

The Art of Community

*Creativity at the Crossroads
of Immigrant Cultures
and Social Services*

A Collaborative Publication of
The Institute for Cultural Partnerships
and Grantmakers Concerned
with Immigrants and Refugees



**I'm sometimes as an eagle . . .
I'm flying alone, I know where I am,
I take care of myself.
I'm smart enough to know what to do in important times
for me, the eagle . . .**

**But in this country, I'm a little bird against
big and tall buildings that are in my way.
For now I need help to fly and to live.
And that's good sometimes.**

**But one day I want to be big enough
to open my wings
and fly over those big and tall buildings,
but always with somebody,
with my flock.**

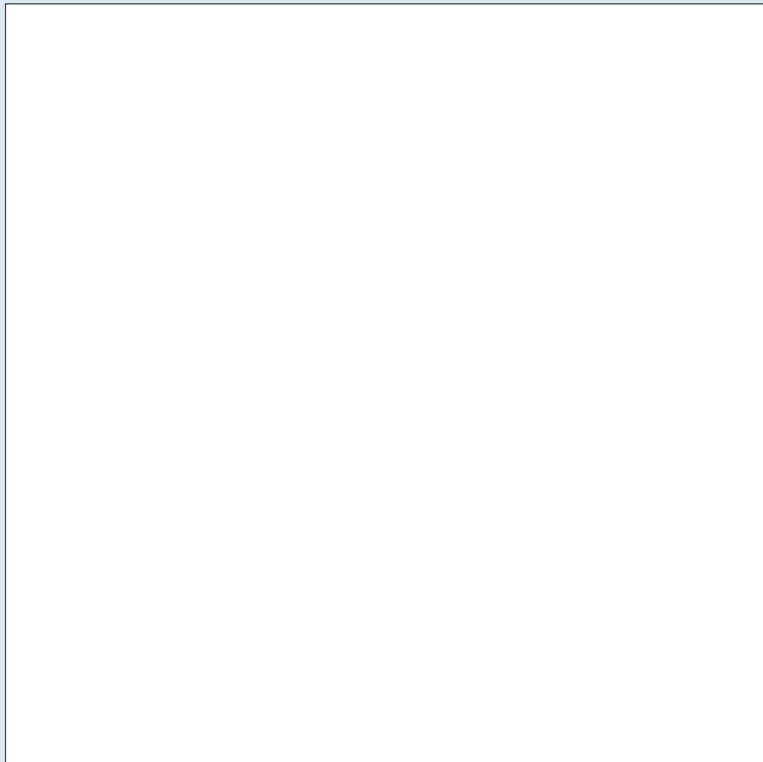
Pedro Gomez, age 17 from Peru

Opposite and pages 3 through 9:
Changing Worlds Newcomer Mural

This mural was created during
the summer of 2000 by high
school students at the Taft High
School's International Newcomers
Center in Chicago.

Working with ESL teacher, Esther
Lieber and art teacher, Esther
Charbit, the group selected the
migrating bird motif to express
their emotions about the huge
changes in their worlds. They
included painted designs and
images, photographs, poetry,
and other writing about their
memories.

- Photos by Ed-Imaging,
Courtesy of Changing Worlds





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opera è stata donata
al Museo di Arte
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Shirley
Morgan
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Creativity at the Crossroads of Immigrant Cultures and Social Services

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This publication is an initiative of Building Cultural Bridges, a national, interdisciplinary project at the Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP). The project's goal is to bridge the arts and social services to support cultural continuity and artistic growth among refugees and immigrants in the United States. Community-based workshops and conference panel presentations bring the project to local, regional, and national audiences, providing tools and encouragement for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The Building Cultural Bridges national advisory task force includes: Joel Jacinto, executive director, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA) and program director, Kayamanan Ng Lahi Philippine Folk Arts; Bobby King, independent consultant and former executive director, Refugee Family Services; Max Niedzwiecki, executive management consultant, Asian American Justice Center; and Sandra Smith, community research and grants management officer, The Columbus Foundation and board member, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees.

Building Cultural Bridges is made possible with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Ford Foundation and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees have also provided critical funding for the production of *The Art of Community*.

