they grew—peppers, tomatoes, and pumpkin were very popular across cultures. They learned to repair hoses and tools, manage compost, and maintain the common areas of the gardens. Everyone's harvest improved and less went to waste on the vine. Now, in the project's third year, more gardeners are requesting special vegetables that they grew in their home countries. They are assuming leadership in organizing work days, garden improvement projects, and celebrations.

Benefits and Outcomes

The mental health benefits of gardening are well documented, yet the degree to which they were realized by the refugee gardeners was surprising. The gardeners truly blossomed with their plants. People who had daily complained of ailments and expressed little hope for the future became lively, strong, hopeful, and even outgoing. English Language Center Director Steve Rainey observes, "Many refugees experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), described by mental health professionals as a 'sense of foreshortened future,' wherein trauma takes away a person's ability to project their actions into the future. Because gardening combines planning with actual physical activity—soil preparation, decisions about what to plant, the actual planting process, watering, weeding, everything leading to a successful harvest—it may be the single best activity for helping to reestablish a concrete awareness of how one's actions can affect the future."

During the growing season, many gardeners spend hours each day in the garden, not only working in their plots, but also socializing, knitting,



crocheting, sharing food, and reading in the shade. Others work in the garden with their entire family. Gardeners share their harvest with other refugee families, often bringing bags and boxes of produce to the English Language Center for distribution.

When asked about the gardens, gardeners talk about friendships, fresh air, hope, beauty, tradition, and the importance of connecting to the land. They talk about life before they were refugees. They talk about feeling that life is returning to normal. They share their gardening expertise and are eager to learn new things from fellow gardeners. Aliya Ghafar-Khan from Afghanistan echoes the sentiments of many: "The time in the garden is as important as the vegetables."

Staff working with refugees observe changes in the gardeners such as a greater willingness to speak English, to ride their bikes or the bus system to new areas of town, to attend other events and activities, and to mentor or take other, more timid refugees under their wings. Staff also report that the gardens provide an opportunity to relate to the gardeners on a different level, to learn about their interests, traditions, and cultural perspectives. They talk about the power of being labeled "gardener," rather than "refugee," in terms of how the gardeners see themselves and how the community sees them. Steve Rainey notes, "Bantu individuals and families were initially very reluctant to discuss or participate in promoting or preserving their culture. The phrase 'We left that behind when we came to America' was heard frequently in English classes. Now that phrase has been replaced by an excitement and pride in being Bantu. I believe that gardening has played a significant role as an expression that Bantu culture is valued here."

The gardens are a source of pride not only for the refugee community but also for the Boise community. They are highlighted in the media and in the

City's promotional materials. Community gardens are very visible, and they raise the visibility of the organizations that sponsor them. The Ahavath Beth Israel Congregation received national and international recognition for its sponsorship of the community garden. Refugee gardeners have been asked to speak at meetings and conferences. Community organizations and individuals have stepped forward to offer new opportunities for refugees including tutoring, access to Girl Scout camps, internships at commercial organic gardens, and invitations to participate in community cultural events. Local funders have expressed interest in helping to fund the gardens and other refugee projects.



Looking Ahead

The refugee community garden project is leading the way in developing a network of community gardens in Boise. In the project's second year, the Idaho Office for Refugees received a grant to establish an independent program, Community Gardens of Boise. The program creates community gardens that are physically, financially, and socially accessible—welcoming low-income and other underserved populations, including refugees. As new garden development and ongoing garden management can be taken over by others, the Refugee Community Garden Project will strengthen its focus on facilitating communication and understanding, and on seeking new resources and outlets for the gardeners to celebrate their cultural heritage in the context of the gardens.

Idaho Office for Refugees

Mission

The Idaho Office for Refugees works to promote mutual understanding between refugees and the larger community by sharing information, encouraging social interaction, and developing opportunities for refugees to participate in all aspects of community life.

Context

Approximately 3,000 refugees from 24 countries representing 42 language groups reside in Boise. According to the 2000 census, Boise's population is approximately 208,000.

Boise Refugee Community Garden – Project Details

Budget includes major items for a first-year garden.

Many of these items can be donated.

Cash: \$3,000: Includes: plowing/tilling, \$200; soil amendments/hauling, \$500; water, \$200; irrigation equipment (hoses, timer, etc), \$1,000; port-a-potty, \$450; tool shed, \$150; shade area and benches, \$200; wheelbarrow, tools, \$250; and seeds and plants, \$50.

