



Sharing and Caring: Together



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By: Nathan Bobinchak
Reprinted from the Loyola Phoenix

Loyola students sorted embroidery floss into piles of color matching the vibrant colors of the women's clothes across the room. In a moment, the women would come together to weave these strings into friendship bracelets, but for now they sat listening to Flora, a Nigerian immigrant who welcomed the crowd before her.

The audience was split into two distinct parts. On one side was a group of women in colorful dresses and hats, all refugees and immigrants from Africa.

"Most are from Burundi," said A. Patrick Augustin, executive director and founder of the Pan-African Association, but others, like Flora, are from Nigeria and other African countries. These women are all a part of the PAA's Women's Support Group, a project that helps refugee and immigrant women with the transition from the culture they are used to in Africa to the cultural norms that they encounter in the U.S.

The other side of the room was almost entirely made up of Loyola students, all women who are part of the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership. Each year, five freshman women are accepted into the program, which includes community service and integration projects. This year, the Gannon Scholars Reach-Out program (GRO) works closely with the PAA's Women's Support Group to do community work that's close to home but at the same time very important to the people it affects.

Flora's short speech was translated from English to the African women's native tongue. Flora thanked the Loyola students who, despite their busy schedules, "still took time, devoted time to bring all this to us."

"This" was a package of essential supplies for the women, from sanitary and hygienic supplies to canned food, all prepared by the students for the members of the Women's Support Group.

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“We Africans, we have been receiving, but I also want to put us in a position to give.” Flora insisted.

Junior Nicki Shamel explained that “the Women’s Support Group has no special funding, so we’ve raised a lot of money, and with that we’ve thrown this wonderful cultural exchange party.”

Aside from thanking the Gannon Scholars and the PAA for all the work they have done for the women. Flora appealed to the women in the crowd.



“We Africans, we have been receiving,” she said, “but I also want to put us in a position to give.” Flora insisted that she was not asking for much, but instead that the women could get into the spirit of giving, not just receiving.



Following Flora’s speech, the women and students mingled together in groups to make friendship bracelets and finished the evening by dancing together. In the coming months, the students will work with the women to help them through their first Chicago winter, which Shamel said “will be very difficult for [the newcomers].”



“Even the little bit I have experienced now,” Flora said, “I am not finding it easy.” But she hopes that the PAA and the Gannon Scholars can help her, and people like her, enjoy their first experience of snow.

As the women of the Pan-African Association prepare for winter, for some their first in Chicago, the Gannon Scholars are sponsoring a coat and blanket drive. There is a box in the Gannon Scholars’ office on the second floor of Piper Hall, the building between the Sullivan Center and Coffey Hall. The Gannon Scholars will be collecting donations for the women and their families until December 16, 2008.

“Following Flora’s speech, the women and students mingled together in groups to make friendship bracelets and finished the evening by dancing together.”

The Friendly Face

When entering the doors at the Pan-African Association, the first friendly face that will greet you is that of Faiza Abdulkadir. Faiza has been working as the receptionist at PAA since the beginning of March of this year. Behind her smile and warm demeanor, there is years of struggle and hardship. Her strength and will to survive brought her to Chicago and with the help of PAA, she is well on her way to creating a better life for her and her family and accomplishing her goals.

Faiza was born in Hismayo, Somalia and lived with her grandparents, parents, three brothers, and sister. When she was seven, her family's home was attacked because of the civil war that was tearing apart the country. Her family members were beaten, her grandparents were killed, and her sister fled because she feared she was going to be raped. Faiza, her parents, and her brothers fled by boat to Kenya, but were unable to find her sister to bring her along. The journey took five days and was incredibly treacherous. The boat was teeming with people fleeing the war and there was no food or water. Many were desperate and resorted to drinking their own urine to survive. Unfortunately, a number of people lost their lives before reaching Kenya and there was no other choice but to throw their bodies overboard.

In Kenya, Faiza and her family lived in three different refugee camps, having to move from one to another until finally arriving at the last one where they spent 11 years before coming to the United States. The conditions in the camps were brutal. The harsh climate was extremely hot and dry. There were problems with insect infestation and there were scorpions and spiders everywhere. Food was distributed every fifteen days and people received oil, salt, beans, and flour but it was not enough to feed the family. The security of the camp was poor and every night people were robbed of their food and clothing and were sometimes killed. There were very few jobs for people unless they were self-employed. People were not allowed to leave the camp to find work or for any other reason and if they were not present for headcount, they would lose their refugee card and be forced to leave the camp. Faiza's father owned a



vegetable shop to support the family.

Faiza, her mother, and her brothers had to deal with a great deal of discrimination while at the camp because they all have lighter skin. Faiza had an especially hard time at school. Other students would harass her and tell her that she was not really Somali because of her lighter skin. She was beaten by fellow students on a regular basis and was unable to defend herself. The beatings and the threats became so bad that she stopped going to school with only two years left. Instead, she started helping her father at his vegetable shop and also volunteered

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Pan-African Night is Celebrated!



