

welcome

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These refugees' new lives? Helping other refugees

They came to the United States as refugees themselves. Now these heads of Church World Service resettlement affiliates in six cities are helping other refugees build new lives in their new communities.

CWS resettles refugees to 23 states through a network of agencies and offices in 34 cities. Former refugees now head resettlement in Fort Worth, Texas; Columbia, South Carolina; Portland, Oregon; Harrisonburg, Virginia; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Denver, Colorado.

Here are profiles of the first two, with more to follow in future issues of *Welcome*.

Abdulkadir "Lee" Abdi
Sub-Office Director
Refugee Services of Texas (RST)
Fort Worth, Texas

Nationality: Somali Benadir.

Education: Associate degree in information technology support, now studying toward a bachelor's degree in IT support and a certificate in nonprofit management.

Refugee story: Was 11 years old in 1991 when the civil war started in his home city, Mogadishu. He, his parents, grandmother, and six siblings fled by car, first to one town, then another. "The war kept pushing us farther away to a point of no return. At least we were fortunate not to see dead bodies, destruction." Finally able to cross into Kenya, the family had to leave the car and most possessions at the border and walk five



Abdulkadir "Lee" Abdi. Photo by Brandon Tarrant/RST.

Continued Next Page



Continued From Page One

hours to the Liboye refugee camp. Abdi and his older brother worked as luggage porters, earning \$1 a day total for supplementary food for the family. After several months, the family was moved to Mombasa, where he resumed studies and began learning English. He and his brother sold oil, soap, and other items in the market, netting about \$8 a day.

Arrived in the United States: June 11, 1996, to Dallas, Texas, with his parents, grandmother, and siblings.

Sponsor: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, through Catholic Charities.

Congregational cosponsor:

“None, but you never forget who met you at the airport. For us it was Wendy, a volunteer from the local university. You arrive ‘blind;’ this person guides you.”

First big surprise: “Living next door to a white American family. We were used to living close to other refugees, and to going outside – especially us boys. Our new neighbors stayed inside at their window, pointing fingers at us and wondering who we were.”

Most challenging: “The American accent, especially hard to understand over the phone. Also, we kept getting lost.”

First U.S. job: Assembly line at Dallas Semiconductor (hired September 1996).

Jobs with RST: Part-time translator and Somali Bantu case manager, full-time case manager and U.S. Refugee Program orientation, and Match Grant program coordinator, all in Dallas; current position.

Languages: Somali, Arabic, Mai Mai, some Swahili, English.

Countries visited: Canada.

Countries you most want to visit next: Brazil and England, “because of my passion for soccer.”

Continued Next Page



Bedrija Jazic
Area Manager, Refugee Department
Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas
Columbia, South Carolina

Nationality: Bosnian.

Education: Bachelor’s degree in English.

Profession in Bosnia-Herzegovina: High School English teacher.

Refugee story: Spent the 1992-95 Bosnian War in Sarajevo under siege, “teaching children English in the basements of their schools because we wanted them to be ready for the world once the war was over, and giving them hope.” She also volunteered at a community center assisting internally displaced persons and refugees, then lived for a short time in Croatia before finding refuge in the United States.

Arrived in United States: July 18, 1996, to Columbia, S.C., with her husband and five-year-old daughter. Sponsor: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, through LFS in the Carolinas.

Continued Next Page

Bedrija Jazic. Photo by Dalila Jazic.

Hero: Caliph Al-Walid I, who in the 8th century built a united, flourishing Hispania.

Favorite book: *Leaders Who Make a Difference*, by Burt Nanus and Stephen M. Dobbs.

Favorite movie: *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Favorite music: Isley Brothers, Chi-Lites.

Interests outside of work: Cultural anthropology.

Why should the United States welcome refugees? “Because they contribute economically and culturally. And it’s a learning experience.” For example, an RST volunteer’s 15-year-old son used to

associate Asians only with kung fu. Now he is “asking them where they are from, what they eat, what languages they speak.”

How is it different for refugees resettling to the U.S. now than it was for you? “When we came, people hardly knew where Somalia was, or what Muslims believe. Now people know more about refugees.” But there also is more stereotyping now, “especially religious,” and some people confuse refugee resettlement with “helping ‘illegals’ cross the border.”

Why do you help other refugees? “I appreciate what God has given me, and to come out alive and

perfectly fine. Working with people is challenging when they are angry or frustrated, and I have that ability. I am answering a call – people need my help.”