In-kind: During the first year of the project, staff and volunteers generated close to \$6,000 in in-kind donations, including irrigation equipment, soil amendments and hauling, plants and seeds, straw bales, a tool shed, lumber, raised beds, and volunteer time and labor, as well as \$1,250 in cash donations.

Time: Year one: staff, 900 hours; AmeriCorps volunteer, 900 hours; community volunteers, 200 hours.

Collaborators: Idaho Office for Refugees, Agency for New Americans, English Language Center, World Relief, Community Gardens of Boise, AmeriCorps, Ahavath Beth Israel Congregation, Girl Scouts of the Silver Sage, and Hillview United Methodist Church.

Funders: Office of Refugee Resettlement, Fund for Idaho, Edwards Mother Earth Foundation, and Rotary.

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What It Takes

- At least one “garden champion.” This person can be paid or unpaid, but should be someone who has this as the focus and priority. It should also be someone who understands gardening.

- Access to free or very inexpensive land and water on a bus line or near

where refugees live. Non-profit organizations and churches are good resources because they often own land that is already being irrigated, and they are interested in community enrichment.

- Funding for or donations of soil amendments, tools and equipment (rototilling at least for the first year), storage, irrigation supplies, hauling, and plants. These items are critical the first year, but as the soil improves, the costs diminish. For us, at one garden, renting a Port-a-Potty is our biggest annual expense!
- A new garden takes three to five years before it will be self-sustaining. Both the land itself and the gardeners who work it need time to become established. Our goal for the first year is to get something to grow, for the second year to improve the infrastructure and soil, and for the third year to support leadership among the gardeners so that they can manage the garden and the landowner relationships on their own.



When Community Stars Shine

Building Connection through the Arts

By Victoria Patterson, Executive Director
Nuestra Casa Family Resource Center
Ukiah, California



La Noche de Estrellas

*Truly amazing.
There were no stereotypes here tonight.
We have a very talented community
and we should all be very proud of it.*

- Mr. and Mrs. Garcia, Community Members

*From a little child to old people,
everybody had a chance
to share their talents.*

- Moises Soria, Family Center Coordinator



Nuestra Casa

Nuestra Casa Family Resource Center was founded in 1995 to serve the Latino community, especially recent immigrants, in Ukiah, a rural town 125 miles north of San Francisco. Once the focus of Mendocino County's rural agricultural economic base, logging, fishing, and growing pears have been replaced by wine, grapes, and tourism. These changes in the economy have brought changes in the county's

demographics. A growing Latino population, primarily from Michoacan and Guanajuato, Mexico, but with groups from Zacatecas, Jalisco, Puebla, and Oaxaca, has joined Native American and European American residents.

Nuestra Casa has a strong focus on preserving Mexican heritage and the Spanish language and sharing them with the greater Ukiah community. We also help recent immigrants become a more vital part of that greater community. These emphases have enabled us to create partnerships with local agencies and organizations, using the arts to enhance our services to Latino families.

Building Networks: Enhancing Family Services through the Arts

A challenge of living in a small, rural environment is competition for private and public funds to support the many programs and services that residents want and need. An advantage, however, is the face-to-face relationships that are built over time. Nuestra Casa has worked long and hard to develop intricate collaborations and innovative ways of sharing limited resources. Our arts projects have emanated from conversations with immigrant community members and local partners, an interest in responding to identified needs, an awareness of potential funding resources, and our imaginations.

Nuestra Casa has worked on a wide range of projects with strong arts and cultural components. Our traditional silver-working class for young adults is



one example. The class drew on the expertise of an immigrant who came from a family of traditional silver workers in Taxco, Mexico and responded to the great need for job training among young immigrants. Although the project has come to an end, Nuestra Casa learned many valuable lessons that inform our current and future work, including the considerable investment of time needed to develop artistic skill and the importance of funding in sustaining a project.

Another example is the Rural Murals Project, which was a collaboration with the Mendocino County Department of Public Health Alcohol and Other Drug Programs (AOD) Prevention Programs. A local artist, himself an immigrant who painted his first mural as a student at Ukiah High School, worked with a group of Latino middle school students, most of whom were recent immigrants identified as “at-risk” youth. The artist encouraged students to remember their years in Mexico in terms of colors, sounds, and images. He also took them on a tour of local murals, presented images of famous Mexican murals, and participated in a ROPES course activity with the students to develop team spirit.¹ The mural, *California Fields*, was unveiled at a ceremony involving the painters, their parents, and the community. The mural adorns the side of the Nuestra Casa building that faces the street, proudly displaying the students’ names.

