

## PORTALS IN THE TWO-WAY PROCESS

### THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

[www.tenement.org](http://www.tenement.org)  
[www.cambodian-association.org](http://www.cambodian-association.org)  
[www.theaanm.org](http://www.theaanm.org)

In 1863, Lucas Glockner invested \$8,000 to build a tenement on a single-family lot in Lower Manhattan's East Side. He moved into one of the apartments with his family, and over the next 72 years, some 7,000 newcomers to America did the same, immigrants from 20 countries.

Since 1988, when Glockner's former home at 97 Orchard Street became the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, the stories of many of these new Americans have been brought back to life in the same tiny apartments they once occupied.

When her husband Julius left for work one morning and never returned, Nathalie Gumpertz, a Jewish immigrant from Prussia, bought a sewing machine and ended up supporting three daughters by making dresses for neighbors. The Rogharshevsky family from Lithuania filled their three rooms with their six children—girls bedded in the kitchen, boys on the front couch—while father Abraham worked until his death from tuberculosis as a presser in a garment shop. The Sicilian Baldizzi family weathered the Great Depression at 97 Orchard: Adolfo, who had been a fine woodworker in Italy, walked the streets with his toolbox in search of odd jobs.

## PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Museum has documented such details for 1,300 former residents of the tenement, bringing their stories to hundreds of thousands of visitors annually—both on site and online. Authentically decorated apartments—the look, the lighting, the clothing, even the smells—help highly trained docent educators to humanize this American narrative, pursuing the Museum's mission "to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America."

Tolerance and historical perspective are promoted by many other Museum programs. Current immigrants learn English in classes that use memoirs, diaries, and letters of earlier newcomers; graduates develop guides for other participants. Native-born audience members are invited to tell the stories of their immigrant ancestors to improvisational actors, who turn anecdotes into on-the-spot theater presentations. Collaborations with other institutions engage immigrant youth in writing and performing original plays and offer training in the museum profession for immigrant adults. The Lower East Side Community Preservation Project, launched by the Museum, brings together diverse residents to select, preserve, and interpret local historic sites.



*Rogarshevsky kitchen with a view of the parlor, Tenement Museum*

© Alan Batt



© Greg Scaffidi

95 Orchard, Tenement Museum

## HEALING, CELEBRATION, AND THE CROSSING OF CULTURES

The Tenement Museum is a portal in the two-way process of immigrant integration, bringing the newly arrived together with native-born descendants of the once newly arrived, animating their common heritage, fostering dialogue and interaction. Guided by the vision of Ruth J. Abram, its founder and president, the Museum has played a leading role in the development of such civic consciousness in ethnic museums around the United States.



© Cambodian American Heritage Museum

Killing Fields Memorial, Cambodian American Heritage Museum

“Museum science has changed because of Ruth Abram,” says Sunny Fischer, executive director of the Chicago-based Richard H. Driehaus Foundation. Fischer visited the Tenement Museum during a Ford Foundation event on the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience. “The power of the place was palpable,” she says. “People actually lived here. The funder in me saw the intelligence, the smartness of connecting history to what is happening today.”

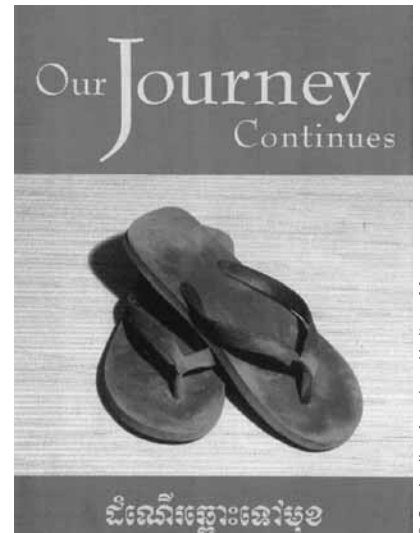
Fischer invited Abram, who has since become a friend, to speak to Chicago funders. One of the many initiatives that got a boost from the example of the Tenement Museum was Chicago’s Cambodian American Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial, a project of the Cambodian Association of Illinois. The first in the United States, the Cambodian American Heritage Museum offers cultural exhibits, arts events, and a curriculum to teach high-school students about Cambodian-American history and culture. Its Killing Fields Memorial, a cathartic act of communal healing, will eventually inscribe on 80 glass columns the names of as many as 4,000 Cambodian genocide victims, all relatives of the Cambodian families who have resettled in the Chicago area.

“A people who forget the past and who don’t take account of their history cannot build a future,” says a prominent Cambodian leader.

Cambodian-American refugees in Chicago are building a future by bearing witness to the stories of their horrors, sharing those stories with the wider community.

The pride engendered in the Cambodian American community through its fundraising efforts has been accompanied by an extraordinary connection with Chicago’s Jewish community. “This was a product of a community trying to coalesce and deal with its own issues,” says Nikki Stein, executive director of the Polk Bros. Foundation. “But a number of Jewish families and foundations participated... you just can’t look at the Cambodian community and not see your own.”

