

Opening Remarks

Best Practices Gallery



Important Support on the Way to the American Dream

It is humbling to have been chosen as the new Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. I have been part of the refugee and immigrant world for over three decades, starting with my own journey to the U.S. as a refugee at a young age, then as a professional assisting other refugees and immigrants start a new life in our country. Thus, my commitment to refugees, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations is very personal.

As we all know, ORR is committed to helping refugees achieve self-sufficiency within the shortest timeframe possible—we want to offer the American dream to all our newly arrived friends. However, it is not just economic self-sufficiency that helps refugees achieve success and happiness. A critical element of a refugee's potential success can, in large part, be directly impacted by his or her support structure within the home. Having family members and partners who provide emotional and spiritual support aids refugees who are embarking on the resettlement journey.

That is why the Refugee Healthy Marriage Program is so important. A strong and healthy marriage provides support not only for the married couple, but also for their children and entire families. The enrichment and respect that comes from healthy marriages can positively impact refugees and their families, ultimately making their resettlement and integration into American society more attainable, sustainable, and enjoyable.

Eskinder Negash, Director
Office of Refugee Resettlement

On the Cover:

Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts hosted a very successful first multi-cultural celebration for refugee families. Among over 150 participants were three young Meskhetian Turk women who came to the celebration in their traditional costumes.

Tamador Gibreel, a Sudanese native who used to be an actress and director of traditional Sudanese theater currently working as a Community Support Clinician at the Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts in Springfield and is well known as a Healthy Marriage educator. She performs on a drum during a multi-cultural potluck dinner for refugees from Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, Russia, Somalia, Sudan, and Vietnam. Tamador believes that cheering refugees up and entertaining them also helps in marriage.

Photography by Bert Krasner.

Kudos to Catholic Charities in Hartford!

For those who do not know, Tamara Moreland-Winters is the Director of the Black Family Enrichment Program (BFEP) within Catholic Charities-Hartford. Under the BFEP's umbrella is the Refugee Healthy Marriage Program. Tamara's management style in integrating both programs is amazing. Though she and her staff of 30 primarily serve the Black community, they also serve refugees from Burundi, Somalia, Burma, Liberia, and Russia. Therefore, they pride themselves on having a very strategic approach in integrating all cultures. One of their strategies is targeting youth through a number of after-school activities. Once they have earned the respect and support from the youth, then they're able to recruit the parents (and other adults) into the marriage education program.

During my site visit I had a chance to sit in and observe two workshops. Both were great, but one blew me away. It was a workshop for teens who are contemplating dating. The workshop's topic was Communication and covered the basics of passive, aggressive, and assertive behaviors—as well as gender roles, differences, etc. The workshop comprised teenaged Burmese girls. Throughout the session, the instructor, Dawn McKinley, asked each girl to expound on a subject as it relates to her parents. I thought this a very clever tactic. It was surprising to hear the diverse norms in different girls' homes.

Then the workshop focused on non-verbal communication. This is where I had to hold back the tears. It's my understanding that Dawn is an expert in Expressive Therapy and uses its techniques quite often in her workshops. So she used it for this one. What she did was using an African drum to communicate with each of the girls, non-verbally. Dawn had one drum and there was another drum given to one of the Burmese girls. Dawn started beating the drum and asked the other drummer to respond according to what she thought Dawn was saying. Almost instantly they started having an intense non-verbal conversation just by using the drums. Then Dawn

took it a step further. She had the other girls interpret (verbally with very limited English) what Dawn and the other drummer were communicating to each other. The responses were amazing. One observer gave her interpretation. She said that both Dawn and the other drummer were having an argument, but Dawn didn't like that she was being ignored so she started yelling. However, the other drummer was not fearful of Dawn's anger so she spoke to Dawn calmly causing her to lower her voice. The conversations and interpretations were so moving. Some argued back through the drum, others took a different approach.

Through this activity the girls were able to distinguish the differences from being passive, aggressive, and assertive non-verbally. I'm assuming the biggest lesson for them was the importance of body language. At least that's what I learned. But the girls were so overjoyed to not only fully understand someone from a different culture, but to be understood. After the session was over I learned that the girls have only been in the U.S. just under a year yet it is obvious that this program is having a positive impact on their day-to-day lives.