Pan-African Night, our annual fundraiser, was held on October 25th at the Levy Center in Evanston. The event was designed to celebrate the rich culture of African and Caribbean countries, while supporting and promoting our work with Chicago's African refugee and immigrants populations. Guests enjoyed a large buffet of African and Caribbean cuisine while being entertained by musicians and performers including the Pan-African Dance and Drums

Ensembles, Fada Dougou and the Dubassaurus Band and Naeem Kelly. Dr. Edwin Silverman and Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries were honored and awarded the Pan-African Community Awards for their support of PAA and their important work with African refugees and immigrants in the Chicago community. Two refugees shared their personal stories of coming to the US and how the Pan-African Association has assisted them in resettling in

the Chicago area. The night concluded with dancing and music provided by DJ MaliQ. The enjoyable evening was an overall success and the proceeds will be used to benefit hundreds of refugees and immigrants as they adjust to life in the U.S. We cannot thank all of the volunteers, sponsors, entertainers, and contributors enough for all they did to make the evening possible. We are already eagerly anticipating next year's event.



Photos: Top Left: Dr. Edwin Silverman of IDHS speaks after receiving PAA's first ever Pan-African Community Award. Top Right: The Pan-African Association Dance and Drum Ensembles perform. Bottom Left: Naeem Kelly and Donald Dorcilus serenaded the audience. Bottom Right: some of the great staff of Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries, which also won this year's Community Award. All the beautiful photos on this page are from Julie Collins, www.RoseMountainPhoto.com.

Pan-African News

“The family applied for a visa so that they could leave the refugee camp and come to the United States because of the tension and conflict that had arisen as a result of the discrimination.”

as a translator with the U.N., doing home visits. In 2000, the abuse and threats had become so bad for her three brothers as well so they fled the camp and Faiza’s family has not heard from them since.

The family applied for a visa so that they could leave the refugee camp and come to the United States because of the tension and conflict that had arisen as a result of the discrimination. Her parents’ health had become quite poor because of the conditions of the camp as well as the stress from losing four children and being unaware of their location or even if they were alive. Within six months, their paper work had been processed and approved. Faiza and her parents flew into Chicago on August 14, 2007. They came with the assistance of World Relief and were assigned a caseworker who met them at the airport and brought them to their new apartment. The family received public aid for eight months after arriving, which included food stamps, medical assistance, and cash.

Once they stopped receiving public aid, they were on their own to support themselves. The family made sure to educate themselves about their new home. They explored the city, got to know the community, and learned how to navigate. Faiza’s father got a job working at a factory but after two

months, he was laid off. In January, Faiza’s parents were stucken by a bus accident. They were both injured and Faiza’s mother is currently unable to work. Despite painful back injuries, Faiza’s father continued to seek employment so that he could support his family.

In February, Faiza and her father came to the Pan-African Association to get help finding work. A friend of Faiza’s, who is a fellow refugee, had recommend she go to PAA because he had done the same and received help with finding employment. Both Faiza and her father went through intake, completed the job readiness program, and worked with PAA’s workforce program staff to develop resumes, fill out job applications and schedule job interviews. Faiza interviewed at PAA and in March was hired as the new receptionist for PAA. She has been working at PAA ever since and is able to support her father and mother. She enjoys working with a staff of such loving and caring people and loves having the opportunity to work with and help people. Faiza uses her ability to relate to their experiences to better assist them.

Faiza is not only dedicated to her work at PAA but also to her future. She has earned her G.E.D. and is currently a student at Truman College taking pre-nursing courses. She is working towards becoming a nurse so that she can directly help people in need and plans to use her language skills--she speaks Somali, English, Arabic, and Swahili-- to specifically serve those whose first language is not English and assist them in receiving medical care.

Faiza describes her dreams as ‘having once been only a dim light in the dark, but with the help of the Pan-African Association, the light continues to get brighter and brighter.’ There is no doubt that Faiza’s strength and perseverance will soon help her reach her goals and that she will continue to help and touch the lives of others who have shared struggles similar to her own.



Highlighted Book: The Middle of Everywhere

Mary Pipher, an author, teacher, psychologist, and cultural broker, wrote *The Middle of Everywhere* about her personal interactions with refugees and immigrants who were resettling in her town of Lincoln, Nebraska. She aims to provide insights and advice to not only professionals but to all of those that are American-born about how to become cultural brokers and help those who are resettling in the U.S.

"There are two ways that refugees are educated. One is through the media and omnipresent advertising. The second is through cultural brokers—schoolteachers, caseworkers, public health nurses, and American friends who may teach them to make intentional decisions about what to accept and what to reject in America... Cultural brokers give newcomers information that directly translates into power," reads the book.