The cross-cultural connection goes back 30 years to the Jewish Federation’s resettlement help with newly arrived Cambodian refugees. The relationship blossomed as fundraising for the museum got underway. As Kompha Seth, executive director of the Cambodian Association of Illinois, recalls, “I said I only had \$300 in the bank. And a Jewish donor gave me a \$5,000 challenge grant that started the building fund, and within two weeks, we had \$30,000.” Some 70 percent of the multimillion dollar Campaign for Hope and Renewal came from the Jewish community.<sup>1</sup>



© Cambodian American Heritage Museum

## PREJUDICE AND PRIDE, DISTINCTION AND LOYALTY

Ethnic museums have opened all across the United States from California to Connecticut, including seven in Chicago, 25 in New York City, three in Detroit. The newest Detroit entry, opened in 2005 and also a first in the nation, is the Arab American National Museum, developed by the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) in Dearborn, Michigan.

Similar pride in accomplishment, and similar story telling to cross-cultural barriers, have accompanied this opening. Since September 2001, the public

1. Kushner, Aviya. 2005. “Donors Open Pockets for a Cambodian Museum.” *Forward*, January 7.

narrative about Arab Americans has been considerably distorted by stereotyping and prejudice. The Museum's aim is to tell the true and quite diverse story of the accomplishments and contributions of immigrants to America from Arab countries. The \$16-million campaign, which was accompanied by a six-month process in which a planning team gathered ideas from Arab-American communities, created 38,500 square feet of exhibits, classroom space, auditorium, and library.

Exhibits at the Arab American National Museum display the cultural contributions of Arab nations throughout history, from the everyday life of Arab Americans to the work of famous politicians. In the words of New York Times critic Edward Rothstein, "like other museums of American hyphenation," it is "at once an assertion of difference and belonging, a declaration of distinction and of loyalty."<sup>2</sup>

"The Arab American National Museum is a door opener for southeast Michigan and the world," adds Brenda G. Price, community liaison program officer at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. "It offers insight into the Arab culture, its integration into American culture, and the valuable contributions made by members of the Arab community over many generations. The Museum is a testament to the diversity in this country, and the contributions made by immigrants who continue to arrive on this soil."

The dynamic integration process that weaves America's receiving society with its newcomer population incorporates the difference, the belonging, the distinction, the loyalty. The country's many ethnic and immigrant museums—portals in the two-way process—model integration as they enhance it. As the Arab



© Arab American National Museum

*Arts program at the Arab American National Museum*

American National Museum humanizes "American hyphenation" in a war-on-terror America in which the "other" can be so readily demonized, the Tenement Museum reminds us that one way to combat dehumanization is to acknowledge the hyphen in us all.

One of those who died on September 11 at the World Trade Center was Frank Reisman, a great-great-grandson of Nathalie Gumpertz, the woman who turned to dressmaking when her husband disappeared on the Lower East Side in 1874. As part of the memorial to the family that started its American journey at 97 Orchard Street, Mr. Reisman's story has been incorporated into the Tenement Museum's Gumpertz tour.

In the words of the Driehaus Foundation's Sunny Fischer, "How can one help but be moved."

**"The Museum is a testament to the diversity in this country, and the contributions made by immigrants who continue to arrive on this soil."**

DVD

**Watch the DVD  
Mohammad:  
Legacy of a Prophet:  
The Bazy Family**

*Some young second-generation immigrants are questioning the "assimilation" of their parents, opting to openly embrace their religious or ethnic identities. Watch what happens when a concerned father learns that his teenaged daughter has decided to don the traditional hijab.*

2. Rothstein, Edward. 2006. "A Mosaic of Arab Culture at Home in America." *The New York Times*, October 24.

## CREATING GREATER AWARENESS OF "INVISIBLE" COMMUNITIES

### THE CENTRAL INDIANA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

[www.cicf.org](http://www.cicf.org)

What makes a community great is the ability to embrace everyone and give them the opportunities to share the gifts, talents, and treasures they bring to enrich and strengthen our community."

Ralph Taylor, program officer at the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), is passionate about this belief. In 2002, he launched the Sam H. Jones Creating Greater Awareness Forum to highlight "the issues, challenges, and concerns of the invisible/shadow populations living in the greater Indianapolis area."

Asked why he uses the term "invisible" to describe newcomer and Native American communities, Taylor explains: "They are here, but they aren't seen or included. For the most part, discussions are about blacks and whites. Other people who make up our communities are not part of the conversation—and they need to be. The conversation should not take place after a group reaches a certain population size, as is usually the case."

This inclusive vision drives Taylor's work and the work of the Central Indiana Community Foundation. "Promoting inclusiveness and engaging community members in ongoing dialogues is central to one of our foundation's vision priorities—Embrace Inclusiveness," says Taylor.

Since 2002, the Forum has brought more than 500 community members together to learn about the Asian, African, Native American, West Indian, and Arab communities. This year, the focus will be on the eastern and central European community.



© Central Indiana  
Community Foundation

*"I don't view myself as a leader. I view myself as a concerned individual who wants to make a positive difference in his community. Too many times, we label people and put a tag on them, but in many instances that's not helpful. From my perspective, you either care about people or you don't. I believe that communities are only as strong as their ability to embrace people from various walks of life. We should focus on opportunities to bring communities together, not keep them apart."*

—Ralph Taylor, Program Officer  
Central Indiana Community  
Foundation  
Indianapolis, Indiana

In bringing together people from many backgrounds, the Forum has facilitated cross-cultural interaction, collaboration, and integration among Indianapolis' diverse communities. Asians have invited Native Americans and African-Americans to participate in their events. African and West Indian leaders have begun working on a joint venture to provide services to their communities. Individuals from newcomer communities have been asked to speak to mainstream civic organizations about issues and concerns facing their communities.