As I usually do when I'm utterly impressed with any aspect of your programs, I extend kudos publicly. So kudos to Tamara and her staff for doing an amazing job in promoting healthy families in Connecticut.

Jill M. Morris,
Refugee Healthy Marriage Program ORR,
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Notes from the Field

Best Practices Gallery



Empowering New Refugee Communities

Refugees from Bhutan were the newest population to attend classes offered by our Pittsburgh Refugee Healthy Families Program at the

Jewish Family & Children's Service (JF&CS) of Pittsburgh this summer. During a recent workshop facilitator Courtney Bahr noted: "The Bhutanese women were so open with each other about the changes they face living now in Pittsburgh that at one point, we were all in tears. It was a great experience."

People are eager to learn. One Money Personalities course graduated eighteen couples from Bhutan – the largest graduating class of any workshops we have provided thus far. As one participant shared, "This is the most valuable information we have been provided with yet."

A separate Money Personalities course was offered to Karen refugees, who arrived in Pittsburgh during 2008. We also are developing plans with both Burmese and Karen community leaders for a mentoring program to work with these populations. This new mentoring program will help provide

resources for services and empower refugees to develop their own community organization.

This year twenty-eight couples have attended our programs. We even had a single young man who asks us to participate. He said, "I know that I am not married, but I wish to stay in the course, because I think it would better to know this information." As the Refugee Healthy Families Program works to strengthen refugee families (and singles!) in Pittsburgh, we continue to build on collaborative relationships with partner organizations, such as Catholic Charities, Acculturation for Justice, Access and Peace Outreach (AJAPO), South Hills Interfaith Ministries (SHIM) and the Prospect Park Family Center. Many of these partner organizations will participate in a free training on working with refugee groups that JF&CS is developing for up-coming fall of 2009.

Dawn Zuckerman, MSW,
Pittsburgh Refugee Healthy Families Program
Coordinator,
Refugee employment specialist
Jewish Family & Children's Service of Pittsburgh

Picture: Healthy Marriage Workshop Graduation in Pittsburgh. Program Coordinator Dawn Zuckerman and Refugee Services Director Leslie Aizenman share a happy moment with Healthy Marriage Workshop graduates from Bhutan.

April Learning

"I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught", said Winston Churchill, one of the greatest leaders of XX century.

Refugee families come to our classes, which we call anything but "Healthy Marriage", and learn a lot of surprising and remarkable stuff. And, like Churchill, they too do not always like to be taught. Rather, they like to be informed in order to become skilled at navigating this new life of theirs.

What about us – people who took it upon themselves to guide refugees through the maze of changes their lives and their relationships undergo in their new country? This last April we put together an educational event for ourselves. Our conference in Atlanta aimed to provide group facilitators and program coordinators with new information; to engage them in sharing stories of various cultures; to present some scientific theories; to provoke discussions; and, of course, to give us all an opportunity to meet each other again!

We received very energetic feedback. Though mostly we got high marks of 5-s and 4-s (!), you wrote many insightful comments, which in the future will help us to do a better job as organizers. Thus to assure you that we heard your voices, here they are:

"...Workshops should be 9 to 5. Conference days are too long". "...Loved my Starbucks coffee..." "... Evaluation workshop should have been presented in the morning!"

"...Don't talk to us as little children!"

...And one little tip from HIAS: Many were disappointed that some workshops have not been applicable for particular cultures (especially for some African groups). But others commented that same workshops were very appropriate to their cultures. This is why I cited Churchill: liking to learn, but not liking to be taught every single detail. Be curious to learn about something that is unknown, and be wise to understand where and how to use your knowledge! I hoped I had extra space to quote more of your remarks! But unfortunately I don't!

Masha Teverovsky, MSW
Associate Director
HIAS Refugee Family Enrichment

Picture: From left to right: Yelena Tishchenko, JFS, Teaneck, NJ; Masha Teverovsky, HIAS, New York, NY; Irina Nikishin, JF&CS, Atlanta, GA; Goli Amin, USCRI, Arlington, VA and Maya Gumirov, JCFS, Chicago, IL at the Atlanta Conference



Opportunity to Attend and Present:

Tenth Annual Conference of the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR-USA) is being held in Spokane, WA on April 14-17, 2010. Historic, yet modern and vibrant, Spokane's past contrasts with cutting edge creativity, forming a city rich in heritage and innovation.

