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Refugee Transitions Newsletter

To All The Friends of Refugee Transitions

September 2006

Welcome to RT's fall newsletter! We've had a great year so far, and are looking forward to more exciting developments on the horizon. In 2006 so far, we've started a new partnership with the Oakland Unified School District, doubled the size of our board, increased our budget, and launched a new series of information sessions in hopes of expanding our community of supporters. Read on to learn more...

New Partnership for Youth Programming

This past spring, Refugee Transitions (RT) formalized a partnership with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) for the federally funded Refugee Students Assistance Program, administered by the California Department of Education and aimed at helping refugee youth achieve grade level performance. This partnership represents the first comprehensive programming specifically for the 3,000 refugee and asylee youth enrolled in the district. The funding, for summer school and after school academic programming, is expected to last for four years.



Over the summer, RT assisted the OUSD in setting up the first summer Newcomers' School, specifically for refugee and

asylee youth in Oakland. RT conducted outreach for students and helped enroll 60 youth in the summer school, which was taught by credentialed district teachers.

Newcomers School Principal Carl Keyes;
Laura Vaudreuil, Executive Director of
Refugee Transitions; Chen Kong, OUSD
Refugee Student Coordinator

The students studied English, social science, and math five mornings a week. RT's volunteers Jane Kraft, Tenley Harrison, Melina Mance, Gina Mori, Mary Loritz, Brittney Staropoli, Marilyn Risi, and Alicia Lobaco assisted the teachers in the classrooms and helped supervise a field trip to San Francisco State University. Other RT volunteers also helped out with the program, with Pamela Geason, who works in the UC Berkeley Admission's Department, conducting a presentation on college preparation, and Joel and Tiffne Whitley leading a sports camp and distributing backpacks to youth enrolled in the camp. Thank you to our wonderful volunteers for all their hard work and dedication! This program was a wonderful success and we look forward to improvement and expansion in the future.

At the end of the summer, teachers and youth designed a yearbook and had a student contest to see who could come up with the best logo and slogan for the school. Congratulations to Bersabel for Palzom!

RT will combine its successful Bridge-2-Success refugee youth tutoring and mentoring program with the Refugee Students Assistance Program in order to better serve the students. We are looking forward to serving many refugee and asylee youth through after school programming and summer school for many years.

New Members of the Board of Directors

RT is honored to introduce the nine new members for 2006:

Brian Bartlett is a Lieutenant in the U.S. Coast Guard where he manages contracts. He received a B.S. in Operations Research from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and is currently a candidate in the Coast Guard's Chartered Financial Analyst Program.

Bill Doyle is an asset manager at the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, one of the largest affordable housing developers in the Bay Area, where he manages over 1,000 units of low-income housing. Bill received a B.A. from Stanford University.

Sarah Charukesnant brings fundraising experience as Development Manager for Environmental Traveling Companions (ETC). Sarah received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English from Cal Poly, and has also served as an adjunct professor teaching literature and writing.

Jason Cheng is a fourth-year medical student at the University of California, San Francisco and previously graduated from Stanford University with a B.S. The son of immigrant parents, his passion for immigrant and refugee issues was further inspired in 2004 when he was selected as a Paul & Daisy Soros Fellow for New Americans.

Chrysty Esperanza is an associate at Farella, Braun + Martel LLP in San Francisco. She earned her law degree from U.C. Hastings College of Law, and prior to that, graduated with a B.A. from UCLA. She has experience working with non-profit organizations that support at-risk youth and volunteers as a mentor and tutor for the Volunteers in Parole program.

Mari Kryder is a Senior Analyst at Cornerstone Research, an economic and finance consulting firm. She has a B.A. in Economics with a minor in Mathematics from Stanford University. Mari has previously worked with several other non-profits.

Samira Rahmatullah currently works in JPMorgan Public Finance, where she helps government entities and non-profit organizations raise financing for public projects by issuing tax-exempt bonds. Samira received a B.A. in Economics from Barnard College, Columbia University.

Iman Sheikh is an Engineering Manager with Ingrian Networks, with a B.S. in Computer Science earned in Bombay. He started with RT as a volunteer tutor.

Kathy Winship has spent her professional career in the non-profit field, most recently as the Program Manager for WorkLink's Integrated Work Program, and has volunteered with other San Francisco non-profits. She has a BA from Wesleyan University.

Refugee Transitions is pleased to welcome this diverse and talented group of new Board members and looks forward to their contributions.