"As a result of our work and partnership with the International Center of Indianapolis," says Taylor, "the majority community has become aware that Native Americans do exist in Indiana and that our ethnic make-up is rapidly changing."

"The success of the Forum," Taylor adds, "has helped CICF establish trust and build relationships with diverse communities and a reputation as an immigrant-friendly foundation."

The Foundation is working hard to live up to that reputation. After the first Forum in 2002, CICF created the Creating Greater Awareness Communication Network to reach out to newcomer communities which are often not in the "information loop." This electric network provides 400 some individuals with valuable information—from job postings and volunteer opportunities to upcoming cultural events and funding opportunities.

Last year, CICF also launched the Uncommon Common Ground series, a spin-off of the Forum. "We started this series to address issues and concerns that tend to be the same for the newcomer communities, such as lack of knowledge about foundations, civic integration, and civil rights," Taylor explains. The two programs in 2006 will focus on immigrants and refugee awareness and the Sikh community.

Bringing community members together to increase awareness and eliminate stereotypes and distrust is a central goal for the Creating Greater Awareness Forum. It is a goal to which Taylor is personally committed.

"I realize that the groups I've been working with probably have negative views of African-American males. I think I may have changed their perceptions about me individually," Taylor reflects. "But people will change their perceptions about whole groups only if they are intentional about getting to know others beyond casual contact during business hours. My acceptance by other communities is not necessarily indicative of how they view other African-Americans, but my hope is that all of us can take the time to get to know people and make a positive difference."



© Central Indiana Community Foundation

Indiana is one of the many states that have experienced a significant growth of the immigrant population over the past 15 years. The 2000 census counted nearly 200,000 immigrants, who made up about three percent of the state's total population.

In the 1990s, census figures show that Indianapolis experienced a 160 percent increase in its immigrant population, and the foreign-born accounted for 44 percent of the city's overall population growth.

According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, nearly half of the foreign-born in Indianapolis comes from Latin America, but Europe and Asia are also important source regions. Mexico, India, Germany, China, United Kingdom, Vietnam, Philippines, Korea, Canada, and El Salvador are the top-ten countries of origin for Indianapolis' foreign-born residents.

Today, figures from the Indiana Department of Education indicate that 214 languages are represented in Indiana public schools and 129 languages other than English are spoken in homes of Indianapolis public school students.

## BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN AFRICANS AND AFRICAN- AMERICANS

### THE KIACA GALLERY OF COLUMBUS, OHIO

[www.kiaca.org](http://www.kiaca.org)

DVD

#### *Watch the DVD Maid in America: Intergroup Relations*

*Meet a dedicated nanny who has worked in several African-American households since immigrating to this country. Hear from the African-American couple she now works for as they poignantly recount their own family's working-class beginnings and see parallels in today's immigrant experience.*

Three years ago, Bamazi Talle arrived in Columbus, Ohio and embarked upon his dream of sharing contemporary African art in America by establishing the KIACA (Kaybe Impact African Contemporary Art) Gallery.

An artist originally from Togo, Talle came to New York City in 1995 with \$185 in his pocket and lack of legal immigration status. Three years later, he got married, obtained a green card, and started a family. After completing a Master's in Fine Arts in painting from the New York Academy of Art, Talle left the bustling metropolis for Columbus so that he and his then-wife could raise their two children in a quieter environment.

Columbus may seem an unusual destination for an African immigrant and his family, but in the 1990s, according to the U.S. Census, this metropolitan area saw a 100 percent increase in its foreign-born population. African immigrants, by local estimates, now number around 30,000. Immigrants, overall, account for more than nine percent of the total population.

Talle started the KIACA Gallery primarily to help bridge Africans and African-Americans and build a platform for the appreciation of contemporary African art. Although most of the world knows of only traditional African art, Talle hopes to acquaint the community with modern work produced by African artists as well as the "transaction between the traditional and contemporary."

"Traditional art is for purposes of culture, not for beauty. Statues were for religion; masks were for rituals. Today, people see Africa, and they only see AIDS and war. They have no idea that we paint and create in the contemporary," Talle explains.

This lack of knowledge regarding contemporary African art has resulted in great difficulty for Africans to showcase their art, and the KIACA Gallery serves to provide such artists with the chance to share their artistic and cultural talents with their new community.

Indeed, this goal is reflected in the very name of the gallery: "Kaybe" is the name of a West African ethnic group famed for growing crops in unfriendly, mountainous terrain by building a wall that supports a level planting field. Talle envisions KIACA as this metaphorical wall that will help African immigrant and refugee artists thrive and gain widespread appreciation of their work in the United States.

The gallery displays Talle's personal work, which he describes as both traditional and contemporary with strong cultural undertones. A key recurring image in his art is the woman form, depicted to emphasize the importance of women in African society. Other artists from countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, and Senegal are also exhibited in the gallery.

While the KIACA Gallery serves to share contemporary African art with the entire community, Talle has a special interest in helping Africans and African-Americans connect. This is especially important in a city like Columbus where competition over jobs and other resources, along with cultural and social differences, has created some tensions.