The theme of the 2010 conference is Living and Working in an Intercultural World.

The Call for Proposals is now available at: www.sietarusaconference.com.

We invite you to submit your proposals by the deadline of **November 9, 2009**.

The conference registration website will open soon. You can find all the information about the organization and

the conference at www.sietarusa.org. Every year SIETAR-USA awards a number of scholarships to attend the conference for graduate students and professionals who work in non-profit organizations serving refugees and immigrants. We invite those who are interested in becoming involved with SIETAR-USA to take advantage of this opportunity.

Tatyana Fertelmeyster,
Director of Cultural Competency Programs, Jewish Child and Family Services, Chicago, IL
Program Co-chair for the SIETAR-USA Conference 2010

Money Matters

Money Matters



It Takes Two to Save a Marriage...

At the International Institute of Los Angeles (one of seven programs of U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants) we offer 3 eight-hour workshops that support families through stressful times. In

relationship education classes, refugees discuss how their marriage and family have changed in America, learn communication skills, and practice talking about money while gaining new financial literacy skills.

While running workshops, I realized that money-related problems could cause families to lose trust, respect and love toward each other. During one workshop, I met a woman who was very sad and depressed. Her husband was addicted to gambling. His addiction had created such a difficult situation that she had decided to file for divorce. She had given up. She did not want to help her husband conquer his addiction. I met separately with her

three times and provided her and her husband with appropriate referrals. After a while, she told me that the relationship workshops helped her consider her situation in a different way and gave her a new perspective about life and family. She changed her mind about filing for divorce. She would give her husband and their marriage a second chance.

The couple attended more workshops over the next few weeks. They described how the relationship skills had changed their relationship dramatically. They learned that revealing their feelings and emotions allowed them to understand each other and to communicate more effectively. When I met with the family a month later, the couple highlighted their improvements in skilled dialogue and communication. The Relationship Enhancement® skills, said the husband, allowed them to discuss their daily problems and hardships without misunderstanding and yelling. The whole family felt appreciative. The workshops had helped them to rebuild their relationship and live together in peace and love.

Anomah Eivazian,
Program Coordinator,
International Institute of Los Angeles

Trainer's Corner

Ways to Spend Less and Save More

If you are teaching specifically about handling money as a couple or financial topic comes up in your other Marriage Education classes, it's always best to have some additional practical information to share with your workshop participants.

Most refugees know how to be careful with their resources but they are often clueless about how to manage them here, in America. The truth is – many Americans are clueless as well when it comes to spending less and saving more than they are used to. And in today's economy this is definitely a skill to have. That's why the internet is filled with just what we all need – ideas, suggestions, and very practical information all of us will find useful. Get it, try it, choose what's relevant for refugees you work with, and share it with them.

Here are some websites Connections' team suggests for all who are interested:

www.66ways.org

<http://www.moneymanagement.org/>

<http://www.101waystosavemoney.com/>

<http://www.rd.com/ways-to-save-money/>

<http://www.careonecredit.com/knowledge/101-ways-to-save-one-dollar-a-week.html>

<http://lifehacker.com/5133176/top-10-ways-to-save-money-in-a-recession>

<http://www.dumblittleman.com/2008/01/30-easy-ways-to-save-money-and-no-you.html>

One piece of advice: do not get too excited and try to share of this wealth of information at once. It can be rather overwhelming.