In addition to this Building Cultural Bridges publication, ICP is issuing a revised edition of *Newcomer Arts: A Strategy for Successful Integration*, a practical guide for refugee and immigrant service providers and artists. For more information on other ICP resources, visit www.culturalpartnerships.org.

Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees has recently published *Investing in Our Communities: Strategies for Immigrant Integration*, which offers additional promising practices on cultural and artistic expression as a vehicle for immigrant integration. This publication also examines other pathways to integration including communitywide planning, language and education, health and well being, economic mobility, and citizenship and civic participation. For more information on other GCIR resources, go to www.gcir.org.

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Edited by Laura R. Marcus, in collaboration with Daranee Petsod and Amy E. Skillman

Acknowledgements

Collaboration is the heart of *The Art of Community* and of the larger Building Cultural Bridges project, of which this publication is a component. Drawing upon the multi-faceted resources and talents that make up any community, we feel fortunate and honored to work with a project team that brings so much to this publication.

Building Cultural Bridges National Task Force members—Joel Jacinto, Bobby King, Max Niedzwiecki, and Sandra Smith—have lent their expertise and input to the content, framework, and editing of *The Art of Community*.

From their diverse professional perspectives, authors Patty Haller, Bobby King, Victoria Patterson, Amy Skillman, and William Westerman vividly illustrate the successful merging of arts and culture with the social services through their project profiles. Changing Worlds founder Kay Berkson and Executive Director Mark Rodriguez, *My Journey Yours* project coordinators Gwylene Gallimard and Jean-Marie Mauclet, and Indian *Bharatanatyam* and *Kuchipudi* dancer Ramaa Bharadvaj have generously contributed consultation and photographs to this publication. We are grateful to Ed-Imaging of Chicago, Illinois for images on pages 1 through 9.

Designer Phillip Hunsaker has captured the spirit of *The Art of Community*, bringing the profiles to life through his dynamic and thoughtful artwork. Kristie Peterson and Bernadette Chavez of Ink and Images, Inc. of Albuquerque, New Mexico have shepherded the publication through the printing phase, taking the project from idea and design to the printed page.

The Art of Community and the Building Cultural Bridges project emanated, in part, from a series of Fund for Folk Culture gatherings on building support for refugee and immigrant arts. To the Fund and Executive Director Betsy Peterson, we extend our appreciation for continued encouragement of this project.

Through their generous support, our funders, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford Foundation, have made possible the sharing of stories that we hope will inspire others to tap their own creativity and communities, and undertake collaborative refugee and immigrant arts initiatives.

Through this project, our two organizations have had the privilege of learning about one another's work and have greatly appreciated the opportunity to collaborate. Although we have distinctly different missions, the cross-learning experience has deeply enriched our respective work, and we look forward to future collaborations with one another.

Finally, we wish to thank Laura Marcus, the driving force behind *The Art of Community*. She played a central role in conceptualizing the project. Her passion, expertise, and attention to detail made this publication such a rich resource and important contribution to the field.

**Institute for Cultural
Partnerships**

**Grantmakers Concerned with
Immigrants and Refugees**



**NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS**



The Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP) facilitates opportunities for understanding among cultures and communities. Now in its eleventh year, ICP works locally, across Pennsylvania, in the mid-Atlantic region, and nationally, to improve the quality of inter-group relations and to work with communities and institutions to overcome barriers rooted in misunderstanding, prejudice, and cultural difference.

The Institute focuses on helping people understand their own culture, understand others, develop positive inter-group relations, and build strong communities. ICP activities concentrate in the areas of:

- 1) *arts and heritage*, recognizing that the arts and cultural traditions provide a window of understanding into a community;
- 2) *community programs*, building the capacity of newcomer and minority communities to live to their fullest potential; and
- 3) *diversity training* and awareness in schools, workplaces, and community settings to reduce prejudice and build positive community responses to hate activity.

ICP has produced a number of products and services that reflect these goals.

