

A Crack in the Rock

VRRP's Volunteer Newsletter

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VRRP is a field office of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

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Photo: Rose McNulty

Our world often seems to be a hard, rocky place. Manmade and natural disasters strip people of what they need to survive. But Vermont is a crack in the rock, widened by the smiles, persistent efforts, and adventurous spirit of its people. Thanks to 248 volunteers, we are offering a new life to people who have endured the harshest conditions in hopes of a new opportunity.

Out of a Crack

By Judy Scott

With all the excitement of receiving new groups of people – Iraqis, Bhutanese, and Burmese – along with continuing to resettle those from Congo and Somalia – I've been very focused on the details of daily life. Where are we going to get enough pots and pans, not to mention beds, for all the newcomers? How to best get to know people quickly so we can offer them the best orientation possible? How to pull myself away from the seven-year-old who wants to learn more English words?

I've been mesmerized by what's happening in Vermont. Watching the Vermont-Congolese community welcome and absorb a new arrival, I was struck by the confidence and understanding they've developed since the days when they were newcomers. Meanwhile our staff at VRRP has been working to learn about and prepare for the new populations that are arriving this spring and summer. They are so very different from each other. The losses endured by the Iraqis are painfully recent. The confusion and lack of uniformity in the Middle Eastern countries in which they've been refugees have robbed them of the opportunity to

even begin to understand the disaster that has befallen them.

The Bhutanese, for the past 17 years in refugee camps in Nepal, have poured all their energy and hope into negotiating with the Bhutanese government to return the land stolen from them. Our government's offer of resettlement in the U.S. has fractured the community, some of whom are choosing to take on the struggles of resettlement in a new country so that they can move forward in a concrete, if difficult, way while others are holding on to their hope of returning home. Ironically, those who are choosing to stay have adopted the tactics that forced them out of Bhutan. Just as they were intimidated, beaten, and held captive by the Bhutanese government 17 years ago in a successful effort to force them to flee from Bhutan, now they are using the same methods to scare people from pursuing resettlement.

The Burmese, our newest population, are Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim. In the refugee camps in Thailand, where they've spent the last 20 years, they had very little opportunity to learn English but a few have succeeded in learning a little and will learn quickly now that they have all of us as English practice part-

ners! Like the other groups, they are very concerned about the family members they've left behind, praying for their safe arrival in Vermont. They're also very eager to start working, to begin to gain some control over their lives.

I had a hard time breaking myself away from all this to go to Washington, D.C. for the four-day 2008 National Network Conference organized by our national office, the U. S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. But what an extraordinary opportunity that was! Our Vermont office had the honor of being asked to bring seven people to the conference this year. Typically, two or three staff members attend. This year four staff members were invited: Matt Thompson (Employment Counselor), Mukiza Noel (Case Manager), Marcia Stone (Volunteer/Preferred Communities Coordinator), and me. Also invited was Ned Castle, a VRRP volunteer who on his own initiative has created a photographic exhibit of former refugees which includes their personal histories (for more about this, see article on page three.) USCRI also invited two former refugees, David Tabaruka and Kamal Pradhan. Kamal and I joined Hari Acharya, the Director of the

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VRRP's Mission

The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program brings hope and opportunity to the lives of refugees and immigrants. We act to defend human rights, promote self-sufficiency and education, and forge community partnerships through a full range of services and programs.

Presentation at USCRI Network Convention

By David Tabaruka

Hello everyone, my name is David Tabaruka and I thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you today.

I was born in Rwanda and I have been a refugee for 14 years. In 1994, during the genocide my family felt unsafe in Rwanda and decided to flee to the Democratic Republic of Congo. We lived there for 2 ½ years until another war broke out in the Congo.

Once again, our family had to run away in search of safety. Together my mom, two younger brothers and my younger sister walked from the small town of Bukavu, located in the South Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the Republic of Congo. The entire journey took us between six to seven months and after walking for 4000 miles, we finally reached the North side.

During our escape we saw many women and children being killed and many more dying because of the lack of food. Many others, including my good friend Maurice, who was about 20 years old, died from a lack of medical attention.

During our flight through the Congo, we felt lost and abandoned. We often asked ourselves what we could have done to deserve this kind of death. I remember see-

ing my younger brother, who was nine months old, having pneumonia, but we had no medicine to make him better. At night, when we stopped to rest in the middle of the jungle, I tried to keep him warm by placing him inside my jacket.