A Few Simple Questions

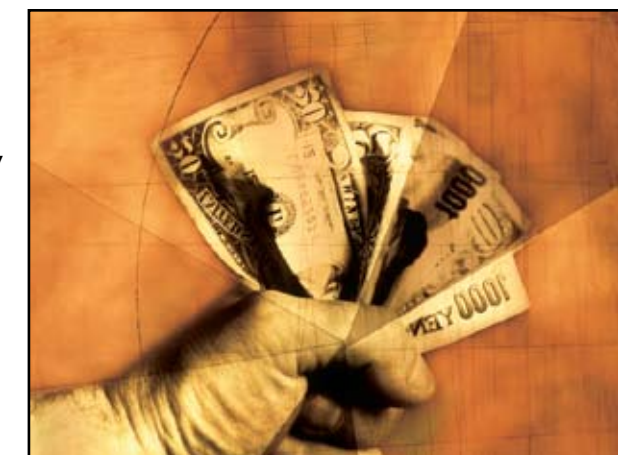
According to 2009 Pay Pal survey 43 percent of U.S. couples are arguing more about money because of the current economic situation. 10 percent of couples have ended their relationships due at least in part to financial issues. Money is the number one cause of arguments among U.S. couples (31 percent) followed by household chores (28 percent), in-laws (22 percent) and sex (15 percent).

So, how we can prevent the economic crisis from causing a relationship crisis in the lives of refugees? For starters, I would like to offer a simple exercise adapted from All My Money curriculum developed by University of Illinois Extension Program and used by the Smart Money Project in Chicago:

Do You Know Where Your Money Goes?

Instructions for the Trainer:

1. Give everyone in the group five to eight one dollar bills of play-money (you can find them in any office supply store)
2. Read questions (below) one-by-one. Advise participants to take a moment to think the question over. Choose how many questions you will ask your participants and collect money from them accordingly. Change questions as needed so they can serve your clients better.
3. Instruct participants to give back one dollar each time they would answer "No" to the question they have heard.
 - a. Do you know how much cash you have in your pocket right now?
 - b. Do you know your monthly income?
 - c. Do you save receipts from your purchases?
 - d. Do you know how much money you spent on food last month?



- e. Do you know how much money you spent on transportation last month?
 - f. Do you keep track of how much you spend every month?
 - g. Are you able to pay rent and other monthly bills before running out of money?
 - h. Did you save any part of your income last month?
4. Debrief using the following questions:
- Does anyone have all the money he/she received in the beginning of the game?
 - How do you feel to have kept it all?
 - How do you feel if you had to give some of your money back?
 - What does it mean for you to know or not to know what's happening with your money?
 - How do you feel talking about money?

This activity creates interest in money management and gives participants a chance to think whether or not they are aware of their money management skills. Beware that when you work with couples together differences in their answers provide you a great insight into how money is being handled and can bring a conflict to the surface.

Maya Gumirov,
Coordinator of Smart Money Refugee Family Strengthening Project,
Jewish Family and Community Service,
Chicago, IL

Front Line

Family Focus



Marriage Education for Refugees and Violence against Women

“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.”

Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary-General, March 1999.

I have chosen to write about many faces of violence against women because as a grassroots activist, I have dedicated a greater part of my life to the struggle that hopefully could end all forms of violence against women. I would like to thank all the women and men who have come before me in their contribution to end this worldwide epidemic- Domestic Violence.

For years women from Africa endured domestic violence for fear of being labeled as “disobedient wife”. The women also worry about many other things like financial dependence on the batterer, lack of support from religious or community leaders who don’t step forward to protect them and condemn their abusers. These women often don’t speak English, don’t understand the laws and are afraid of everything including deportation that abusers might threaten them with.

As professionals serving refugees we are faced with challenges rooted in traditional approaches some communities have when they blame the failure of the marriage on a woman. We know many stories of women who were instructed to pray harder to God and to be more obedient to her husband, to improve their cooking or get

a new cookbook, to improve their language or physical appearance. By herself a woman cannot fight this. She begins to blame herself for being hit, for being badmouthed or perhaps for not trying hard enough to please her husband. She is left alone to bear the burden of her pain.

Through the Healthy Family program, Women Watch Africa (WWA) provides training and support necessary to foster healthy marriages in refugee families. To this day, we have served refugees from Serbia, Bosnia, Iran, Russia, Somalia, Burma, Bhutan, Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Togo, Haiti, Liberia, Nigeria, and Uganda. Many of them shared with us that tools they have learned help them build successful and stable families and, therefore, communities in their new country. My biggest hope is that the Healthy Marriage Initiative will help put an end to the Domestic Violence problem in refugee homes and promote self-respect, respect for human dignity, and understanding of how to resolve a conflict between a woman and a man without abuse or violence.

Glory A. Kilanko,
Director & CEO
Women Watch Africa, Inc.