Nuestra Casa regularly hosts community celebrations like our yearly Dia de los Muertos, featuring Aztec dancers, community altars, and traditional folk arts workshops. In cooperation with Mendocino College, we offer a weekly ballet folklorico class for elementary school children. Our summer day camp is a complex collaboration with California Migrant Education, Ukiah Unified School District, and the San Francisco office of the Mexican Consulate. The camp brings teachers from Mexico to Ukiah for four weeks to teach traditional arts and crafts, Mexican dances, songs, games, and history. Last summer over 200 children participated in the camp.

All of these projects, regardless of whether they were time-limited or whether they continue to operate successfully, have left lasting images and lessons that continue to influence us.

La Noche de Estrellas

Our most recent collaboration has been with SPACE (School for Performing Arts and Cultural Education), a local non-profit performing arts school for children, and the Ukiah Players Theatre (UPT), a local non-profit theater company. The partners worked together to plan and present a Spanish-language theatrical performance at the Ukiah Playhouse.

The idea stemmed from a mutual desire to introduce Latinos to the local theater—which has had minimal attendance and participation from the Latino community—to develop a Spanish-speaking audience and provide a venue for Latino performers. The result was *La Noche de Estrellas*, Night of Stars, a talent show that involved performers from age five to 80 in traditional and modern dance, original songs and poems, dramatic sketches, and pop music.

Anibal Fragoso Castilleja, the event coordinator and SPACE’s bilingual community liaison, remembers the public square in his Mexican hometown filled with music and community: “For Latinos living in the United States, surviving becomes the priority; the hardest challenge in life is adaptation and there is no downtown square in which to gather. Barriers are created, jobs are hard to find, television speaks your language, and isolation hardens.” He adapted the spirit of *carpa*, the traditional Mexican vaudeville tent show, to a variety show that encouraged local performers to showcase their talents and attract a largely Latino audience to a new venue: the Ukiah Playhouse.

Castilleja formed a committee of 16 people with an interest in theater, the arts, and Spanish language, which met regularly at Nuestra Casa over a period of four months to develop, design, and direct the show. The group provided performance direction and made decisions about auditions, the length and quality of the program, tickets vs. donations, scheduling, backstage, and production issues. They built the set, prepared the theater lobby with a Latino art show, and arranged for concessions to be sold by the MESA Club at Ukiah High School.²

UPT donated the theater, lighting and recording specialists, and publicity. Nuestra Casa served as the focal point for information, audition

scheduling, meetings, and general support. To acquaint a new audience with the local theater, the event provided tickets on a first-come, first-served basis for a suggested donation. A set ticket price was not established, to encourage the participation of large families. The dress rehearsal was advertised as a free event and over 100 attended. The next two nights were sold out to capacity audiences of 130 each evening. Families, interested community members, and teachers flocked to experience this historic event.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The success of *La Noche de Estrellas* created challenges for Nuestra Casa to tackle in the future. The higher-than-expected level of attendance, which resulted in many people being turned away during the two-night run, means that a larger venue will be needed. Other future improvements include developing a smoother committee process that avoids scheduling conflicts and fosters better communication between graphic designers and Spanish translators. Finally, charging for admission, instead of suggesting a donation, will help cover production expenses.

Benefits and Outcomes

The success of the first *Noche de Estrellas* has paved the way for numerous arts projects, including the formation of a Latino theater group that performed a delightful, comedic *Pastorela* at Christmas and is planning a new production for Cinco de Mayo. With support from community underwriters, SPACE developed a large community arts scholarship fundraiser featuring a women's mariachi band and a special voice workshop hosted by Nuestra Casa. Nuestra Casa also offers guitar lessons and digital workshops for Latino teens that combine photos and voice-over narration to create compelling stories about their lives and dreams. These teen workshops will culminate in an exhibition.

And of course, plans are underway for a second *Noche de Estrellas* with perhaps four performances instead of two!

Integrating the arts into social services has reaped many benefits. It has allowed Nuestra Casa to showcase the talents of the Latino community to itself and to the larger community. Valuing traditional Mexican heritage and culture by making it publicly visible has strengthened cultural pride and self-esteem. It has also encouraged youth to study and participate in the arts and to maintain fluency in Spanish. Weaving the arts into our work, Nuestra Casa has created a public venue to promote and display both traditional and contemporary Mexican American art and culture.

Participation in the arts not only benefits the newcomers—it also contributes to the overall well-being of the broader community. Arts programs create an opportunity for interpersonal interactions and for the development of healthy relationships between people who might otherwise not have the opportunity to do so. Santiago Simental, board president of Nuestra Casa, aptly observes: “This is how real change will come about: by sharing our deepest and best selves.”