"Africans aren't warmly welcomed by the African-Americans here. There's no discussion; it's like we are two separate peoples." Talle observes. "I want to use art as a tool to bridge Africans and African-Americans."

To this end, Talle ensures that there is also work by at least one African-American artist at each show in addition to that of the featured African artists.



© KIACA Gallery

"When these artists come in, they start supporting each other, mingling, and communicating. This way they have a chance to talk and try to understand each other," Talle explains.

In addition to showing art, the gallery gives back to the broader community through weekly art classes for children who have experienced drug and alcohol abuse. Other classes focusing on traditional and contemporary African art, taught by Talle and a few volunteers, are offered to both adults and children.

"KIACA also reaches out to young people from various cultures, allowing them to explore their perceptions and perspectives," says Sandra Smith, a community research and grants management officer at The Columbus Foundation. "Being surrounded by art and artists from different ethnicities, cultures, and continents is important to their gaining a comfort level with people who are different. It widens their appreciation for all cultures."

With plenty of local coverage and visitors, the gallery has successfully achieved its original goal and is now a prominent landmark on Columbus' art and cultural landscape. Still, Talle has ambitious plans for growth: He would like to see this gallery grow into a museum that has a permanent exhibition and a number of educational opportunities such as seminars and lectures.

When he first dreamt of this gallery, Bamazi invested all his savings to make it a reality. During its first three years, KIACA was entirely funded by Talle's savings and income from selling his pieces. "Even now, any time I sell my art, all the money just goes to the gallery. I really, really believe in what we are doing to make our art known and documented," Talle asserts.

However, as the gallery has expanded, so too has the funding. The Capacity Building Initiative: Immigrant and Refugee Organizations, a collaborative of eight local funding entities, contributed a two-year grant of \$20,000 to help the gallery strengthen its effectiveness.



© KIACA Gallery

**Bamazi Talle**

"KIACA is a wonderful cultural asset to the Columbus community," says Rachel McIntosh, project director of the funding collaborative. "It is a resource that can help those concerned with rapidly changing demographics understand the significant contributions that immigrants and refugees can make to enrich our community."

The Greater Columbus Art Council granted \$2,000 for a showcase featuring

the work of a Somali photographer who spent a year documenting the lives of several Somali refugees who had just arrived in America after spending 15 years in refugee camps in Africa. The exhibit aims to increase community understanding of the refugee experience.

The Columbus Foundation also made a \$1,700 grant to KIACA, specifically for its commitment to art for people of color and to providing access to art and culture for the overall community, according to Smith.

Smith stresses the unique opportunities that this gallery presents: "I think this gallery is a tool for promoting immigrant integration and cross-cultural understanding. It can be a social opportunity, an opportunity to examine various cultures. It is an opportunity for people to come together not around any specific issues, but in a very relaxed environment. People come to this gallery to really explore their curiosity and share their perspectives, which is different than people gathering because of a crisis, when tensions are high."

## FUNDERS IN COLUMBUS, OHIO RESPOND TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

The Capacity Building Initiative: Immigrant and Refugee Organizations (CBI) was established to build the effectiveness of the growing number of organizations founded and led by immigrants and refugees to serve their communities. This two-year funding collaborative provides grants, training, and technical assistance to grantee organizations.

With leadership from The Columbus Foundation, local funders, in 2003, began discussing the needs of newcomer organizations and how they can respond. CBI was formed in 2005, after raising more than \$800,000 from six local public and private sources: Columbus Medical Association Foundation, City of Columbus Community Relations Commission, Fifth Third Bank, Franklin County Board of Commissioners, The Columbus Foundation, and United Way of Central Ohio, which houses CBI. In addition to these funding partners, Ohio State Bar Foundation and a number of community representatives serve on the CBI steering committee.

KIACA Gallery is among nine organizations participating in CBI; these groups provide a wide array of services to help newcomers from Latin America, Africa, and Asia establish a social and economic foothold and integrate into their new community.

## CREATING COMMUNITY ACROSS CULTURES

### THE POWER OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES

by Amy E. Skillman  
Institute for Cultural Partnerships

[www.culturalpartnerships.org](http://www.culturalpartnerships.org)

**W**An unlikely group of women sit comfortably in chairs around the rehearsal studio of a local theater. For several months they have been gathering regularly to share stories and create a performance piece about their experiences of coming to America from Vietnam, Colombia, China, India, Ecuador, Guinea, Cambodia, Turkey, and Trinidad. What brings them together now is their struggle to make a new life and their desire to share their stories with new neighbors in central Pennsylvania.

The artistic director jumps up and says, "Okay, I am going to leave the room and I want you to create the Statue of Liberty with your bodies." The women discuss how to do this. Should they stand side by side, each one in the pose of the Lady? Or, can they create a single living statue using all of their bodies together?



© Institute for Cultural Partnerships

After short deliberations and a few practices, they take their positions and call the director back into the room. She walks through the door and stops in her tracks, hand to her mouth, a single breath caught in her throat. Tears fill her eyes as she begins to understand what Lady Liberty means to these women.

This camaraderie wasn't always there. While the play was created and staged in a mere six months, the trust and community that made the play so successful were four years in the making.