My Wife, the Berlin Wall and I: Men and Women in Conversations

“Speak up now or remain silent forever,” are familiar words usually declared by a cleric in a wedding ceremony before the madly in love couple exchanges their vows in front of God and Community. While the above statement is usually heard only once by husbands, it is not unusual for wives to hear the same exact words again and again in variations.

To give you an example, I will use my wife and myself. It is early in the morning and I want to read the newspaper, so I use my favorite line of: “say it now or stay silent forever” to my wife. As a civilized husband, I cannot say it in that form so I use my skills of communication to re-frame it into: *Habititi* (Honey in Arabic), is there anything that you want to tell me before I start reading the newspaper? “Not really”, my wife responds taking a sip of her decaffeinated, sugar-free, skim milk-creamed coffee. “Good,” I say trying to hide my victorious smile as I embrace my beloved newspaper.

A few minutes of peace pass before the newspaper transforms to become the New Berlin Wall between two worlds. But as history testifies, man-made walls do not last forever and often collapse whenever the moment of truth arrives carrying within it waves of change and renewed connectedness. My wife’s eyes suddenly glow with enthusiasm. She stops glaring at the back of my newspaper, and starts passionately and without any preparatory notification talking about a conversation that she had last night with one of her co-workers. Her words penetrate my Berlin Wall and get into my space of peace and harmony behind it. Now I have no choice but to defend my territory.

But how do I as a man defend myself from these intrusions? A long time ago and before I got married, I asked a friend of mine who spent many years in the military about the best way to handle

conflict. “The skill of hiding or freezing,” he said. So I decided to freeze. Not responding has been proven consistently to be very effective in discouraging any kind of open and intimate conversation. To tell you the truth, the trick had worked well with my mother whenever she asked me to take the trash out.

Evidently, this was not working because my wife continued to tell her story in detail. So I decided to switch to another strategy. This time to respond by saying “Aha.” All men believe “Aha” to be the “mercy bullet” that can put an end to any miserable conversation. This strategy typically works as long as women do not ask follow-up questions checking if their husbands were really listening. Unfortunately, I was careless and went so far in using “Aha” that my wife caught me and I had to lay down the newspaper.

The Wall fell. I apologized and had to listen. As my wife continued her story, my mind wondered again as I was reminded of these words by Helen Rowland: “When a girl marries, she exchanges the attention of many men for the inattention of one”.

Issam Smeir, LCPC, Ed. D. Candidate,
Family Services Coordinator, Counseling Services
World Relief, DuPage

Picture: Issam Smeir with his wife Stephanie and their sons Laith and Liam. The Smeirs recently welcomed the latest addition to their family – their baby-son Luke. Congratulations!



Looking Forward



Technical Assistance in 2010

We believe that next year is an ideal time to start a comprehensive conversation about the Refugee Healthy Marriage program's results. Beyond

continuing implementation of refugee family stabilization and refugee integration outcome evaluations started in 2008-2009, we plan to also talk about other ways to measure and assess the impact of this program on the refugee community.

For example, we will offer a new workshop on process evaluation. Process evaluation concerns with how the program is delivered; it asks the question whether the program is being delivered as intended. HIAS will also provide presentations and hands-on assistance on community awareness events, and how to present program results to various decision makers and funders.

In 2010 we will organize a major TA event: a two-day training/brainstorming event for all ORR RHMP

grantees. The theme of this gathering will be "Evaluating and Assessing the RHMP programs".

One of the special projects for the next year will be a creation of a Facilitator's Guide for Working with the Pre-literate Populations that will address a variety of culturally appropriate facilitation techniques, which do not necessarily rely on participants' ability to read or write in any language.

The web-based Refugee Family Information Exchange Project will carry on, now in close collaboration with the Healthy Marriage Resource Center. Our "Connections" magazine will undergo a facelift, and novel ideas and themes will be incorporated. And, in addition, we will send you monthly Refugee Family Information Exchange updates, so you will not forget to check our web site!

Masha Teverovsky, MSW
Associate Director
HIAS Refugee Family Enrichment

Picture: Tatyana Fertelmeyster, a member of the HIAS Technical Assistance team, is facilitating a workshop "When Emotions are Hard to Handle" for trainers from the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Trainer's Corner

Reflections on "Participation"

If you are a facilitator of Healthy Marriage workshops, what does "participation" mean to you? Do you ever ask questions, wanting to hear answers and active discussion, but find yourself standing or sitting in a quiet room instead?