¹ *ROPES* is an outdoor adventure course that focuses on team-building, creating trusting relationships, building self-esteem and self-confidence, and developing new physical and mental skills through the use of zip lines, climbing structures, trapezes, and other equipment made of ropes hung from trees and other structures.

² *MESA* is Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement—a California program designed for high school and college students to encourage under-represented populations in these fields.



Nuestra Casa Family Resource Center

Mission

Nuestra Casa provides Spanish-language, culturally appropriate social services to the growing Latino population of Mendocino County, California. The organization is vital to the entire community because:

We help families reach their goals and succeed;
We ensure that families adjust to life in the United States;
We teach children and adults to be successful learners;
We guide Latino families as they become full members of our economic, social, and cultural institutions; and
We showcase the strengths and uniqueness of the Latino culture.

Context

The population of Ukiah and surrounding hamlets is approximately 45,000. Mendocino County's population is considered to be 20 percent Hispanic; however, between 1995 and 2005, Latino enrollment in county schools has increased by 62 percent, while White enrollment decreased by 26 percent.

La Noche de Estrellas – Project Details

Cash \$6,157: Includes production costs such as stage and lighting technicians, lighting and sound expenses, minimal set design and theater sets, and videotaping; and publicity costs such as graphic design, posters, flyers, and ticket printing.

In-Kind: Nuestra Casa provided contact with Latino artists, meeting space, publicity and ticket distribution, and served as the project's information contact, with a total value of \$3,000. SPACE contributed project coordination and publicity. The Ukiah Players Theatre donated the use of its theater, directorial assistance, and technical support, including lights. The combined total of in-kind support from SPACE and UPT is \$6,000.

Time: Event coordinator, 200 hours; volunteers, 600 hours.

Collaborators: SPACE and Ukiah Players Theatre.

Funders: The S.H. Cowell Foundation chose Ukiah as a recipient of one of its place-based grants to stimulate community collaboration. The Foundation provided funding for a Spanish-language facilitator.

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Domestic Voices

Using Oral History and Ethnography for Social Activism

By Amy E. Skillman, Director, Arts and Heritage
Institute for Cultural Partnerships
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania



*Even from all our diverse
backgrounds and experiences,
we find it easy to sit down,
woman to woman, and
just talk to one another.*

• Susan Man



An Unlikely Group

An unlikely group of women sit comfortably in chairs around the rehearsal studio of a local theater. Remnants of Indian, Vietnamese, and Colombian snacks litter the side table; half-full bottles of water stand within reach, ready to quench thirsty throats too focused on their lines to notice they are getting dry. For several months these women have been gathering regularly to

share stories and create a performance piece about their experiences coming to America from Vietnam, Colombia, China, India, Ecuador, Guinea, Cambodia, Turkey, and Trinidad. What brings them together now is their struggle to make a new life and their desire to share their stories with new neighbors in central Pennsylvania.

The artistic director jumps up and says, "Okay, I am going to leave the room and I want you to create the Statue of Liberty with your bodies." The women discuss how to do this. Should they stand side by side, each one in the pose of the Lady? Or, can they create a single living statue using all of their bodies together? After short deliberations and a few practices, they take their positions and call the director back. She walks through the door and stops in her tracks, hand to her mouth, a single breath caught in her throat. Tears fill her eyes as she begins to understand what Lady Liberty means to these women.

This camaraderie wasn't always there. While the performance piece was created and staged in a mere six months, the trust and community that made the play so successful were four years in the making.

The Story Circle: Bringing Experience to Life

Since 1992, over 30,000 refugees and immigrants have made Pennsylvania their home. The resulting dramatic demographic shifts have given rise to unprecedented levels of prejudice and hate crimes. It is hard to hear newcomers talk about the prejudice, misunderstanding, and stereotyping they face here after such difficult journeys to escape that very experience in their homelands.



At the Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP) we believe that paying attention to newcomers' stories and traditions might ease their resettlement and build awareness and tolerance among the general public. To that end, we sought refugee and immigrant women to collaborate on a project with ICP and found a perfect partner in the Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN).

Led by Ho-Thanh Nguyen, a Vietnamese refugee, PAIRWN works with immigrant and refugee women to develop leadership skills, self-confidence, and fellowship to assist one another in making a successful transition to a new life. Since 2001, ICP and PAIRWN have worked closely together on many projects. For instance, the PAIRWN cookbook gathered over 100 recipes, as well as stories from each contributor about the meaning of food in her life and family.