What is your first counsel to a newly arrived refugee? “Don’t think that because you are from a big tribe or a prominent family, everything will be fine. Work hard. Give 110 percent effort. Obey the American laws, because here your record will always follow you. Focus on your new life. Still, be who you are. Find a balance between your cultural traditions and beliefs and your new land, culture, neighbors, and friends.” ●

Congregational cosponsor: “None, but as a volunteer interpreter with LFS from day one, I saw how great it was to have a cosponsoring church. You feel a tingle of envy when you see how people are blessed to have people visiting them, taking them out, helping them find jobs, taking care of their children.”

First big surprise: “South Carolina humidity. The 104 degrees plus 100 percent humidity the day we arrived was a big-time shock.”

Most challenging: “Getting used to living without our family and friends. I have a sister in Dallas, Texas. The rest of the family is still in Bosnia.”

First U.S. job: Part-time receptionist at Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas (hired October 1996).

Jobs with LFS: Office assistant, administrative assistant to the vice president for program, assistant to the VP for partnership initiatives, current position.

Languages: Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, German, English.

Countries visited: Italy, Hungary, Greece, Turkey, England, Poland, Austria.

Country most want to visit next: Egypt. “I am fascinated by ancient Egyptian culture.”

Heroes: “All the people who manage to survive war and still have trust and love for others.”

Favorite books: *Forever Amber* by Kathleen Winsor, *The Egyptian* by Mika Waltari.

Favorite movies: *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Red Violin*, *Legends of the Fall*.

Favorite music: Classic rock, jazz.

Interests outside of work: “Reading, traveling, spending time with my teenager.”

Why should the United States welcome refugees?

“It is important to give people another chance, to give them enough support to start their lives anew, and to accept them as they are.”

Why do you help other refugees? “I know what it means to be a refugee and how hard it is at the beginning when you don’t have anybody to help you. Sometimes it was quite enough that one person was nice enough to give me advice and direct me to an appropriate place. I decided, I can at least be that one person for others.”

What is your first counsel to a newly arrived refugee?

“Accept where you are. This is not your homeland, but it is your new home. Be patient, and be thankful.” ●

Eating out? Think of refugees as you butter your bread

Butterball® Farms, Inc., a leading supplier of specialty butter products for the food service industry, has long been proud of its diverse workforce. So Human Resources Manager Belinda Lazo said she “didn’t need convincing” when PARA Refugee Services approached her about hiring some of its clients.

“I just honestly didn’t know what a refugee was,” Lazo admitted. “So PARA educated me. I learned that some of them have lived under extreme conditions, and sometimes have had to worry about whether they were going to live or die. And it made me even more excited to have some kind of impact in their lives coming to the United States.”

Butterball Farms’ butter portions – in the form of roses, rosettes, balls, seashells, geometric compositions, and more – grace tables at hotels, restaurants, country clubs, and resorts across the country.

McDonald’s is among clients of Butterball’s custom logo products, its golden arches stamped onto its butter portions. The Web site of this Grand Rapids, Michigan-based company notes that it is “the largest national dairy supplier of specialty butter in the U.S.”

Butterball’s first refugee “hire” is Capitoline Nduwimana, a 21-year-old single mother of two from Burundi. Civil war forced her parents to Rwanda, where she was born. Then the Rwandan genocide scattered her family.

“I got separated from my parents. I was 10 years old,” she said. “I was living in refugee camps from that time. I left from Rwanda, went to Congo for two years, then back to Rwanda and finally to Uganda.” Nduwimana was accepted into the U.S. Refugee Program and resettled to Grand Rapids in January 2005 under the auspices of Church World Service and PARA Refugee Services.

When Nduwimana started work in June 2005, “she was really hesitant,” said her supervisor, Lela Honicutt. “It was really hard to talk to her because she knew little English. But she wanted to try. And because of the energy and the motivation she had, she wanted to keep learning. And even though we had little ‘talking



Capitoline Nduwimana, in uniform at Butterball Farms. Several of Butterball’s specialty butter portions are pictured behind her.

communication,’ she could still understand what I was doing. I just showed her.”

Nduwimana shared her own vivid recollections of her first days on the job at Butterball. “I was scared because I didn’t speak English,” she said. “I was pretty sure I could do the work. But I was thinking, ‘How will I know what to do? How will I learn it?’

“But when I got here, they tried to make it easier for me. Lela would tell me something, and then she would do it, and then I would do what she did. And then I felt comfortable when I started to know what to do.”

Lazo recalled that when Capitoline “first started, during the interview process, I needed the assistance of an interpreter. And wow, maybe a month or so later, I was

able to carry on a conversation with her. She caught on to the English language really well.”