In working with people who don't have the experience of participatory adult education,

participation can be easily encouraged by the way in which facilitator sets the tone for the session.

At the first workshop, pass out pieces of paper and markers. Ask everyone to write one word or phrase that comes to mind when you say "Marriage" or "Relationship." Be sure to request that participants write in large

letters, so that the word or phrase is easy to see. An alternative, especially if working with pre-literate groups, would be to have a stack of pre-cut magazine or newspaper pictures, and just ask everyone to select one picture, based on the same question.

Ask participants to then place their pieces of paper or pictures they selected up on the walls with masking tape (it might be best to use the blue tape used for painting, as it does not pull paint from the walls).

You can do this exercise after initial introductions, or it could be done as a way of having workshop participants introduce themselves to the group, such as, "My name is _____. I came from _____, and one word that comes to mind when I hear the word, "relationship," is _____."

With these pieces of paper up on the walls, the room becomes a little bit more of "the group's room." Everyone participated in this creation. The facilitator is taking the things that workshop participants had "taped up in their brains" and is bringing them out into the open discussion instead. Additionally, having everyone share responses that do not have a right or wrong answer decreases anxiety in the room. Since everyone has participated, it makes participating the next time maybe not so intimidating. This might take some extra time when introduced in a workshop. However, it can be repeated on later occasions, such as asking workshop participants to express themselves in similar manners about the words such as "Communication," or "Conflict." Some facilitators might think such activities take too long, and might choose to lecture,

since lecturing is standard in their culture of origin, as well as the participants'. These thoughts may be true, but a deeper part of why we are doing this work is to help refugees in their transition into U.S. Culture. Participants' children may experience this type of learning in their classrooms and will talk about it at the family dinner table. Or, workshop participants might also experience this non-lecture style later in a job-training session. Exposure to different types of learning helps refugees in their family's adjustment process.

I often repeat the words of a person who taught Chemistry during my high school days. On the first day of classes, he would say, "I am not a teacher. I am a presenter of learning opportunities." His words challenged his students to become active participants. The tone he set led his students to new ways of thinking, and new ways of learning.

In the same spirit, I challenge all of us to help our project participants discover new ways of learning.

Brant Dykehouse, LCSW
Coordinator of the Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project,
Jewish Child and Family Services, Chicago, IL



Cultural Competency

Marriage and Culture



The SMART Card

The “SMART Card” developed by Kelly Simpson and modified by trainers working with different refugee communities is a tool for conflict resolution which can easily be

used anywhere as it is small and portable. It contains 10 simple sentences which help couples by guiding them through the discussion of a problem step by step. During the Active Communication and Active Money Management workshops each couple gets to practice using the tool in the presence of the Trainer. In addition each couple is given a copy of the SMART Card to bring home and use in the future.

“Sharing feelings and discussing something that upsets us is not something that we do in our culture, it is very foreign to us. Now that we have used the SMART card at home I realize how important it is to be able to discuss openly how we feel; if I do not tell my husband that certain things upset me, how is he then supposed to know?”, says Thi Da Lwin Kyaw. Her husband, Eh Gay Paris (Kennedy) agrees by

adding: “Exactly, I know how she feels now, it is a very good feeling!”. Kennedy and Thi Da Lwin Kyaw have been working on creating a DVD in Burmese and Karen to help couples who cannot read understand how to use the SMART card. Kennedy says: “By watching us act out the SMART card on DVD in their language couples from Burma will be able to understand what a fantastic tool this is”.

Kennedy and Thi Da Lwin Kyaw came to San Diego from North Carolina in 2008 to help establish a Karen community which will be able to assist newly arrived refugees from Burma. When asked where they want to be in 5 years from now the couple answered simultaneously “Arizona!” “Australia!” then looked at each other and broke out in laughter. - “I guess we are going to need that SMART card again”, smiles Kennedy.