The interest in stories associated with food paved the way for the Story Circle Project. About 30 women with a diverse range of experiences, histories, and cultures participated in individual interviews, as well as monthly Story Circles where they had the opportunity to practice their English and share common experiences.

Each month we picked a topic, such as the role of women in community life and the changing roles of women in diaspora, how they recreate their culture and traditions in a new world, and their perspectives on diversity in Pennsylvania. One story led to another as this circle of women drew closer in friendship and understanding. Eventually, we invited a licensed therapist to be on hand at each meeting to handle any especially difficult situations that might arise when the women talk about leaving their homelands, facing prejudice in the workplace, or losing control of their children.

Our Voices: Refugee and Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories

As the women read transcripts of interviews and Story Circles, they identified important themes and explored how best to present what they were learning. A curator, filmmaker, and theater educator offered recommendations about how the stories might be presented in their respective media. The women became particularly excited about doing an exhibit and a theater piece, so we did both!

The exhibit, *Our Voices: Refugee and Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories*, opened at the State Museum of Pennsylvania on September 11, 2005—a date whose significance was not lost on these women. Blending artistic sensibilities, oral history, and ethnographic perspectives, *Our Voices* offered an understanding of the ways that refugee and immigrant women have rebuilt their lives in Pennsylvania. The exhibit put a face on these newcomers through their stories, which drew upon several themes:

- **Humor**—stories about language and confusing behavior patterns among Americans.
- **Acculturation**—getting used to the way that Americans do things.
- **Personal transformation**—adjusting to changing roles as women.
- **Courage**—overcoming incredible barriers in order to escape terror.
- **Motherhood**—having babies without the usual extended family to help out, becoming invisible in their children's lives.
- **The act of leaving everything behind**—the things they miss most about their home countries.

An artistic quality portrait photograph complemented each woman's story. A display case of personal artifacts—a mother's rosary, a cookbook, a family photograph—made a powerful statement about what was most important in these women's lives. There was a circle of chairs, each one hand-painted by the women with motifs and colors that she selected. A 14-foot-long, life-sized group photograph hung along one wall with a quote from one of the participants overhead that read, "Even from all our diverse backgrounds, we still find it easy to sit down woman to woman and just talk to each other." The women's real voices were brought into the room through a DVD that captures the feel of the Story Circles. More than 750 people attended the opening.

Story Circle: Coming to America in the 21st Century

At the same time, we worked together on a script for the performance, while attending diction and improvisation workshops with a theater educator. Those who chose not to act learned sound, lighting, and stage management.

Story Circle: Coming to America in the 21st Century re-created the Story Circle setting, with women sitting around a table talking. Through music, movement, visual art, and the spoken word, *Story Circle* dramatized the courage, heartbreak, and dreams of immigrant and refugee women. Created and performed by the women themselves, the play depicted the challenges and triumphs that newcomers to America have conquered and celebrated. *Story Circle* was presented for three nights to sold-out audiences as part of our local community theater's *WomenSpeak* celebration of women playwrights and women-centered theater, and again six months later to accompany the exhibit.

For both the play and the exhibit, we offered Study Guides and Talk Back Sessions to assist audiences and visitors in looking at their own attitudes about immigration, racism, and tolerance for diversity. During the Talk Back sessions, we asked if the play offered any surprises or new discoveries. One woman said, "These women's stories made me realize the internal racism I carry, and they give me the courage to talk about it and the desire to make some personal changes."

Benefits and Outcomes

The Story Circles have created an almost sacred space where these women, who have to hold back in all other aspects of their lives, can say what is on their minds to other women who understand, who share the experience. Most of the women appreciate the challenge of expressing ideas and feelings in a second language; they have all helped each other find the right words. Whether refugees or immigrants, they have mourned their losses together,

laughed at their mistakes, and shared ideas for dealing with insensitive attitudes in others. They have created new traditions and a new sense of community. Some have said that the PAIRWN community is even more important to them than their national or ethnic community. The daughter of one woman in the play told us that the play ". . . saved my mother's life at a time when she was struggling every day just to get out of bed."

The Story Circle project has been about much more than the exhibit or the play. It has enhanced self-confidence, developed leadership skills, and provided a forum for sharing child-rearing strategies. It has also been about the process of telling stories to understand one's own experience and translating personal narratives into powerful tools for social and personal change. During a planning meeting, one woman helped me understand: "This project is making me feel important for the first time since arriving in the U.S. two years ago."



Coming to America

The first meal I have, the church and my sponsor bought us a big box of Minute Rice . . . and told us that this is the rice, you can cook it and eat it. And the directions were in English. Nobody showed me how to do it. I never cooked that way before. We rinsed the rice off, then we put the rice in the pot and we put the cold water in there, measuring one knuckle on my finger. That's how I learned when we cook rice in my country. Regardless, Minute Rice is different from long rice.

Then, in half an hour, forty-five minutes, when we think the rice is done, we put it in the bowl to serve, to eat dinner; it's just like soup! We sit there and cry. Six of us sit there and cry. Because we have the meat there, but we have no rice, and rice is like potatoes here—very important. Right now, we're looking back the last 28 years to the first meal we had, and I'm laughing now. But at that time it wasn't funny. That time was sad; it was really sad. Now I know how Minute Rice is cooked!



• *Ho-Thanh Nguyen, PAIRWN leader and Vietnamese refugee, relates the story above about her early days living in the United States. From an interview conducted in 2003.*

Institute for Cultural Partnerships

Mission

The mission of the Institute for Cultural Partnerships is to facilitate opportunities for understanding among cultures and communities. Our work often occurs at the intersection of tension and culture and takes the form of arts and heritage initiatives, community programs, and diversity training.

Context

In the last five years, 22 percent (2,232) of all refugee arrivals to the state have settled in central Pennsylvania. A substantial influx of secondary migrants from around the country has added to the numbers. Since 2002, refugees have come from over 26 countries: Cuba, 43 percent; various African countries, 16 percent; Ukraine, 13 percent; Russia, 10 percent; and Bosnia, 4 percent.

Story Circle Project – Project Details

Over three years, the first year was devoted to background research. The exhibit and play were developed during the second year, and installed/performed during the third year.

Cash: \$53,592: Includes: research component (one year), \$17,600; exhibit design and implementation, \$23,684 (includes DVD, study guide, and participant workshops). The *Story Circle* play cost approximately \$6,154 for each run of three performances.

In-kind: The State Museum of Pennsylvania provided design and installation services for the exhibit. The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency printed the project study guide. Total in-kind support was \$28,000.

Time: Project coordinator Amy Skillman spent 30 percent of staff time on the project over three years. Two full-time summer interns worked on various aspects of the project.

Collaborators: Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN), The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, Open Stage of Harrisburg, and Women, Create! The Center for Women's Creative Expression.

Funders: Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Pennsylvania Humanities Council, Harrisburg School District, Women, Create!, The Greater Harrisburg Foundation, Jump Street (a local arts council), and the YWCA Race Against Racism Fund.

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The story of the hunter and the doves has great significance to immigrant artists. I created this production many years ago for my son who was five years old then, and not very interested in watching the traditional stories portrayed in Indian dance. What began simply as a gift to him has been kept alive by the interest of audiences who have seen or heard about it. It's a classic example of the relevance of stories through the ages and the ability of art to travel with ease.

• Ramaa Bharadvaj

In Conclusion

Working at the Crossroads of Immigrant Cultures and Social Services

By Laura R. Marcus, Project Director
Building Cultural Bridges



Once, a hunter scattered some grains and set a trap.

A flock of doves, unaware of the danger, were lured into the trap.

They fought, pulling in different directions to escape from the net.

The wisest among them advised the flock to stop their individual struggles, join together, and flap their wings in united effort to push themselves upwards toward the sky.

As they did, they rose up with the net and flew into the air.

From the 5,000 year old fable, Panchatantra; Animal Fables of India, specifically from the section Mitra Praaptikam. In Sanskrit, Mitra means "friend" and Praaptikam is "attaining or gaining." Combined, they add up to attaining success through unity or friendship.

• As related by Ramaa Bharadvaj, Indian Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi dancer and Director, Angahara Ensemble.
www.ramaadance.com



The fable of the hunter and the doves offers words to live by. The wisdom and cultural knowledge embodied in the *Panchatantra* have traveled through centuries via human memory—in storytelling, dance, music, puppetry, and the printed page—resonating in the hearts of generations who find in its lessons enduring relevance and beauty. The traditional art forms of many cultures continually travel the world in the global flow that transports people and ideas from country to country, as war, the quest for opportunity, or countless other circumstances compel people to leave their homes.