- *Refugee Arts*—a manual for refugee service workers and refugee artists, provides guidance and practical information on how to work with refugee artists or tradition bearers in order to enhance the resettlement process.
- *What's Your Name?*—a study guide based on our On Tour Recording Series offers standards-based instructional resources that use traditional arts to advance student learning while increasing awareness of cultural diversity in Pennsylvania.
- *Does it Run in the Family?*—a non-medical toolkit that uses oral history and cultural awareness to assist families in collecting their health history and empowering them to better communicate with their health care providers.
- *Folk Arts of Newcomers*—a youth oriented series of webpages designed to engage children in exploring diversity in their communities through the arts and culture of their neighbors.
- *GAIN (Greater Access to Independence for Newcomers)*—an innovative job coaching program using both staff, volunteer, and business resources to prepare eligible refugees for available employment opportunities.

Since 1983, ICP has developed and maintained the Pennsylvania Folklife Archives, a collection of photos, taped interviews, and other documentation of traditional arts, cultural communities, and folklife in the Commonwealth. The Archive provides a wealth of information on the arts and cultural heritage of Pennsylvania.

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Nuestra Casa Family Resource Center

Mission

Nuestra Casa provides Spanish-language, culturally appropriate social services to the growing Latino population of Mendocino County, California. The organization is vital to the entire community because:

We help families reach their goals and succeed;
We ensure that families adjust to life in the United States;
We teach children and adults to be successful learners;
We guide Latino families as they become full members of our economic, social, and cultural institutions; and
We showcase the strengths and uniqueness of the Latino culture.

Context

The population of Ukiah and surrounding hamlets is approximately 45,000. Mendocino County's population is considered to be 20 percent Hispanic; however, between 1995 and 2005, Latino enrollment in county schools has increased by 62 percent, while White enrollment decreased by 26 percent.

La Noche de Estrellas – Project Details

Cash \$6,157: Includes production costs such as stage and lighting technicians, lighting and sound expenses, minimal set design and theater sets, and videotaping; and publicity costs such as graphic design, posters, flyers, and ticket printing.

In-Kind: Nuestra Casa provided contact with Latino artists, meeting space, publicity and ticket distribution, and served as the project's information contact, with a total value of \$3,000. SPACE contributed project coordination and publicity. The Ukiah Players Theatre donated the use of its theater, directorial assistance, and technical support, including lights. The combined total of in-kind support from SPACE and UPT is \$6,000.

Time: Event coordinator, 200 hours; volunteers, 600 hours.

Collaborators: SPACE and Ukiah Players Theatre.

Funders: The S.H. Cowell Foundation chose Ukiah as a recipient of one of its place-based grants to stimulate community collaboration. The Foundation provided funding for a Spanish-language facilitator.

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Domestic Voices

Using Oral History and Ethnography for Social Activism

By Amy E. Skillman, Director, Arts and Heritage
Institute for Cultural Partnerships
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania



*Even from all our diverse
backgrounds and experiences,
we find it easy to sit down,
woman to woman, and
just talk to one another.*

• Susan Man



An Unlikely Group

An unlikely group of women sit comfortably in chairs around the rehearsal studio of a local theater. Remnants of Indian, Vietnamese, and Colombian snacks litter the side table; half-full bottles of water stand within reach, ready to quench thirsty throats too focused on their lines to notice they are getting dry. For several months these women have been gathering regularly to

share stories and create a performance piece about their experiences 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? After short deliberations and a few practices, they take their positions and call the director back. 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 performance piece 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.

The Story Circle: Bringing Experience to Life

Since 1992, over 30,000 refugees and immigrants have made Pennsylvania their home. The resulting dramatic demographic shifts 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 such difficult journeys to escape that very experience in their homelands.



At the Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP) we believe that paying attention to newcomers' stories and traditions might ease their resettlement and build awareness and tolerance among the general public. To that end, we 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, a Vietnamese refugee, PAIRWN works with immigrant and refugee women to develop leadership skills, self-confidence, and fellowship to assist one another in making a successful transition to a new life. Since 2001, ICP and PAIRWN have worked closely together on many projects. For instance, the PAIRWN 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. About 30 women with a diverse range of experiences, histories, and cultures participated in individual interviews, as well as monthly Story Circles where they had the opportunity to practice their English and share common experiences.

Each month we picked a topic, such as the role of women in community life and the changing roles of women in diaspora, how they recreate their culture and traditions in a new world, 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 homelands, facing prejudice in the workplace, or losing control of their children.