Honicutt affirmed that Capitoline is now “doing beautifully. She volunteers for a lot. She helps out a lot, even training. If she sees someone having trouble, she’ll help. She is the kind of person who likes to work really hard.”

Nduwimana, responsible for products’ final inspection before they are packed, said the job has changed her life. “I was sitting at home,” she said. “I say, ‘My gosh, I wish I could find a place to work.’ In my life, I never had a place to work. When I started working, I felt like I arrived. Because when I work full time, five days a week, sometimes overtime, six days a week, that’s good, because I can pay my bills, my food, my clothing. I feel very good to have this job!”

As Nduwimana was getting to work, her cosponsors at the River Valley Church, a Vineyard church, were coaching her on how things work in the United States. At first, it was “what do you need to buy, what don’t you need to buy in order to save a little money,” she said. They advised her to notify her supervisor when she needed time off to go to the doctor, and helped her find babysitters.

Through her steady employment and prompt payment of bills, she built up her credit score. This past summer, with her cosponsors’ encouragement, she bought a house. Nduwimana expects to complete her part-time high school studies soon and go on to college.



Belinda Lazo.

She has located her parents in Tanzania and hopes they can join her soon. Meanwhile, other members of her extended family have resettled in Grand Rapids, and five are now working at Butterball, where they are doing well. “Since Capitoline knows them personally, she gave recommendations of who she thought would be the most successful in our environment,” Lazo said. “At orientation, it was just nice to see the excitement in their eyes. They are very grateful to have the opportunity.”

Nduwimana advises newly resettled refugees just entering the U.S. workforce, “Don’t be nervous. You can’t think that because you don’t speak English you’re not going to do it. I know it’s scary. You say, ‘Wow, what am I going to say? What am I going to do?’ Try hard. You can do it. In a couple of weeks or months, you’ll be ok.”

Her counsel to employers? “I think any job, a refugee could do it. Just make sure they get a good trainer and they understand.” Honicutt echoed Nduwimana’s words, saying, “As long as they want to



Lela Honicutt.

learn, you can work with them. I would recommend any company to hire refugees. Give them that opportunity and they will work for you.”

Agreed Lazo, “The investment is well worth it. The resettlement agency provides an interpreter for the interview and orientation, and helps when there are issues with transportation or anything else. It’s been an extremely positive experience for us. We’ve received much more – we have awesome employees out of this!” ●

Nduwimana is among refugees and cosponsors featured in a new CWS DVD, *A Future with Hope: Welcoming Refugees*. Visit www.churchworldservice.org or phone 800-297-1516 to order.

***Photos, story by
Carol Fouke-Mpoyo***

***Fifth in a series of articles
featuring enterprises identified
by CWS affiliates as exemplary
employers of refugees.***

Refugee: “It was like coming from nowhere to somewhere”

Refugee newcomers face enormous challenges during their first months in the United States. With congregational cosponsors’ help, they acculturate and become self-sufficient more quickly.

“I thank God, because we had a church,” said Patient Katabana Marandura, a refugee from war and persecution in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

He and his family escaped rebel soldiers who had targeted him for refusing to help them. After several difficult years in Uganda, Marandura, his wife, and their three children were approved for U.S. resettlement.

Church World Service took their case and enlisted PARA Refugee Services in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to provide resettlement services. In short order, the family was boarding a U.S.-bound flight.



Patient Katabana Marandura with his daughter Rita, a “straight A” high school student who plans to become a doctor. Photo by Elizabeth Smith/PARA Refugee Services.

“We didn’t even know the address of where we were going,” Marandura recalled. “To arrive at the airport was like a dream. We did not know how it was going to happen and what it would look like.”

Members of Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the family’s cosponsoring congregation, were waiting at the airport with a warm welcome. “It was like coming from nowhere to somewhere,” Marandura said. “We said, wow, we have people who knew our names before we came here.”

Members’ ongoing social support has provided comfort and hope following years of fear, trauma, and loss, he said. There also was much to learn about how things work in the United States: “how to fill the application form, go to the appointment, get a driver’s license, find a job, use the ATM, rent a house.”

Marandura’s first U.S. job was in a factory. He went on to work caring for elderly, ill, and mentally disabled persons before undertaking full-time studies toward a master of social work/public administration.

“To make the resettlement really very smooth, you need people around,” Marandura affirmed. “The church was there and knew how to help me. That’s how I came today to be a strong man in America.”