Since 1992, over 30,000 refugees and immigrants have made Pennsylvania their home, resulting in dramatic demographic shifts. Unfortunately, these changes have given rise to unprecedented levels of prejudice and hate crimes. It is hard to hear newcomers talk about the prejudice, misunderstanding, and stereotyping they face here after many had made such difficult journeys to escape that very experience in their homelands.

At the Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP), we believe that attention to newcomers' stories and traditions might ease their resettlement and build better awareness and tolerance among the general public. To that end, I sought refugee and immigrant women to collaborate on a project with ICP and found a perfect partner in the Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN).

Led by Ho-Thanh Nguyen, herself a Vietnamese refugee, PAIRWN works with refugee women to develop leadership skills, self-confidence, and fellowship to help one another make a successful transition to a new life. Since 2001, ICP and PAIRWN have worked closely together on many projects. The first, a cookbook, gathered over 100 recipes as well as stories from each contributor about the meaning of food in her life and family.



The interest in stories associated with food paved the way for the Story Circle Project.

Around 30 women with a diverse range of experiences, histories, and cultures participated in individual interviews, and many also attended monthly Story Circles where they had the opportunity

to practice their English and share common experiences.

**“This project is making me feel important for the first time since arriving in the U.S. two years ago.”**

Each month, we picked a topic, including the role of women in community life and the changing roles of women in diaspora; the ways women recreate their material culture and artistic traditions in a new world; their experiences of emigration and resettlement; and their perspectives on diversity in Pennsylvania. One story led to another, as this circle of women drew closer in friendship and understanding. Eventually, we invited a

licensed therapist to be on hand at each meeting to handle any especially difficult situations that might arise when the women talk about leaving their homeland, facing prejudice in the workplace, or losing control of their children.

As the women read transcripts of each other’s interviews, they identified important themes and explored how best to present what they were learning. A curator, filmmaker, and theater educator offered recommendations about how the stories might be presented in their respective media. The women became particularly excited about doing an exhibit and a theater piece—so we did both!

The women titled the exhibit, “Our Voices: Refugee and Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories.” The exhibit opened at the State Museum of Pennsylvania on September 11, 2005—a date whose significance was not lost on these women. Blending artistic sensibilities, oral history, and ethnographic perspectives, Our Voices offered an understanding of the ways that refugee and immigrant women have rebuilt their lives in Pennsylvania. The exhibit put a face on newcomers through their stories, which drew on several themes:

- **Humor:** especially stories about language and confusing behavior patterns.
- **Acculturation:** getting used to the way that Americans do things.
- **Personal transformation:** adjusting to changing roles as women.



- **Courage:** overcoming incredible barriers in order to escape terror.
- **Motherhood:** having babies without the usual extended family to help out, becoming invisible in their children's lives.
- **The act of leaving everything behind:** the things they miss most.

An artistic quality portrait photograph complemented each woman's story. A case of personal artifacts (e.g., a mother's rosary, a cookbook, a family photograph) made a powerful statement about what was most important in these women's lives. There was a circle of chairs, each one hand-painted by the women with motifs and colors that she selected. A twenty-foot-long, life-sized group photograph hung along one wall with a quote from one of the participants overhead: "Even from all our diverse backgrounds, we still find it easy to sit down woman to woman and just talk to each other." The women's real voices were brought into the room through a DVD, capturing the feel of the Story Circles. More than 750 people attended the opening.

At the same time, we worked together on a script for the performance while taking diction and improvisation workshops with a theater educator. Those who chose not to act learned sound, lighting, and stage management. Story Circle: Coming to America in the 21st Century re-created the Story Circle setting with women sitting around a table talking. Through music, movement, visual art, and spoken word, Story Circle dramatized the courage, heartbreak, and dreams of immigrant and refugee women. Created and performed by the women themselves, the play depicted the challenges and triumphs that newcomers to America have conquered and celebrated. Story Circle was presented for three nights to sold-out audiences as part of the local community theater's WomenSpeak celebration of women playwrights and women-centered theater, and again six months later to accompany the exhibit.

The play and the curatorial process of creating an exhibit together provided a safe place for participants to practice their English and struggle with ways to



© Institute for Cultural Partnerships

present their feelings. They understand the challenges of expressing important ideas in a second language and often help each other find the right words. During a planning meeting, one woman helped me understand when she said, "This project is making me feel important for the first time since arriving in the U.S. two years ago."

The Story Circles have created an almost sacred space where these women, who have to hold back in all other aspects of their lives, can say what is on their minds to other women who understand, who share the experience. Whether refugees or immigrants, they have mourned their losses together, laughed at their mistakes, and shared ideas for dealing with insensitive attitudes in others. They have created new traditions and a new sense of community. Some have said that the PAIRWN community is even more important to them than their national or ethnic community. The daughter of one of the women in the play told us that the play "...saved my mother's life, at a time when she was struggling every day just to get out of bed."

This project has been about much more than the exhibit or the play. It has also been about the process of telling stories to understand one's own experience and translating personal narratives into powerful tools for social and personal change.