To get a copy of the DVD, please contact Mikaela Wallinder, mikaelaw@jfssd.org

Mikaela Wallinder,
Refugee Family Strengthening Coordinator
Jewish Family Service, San Diego, CA

Picture: Kennedy and Thi Da Lwin Kyaw have been happily married for almost twelve years. Together they have three beautiful children.

Family Traditions – Old and New

“You have a baby-girl!” – Announced doctor to Amina Said, a beautiful young woman with a sparkling smile. Her husband, Samatar Jama was delighted to hear the news as well: his first child, his American baby has arrived!

Amina Said, a former refugee from Somalia, came to the U.S. in 1997. Since she was six her family who once was wealthy and prosperous was forced to run from one country to another and live in three different refugees camps for six long years. She did not go to school, and did not do what kids normally do at that young age. Since her early years Amina helped her family to survive in overcrowded and under-serviced refugee camps.

Amina says that at the age of 12 she was born again. Austin, Texas became a new American home for her family. A sixth-grader by age, she was illiterate in her native Somali language and could not speak much English. Fortunately for her one of the teachers in her school could speak Swahili, the language that she learned and spoke in Kenya. This man helped her to overcome a stress of that first year in an American school. Amina graduated high school at the same time as her American friends: she studied hard and jumped from class to class to get her goal accomplished.

“As a child of divorced refugee parents I had to earn everything myself,” – shared Amina whose parents divorced 5 month after arrival to America. – “I did not get a car for my 16th birthday, instead I had to go and apply for a warehouse job and work many hours in order to buy my first car... Many of my girlfriends and even sisters dreamed about getting married and having children. I always thought I have to go to college first”.

Amina met her husband at a friend’s wedding in 2004. Since that time Samatar, a former refugee himself and now a medical student, courted his beautiful wife. By Somali traditions, Samatar proposed to her family first and then proposed to

Amina. Amina knew she loved this guy, yet she wanted to get an education first, and so, she did not hurry to accept her fiancé’s proposal.

When time finally came they planned two weddings at once: an American wedding with a white dress and a big limo, and a traditional Somali wedding with rituals that have been carried on in Somali culture from generation to generation. Marriage in Somali culture is not only a union of two young people but also two families and most of the time, two clans. Both Amina and Samatar wanted to keep family traditions alive, and so they planned their ritual by all homeland traditions.

Today, Amina, Samatar and their daughter Aleena live in Columbus, Ohio. Amina continues to work as a case manager and marriage educator at the organization called US Together. She is the first one in the history of the Refugee Healthy Marriage Initiative in the United States who taught Romance Workshops to Somali refugees – a subject that had never been discussed in this culture before. “In the culture I am working with romance is not a very well known concept”, – says Amina. – “Yet I understand every step the young people go through when they are in love and want to get married, so it is very natural for me to facilitate Romance workshops and talk about love and traditions”.

Maya Gumirov,
Coordinator of the Information Exchange Project,
Jewish Family and Community Service, Chicago, IL

Picture: Amina Said



Trainer’s Corner

Here are a few books that have been very helpful in deepening our understanding of how and why marriages work or don’t work:

How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It by Patricia Love and Steven Stosny

The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate by Gary Chapman

Add to Your Library

Ten Lessons to Transform Your Marriage: America’s Love Lab Experts Share Their Strategies for Strengthening Your Relationship by John M. Gottman, Julie Schwartz Gottman, and Joan Declaire

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by John Gottman and Nan Silver

Collective Wisdom

Collective Wisdom



As They Are Saying

We asked our colleagues to share with us their favorite quotes about marriage. Here is a sampler from our new collection:

At one of the Smart Marriages workshops I attended this July - I received a t-shirt that my husband enjoys to wear now. It says: "My Spouse is Healthier because of ME (ME= Marriage Education)".

"How much dearer is the wife than the bride!"
(Lord Lyttleton, British Statesman. 1709 –1773)

"Every marriage can be terrific, just maintain AAA approach: affection, attention, and appreciation".
(Unknown)

"A woman marries the husband's family not just her husband" (Igbo Tribe, Nigeria)

"Marriage is like a watermelon- - you never know what it is till you open it". (Arabic proverb)

"For marriage you need more patience than logic".
(Serbian proverb)

"In marriage you need to know how to be silent".
(Serbian proverb)

"Even when husband and wife sleep on the same pillow they are dreaming different dreams".
(Mongolian proverb)

"A poor life with your family is better, than living alone in abundance". (Vietnamese proverb)

"Marry young - it is too soon; marry old - it is too late". (Serbian proverb)

"Love without conflicts is like food without salt".
(Lithuanian proverb).