Ms. Pipher creates an awareness of the challenges and strengths of refugees and immigrants through the stories of individuals and families that have come to the U.S. from various places around the world including Bosnia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Sierra Leone, and Iraq. She educates refugees

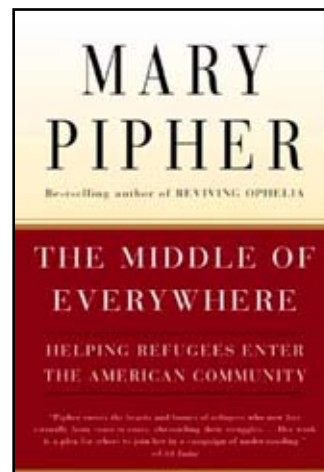
and immigrants on a range of aspects of the American culture, from how to feed a parking meter and use a revolving door to how to negotiate for housing, transportation, work, and health care, and in turn, has learned just as much, and possibly more, from them.

"They knew that before housing, jobs, medical care, or money, community is what heals. It is good to share pain, but what is really healing is to share joy," Ms. Pipher wrote.

The Middle of Everywhere also highlights the specific challenges of different age groups, including children, teenagers, young adults, and parents. The challenges of children were especially poignant during her time in an English as Second Language (ESL) classroom.

"I marveled at these kids' resilience. Many had been starved, shot at, and terrorized, and yet here they were drawing and talking... It is not surprising that traumatized kids who don't speak much English have trouble learning. What is surprising given their circumstances is how much and how quickly most kids learn."

Pipher provides the reader with



strategies of how to be more welcoming to newcomers and also debunks common myths about refugees that typically have led to resentment and misunderstanding. *The Middle of Everywhere* is a great resource for those who work or volunteer with immigrants and refugees and is an overall good read for American-born individuals who desire to gain a better understanding of the immigrant and refugee experience and how best to help them successfully resettle in the U.S.

"People come here traumatized, and the trauma doesn't end with arrival. But having a cultural broker can make a difference in how successfully a new family adapts to America," said Ms. Pipher.



Special Thanks

Special thanks goes to Stephanie Ann Boehmer, an amazing student and great intern, who wrote almost all of this newsletter! Stephanie has gone above and beyond in her work and commitment to refugees and immigrants. We'll miss her now that she is returning to her home campus!

Workshops that Warm Hearts

The Pan-African Association holds a number of educational workshops each month that provide refugees and immigrants with valuable information that assists them in living more successfully in the United States.

Recently, a Winter Survival Workshop was held to provide our newest neighbors with advice on how to best survive their first winter in Chicago. Many have no idea exactly what to expect when it comes to Chicago's winters because they are used to temperatures that average in the 90s as opposed to below zero. At the workshop, clients learned about what to wear in the winter, how to take care of dry skin, how to walk on ice, and other survival tips. Later that day, everyone took a trip to Care for Real, Edgewater's food pantry, which has been feeding and clothing needy area residents for over 35 years. Here, each client received donated coats and winter accessories. Thank you, Care for Real!



Other recent workshops have included topics such as personal hygiene as well as child abuse and neglect. Check out our website for information about upcoming programs at www.panafricanassociation.org.

Pan-African News and Events

The Pan-African Association will launch its drivers education program in January 2009. This specially-designed initiative will help refugees to receive their learning permits, teaching the rules of the road and related literacy skills: the first steps to becoming good drivers.

PAA welcomes its newest staff member, Mr. Jean-Pierre (Cadet) Valbrun. He will serve as our citizenship program coordinator.

On December 19, 2008, the Pan-African Association will host a holiday celebration for all refugees and immigrants that it serves. This special event will not be open to the general public, but donations of toys, clothes, and other new gifts are welcome.

On January 20, 2009, the Pan-African Association will proudly celebrate our 6th Anniversary alongside a Presidential Inauguration Viewing Party! All people are warmly welcome to attend. Visit our website at www.panafricanassociation.org for updates as they come.

Volunteer for Better lives through the Pan-African Association!



Volunteers are an essential part of what we do here at the Pan-African Association. We are always looking for people to partner with us in service, to share their skills in a way that is valuable both for the organization and the volunteer.



The most important qualifications include cross-cultural sensitivity, patience and flexibility, a passion to learn, and a commitment to the people with whom you are working. Language skills and/or previous experience working with people of other cultures is a plus but not a requirement. If you are committed to serving and learning, we would love to have you join our family!



There are a variety of opportunities in a number of areas:

- Mentor/Tutor
- Job Readiness
- Resource Development
- Community Outreach
- Marketing
- Interpreter/Translator
- Workshop Facilitator
- Childcare

If you are interested in volunteering at PAA or would like more information, contact our volunteer coordinator, Tooni, at oakanni@panafricanassociation.org or 773-381-9723. Volunteer applications are also available on our website at www.panafricanassociation.org. Hope to see you soon!



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