Our Voices: Refugee and Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories

As the women read transcripts of interviews and Story Circles, 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 exhibit, *Our Voices: Refugee and Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories*, 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 these newcomers through their stories, which drew upon several themes:

- **Humor**—stories about language and confusing behavior patterns among Americans.
- **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 about their home countries.

An artistic quality portrait photograph complemented each woman's story. A display case of personal artifacts—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 14-foot-long, life-sized group photograph hung along one wall with a quote from one of the participants overhead that read, "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 that captures the feel of the Story Circles. More than 750 people attended the opening.

Story Circle: Coming to America in the 21st Century

At the same time, we worked together on a script for the performance, while attending 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 the 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 our local community theater's *WomenSpeak* celebration of women playwrights and women-centered theater, and again six months later to accompany the exhibit.

For both the play and the exhibit, we offered Study Guides and Talk Back Sessions to assist audiences and visitors in looking at their own attitudes about immigration, racism, and tolerance for diversity. During the Talk Back sessions, we asked if the play offered any surprises or new discoveries. One woman said, "These women's stories made me realize the internal racism I carry, and they give me the courage to talk about it and the desire to make some personal changes."

Benefits and Outcomes

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. Most of the women appreciate the challenge of expressing ideas and feelings in a second language; they have all helped each other find the right words. 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 woman 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."

The Story Circle project has been about much more than the exhibit or the play. It has enhanced self-confidence, developed leadership skills, and provided a forum for sharing child-rearing strategies. 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. During a planning meeting, one woman helped me understand: "This project is making me feel important for the first time since arriving in the U.S. two years ago."



Coming to America

The first meal I have, the church and my sponsor bought us a big box of Minute Rice . . . and told us that this is the rice, you can cook it and eat it. And the directions were in English. Nobody showed me how to do it. I never cooked that way before. We rinsed the rice off, then we put the rice in the pot and we put the cold water in there, measuring one knuckle on my finger. That's how I learned when we cook rice in my country. Regardless, Minute Rice is different from long rice.

Then, in half an hour, forty-five minutes, when we think the rice is done, we put it in the bowl to serve, to eat dinner; it's just like soup! We sit there and cry. Six of us sit there and cry. Because we have the meat there, but we have no rice, and rice is like potatoes here—very important. Right now, we're looking back the last 28 years to the first meal we had, and I'm laughing now. But at that time it wasn't funny. That time was sad; it was really sad. Now I know how Minute Rice is cooked!



• *Ho-Thanh Nguyen, PAIRWN leader and Vietnamese refugee, relates the story above about her early days living in the United States. From an interview conducted in 2003.*

Institute for Cultural Partnerships

Mission

The mission of the Institute for Cultural Partnerships is to facilitate opportunities for understanding among cultures and communities. Our work often occurs at the intersection of tension and culture and takes the form of arts and heritage initiatives, community programs, and diversity training.

Context

In the last five years, 22 percent (2,232) of all refugee arrivals to the state have settled in central Pennsylvania. A substantial influx of secondary migrants from around the country has added to the numbers. Since 2002, refugees have come from over 26 countries: Cuba, 43 percent; various African countries, 16 percent; Ukraine, 13 percent; Russia, 10 percent; and Bosnia, 4 percent.

Story Circle Project – Project Details

Over three years, the first year was devoted to background research. The exhibit and play were developed during the second year, and installed/performed during the third year.

Cash: \$53,592: Includes: research component (one year), \$17,600; exhibit design and implementation, \$23,684 (includes DVD, study guide, and participant workshops). The *Story Circle* play cost approximately \$6,154 for each run of three performances.

In-kind: The State Museum of Pennsylvania provided design and installation services for the exhibit. The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency printed the project study guide. Total in-kind support was \$28,000.

Time: Project coordinator Amy Skillman spent 30 percent of staff time on the project over three years. Two full-time summer interns worked on various aspects of the project.

Collaborators: Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN), The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, Open Stage of Harrisburg, and Women, Create! The Center for Women's Creative Expression.

Funders: Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Pennsylvania Humanities Council, Harrisburg School District, Women, Create!, The Greater Harrisburg Foundation, Jump Street (a local arts council), and the YWCA Race Against Racism Fund.

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