"Life without a wife is like a garden without a gardener". (Lithuanian proverb).

"The first duty of love is to listen". (Paul Tillich, German-American theologian and Christian existentialist philosopher. 1886 – 1965)

"A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person"
(Mignon McLaughlin, American journalist and author. 1913 – 1983)

"Love at first sight is easy to understand; it's when two people have been looking at each other for a lifetime that it becomes a miracle". (Amy Bloom, American writer. Born in 1953)

"Marriage is not just spiritual communion; it is also remembering to take out the trash".

(Joyce Brothers, American psychologist and advice columnist (Born in 1927)

"My advice to you is to get married. If you find a good wife, you'll be happy; if not, you'll become a philosopher". (Socrates, Greek philosopher. 469 – 399 BC)

"Marriage is popular because it combines the maximum of temptation with the maximum of opportunity". (George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright. 1856 – 1950)

Submitted by Irina Nikishin, Atlanta, GA; Dr. Ed Gray, Memphis, TN; Yelena Tishchenko, Teaneck, NJ; Submitted by Martin Okpareke, Kansas City, MO; Liliana Popovic, Wheaton, IL; Laima Zavitauskas, Aurora, IL and Maya Gumirov, Chicago, IL

Picture: Participants of the mentoring training conducted by Kelly Simpson in New York City for HIAS sub-grantees

What's cooking?

World Relief Moline, a collaborating partner of the Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project resettles and serves several refugee populations. Kathy Lemburg, a Social Work intern, co-facilitated Healthy Marriage Workshops on Saturday nights. Refugee families were eager and willing to gather on weekends, and make the educational workshop their "evening out." After the actual workshop was held, participants brought home-cooked food to share for post-workshop potluck.

At this point, Kathy Lemburg came up with the idea to develop a cookbook featuring recipes shared by the workshop participants. For practical purposes, she considered it to be a potential fundraiser for World Relief Moline. Kathy also thought a cookbook could be a useful tool to increase awareness about and understanding of refugees among American-born residents of the Quad Cities. She viewed it as a potential for having an impact on the cultural competency of the community at large.

The result is "Savoring Freedom and Cherishing Home: Quad Cities Refugees Share Recipes," a

seventy-two-page publication featuring recipes from refugees of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Kathy Lemburg (pictured in a photograph from the cookbook) advises readers, "Travel with your family into broader horizons that will only enhance your lives as well as your kitchen."

If you would like to inquire about ordering copies of this cookbook, feel free to do so by phoning Mr. Bekzod Toorsunov at the World Relief Moline Office at 309.764.2279 or by email (Btoorsunov@wr.org).

Brant Dykehouse, LCSW, Coordinator of the Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project, Jewish Family and Community Service, Chicago, IL

Picture: Kathy Lemburg with refugee children served by World Relief of Moline, IL



Upcoming Events

About 2010 Census

For many of our clients this might be their first ever experience with census. Let's make sure we help them understand what it is and how it works.

The following information (and much more) is available at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/>

What

The census is a count of everyone residing in the United States: in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Island Areas.

Who

All residents of the United States must be counted. This includes people of all ages, races, ethnic groups, citizens and non-citizens.

When

The first Census was conducted in 1790 and has been carried out every 10 years since then. The next census occurs in 2010. Census questionnaires will be mailed or delivered to every household in the United States in March 2010. The questions ask you to provide information that is accurate for your household as of April 1, 2010. Households that still do not respond will be called or visited by a Census worker. (Census workers can be identified by a census badge and bag.)

The Census Bureau must count everyone and submit state population totals to the U.S. President by December 31, 2010.

CONNECTIONS

Refugee Healthy Marriage Initiative Information Exchange Magazine

Editor: Maya Gumirov • Editor in Chief: Tatyana Fertelmeyster • Design: Ella Epton - elaton.com

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If you have comments or questions about Connections or want to submit an article for the next issue please contact

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