In the United States demographics are changing dramatically as new cultural communities take shape in traditional gateway cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, as well as in seemingly unlikely destinations like Atlanta, Omaha, and Las Vegas. Global unrest and the renewed national conversation about immigration resound in newscasts, in our streets, and in the halls of our legislature. We encounter demographic change most intimately in our own neighborhoods. It is easy to lose sight of individual stories and voices, as the larger issues, concerns for equality, and fear of the unknown take hold. Yet, such shifts in our cultural landscape are a constant in our history, giving us the moniker, “land of immigrants.” Among members of host communities and newcomers alike, each generation experiences new waves of immigration as fundamental change. The potential for tension and discovery are there for all of us to navigate.

Where once the “melting pot” encouraged the melding of ingredients into a cultural soup, today’s buzz around diversity invites us to savor the uniqueness of individual flavors. What better way to explore our commonalities and differences than through the arts? In our country, the arts with a capital “A”

tend to be regarded as a separate category of experience, one that is unfortunately not always considered essential to our wellbeing. Yet especially in the case of traditional cultural expression, art is organically woven into the fabric of daily life, inseparable from the way we think, eat, build shelter, work, celebrate, or create family. For newcomers who have made the United States their home by choice or necessity, traditional culture is often a thread of continuity between a person’s homeland and a new neighborhood.

In *The Art of Community* we have gathered profiles of initiatives focusing on refugee and immigrant cultures, in which arts and social service workers have stepped outside their respective boxes to pool their expertise and share resources for the common good. As professionals, we tend to work in separate but parallel universes, often unaware of our collaborative potential.

On the surface, the arts field may seem driven by an “art for art’s sake” philosophy. Deeply engaged in identifying, documenting, encouraging, and presenting artists and their work in a multitude of contexts, we may not always stop to consider the far-reaching benefits of participation in arts activities for all involved. Understandably, most social service agencies working with immigrant communities concentrate on the practical realities of basic survival: shelter, employment, language acquisition, and education—the tools of self-sufficiency and the foundation for a good life in a new country. As the profiles in this volume suggest, attention to the artistic and cultural wellbeing of immigrants can support these goals. Enhanced general and mental health, English language acquisition, professional and economic development, and opportunities for cross-cultural interaction are among the benefits of incorporating the arts into the processes of resettlement and cultural integration.



As funding in both the arts and social services dwindles, there are fewer people doing more work with less support. The idea of disrupting our routines to work with colleagues in other fields may appear a burden. Yet the reality often creates an economy of effort and resources that is mutually beneficial, greater than the sum of its parts. It is at this crossroads that innovation and creativity can flourish, helping to build community in the face of change and adjustment.

The profiles included here emanate from diverse professional perspectives, inviting others to collaborate across disciplinary or cultural borders. The first step is as simple as identifying potential partners. For folklorists and arts organizations, outreach to social service agencies working directly with immigrants can create better access to existing programs, and develop more inclusive and representative constituencies. For those who work in social service settings, learning about local arts resources can open the door to new ways of assisting clients. Participation in arts and cultural activities is not a substitute for job placement, but it gives people a sense of value or belonging in a new environment, and provides much-needed opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. Further, the opportunity for newcomer artists to make the leap in translating their work to a new cultural context offers the potential for professional development or a way to earn additional income through the sale, demonstration, teaching, or performance of art forms.

As arts and social service organizations become familiar with each other's programs and services, new avenues for cooperation and mutual support emerge. The profiles featured here demonstrate an ever-expanding circle of collaboration that can encompass such community resources as museums and galleries, schools, theaters, and community gardens. Arts supply and music stores, crafts guilds, libraries, restaurants, farmers markets, and others are also likely partners in supporting immigrant arts and cultures.

Many immigrant communities are already engaged in artistic and cultural activities, attesting to the importance of maintaining their heritage in a new country. Enhanced access to local arts resources—including specialized supplies and instruments, space, opportunities to share or market their art forms, and funding—will bolster these efforts. Ultimately, support for immigrant cultures offers a win-win situation, as receiving communities enjoy opportunities to better understand their newest neighbors through the arts.

At first glance the goals and practices of arts and social service agencies may appear vastly different, but a closer look will reveal that there are many shared concerns. As in the timeless fable of the hunter and the doves, we must recognize our collective strength and unite our individual efforts to ascend greater heights in supporting the arts and cultures of immigrant communities.

Photo Captions and Credits

My Journey Yours

Page 10, corner – A Refugee Family Services office is temporarily transformed by *My Journey Yours* participants at work.

Page 10 / 11 – Collage made by *MJY* project director Gwylene

Gallimard from images of refugees and walking people, as well as indigo batik made by participants.

Pages 10 & 12, inset – Details from *Our Island* embroidery piece.

Page 12 – Nigerian artist Marcia Kure paints plants, a metaphor for taking root and taking refuge.