**DVD** *Watch the DVD*  
**The New Americans:  
 Support Networks**

*Social networks are a foundation of immigrant integration, but that doesn't mean that they always need to be constructed. Drop in on an impromptu meeting and a surprise party as co-workers celebrate success and new beginnings.*

## GROWING COMMUNITY ROOTS

### THE BOISE REFUGEE COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

[www.mtnstatesgroup.org/  
community](http://www.mtnstatesgroup.org/community)



© Diane Ronayne Photography, Boise

Corn, cabbage, tomato, squash, pepper, and onion. These are essential ingredients to integrate refugees into community life, according to the Boise Refugee Community Garden Project.

Launched in 2004, the Boise Refugee Community Garden Project views community gardens as a way to reduce isolation, teach English skills, and improve the physical and mental health of refugee seniors. This collaborative effort involves four refugee-serving organizations: the Idaho Office of Refugees, Agency for New Americans, English Language Center, and World Relief.

Now in its third season, the project supports two organic gardens, with a third in the works. The gardens serve 40 intergenerational refugee families, including members from Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia, Ukraine, Bosnia, and Sudan. None of the participants would otherwise have the opportunity to garden, as all live in apartments.

Without existing community gardens in Boise to serve as a model, the four partner organizations had to work from scratch. But other community institutions quickly stepped in to lend support. The Ahavath Beth Israel Congregation and the Girl Scouts of the Silver Sage donated the use of the land. More than 60 volunteers came on board, doing everything from providing gardening advice to repairing the irrigation system.

In its first year, the project received cash and in-kind donations totaling over \$7,000 from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, local agribusinesses, building contractors, greenhouses, schools, and master gardeners.

With this strong and diverse community support—including grants from Fund for Idaho, Edwards Mother Earth Foundation, and Rotary—the Boise Refugee Community Garden Project was able to hire a part-time coordinator to oversee the gardens. But getting monetary and community support turned out to be easier than dealing with Mother Nature.

“The most difficult challenges we faced were related to soil, water, and weeds,” recalls Patty Haller, assistant director of the Idaho Office for Refugees. “As refugee service agencies, we don’t have expertise in this area. The need for manual labor and materials to maintain the garden spaces consumed a great deal of time and energy as well.”

Reflecting back on the planning process, Haller says, “Both the challenges and the benefits of community gardens far exceeded our original understanding.” The challenges turned out to be “a major unforeseen benefit,” creating an opportunity to involve other community stakeholders.

Another challenge was adapting the refugees, many of whom had gardened or farmed in their home country, to local crops, climate, and soil conditions. During the first season, many of the crops went to waste on the vine, since the refugees were unfamiliar with the plant varieties. By the third season, however, they were comfortable enough to request vegetables from their home country. Now, gardeners take leadership in organizing work days, garden improvement projects, and celebrations.

The gardens are reaping considerable benefits for the refugee participants. Many spend hours each day in the garden, working in their plots but also socializing, knitting, crocheting, sharing food, and reading in the shade. Others work in the garden with their entire family, strengthening bonds among children, parents, grandparents. Many gardeners share the fruits of their labor with other refugee families, often bringing bags and boxes of produce to the English Language Center for distribution.

While the mental health benefits of gardening are well-documented in research, the degree to which these benefits were realized by the refugee gardeners surprised the partner organizations.

“The gardeners truly blossomed with their plants,” says Haller. “People who complained daily of ailments and expressed little hope for the future became lively, strong, hopeful, and even outgoing.”

When asked about their garden experience, the gardeners express the importance of the gardens to them, focusing on friendships, fresh air, hope, beauty, tradition, and the importance of connecting to the land. They talk about life before they were refugees. They talk about regaining a sense of control in their lives. And they share their expertise—be it composting, hose-repair, or gardening tips—with their fellow gardeners, each eager to learn from others.

Aliya Ghafar-Khan from Afghanistan echoes the sentiments of many, “The time in the garden is as important as the vegetables.”

When staff of the partner organizations talk about the benefits of the gardens, they mention the gardeners’ newfound and greater willingness to speak English, to use the bus system, to attend other events and activities, and to mentor more timid refugees. They say the gardens have provided them an opportunity to relate to the refugees on a new level and to learn about the refugees’ interests, traditions, and cultural perspectives. The power of being viewed as “gardener” rather than “refugee” is very strong, they point out, both in terms of how the gardeners see themselves and how the community sees them.

“Bantu individuals and families were initially very reluctant to discuss or participate in promoting or preserving their culture. The phrase ‘we left that behind when we came to America’ was heard frequently in English classes. Now that phrase has been replaced by an excitement and pride in being Bantu,” says Steve Rainey, director of the English

Language Center. “I believe that gardening has played a significant role as an expression that Bantu culture is valued here.”

Yet, the community gardens are not just a source of pride for the refugees—members of the Boise community are also enthusiastic.

“The garden adds so much color and life to our neighborhood!” says one long-time Boise resident and neighbor to the project. “The gardeners give me a friendly smile whenever I walk past and I think to myself, what a great place to live.”

“I don’t think any of us could have envisioned the reward, each day, of driving onto our site and seeing plants growing and families laboring together in what was once bare soil,” says Sherrill Livingston, a member of the Ahavath Beth Israel Congregation which sponsors one of the gardens.

But more importantly, she adds, “The garden has been a tool for teaching. The children participated in a Jewish nature camp... The teens built raised beds for senior and handicapped gardeners. Synagogue members joined community work days to help refugees till the soil. Even into the winter, we have begun a tutoring program with the refugees. Each part of the congregation, from day camp to senior volunteers, has benefited from working the soil with and welcoming these new Americans.”