Central Christian Church also has cosponsored refugees from Bosnia, Iran, Russia, and Sudan. Pastor Kris Branaman commented, “It has really transformed our way of looking at the world. We don’t listen to the news the same way we would, because our families have families in these situations,” in Congo, for example, where an estimated 5.4 million people have died since 1998 as a result of a war that continues in the country’s east, and in Sudan, where the genocide continues in Darfur. ●

Patient and Rita Marandura and Rev. Kris Branaman are among refugees and cosponsors featured in a new CWS DVD, *A Future with Hope: Welcoming Refugees*. Available free. Visit www.churchworldservice.org or phone 800-297-1516 to order.

By Carol Fouke-Mpoyo

Dave Johnson named Representative of CWS JVA/Nairobi

Dave Johnson has been appointed to head the Church World Service Overseas Processing Entity (“Joint Voluntary Agency”) in Nairobi, Kenya, which since 1990 has helped more than 136,000 refugees from 22 African countries resettle to the United States – nearly 14,000 just last year. He succeeds Ann Marie Winter, the Representative from August 2005-May 2007.

Johnson has been with the JVA for 11 years as Caseworker, Team Leader, Pre-CIS Supervisor, and, since September 2001, Deputy for Operations. He has been involved directly in the processing of all special African groups since then.

Through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. State Department, CWS administers both the JVA and Overseas Processing Entity/Ghana. Together, they are responsible for all case processing and cultural orientation in sub-Saharan Africa on behalf of the U.S. Refugee Program, which receives and places refugees through 10 U.S. voluntary agencies, including CWS.

“Dave has spent time with the CWS domestic resettlement affiliate network on several occasions and has gained a good understanding of the importance of the impact that the overseas processing of refugees has on domestic resettlement,” said Joe Roberson, Director of the CWS Immigration and Refugee Program.

Johnson’s appointment as Representative became effective December 17, just days before civil



Dave Johnson. JVA/Nairobi photo.

unrest erupted in Kenya over disputed presidential election results.

“While worried by recent events in the country,” he said, “I aim to ensure that JVA staff can work safely, while continuing to serve refugees in need.” He expressed particular appreciation for CWS efforts to assist Kenyan

victims of the recent violence, including the estimated 250,000 displaced.

“Right now we have thousands of Nairobi city residents who are camping in a showground, having been chased from their homes,” Johnson said. “We also have several internally displaced camps in the country, and many more displaced persons are staying with relatives.”

Johnson said he is proud that JVA staff members have donated generous quantities of food, clothing, and blankets for the relief effort.

Rev. John L. McCullough, Executive Director of Church World Service, said, “I am very pleased to hear of Dave’s appointment in Nairobi. I think this is a well-deserved promotion, and feel confident that he will provide outstanding leadership for many years to come.” ●

Resources for refugees’ advocates

Each year since 1999, the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York City has recognized excellence in reporting on race, ethnicity, and demographic change. Many “Let’s Do It Better!” award winners have been about refugees and immigrants.

An annual workshop – set this year for May 1-3 – then uses the winning stories in case study presentations for an audience of news industry leaders and managers who want to improve the diversity and cultural competency of their content and newsrooms.

Winners from past competitions have been published in *The Authentic Voice: The Best Reporting on Race and Ethnicity*: a book, DVD, and Web site – www.theauthenticvoice.org. For more information, contact Arlene Morgan, Columbia University, 212-854-5377/646-284-5516. ●



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**Cover story –
These CWS affiliate
directors were
refugees themselves**

welcome

Joan Maruskin named to head Religious Services Program



Rev. Dr. Joan Maruskin has been named National Administrator of the Church World Service Religious Services Program (RSP), responsible for multi-faith spiritual care at seven U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers. A long-time advocate for refugees and immigrants, she was CWS Associate for Public Policy in Washington, D.C., from 2000-2006.

Maruskin returned to CWS February 1 after serving for the past year as Executive Director of the York, Pennsylvania, County Council of Churches. She dates her passion for detainees' rights to June 6, 1993, when nearly 300 Chinese asylum seekers fleeing forced sterilization and abortion were arrested after their ship ran aground on Long Island, New York.

Most were taken to York County Prison. At that time, Maruskin was pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Yoe, Pa. She led outreach on the detainees' behalf, then researched conditions at immigration detention centers nationwide, finding that few offered spiritual care appropriate to each detainee's faith. Maruskin's advocacy helped lead to the RSP's creation in 2004. She succeeds Rev. John Shaia, the program's first administrator. ●

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