Page 13, top

– A Sewing Circle participant at RFS.

Page 13, bottom – The RFS Sewing Circle poses with their embroidery piece, *Our Island*, at the Youth Art Connection exhibition.

- Photos courtesy of Gwylene Gallimard, Jean-Marie Mauclet, and the *My Journey Yours* team at Refugee Family Services.

Changing Worlds

All photos from *Changing Worlds' Literacy and Cultural Connections Program in Chicago*.

Page 14, top – *Our Life Changes*, by Meeda Pongpradith, fourth grade student at Daniel Boone School.

Page 14, bottom – Students work on individual squares for their class identity quilt at Gale School. Students designed individual quilt squares for a class quilt. Each square incorporates photos, drawings, and writing about students and their family.

Page 14, inset – Collage by Michael Mancilla, fourth grade, George Rogers Clark School. Accompanying story excerpt: "My mom said we were leaving. We were leaving Mexico. I was going to miss Mexico everyday."

Page 15 – Student and mother with Gale School Identity Quilt.

Page 16, inset – *Jacob's Family*, collage by Jacob Torres, fourth grade, George Rogers Clark School.

Page 17, top – Identity Quilt square.

- Photos by Kay Berkson, courtesy of Changing Worlds.

Growing Community

Page 18 – A Somali Bantu gardener plants her crops.

Page 21, top – Gardeners and volunteers turn bare ground to fertile soil.

- Diane Ronayne photo (Fund for Idaho).

Page 21, bottom – Bosnian children help to build garden paths.

- Photos courtesy of Idaho Office for Refugees.

Community Stars

Page 22, top – Rodrigo Ruiz, Snake Dance, *La Noche de Estrellas*.

- Evan Johnson photo

Page 22, bottom – Summer campers at Nuestra Casa's Plan Vacacional.

Page 22, inset – Juvenal Vasquez and Lisette Pona dance at *La Noche de Estrellas*.

Page 23 – Pomolita Middle School students and *California Fields*, which they designed and painted with muralist, Isidoro Cervantes (wearing cap).

- Victoria Patterson photo

Page 24, top – Gregoria Prieto and Anibal Fragoso Castilleja in "La Danza del Venado," *La Noche de Estrellas*.

- Evan Johnson photo

Page 24, bottom – Summer campers at Nuestra Casa's Plan Vacacional.

Page 25, top – Lifting *California Fields* into place.

- Victoria Patterson photo

Page 25, bottom – Lisette Pona and Juvenal Vasquez in "El Huarachaso".

- Evan Johnson photo

- Photos courtesy of Nuestra Casa

Domestic Voices

Page 26, top – Original paper cut by Jupi Das; logo used for *Our Voices: Refugee and Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories*.

Page 26, bottom – As the closing scene in *Story Circle*, the actors enact Lady Liberty as a symbol of their accomplishments.

- Don Alsedek photo, courtesy of Open Stage of Harrisburg

Page 26, inset – *Story Circle* participant Susan Man from China and Canada.

- Don Alsedek photo, courtesy of Open Stage of Harrisburg

Page 27 – Women from four countries and three continents share a moment during the opening of *Our Voices*.

Page 28, top – *Our Voices* participants selected and displayed dresses brought from India, left, and the Philippines among their most precious belongings.

Page 28, bottom – Dr. Suliman from Sudan stands in front of the mural of all the exhibit participants.

Page 29, top – A bag of jasmine rice helps fill a kitchen cupboard used in *Our Voices* to depict the many foods that newcomers seek in the U.S.

Page 29, bottom – Ho-Thanh Nguyen.

- Don Alsedek photo, courtesy of Open Stage of Harrisburg

- Unless noted, photos by Don Giles, courtesy of the State Museum of Pennsylvania

Conclusion

Angahara Dance Ensemble in *Panchatantra—Animal Fables of India*

- Photos courtesy of Ramaa Bharadvaj



We immigrants who leave the culture, comforts, and conveniences of our known land and embark on the journey to a new land, we come in search of Freedom. Sometimes, the roots that once nourished us now seem to tug at our feet like iron chains. As we journey through the transformational stages of acculturating ourselves to our new environment—namely the adventure, the anxiety of separation from (and sometimes even rejection of) our own roots, and the adjustment—finding the final equilibrium happens through the recognition and sharing of our own culture. That is how we define our place in our new land. It is only through finding our roots that we find a state of integration, freedom, and acceptance. And it is our arts that provide us those roots.

- Ramaa Bharadvaj