My mother had to sell her wedding ring, the only physical reminder she had of her marriage to my father, who had died before the genocide. In return for the ring, my mother was able to get a small bowl of soup for my brother Jean-Luc and me who were suffering from a bout of cholera.

Eventually, we were able to reach the other side of the Republic of Congo by crossing the Congo River, but in the process felt as if we had ceased to be human.

We stayed in this small village surrounded by a forest on one side and the Congo



Photo: Marcia Stone

River on the other side for nine months, but found it challenging to re-integrate into community life because we had lost our ability to relate to others. I used to spend time at the river thinking about my past, but I could not see anything except my pain and struggle.

Finally after spending over seven years in

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Newest Arrivals!!

By Emily Cochrane

On Tuesday, May 20th, Megan Cannella and husband, Mark, welcomed two new arrivals of their very own. These arrivals did not come on a plane with International Organization of Migration bags in tow; rather, Grace and Adeline Cannella, identical twin girls were born in Burlington to very proud parents. From an initial encounter at the hospital with a former ESL student, the news spread quickly throughout the refugee community. Did you hear about Megan's babies? Alhamdulillah! Did you know Megan had twin girls? Yes I did, Praise God! Megan continues to receive many lovely calls of congratulations and support from the refugee community. Grace and Adeline are already healthy Vermonters with big appetites, keeping their mother busy most of the day and night! The girls are happily installed at home, eating and sleeping often, and looking more alike every day.



In Their Own Words

By Amy Lily

Aziza Azimove is a remarkable woman. An Ahiska Turk originally from Uzbekistan, the 55-year-old grandmother was resettled to Barre, Vermont, in December 2005. She got a job at the ClearSource water-bottling company and makes loaves of her native bread at home to sell at a local market. She is so grateful for the help given her by VRRP volunteers that, in return, she makes and delivers food regularly to needy and home-bound neighbors.

Anyone who strikes up a conversation with Aziza will soon be shown a stack of photographs she keeps in her purse: Here she is making bread at her Barre home or cooking a special new year's soup outside; here, she sits with her family on the couch; in this one, she poses with a younger Ahiska Turkish bride in traditional dress in her living room.

This is Aziza's life in Vermont. But what about her past? How did she get here?

Ned Castle, a 23-year-old from Charlotte, became interested in the back stories of refugees like Aziza when he met two workers in his father's company, Rhino Foods, at

an employee picnic a couple years ago. Jean-Luc Dushime and David Tabaruka, two brothers from Rwanda, had a horrifying story that he learned only partially that day.

Over the next eight months, Castle sought out, befriended, extensively interviewed, and photographed a total of 13 refugees (or refugee couples) from Bosnia, Burundi, Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. The result is a photo-and-text exhibit entitled "In Their Own Words: Stories from Refugees Settled in Vermont Communities." Housed in two rooms of the Vermont Folklife Center in Middlebury, the exhibit lasts through June 14.

"In Their Own Words" features three large-format black-and-white photographs per subject accompanied by a few paragraphs in the refugee's voice, which Castle excerpted from much longer interviews. The photos consist of a striking head shot of the refugee looking directly back at viewers, a shot of the subject in his or her yard or workplace, and a close-up of a treasured memento. Castle says that he asked the refugees to choose the significant item and the setting in which they wanted to be depicted.

The refugees' stories, mounted on laminated boards, help connect these images of past and present. Binh from Vietnam, for example, holds a double photo frame up to Castle's lens, containing shots of her younger self and her daughter Loan. Her story tells of running into the forest with Loan to escape the bombs that had just killed her husband and son. Mother and daughter survived two months in the forest by drinking drops of water that had collected on leaves. In Castle's third photo of Binh, she poses with Loan and two grandsons – a moving testament to her efforts to survive.

Most of the refugees featured in "In Their Own Words" live in Burlington or Winooski, says Castle. They all saw the exhibit at its Burlington opening in December 2007 at the Firehouse Gallery – all except Aziza, that is. So Castle kindly picked her up in Barre on a recent weekend morning and drove with her down to Middlebury, where I met up with them at the Vermont Folklife Center.

Castle was first introduced to Aziza in May 2007 by his aunt, who was running a personal finance workshop Aziza was attending. The last time he saw her was about six months ago, so he is pleasantly surprised at her progress in speaking English and com-

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Why Vermont?

By Marcia Stone

Part of my job is educating not only our volunteer force, but also doing presentations in the community about who we are and what we do to resettle refugees. This is always a great learning situation for me as I try to answer each question thoughtfully and completely. Sometimes the questions need time to answer or come to me in unusual ways. In the wintertime I am often asked why people from the hot climates are resettled in such a cold environment. Why is Vermont a good place for resettlement?

A general perception is that the best places to resettle refugees would be in larger metropolitan areas where there are factories and massive apartment buildings with a reliable mass transit system. While all of these are certainly pluses there is much more to successful resettlement than what first meets the eye. Most of our refugees arrive in Vermont having suffered many, many hardships and have survived tremendous losses. Just yesterday as we

were getting twenty new arrivals settled into either their hosts' homes or in their apartments, I asked one of the Burmese families how long they had been living in the refugee camp that they came from. The answer was eight years! Can any of us really understand that kind of hardship? I flashed back to the year we had the huge ice storm here in Vermont and how impatient I was that we didn't have electricity for one week. I observed how angry people became that their lives were disrupted for that one week. I am forever humbled by the incredible resilience that our new comers demonstrate time and time again. They are here full of hope and determination and they are so grateful to finally be safe. They all want to become productive members of the community.

So why Vermont? Some of the best-suited places in our country for refugees are the smaller cities and towns beyond the main urban centers. These smaller communities can offer support and opportunities not available or affordable in big cities. Our community is typically eager to welcome, support and integrate a diversity of new residents. In smaller towns across the U.S. refugee clients have more opportunities to

make a connection with someone who will act as a cultural ambassador, guiding them through the complexities of our culture. This guidance is critical to successful resettlement! All other things being equal, the volunteers who work with our clients are truly what make the difference between success and failure for our clients. Our volunteers are the bridges between our service providers and our clients. They constantly demonstrate and reassure that what we view as basics here, like the fact that we can trust our doctors, and that our police are here to help rather than hurt, as may have been the case in our client's home countries, are valid realities. Volunteers are truly life skill trainers and cultural brokers at their finest!

I often think about myself being in the reverse situation. How would I ever survive, much less succeed, if all of a sudden I lost everything familiar to me and was plopped in the middle of Burma or Somalia? I would be completely ignorant of the language, the culture and survival skills would be completely foreign to me. What would I do if my child became ill

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Save the Date: Sip a Bowl Benefit!!

WHAT: Benefit Dinner and Silent Auction for the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program

WHEN: June 29th, from 6pm to 9pm

**WHERE: First Congregational Church
38 South Winooski Ave.
Burlington, VT 05401**

WHY: All proceeds will support VRRP and will be used to provide newly arriving refugees with the basic needs to start new lives in Vermont.

**PRICE: \$50 per Person \$30 with Student ID
Purchase is tax- deductible**

Includes dinner, entertainment, and a hand-made clay soup bowl to take home! Limited number of tickets available previous dinners have sold out quickly.

**Please Contact
Supriya Serchan, Intern
Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program
802-338-4618 or intern@uscrvt.org**

Fabulous and Unique Silent Auction Items!

A delicious meal will be served featuring traditional Nepalese appetizers and delectable international soups, breads and salad!

Along with dinner you will be entertained by singing, drumming and traditional dancing!

Sip A Bowl

By Supriya Serchan

On a cold evening in March, 2008, our first Bhutanese refugees arrived from Nepal. The director of Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program and several employees were present to welcome our first Bhutanese refugees. Even though I was not there, earlier that day I was busy with three volunteers in arranging the family's new apartment. The beds were made; the bathroom sink had six brand new toothbrushes along side a tube of toothpaste. In the kitchen downstairs, a dish of steamed rice and vegetable curry sat warm. It has always been a joy to furnish the homes, make the beds, and prepare a meal for new arrivals. I have also seen the faces of people when they first enter in their new home. We are always thankful to the community for their generous donations of furniture, which we use to furnish the apartments of new refugees.

Today, I, along with eight other volunteers, am working hard to organize a benefit dinner for the Vermont Refugee

Resettlement Program. All proceeds will support the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program's efforts to provide new refugees with basic needs for their new homes in Vermont. Please help us by attending the event, which is on June 29th at the First Congregational Church at 38 So. Winooski Ave. in Burlington from 6pm to 9pm. A delicious meal will be served featuring Asian appetizers and delectable international soups, bread and salad. The evening includes traditional singing and dancing. In addition, there will be a silent auction and YOUR OWN HAND MADE CLAY BOWL TO TAKE HOME!

Last January we organized a benefit dinner, "Taste of Nepal", to help refugees start a small business in Vermont. Please visit our website to learn about the program and also about the previous event (newsletter February 2008). We raised \$2,075 to create the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Family New Venture Creation Fund. We will distribute the

form on June 29th, 2008 at the Sip a Bowl Benefit event. The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Family New Venture Creation Fund was established to provide small loans to refugee families who want to start a small business in Vermont. In addition to financial support, the advisory committee of the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Family New Venture Creation Fund will also provide necessary information and training in business planning and new venture creation process.

The fund is managed by the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program and the initial source of funds came from donations from the dinner, "Taste of Nepal". We will provide a very small loan without any interest and without any collateral. We provide the resources they need to start a small business on their own. To learn more about this program please e-mail Supriya at sserchan@uvm.edu. Thank you for the love and support.

Join us for
World Refugee Day!

Celebrating the United States' proud tradition of welcoming refugees and the cultures and traditions they bring to towns and cities across America.

*Saturday, June 21 from 11:00 - 4:00 at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 152 Pearl St., Burlington

*Bring a dish to share and a blanket to sit on

*Enjoy kids activities, ethnic food, music and dance!

Meet Ongyel Sherpa

By Deirdre Smith

Please join us in welcoming Ongyel Sherpa to our staff as our new Employment Counselor. Ongyel came on staff just a month ago but has already survived our busiest time yet this year. Ongyel is prepared to work very closely with Matt Thompson to make sure our clients are successfully employed.

Where are you from?

I am from Nepal and I came to America on April 8, 1998 with the help of Dr. Geoff Tabin.

What interested you specifically in VRRP?

I had heard about the organization about five years ago and I had read some articles about new refugees coming into Vermont. Because of my background and experience, I knew that I could offer my help to the organization.

What past experiences do you bring to your new position?

I have had many experiences dealing with people from various parts of the world and I love helping. I know what it feels like to come to a new country where so many things are different because I was in that same situation when I came to Vermont 10

years ago. I came to work for VRRP because I met Jacqueline Rose a few years ago at Chittenden Bank and later, she told me about the job opening. Furthermore, the organization was going to receive a number of Bhutanese refugees and I could speak their language. Before April 1998, I worked in the trekking/tours, food and hospitality industry in Nepal where I dealt with people from India, Singapore, Japan, France, Germany, USA and England. These jobs included working for my parents who owned a small trekking and dry food business and some other businesses. Eventually, I met Dr. Geoff Tabin in Nepal, who had climbed Mt Everest with my uncle in 1988, and he helped me come to America. I lived with his family for four and a half years; finishing my four years of school and helping the family in Burlington. I became involved in Dr. Tabin's organization providing housing and trekking service to medical students and doctors in Nepal. Over the years, we have had almost 100 people go to Nepal and many have stayed with my parents and continue to do so today. My other experiences include working at Champlain College, Shelburne Museum, Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce, Eastern Mountain Sports, Healthy Living and Chittenden Bank. I also have my own business where I import handcrafts from Nepal and provide trekking services to Nepal. I have about twenty vendors

around the area who carry my handcrafts.

You have only been working at VRRP for a short time, but what has your general impression been? What have you learned about working here that you didn't expect originally?

It has been great so far working for such a good organization. I love learning new things and the reward is very satisfying. I have also learned how important it is to work closely to each other and to have good communication. Sometime I wish for more than 24hrs in a day but time goes fast.

Based on your experience, what are your goals for this year at VRRP?

Mostly I want to help new refugees find jobs that support their families. I also would like to see our organization grow and make ordinary citizens and businesses aware of VRRP. What Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program is doing is very important and the organization works extremely hard to help new refugees. So I would like to have more and more people involved in this process to make a better world.

Anything (and truly anything) else you'd like to add?

I want to thank all of the VRRP staff members and volunteers for all of their hard work.

Presentation at USCRI Network Convention

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the Congo, our family was able to reach the United States safely. We arrived in Burlington, VT on November 30th, 2004. It was cold and we were exhausted from the trip and from the isolation and emotional toll of not being able to communicate in English.

When we arrived at the airport, we met the director of the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, Judy Scott, who was finally able to communicate with us in French. We felt a huge relief at being able to make ourselves understood. Judy and her staff slowly helped us to connect to the Burlington community and to build a new life in America.

Because of all that my family and I experienced, I have learned to value humanity. If something can happen to one person, it can happen to anyone! It can also happen to you! I feel grateful because my family and I were given a second chance to see the sun again.

Today, I am pursuing a college education at Champlain College. I am exploring new

opportunities and dreaming of a better future. If you had told me a few years ago that I would be who I am today, I would probably have said that you had lost your mind. I thank the U.S. government for creating this resettlement program and helping refugees to create a new reality in the United States.

Today, 14 years after the Rwanda genocide, there are many other refugees around the world. Refugees need our attention and support. They need someone who understands their language, their experience, their loss and grief and their hope. We are all in a position to create change and to contribute solutions to the refugee crisis.

As a refugee who has been given the opportunity to begin a new life in America, I ask you from the bottom of my heart to improve conditions for refugees in Africa. You are their only hope!

Think about the thousands of women,



Photo: Rose McNulty

children and men dying in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur today. We have the privilege of choosing to pay attention and to get involved in finding solutions. The lives of many depend on our efforts. Thank you.

In Their Own Words

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pliments her warmly. Castle brought translators to all of his interviews, he explains, to make sure he was recording the refugees' stories correctly.

Aziza's pictures and story are in the second room. She gives a modest smile as Castle gestures to her portrait on the wall but seems reluctant to look at it. Instead, she moves to a table in the center of the room and pulls her stack of photos from her purse, describing them one by one as we stand on either side of her.

Castle's three framed images of Aziza directly relate to her snapshot collection. In one, she is draped in a traditional wedding-day veil edged with dangling coins, just like the one worn by the young bride in the photo she shows us. Castle's other shot is a collage-like image of many of the snapshots Aziza is showing us, spread across her kitchen table. But each attempt to draw Aziza's attention back to the exhibit fails, so Castle brings her into a side room to show her how to access the show online, while I read her words.

Aziza's story is, of course, one of cultural exclusion and forcible removal. Just as her parents had been kicked out of Georgia

simply for being Turkish, she and her family were driven out of Uzbekistan, deprived even of the chance to say goodbye to her parents in the next town. After the ethnic group had moved to Russia, the Uzbeks realized their mistake: Without Ahiska Turks, there was no working class to till the cotton fields. They were invited back, but they refused to return. The excerpt leaves out the rest of the story: For the next sixteen years, Russia denied them citizenship, the right to own a home, and the right to work. Aziza was part of the first wave of displaced Turks to be accepted into the U.S. in 2005.

Like the other refugees' stories, Aziza's is not supplemented by a historical framework. Castle learned a lot of history in the course of his research, but he leaves viewers to rely on their own knowledge or do the research themselves. "What was important to me was the experience of the individuals," explained the young ethnographer, as he has been dubbed by some local media. "The power of [the exhibit] is in the personal experience – what happened to me, versus what happened to people like me."

Castle's efforts to record Aziza's and other refugee stories are laudable. The Williams College graduate conducted his research while working as a consultant for a Vergennes law firm. This is his first exhibit,

and it is beautifully done, from the maple frames and recessed matting to conceptual aspects like the direct gaze and the array of cultures. He is even looking into grants to fund a translation of his project into the subjects' own languages. But Castle refuses to take the spotlight. As he put it, "I could be the story, but I shouldn't be."

When he and Aziza emerge from the other room, I ask her directly what she thinks of the exhibit. "Every time I see my story, I am crying," she replies. She wants to say more but can't talk through her tears and has to turn away. Eventually, Castle pulls out a map and she describes her parents' journey in more detail, tracing their month-long train ride after being exiled from Georgia by Stalin in 1945. "Many people die – no eat, very cold," she says, as if it were her experience.

Finally, she sums up her own long journey in a single, emphatic declaration: "I come here no for me, I come here for grandchildren."

"In Their Own Words: Stories from Refugees Resettled in Vermont Communities" can be viewed through **June 14 at the Vermont Folklife Center (388-4964) and online at <http://their-own-words.org>.**

IRAQ-SYRIA: Ibrahim Sayyid, Syria, "You have to study hard to escape life in a tent"

(IRIN News) (April 2008) (<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77693>)

DAMASCUS, 10 April 2008 (IRIN) - After his sister was kidnapped in Iraq, 15-year-old Ibrahim Sayyid and his family fled Baghdad for the Syrian border in the summer of 2006. Staying in the no-man's land camp at al-Tanf, Ibrahim focused on his studies, braving freezing winters, scorching summers and a fire in his tent. He eventually won a scholarship and is now in Syria, unlike the rest of his family.

"I have always been at the top of my class," said Ibrahim as he described his journey from Baghdad to Damascus.

"I attended school up to seventh grade in the Baladiyat suburb of Baghdad. Then my sister was kidnapped. Her captors demanded US\$50,000 for her release. My father used to be quite well-off and had two stores before the war, but his savings were drained, and he could only pay \$5,000 of the ransom. The kidnapers accepted that and she was released the same day.

"When my father began to receive death threats from a Shia militia, we decided that living in the desert was safer than being Palestinian in Baghdad. He bought a tent and we left along with my four siblings in the summer of 2006. We knew that we couldn't get into Syria because we were Palestinians. We hadn't heard

about al-Tanf. When we heard about it, we decided to go there.

"I studied for the Syrian ninth grade exams for three months in



a tent provided by UNRWA at al-Tanf. A fire broke out in the camp and partially destroyed my family's tent. But I still passed - I was one of two students from al-Tanf who passed the Syrian Ministry of Education exams. Now I study plumbing at the Damascus Training Centre. But I want to become a doctor. You have to study hard to escape life in a tent."

Why Vermont?

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and I didn't know what doctor would take good care of her? How would I buy food if I didn't understand the currency? Why would I trust a uniformed man if he had beaten and raped me in my home country? I just can't even imagine how I would survive this. My only hope would be that I had someone in my new country that I could trust and rely on to help me.

It is the goal of our small staff at Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program to help our newly arrived refugees achieve early employment and to become economically independent. With the unyielding devotion of staff, service providers and volunteers forging partnerships, our humble little community in Vermont is recognized as a Preferred Community in the eyes of the world of refugee resettlement.

I recently attended the USCRI's (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants) National Network Conference in Washington D.C. I only recently became a staff member at Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program so I was very excited for the opportunity to join others from around the country who all do the same work and to glean all the knowledge I could from them. I was truly humbled by

being in the same room with so many selfless, devoted and yes, colorful people! What a rich and wonderful environment of ideas and experiences. Here I was rubbing elbows with all the Washington big wigs involved in all aspects of refugee issues, as well as meeting with others doing the same work that I am doing and sharing the same issues that I struggle with daily in my work. It was totally exhausting and totally exhilarating all at the same time. I have to tell you all that I left Burlington with a preconceived notion that we would probably be seen as the "little guys" from Vermont (being a native Vermonter, this conception pretty much has followed me throughout my life!). However, after the first few days I soon realized that although we might be one of the smallest states and one that is reputed as having more cows than people (wonder if that is still true?) we are also one of the best resettlement agencies in the country! We truly reflect and live up to the criteria of a Preferred Community. We are seen as a model for resettlement, not due to our size, but due to the devotion and collaboration of our service providers including, but not limited to, our medical providers, housing professionals, educators, community service agencies and foremost our volunteers! After comparing notes with other coordinators it was my impression that we

have the largest active group of volunteers right here in little 'ole Vermont! I left Washington with a very proud heart of what we are able to do at VRRP. I am so proud that we can stand in the front of the line and lead the country in being an open and welcome community for those who, by no fault of their own, have had their lives crushed. I am again humbled to be given the opportunity, along with you, to help our refugee clients rebuild their lives.

Now when I am asked the question, why are people resettled in such a cold and small place like Vermont, I truly have the answer.....What we might lack in warmth of climate here in January, we more than make up for in the warmth of our generous people who open their homes as hosts, who drive to the doctor's offices, who collect donations of clothing and toothpaste, who write grants to help save energy, who bend over a small wobbling table to help someone write their name, who wipes away the tears of a mother without her child. You, the staff of VRRP, the volunteers and the service providers are the reason we have the privilege of resettling refugees in Vermont. I thank you all, it is an honor to work with you.

Out of a Crack

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Association of Bhutanese in America as panelists in a seminar on how resettlement sites can prepare for this new population. David not only presented, with Ned, the session on In Their Own Words, he was also a luncheon speaker, addressing the entire group of 300 people from all over the country. For the text of his speech, please see page two.

USCRI honored Vermont not only by sponsoring a high number of attendees, but also by inviting such a variety: staff, clients, and volunteers. It speaks well of the USCRI understanding, appreciation, and support of our work and our human resources. It also speaks well of the human potential opened up by a small and effective program in a small and fertile (welcoming) state.

The conference itself demonstrated how fortunate we are to be part of the USCRI network. The first day I met with the national staff and directors of resettlement programs from half the states in the union to discuss the international situation, to scrutinize our local programs, and to consider ways we can make our work more effective in spite of the slow economy.

By evening the rest of the Vermont team had arrived so we met for dinner and then walked through the streets of our nation's capital to the White House.

The next morning we heard speeches from and had a chance to ask questions of Lavinia Limon (USCRI President and CEO), four top State Department officials, and representatives from the three major presidential candidates. The latter, frankly, was the least informative, but the best question asked of them came from our own Matt Thompson, who inquired how each candidate would work towards eliminating the conflicts that create refugees. They kind of looked at each other, hoping someone else would answer first. Leave it to Matt to get them thinking!

Lavinia Limon struck the clearest note with all of us in the audience as she talked about her own experiences as a case manager years before she became the Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement during the Clinton administration. As we in the field put our hearts and minds into creating the best resettlement we can, it's great support to know that our CEO has written policy at the highest level as well as having had her own "adventures in miscommunication" with newcomers.

We participated in breakout sessions on nutrition, cultural orientation, financial programs, and employment. We split up and covered every session so we could maximize the information we bring back to Vermont. Thursday afternoon David, Mukiza, Kamal, and I went to speak with Peter Welch at his office on Capitol Hill. He welcomed us graciously, listened closely while they described the hardships they'd

endured to get to the U.S. and the hardships they continue to work to overcome as they build new lives for themselves.

It was a great trip, one in which my fellow team members repeatedly made me feel proud of the work we do. Flying back into Vermont, I looked down at the landscape and tried to imagine what it must be like to make this trip as a refugee about to land in a strange new home. I'd have no idea that someone named Deirdre Smith had been working late the night before to make sure there were enough beds for my family. Or that someone named Rashid Hussein had been thrilled when his appeal to my landlord had resulted in a rent reduction. I couldn't guess that there were volunteers and staff members whose mouths were struggling with how to pronounce my name. I couldn't know that there were literally hundreds of people at USCRI and at the State Department who'd played a part in getting me to my new home. Nor could I begin to imagine the people whose lives would touch mine in the years to come.

Why we have been offered this opportunity to touch each other's lives passes my understanding. Let's rejoice in it. Let's teach that seven-year-old all the English words he can hold. Let's explore the garage sales and donate essential goods to new families. Let's read over David Tabaruka's speech and glory in it. Strangers though we may be to each other, let's feel the warmth of each other's smiles.

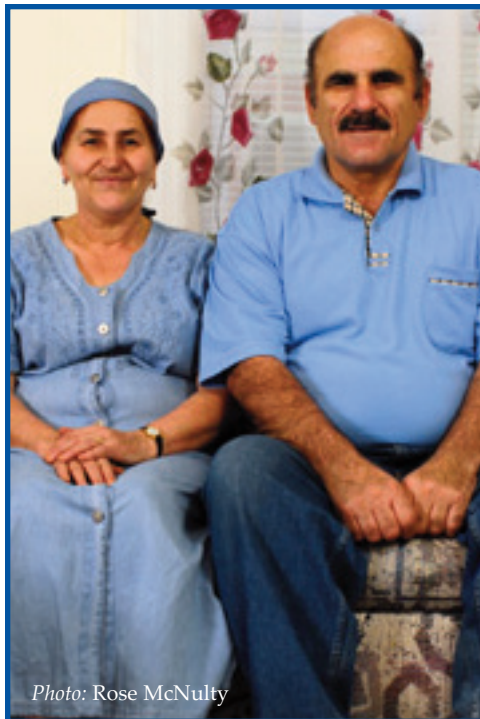


Photo: Rose McNulty

VRRP STAFF PHONE DIRECTORY

Deirdre Smith	AmeriCorps*VISTA Volunteer Office	802-338-4632
Emily Cochrane	AmeriCorps*VISTA ELT Office	802-655-2656
Fatuma Bulle	Staff Interpreter	802-654-1706
Jacqueline Rose	Coordinator of Interpreting Services	802-654-1706
Judy Scott	Director	802-654-1700
Loan Nguyen	Financial Support Specialist	802-654-1701
Marcia Stone	Coordinator of Volunteer Services	802-338-4627
Matt Thompson	Employment Counselor	802-338-4625
Megan Cannella	ELT Coordinator	802-654-1704
Mukiza Noel	Case Manager	802-338-4617
Nada Popovac	Front Office Manager	802-655-1963
Ongyel Sherpa	Employment Counselor	802-654-1717
Rashid Hussein	Senior Case Manager	802-654-1707
Tam Truong	Accountant	802-654-1733
Volunteers and Interns	Volunteer Office	802-338-4633
		802-338-4618
Wendy Reid	Relationship Enrichment Coordinator	802-338-1860

*e-mail addresses follow this pattern: Marcia Stone = mstone@uscrivt.org
(Exception: Volunteer Office = volunteer@uscrivt.org)*

community buzz

Volunteers: What Are You Learning? Share a few words with others!

Each month, we pride ourselves on the fact that our newsletter includes articles by volunteers, former refugees, and staff members. Input from such a wide range of people involved in the resettlement process enables us to offer many different perspectives on the experience to our readers.

We would love to include an article about **your** experience, which will help us keep volunteers and community members abreast of challenges, successes, and questions that volunteers face. If you have a story to share but don't have the time to put it into words, one of our volunteers is a professional writer and has offered to work with other volunteers to capture their stories.

If you'd like to discuss an idea for an article, please contact Marcia at 338-4627 or mstone@uscrvt.org.

Articles for our July newsletter are due June 25th.

Yard Sale Watch!

It is once again that time of year. Neighbors everywhere seem to be discarding old furniture and household items.

VRRP wants those items that are still in good condition so that we can furnish apartments as new families arrive!

Please be our ears and eyes as you travel in your area. VRRP can give a tax receipt for items donated to our organization.

For a list of acceptable donations or to donate an item, please contact Deirdre Smith at dsmith@uscrvt.org or 338-4632

Volunteer Orientation

Volunteer Orientations provide a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our organization, our volunteer program, and volunteer opportunities. Marcia and Deirdre will be present to discuss our programs and answer your questions, and we hope that experienced volunteers will stop by during the second hour to share their stories or concerns. While attendance at one orientation is mandatory before beginning service, they are also a great time for new and veteran volunteers to check in with VRRP staff.

In June, orientations are being held every Friday from 11:30 - 1:00. If evening meeting times are better for you, then you're welcome to come to one of our July orientations, which will be held every Wednesday from 5:30 - 7:00.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Save Your Bottles!

For the month of July, Hannaford Supermarket on Dorset St. in South Burlington has selected VRRP as the donation recipient for any bottle returns that are donated for charity!

Any money that VRRP receives from this wonderful project will be used to purchase items for the Welcome Kit that each family receives including: soap, shampoo, toilet paper, trash bags, light bulbs and other necessary household items.

Thank you to Hannaford and VRRP volunteer, Denise Richards, for organizing this wonderful collaboration!

Volunteer Trainings

A Cultural Perspective of Bhutanese Refugees

6:30- 8:00 Monday, June 30

Presenter: Remu Timsina, a recent Bhutanese arrival will discuss different cultural experiences of the Bhutanese refugees resettled in Burlington.

Fuel Assistance Training

6:00- 7:00 Thursday, July 10

This training is especially important for volunteers working with newly arrived families. The Fuel Assistance application will ensure that they receive a benefit for winter heating costs.

A Cultural Perspective of Burmese Refugees

6:00-7:30 Tuesday, July 29

Presenter: Burmese interpreter Htun Sein will explain some of the cultural traits and differences among the Burmese refugees resettled in Vermont.

Please contact Deirdre (dsmith@uscrvt.org or 338-4632) if you plan to join us for a training.

Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program

462 Hegeman Ave, Ste 101, Colchester, VT 05446

Phone: 802-655-1963 Fax: 802-655-4020

E-mail: volunteer@uscrvt.org

Volunteer Office Phone: 802-338-4633

Directions to VRRP

Coming from downtown Winooski, follow Route 15 east past St. Michael's College. Continue past Camp Johnson Military Facility. Take a left at the next light and turn into Ethan Allen Complex.

Coming from Essex, follow Route 15 west past Susie Wilson Road. Turn right at the next stop light to turn into Ethan Allen Complex.

Hegeman Avenue is the third road on the right. VRRP is at 462 Hegeman Avenue (the third building on your left — a brick building with a green on white sign out front.)