The gardens have given the refugees an opportunity to reach out to the larger Boise community. The gardeners regularly speak at meetings and conferences, educating community members about refugees while building their own leadership skills. With heightened awareness, community organizations and individuals have stepped forward to offer valuable resources to assist refugee families, including tutoring, access to Girl Scout camps, internships at commercial organic gardens, and opportunities to participate in community cultural events. Local funders have also expressed interest in helping to fund the gardens and other refugee projects.

“The refugee garden project has helped to promote mutual understanding among refugees and between refugees and the broader community,” says Haller.



© Idaho Office of Refugees

“People in Boise now view refugees as multi-dimensional individuals who have needs but who also make an important contribution to the quality of life in our community.”

Inspired by the Boise Refugee Community Garden Project, Community Gardens of Boise was established in 2005 through a grant to the Idaho Office for Refugees. This new endeavor aims to expand the availability of community gardens to low-income and other disadvantaged populations, including refugees.

The hope is that they, too, will share a garden experience similar to Saliha, a refugee from Afghanistan, who said, “I went to the garden to grow my food; instead I grew a friend.”

**DVD** *Watch the DVD*  
***Rain in a Dry Land:***  
***Taco Bell***

*New immigrants and native-born Americans have many different kinds of encounters. For a familiar snapshot of cultural clash and mutual frustration, follow an immigrant mother and her son into a Taco Bell in search of a suitable chicken.*



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# CULTURAL INTEGRATION THROUGH THE ARTS

## THE TAMEJAVI FESTIVAL

[www.tamejavi.org](http://www.tamejavi.org)

*"All of us, no matter our place of birth, carry a deep-seated longing to know ourselves through cultural roots. All of us, whatever our innate artistic talent, have an impulse to reach out through cultural expression. Such longing and impulse propel us to reach across cultural boundaries, bridging differences and finding common ground."*

—Craig McGarvey, who supported the Tamejavi Festival in California's Central Valley while program director at The James Irvine Foundation

When the stage lights dimmed on the play "Promise of a Love Song," the audience that rose to applaud in the historic Tower Theater of Fresno, California represented an even greater cultural spectrum than the play itself.

Hmong refugees and middle-class whites, migrant workers from Oaxaca and Pakistani business owners had sat together to experience a drama set in three distinct locales: a home in rural Appalachia, a Puerto Rican tenement in New York, and a shotgun house in New Orleans. The performance was given by ensemble actors from New Orleans' African-American Junebug Productions, the Puerto Rican Pregones Theater in the Bronx, and Roadside Theater from the coalfields of eastern Kentucky.

A mosaic of intergenerational love, the play used music and theme to weave together three seemingly disparate stories—each infused with the voice of its culture—into a coherent whole. For the greatly diverse audience, the play illustrated how art can be a tool to strengthen cultural identity and bridge cultural chasms.

The same message of unity through art animated the three-day, spring 2002 Tamejavi Festival that featured "Promise of a Love Song," along with dance, comedy, music, photography, art, theater, crafts, food, and more from the many newcomer groups that populate California's Central Valley, perhaps the most diverse rural region in the world. An estimated 1,500 people participated in the festival.

"Promise" and Tamejavi share a similar back story as well. The three theater companies—Pregonis, Junebug, and Roadside—had deliberately built their collaborative effort, first taking time to visit one another's theaters with their own work, then engaging in dialogue.

"When we took a play about Appalachia to the Bronx," says Roadside's director Dudley Cocke, "people connected with the mountain culture of Puerto Rico. It put them in mind of their own stories. The next time we visited, it was their story."

## CULTURAL EXCHANGE AS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

During the planning stages of Tamejavi (the name is an amalgam of the Spanish, Mixtec, and Hmong words for cultural marketplace), a series of workshops, story circles, and study groups brought diverse participants together in shared space, building trust and relationships among the group members. But the festival was a milestone, not a culmination, in their cultural exchange.

Following the festival, meetings for reflection and evaluation helped participants recognize the great value of cultural exchange and reinforced the importance of continuing such cultural learning opportunities.

In the words of Myrna Martinez-Nateras, director of the American Friends Service Committee's Pan Valley Institute (PVI), the lead organization for Tamejavi, people felt that "to promote understanding and respect for differences, more spaces for cultural learning were needed. So an idea was proposed to visit other communities during the celebration of their traditions, learn about their beliefs and how they are or are not adapting to a new society."

With foundation support and active community involvement, this idea quickly became reality. Latinos, South and Southeast Asians, indigenous Mexicans and Americans, blacks, and whites began a nine-month, round-robin series of participation in one another's traditions:



© Daranee Petsod

Hmong New Year. Martin Luther King candlelight vigil. Bear Dance Ceremony. Music and dance of the P'urhepechas. Lao New Year. Juneteenth Celebration. Cultural poetry exchange. La Guelaguetza celebration. Dialogue on black reparations.

Each visit was designed as a learning opportunity, facilitated and guided by people from the community being visited, with pre- and post-dialogues. Approximately 300 people participated in some way.