Volunteer Spotlight

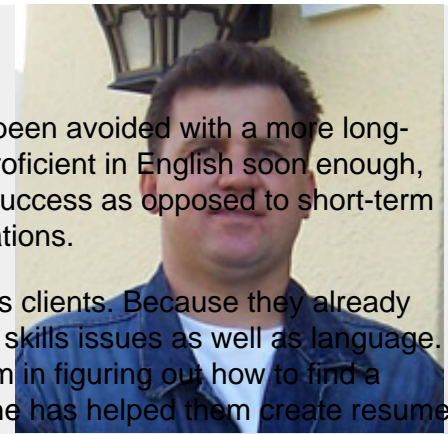
This month we would like you to meet Jozsef Horvath, who arrived in the United States as a refugee seventeen years ago. Jozsef currently works as a volunteer with a Ukrainian family (parents and two-and-a-half-year-old daughter) in San Francisco. He finds that being a tutor enables him to help the family avoid some of the problems and mistakes he himself encountered when he arrived as a refugee.

Jozsef left Hungary in 1986 and lived for two and a half years at a refugee camp in Austria. In 1989, thanks to sponsorship by a religious group, he was able to immigrate to the United States, and was placed in Syracuse, New York. For the week

after he arrived, volunteers helped him get oriented--but after that he was on his own. In the months and years that followed, Jozsef made a number of mistakes that impeded his integration into American society, mistakes he feels could have been avoided with a more long-term advisory system. Those mistakes included not becoming proficient in English soon enough, not getting the necessary educational credentials for long-term success as opposed to short-term employment, and not understanding all of the immigration regulations.

Jozsef keeps these mistakes of his in mind while working with his clients. Because they already have developed some English skills, he has tried to focus on life skills issues as well as language. For example, when their daughter became sick, he assisted them in figuring out how to find a doctor. Likewise, with the parents now focused on getting jobs, he has helped them create resumes and work on specific English skills, such as what to say when a potential employer calls back for an interview. Again keeping his own past in mind, he makes sure the family keeps their registration with the INS up-to-date and avoids the kinds of mistakes he made that slowed down his path to citizenship.

As a refugee himself, Jozsef serves as a powerful role model. He worked in the hotel industry for ten years, then earned a degree in International Relations, and also got married. On top of that, he is working on another graduate degree. Luckily for us, he still makes the time to volunteer with Refugee Transitions because he wants to give something back, and help others have a smoother transition than he had.



Refugee Awareness Celebration

RT and several other members of the East Bay Refugee Forum held a refugee awareness event/picnic at San Antonio Park in Oakland on August 11. This celebration was a success, with over 70 attendees enjoying Vietnamese barbeque, Bosnian burik, and Liberian specialties, in addition to at least ten other gourmet dishes from around the world. Several students enrolled in the summer Newcomer's School received yearbooks from the OUSD and had a great time playing badminton, tug of war, and soccer.



Volunteers and youth at picnic.

World of Refugee Transitions - Introductory Meetings

Please come to a one-hour session and learn more about the agency's history, programs, and clients. We are holding these monthly sessions to introduce people to the work our organization is doing, whether they are interested in volunteering, helping with financial support, or just finding out more about our mission and programming. At present we are holding them in San Francisco, but plan to expand the sessions throughout the Bay Area in the future. If you know of people who might like to attend one of these one-hour introductions, please let us know and we will send an invitation. Or call 415-989-2151 to sign up!

Upcoming Sessions:

October 25th, 6:30 PM

November 15th, 6:30 PM

World Difference Lunch Hosted by Refugee Transitions

December 7, 2006, 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Mark your calendars and come to a luncheon hosted by Refugee Transitions at Farmer Brown, one of the most popular new restaurants in downtown San Francisco!

Call 415-989-2151 in advance to reserve a seat.

<http://www.farmerbrownsf.com/>

Become a Volunteer

Become involved with Refugee Transitions and help support the refugee and immigrant communities in the Bay Area! You'll receive extensive training and case support and will benefit from a unique experience.

RT has long waitlists for refugees and immigrants who need our services. If you'd like to volunteer, please contact Muhamed at 415-989-2151 or go to our website at www.reftrans.org and fill out an application.

Those of you who currently are or have been volunteers, please talk to friends who you think will benefit from such an experience and encourage them to give us a call.

Our Supporters

Refugee Transitions wishes to thank the following for their tremendous support during the year 2006:

Private Institutional

- [The Van Löben Sels/Rembe Rock Foundation](#)
- [East Bay Community Foundation](#)
- [Everett Foundation](#)
- [The Vanguard Foundation](#)

State and Federal

- [The California State Department of Education](#)

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- [Cisco Systems Foundation](#)