Over 70,000 refugees entered the United States last year, each one carrying dreams for a better future and a new place to call home. The quest to fulfill the American Dream did not die out in the mid-20th century; it continues to exist with every new arrival in the United States. To trek across the globe with hopes of owning a home, getting an education, and obtaining a career is incredibly hard work. Refugees or Asylees who have participated in Project SHINE initiatives are tremendous examples of the effort it takes to accomplish these goals in a completely different language.

There is one particular couple this fall that has shone through the masses to determine their big plans for the future. Two months ago, Elsuleik and his wife, Arafa, arrived in the United States with their son. As refugees from Darfur, Sudan, life has not been easy for this couple, but they are working together to improve their lives.

Through the support of Nationalities Service Center, Elsuleik and Arafa attend the Project SHINE Workforce Development Program two days a week. With their young son in attendance each week, learning for this family can be a challenge. Both parents juggle the responsibility of learning English while caring for their energetic son. Elsuleik and Arafa both understand the value of what they’re learning at NSC and the incredible impact learning English and job skills will have on the joint success of their family.

In his home country, Elsuleik attended university for Food & Science Technology where he received the equivalent of a Bachelor’s Degree. He worked as a teaching assistant at this university for some time. Elsuleik then went on to work as a nutrition specialist for the organization, Doctors Without Borders. His family traveled from Darfur to live in Syria and then, Lebanon before their final move to the United States.

Elsuleik hopes that through these classes, he can improve his English-speaking skills and be able to better transition into the United States. After only two months of class, he feels more confident communicating with others and navigating the city. Elsuleik has big plans to go back to school here in Philadelphia to further his studies in Food & Science Technology with a Master’s Degree. Ever since he was a child, he has dreamt of becoming a professor and he hopes to fulfill that dream here in the United States.
Leading the Future at City College of San Francisco

Imparting wisdom onto new ESL tutors is a significant part of the SHINE Leadership Program at the City College of San Francisco. We are very proud of our national consortium here in Philadelphia and the success at CCSF is a huge reason why National SHINE is so strong.

The program coordinator, Denise Maduli-Williams supervises over 200 SHINE coaches in around 90 ESL, Literacy, and Citizenship classes at all of the CCSF campuses as well as surrounding community partner sites. Volunteers are referred to as “coaches” and they serve a minimum of twenty hours per semester. Many of these students coach beyond the required ten weeks by supporting teachers in the classroom. After coaches finish a semester, they are eligible for the SHINE Leadership Program.

It can be difficult to start out as a new tutor and utilizing a group of leaders who are willing to lend support to new tutors is a large component to the success of the SHINE program at CCSF. “We have an extremely strong SHINE Leadership Program,” says Denise. After an application process, Denise writes, the leaders, “assist in running the Orientation and Reflection ceremonies, mentor new SHINE coaches, write, interview and submit articles for the SHINE newsletter, represent SHINE on campus events like Unity Day, fundraise at activities like the campus-wide Food Sale, and go on fun leadership activities like rock climbing!”

There are many students who participate in SHINE classes who do not have the funds to enroll in credit-bearing courses at CCSF. The SHINE Club realized this need and decided to create a new initiative for their fundraising money. The creation of a scholarship for non-credit ESL students hoping to enroll in credit courses now have the opportunity to receive a small stipend. Starting last spring, the SHINE Club members fundraised at events such as the Food Sale to collect money for the scholarship. Each semester, up to $200 is given to a student to help purchase supplies and materials as they transition to credit courses.

The scholarships were awarded for the first time last semester with four student recipients. These four students are now currently enrolled into credit courses at CCSF. Thanks to the incredible leadership of Denise and the SHINE Club members, new opportunities are given to tutors and learners alike each year.
Smooth Sailing with our Spectacular Community Partner

One of Project SHINE Philadelphia’s community partner sites that has taken advantage of many of the programs that we have to offer is the Philadelphia Arab American Community Development Corporation. Located in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, the AACDC serves to empower the Arab-American community and promote positive development.

SHINE currently has a Workforce Development class, an AmeriCorps Health Literacy class, and a citizenship class at this site. Nearly every single day of the week, there is a class to fit someone’s needs. Zeina El-Halabi, the assistant director of the AACDC is one of our direct contacts for all of these programs. “It is important to stay connected to SHINE,” she states, “because SHINE is the only resource we have for ESL classes. SHINE has been extremely effective at helping learners to pass naturalization tests and better their English-speaking skills.” Zeina describes the relationship between Project SHINE and the AACDC as “a two-way street. We need you as much as you need us and over the last three years, this partnership has been very successful.” It is difficult for small community sites such as the AACDC to have both the budget and the staff capacity to teach English. Project SHINE has enabled this organization to provide these classes. Learners graduate from programs far more prepared to navigate the system according to Zeina and she has noticed a definite increase in self-esteem after involvement in a SHINE class.

This fall, Zeina took part in the Semester of Awareness as a speaker on the Immigration Awareness Forum panel. Zeina spoke of the importance of the Arab-American community and of their contributions to the United States. As an advocate, she encouraged all of us to become educated on Arab-Americans to decrease stereotypes in this country.

Zeina and Wiam hope to participate in future Project SHINE related events to continue the awareness for their community and other immigrant populations.

Teaching Job Skills in Philadelphia

One of the biggest concerns for immigrants and refugees in the United States is finding a job. With the knowledge of English aside, these individuals do not know how to create a resume or even fill out a job application. Knowing concepts that Americans take for granted such as introducing yourself and responding to job interview questions are complex and frightening to someone who is from another culture.

Through funding from the Bureau of ABLE, Philly SHINE has formed collaborations with two community partner sites, Nationalities Service Center and the Arab-American Community Development Corporation, to introduce a pilot-project entitled Workforce Development.

The purpose of the class is to promote English learning through the lens of job preparation. While learning basic conversation skills and formalities, learners grow to understand the relationship between everyday environment and the job world. Continued on page 6...
Global Awareness at Temple University

During the months of October and November, Project SHINE organized an immigrant awareness initiative with events on Temple University’s Campus around the topic of immigrants and refugees and the existing communities in Philadelphia. These events provided an opportunity for Temple students to learn about the immigrant experience in the city of Philadelphia.

Jessica Kratzer, the Local Program Coordinator of Project SHINE, along with the Community Learning Network and the Fox School of Business, worked to create a positive arena for discussion on immigrants in this country while informing the student population about issues in their “own back yard.”

Three Thursdays in October, students gathered to view movies that related to this theme. Thought provoking discussion followed each film to ensure that the students gained the proper message and understood the relevancy of these themes in our society today.

The first film shown was Amreeka, a story about a mother and her son who are selected as refugees from the Palestinian Territory to move to the United States. The film outlines the process of resettling in another country along with the hardships that present themselves. What really spoke to the students in their reflections was how realistic it all seemed. The experiences displayed in the film were neither sugarcoated nor exaggerated. One student who viewed the film was a refugee himself and he felt it was very comforting to know that people could learn about experiences like his through this film.

Sentenced Home was the second film showing of the month. This documentary follows three Cambodian men who came to the United States with their parents during the Khmer Rouge.

Growing up in the ghetto of Seattle, the families struggled to provide the support their children needed for a safe and healthy future. The young men in the film retreated to gangs in their teenage years and were involved in crime. Years later, after the post-September 11th strict anti-terrorism laws, immigrants were more likely to be deported if they had a criminal background in the United States.

Learning about the stories of these individuals who risked deportation really resonated for the student viewers of the film. These men only knew the United States as their home, none of them remembered life in Cambodia nor did they speak the language.

Michael Matza, a staff writer for the Philadelphia Inquirer and a guest speaker at this event to enlighten students about the relevance of the law with these situations. Matza has written numerous articles on the status of immigration in the country and Philadelphia. He was able to contribute an incredibly strong presence for the questions concerning these issues.

The last showing was The Meh Sha Story, a documentary created by Villanova undergraduates on the process of refugee resettlement in the United States. The film was created for a class titled, Social Justice and Film. Meh Sha, a 19 year-old from Burma, whose family fled three years earlier due to war and political unrest is the main subject of the film. A screenwriter and one of the film editors accompanied Meh Sha to the event and opened up the discussion for students after the film. “So many attendees didn’t know anything about Burma,” states Kratzer, “The film and Meh Sha’s visit really helped to educate the students on this conflict in Burma.”

The final event during the Semester of Awareness was the Forum entitled, Immigrant Philadelphia: Stories, Cultures, and Communities. A panel consisting of five individuals spoke to explain how immigration continues to change the face of the campus and our city. The topics discussed ranged from Arab-American integration and representation in American culture to resettlement of refugees and the concept of diversity. One poignant presentation was a Temple University student who represented undocumented immigrant youth. She lobbied for the “Dream Act” and young individuals like herself who were illegally brought to this country as infants and did not make a conscious choice to break the law, who only want to fit in with the rest of their peers.

The overall response from the forum was incredibly positive with over 50 attendees.

For more information and to view highlights from the Immigration Awareness Forum, please visit www.projectshine.org.
SHINE Across the Globe

One particular student has carried the SHINE mission with her across the globe!

Kimberly Mitchell is currently a student at Temple University in the TESOL Master's Program and she tutored at Taller Puertorriqueno through Project SHINE in 2009. Currently, Kimberly has put her Master’s on hold and is serving for the Peace Corps China 16 Group. This particular Peace Corps program is unique in that all of the volunteers teach English at the university level.

Even before Kimberly tutored with SHINE, she was an English instructor in Japan for many years. She taught thousands of students during this time frame, but still finds her time with Project SHINE to be a significant point in her life. After living in Philadelphia for quite some time, Kimberly realized that she had not spent any time in North Philly and felt disconnected from the multi-cultural populations that live all around the city. “I had just come back from living in Japan,” she states, “and Taller Puertorriqueno jumped out at me, it was my first pick. I was just excited to be a part of a community center I had heard positive things about. I really loved the chance to meet people from so many countries…so different from my own Philly neighborhood!”

Kimberly feels even more prepared teaching in China because she now has a better grasp of the needs in her home country, “I had such limited experience in my own country [before tutoring with SHINE]. I think it really opened my eyes to see how desperately we need teachers in all kinds of institutions in the United States who understand the special needs of English language learners.” A large number of students Mitchell teaches in China are first-generation college students. Understanding the importance of an education and even the access to a university is crucial for, “families stuck in cycles of intergenerational poverty, in China or especially in Philadelphia!”

After her time abroad, Kimberly hopes to finish her masters and continue working in ESL Education. “I hope to come back to the United States, my home, and focus on what is most important to me, creating community opportunities for people next door rather than across the world. “

With these kinds of issues on her mind every day, Kimberly Mitchell, has devoted herself to a life of service, traveling across the globe to reach out to others through the English language. But her plans to return to Philadelphia show her loyalty to the needs of local children and adults who deserve English literacy instruction.

Out of the Jungle and into the City

Within the last three years the United States has accepted thousands of refugees into the country mainly from war torn countries such as Iraq, however, the newest refugee population to enter the US have been refugees from nearly 20 years. They come from small, isolated rural countries located in Southeast Asia, known as Bhutan and Burma.

Forced to leave their home country or become victims of military dictatorships and harsh minority oppression, they fied into neighboring countries living in refugee camps or lost in the thick jungles of Thailand for nearly 20 years. Many of the refugees resettling to the US have never had the modern amenities such as electricity, highways or gas stoves. As can be imagined, transition to the US has been rather difficult. Many non-profit organizations and local service agencies have been assisting these communities, however, even with this assistance, many refugees feel lost in this strange new land.

Project SHINE recently completed a year long research project surrounding the newly arrived refugees from Burma and Bhutan. Both refugee groups were victims of civil war and minority oppression in their home countries thus resulting in decades of displacement and finally relocation to the United States within the last few years.

The project, a community needs assessment, was conducted to inform the training and technical assistance provided by SEARAC (South East Asia Resource Action Center) of Washington, DC, a technical assistance provider of the US Office of Refugee Resettlement. The goal of the assessment was to gain a greater understanding of community needs and help refugees toward self-sufficiency.

SHINE conducted Focus Groups with refugees from Burma and Bhutan across the country in Philadelphia, PA, Atlanta, GA, Chapel Hill, NC and Indianapolis, IN. During these focus groups the participants shared the hardships of resettlement which were much more severe than the refugees had expected. Refugees were also able to share their experiences with the community and with SHINE. Many of the focus group participants commented that they appreciated the opportunity to not only share their story, but also have an opportunity for the community to gather together.

With the results of Project SHINE’s needs assessment, SEARAC will conduct training and technical assistance to the refugee communities to enable self-sufficiency within the Bhutanese and Burmese communities in the future. This T&T training is the first step towards organizing these newly resettled communities in the hopes that within the next decade they can be a thriving community.
Three hired work-study students from Temple University serve as the instructors. In addition to the work-study instructors, SHINE has recruited volunteers through the Coming of Age Inspiring Opportunities Newsletter. Professionals, ages 50+ donate several hours a week to share their wisdom on job preparation and how to survive in the work world. In addition, these volunteers help to contribute expertise on resume development and skill building.

One instructor, Lindsay, a sophomore Criminal Justice major at Temple, commented that when she first started teaching at the Arab-American CDC, she didn’t think she could make as big of an impression on the learners. “I walked into the class and was scared that these women would learn nothing from me, but now I consider them my friends. I have a personal connection with them and they can be honest with me about their expectations of the class. The women have come so far since the beginning.” The classes are winding down at the end of this month and will start up again in mid-January. Some of the plans for classes next semester include creating a formal resume and field trips to local businesses for informational interviews. Come the month of May, this program will be a job well done.