"To result in meaningful learning experiences, it was important to have an understanding and promote respect for each community's cultural protocols... for establishing cultural awareness and for dealing with and beginning to embrace ethnic differences," Martinez-Nateras explains. "Otherwise, people tend to interpret others from their own cultural perspectives, which can make them judge unfairly and react disrespectfully when they see a cultural practice that might not be accepted in their own cultural values."

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### CREATING A NEW CULTURAL TRADITION

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From the visits emerged several working groups: Women, Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Outdoor Marketplace, and Documentation. These groups engaged in an interactive process of cultural exchange, led by "cultural organizers" who used various techniques to bring those from unlike backgrounds together to develop cultural products.

One of these products was Tamejavi II. In fall of 2004, some 2,000 of the Valley's demographic medley gathered for the three-day festival that blended audience with performers, amateurs with professionals. This time, the featured theatrical piece was completely home-grown. Developed from oral history projects from within their respective communities, "Diary of an Endless Journey: Towards a New Dawn," with a cast of 40, told the migration stories of refugee Hmong and migrant Mixtec families.

"I was very moved by the coming together of the multiple communities," says Joan Shigekawa, program officer

in Arts and Culture at The Rockefeller Foundation, one of the foundations that provided support for the festival. "These were community members coming together in the crucible of making art. They created a piece full of feeling and theater craft that helped us understand their shared experiences, triumphs, and challenges."

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### PROMOTING COMMUNITYWIDE CULTURAL EXCHANGE

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The working groups are, of course, looking ahead to a third festival. In the interim, they are creating opportunities for cultural exchange for the broader community. Their plans include a series of interactive dialogues and "mobile exchanges" in community centers and libraries, doing outreach through local media in rural settings to draw the general public. And the broader community has been responding. Academic institutions and community-based service providers are turning to Tamejavi's parent organization, PVI, to learn more about techniques to promote cultural diversity.

These techniques include "participatory action research," which Tamejavi's working groups are using to actively engage in answering the questions that interest and motivate them. As expressed by PVI's Martinez-Nateras, these questions go to the heart of immigrant integration: "What is the role of cultural identity for immigrants' social inclusion and participation in building democracy?"

What role does the freedom to exercise one's own cultural traditions and activities play in the process of developing a sense of belonging in a new and culturally diverse society? In the process of integration, which cultural traditions must be kept and which ones must be changed?"

Seeking answers to these questions, Tamejavi's participants are planning to develop curricular materials that they will make available to other educators and practitioners through their website. They also have aspirations to convene policymakers to discuss cultural aspects of the integration experience.

The Tamejavi festivals are much more than occasional celebrations of diversity. They have laid the groundwork for long-term, ongoing cultural exchange that is vitally important to newcomer integration. Not every cultural interaction program can be as extensive as the Tamejavi Festival experience. But the activities that the festival encourages—artistic expression, support for native culture, facilitated cultural exchange, guided learning, leadership development, and engagement of the broader community—carry powerful lessons that can be applied to individual grants as well as major funding initiatives.



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## PROGRAM EVALUATION

As case examples in this section illustrate, social and cultural interaction among people of different backgrounds can take many forms, including community forums, visual and performance arts, historical exhibits, among others. Well-developed and -executed efforts, as shown in the figure below, will result in outputs which, in turn, can lead to outcomes that facilitate integration. One way to assess the quality of the outputs is to examine the extent to which the features mentioned in the introduction section are present.

To determine if the outcomes below occurred, foundations might consider collecting the following information:

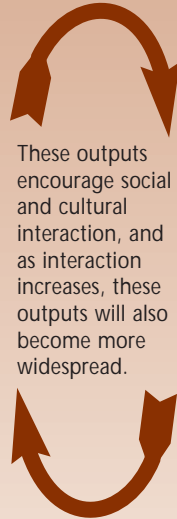
- Knowledge of traditions and basic behaviors during cross-cultural interaction (e.g., how to properly greet the other person, religious holidays).
- Understanding and acceptance of similarities and differences in culture and experience.
- Perceptions about people from other groups (e.g., using the Bogardus scale, available on [www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/bogardus02.htm](http://www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/bogardus02.htm), which asks questions about how a person feels about having people from

another group as a family member, friend, work colleague, neighbor, visitor, and fellow citizen).

- Frequency and quality of interaction with people from different cultures (e.g., average number of visits to homes of people over a year and purpose of visits).
- Participation in activities that bring people of diverse backgrounds together (e.g., number of times people attend block club meetings and community festivals).
- Establishment of multicultural partnerships, coalitions, and teams to work on communitywide issues.

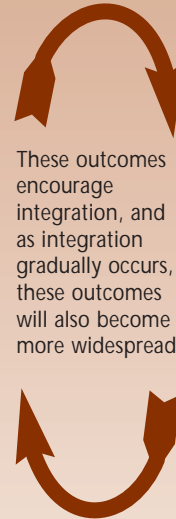
### OUTPUTS

- Number and quality of activities and events (e.g., cultural festivals) for people to get to know each other as individuals.
- Number and quality of opportunities (e.g., policy campaigns) for people to work together on common issues.



### OUTCOMES

- More relationships across cultures.
- Improved understanding about different cultures.
- Reduced prejudices and misperceptions about people from different cultures.
- Increased collective action across cultures.



### IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION