

Newsletter

Vol I, No. 1
Spring 2013

Highlights

From 2002-2012, we issued **91** loans worth **\$81,648** and served over **633** clients from **70** countries.

In 2012, ERICA issued **5** new family reunification loans, reuniting **11** children and **4** spouses with family already here. We issued **5** new legal aid loans for green cards, legal consultation fees, and asylum case document shipping. We currently support **35** individuals in case management.

We celebrate the **YES** vote to sustain passage of the **Maryland DREAM Act**, guaranteeing in-state tuition for all Maryland high schoolers regardless of immigration status.

Our advocacy included sponsoring educational events; presenting to congregations, inter-faith gatherings and school groups; and participating in get-out-the-vote efforts.

In 2012, we organized or co-sponsored **7 Workshops** related to health, education and adjustment of status (green card).



Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Center Alliance



Compelled by faith, compassion, and a yearning for justice, the Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Center Alliance (ERICA) honors and ministers to the dignity and humanity of our brothers and sisters fleeing oppression, persecution, and poverty in other countries. ERICA was founded in 2001 by members of the congregation of the Cathedral of the Incarnation — refugees from years of civil conflict in Liberia — who were experiencing first hand the challenges faced by those new to American society. The organization has grown steadily and is now an active church-based community resource center offering immediate, practical assistance to refugees, asylees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants in the greater Baltimore area. With the help of volunteers and community partners, ERICA supports newcomers through educational workshops, interest-free loans for family reunification and immigration-related legal/government fees, and one-on-one problem solving.



Exec Dir Betty Symington with the Akoh family, reunited after a nine year separation.

This Newsletter is designed for ERICA supporters and clients alike. We hope the Newsletter will foster a more welcoming and connected community for new arrivals.

Please contact us: (410) 467-3750, ext. 224 | infoerica.cathedral@gmail.com
Visit us at: <http://erica-baltimore.org>

Great News! ERICA has just been selected as an AmeriCorps/VISTA site. We will have a full time VISTA on staff from July 2013 — June 2014.

THE LISTENING PROJECT: ERICA CELEBRATES THE BHUTANESE COMMUNITY

It started with a question. At a green card workshop, Margo Landon, ERICA Advisory Board Vice President, asked Bhutanese refugee Yadu Baskota where he and the Bhutanese Hindu community worship. His response was discouraging and disheartening. Not only did they have no place to gather, but members of the community, numbering more than two thousand, were living with the daily stress, isolation and public safety challenges often faced by newly resettled refugees. Physical assaults on these peaceful people were not uncommon, one even resulting in the death of a young man. Over the next months, ERICA helped form a neighborhood partnership between the Bhutanese and Most Precious Blood Catholic Church. The Bhutanese are now using the parish hall for meetings and cultural activities. From there, ERICA's relationship with the

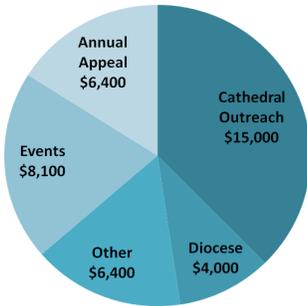


Bhutanese community deepened, leading to our 2012 benefit: Diwali—The Festival of Lights. The event was a rousing success as members of the Bhutanese community joined ERICA supporters in a night of education and music, food, and dance. Our guest speaker, Bill Frelick, Human Rights Watch Refugee Program Director, made an impassioned and informative presentation of the history of the Bhutanese refugee population and their current circumstances both in Bhutan and in the United States. Click [HERE](#) to see his presentation or on our website www.erica-baltimore.org.

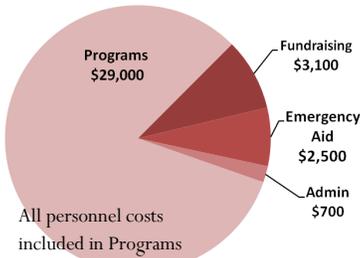


2012 INCOME/EXPENSES

Total Income \$39,900



Total Expenses \$35,500



We ended 2012 with a \$4,400 surplus that we will use to buy new computers and replenish loan funds.

See website for March Workshops and other Volunteer Opportunities!

DONATION NEEDED:

Laptop with software for a client who recently received asylum and has found a job!

Support asylum seekers like Gbolahan! All March donations go to our legal aid loan fund, supporting asylum seekers throughout their complicated journeys. Click [HERE](#) to donate or visit www.ericabaltimore.org

ERICA OPEN HOUSE

On January 12, 2013, ERICA hosted its second Open House at the Cathedral, featuring Judy Cloughen's beautiful collection of nativity scenes from all over the world. Advisory Board members, parishioners and friends of ERICA gathered with clients and their families to the upbeat sound of Fiddle Oaks bluegrass



band. All enjoyed food, fellowship, and the positive atmosphere of the event. The children enjoyed games, arts & crafts and mild weather on the patio! Important client connections were renewed and new ideas emerged about how best to support ERICA clients. **Thanks to Susan Larson for organizing the event and to all who attended, cooked, hosted, or helped with gifts!**

MESSAGE FROM GBOLAHAN O.

I would like to share with you my ERICA story. I came to ERICA sometime in 2008/2009 seeking support during the process of my political asylum application. I met with then Executive Director Peter Kirchengraber who was very supportive and helped me begin networking to find a job related to my background in social work.

My journey to safe harbor in the USA seemed to proceed according to law and God's grace. I had secured a good job with Baltimore City Department of Social Services and believed that my asylum case was winding its way through the system. In fact, it was being derailed by the negligence and procedural mistakes of my attorney. Unbeknownst to me, my case was closed and a removal order issued in March 2010. I did not learn that I was "out of status" until May 2012 when I landed in a detention facility of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

During my 6 months in detention, as my life slowly crumbled, ERICA's Executive Director Betty Symington and staff member James Byun visited me and kept up my spirit during the regular phone calls I made to ERICA. They linked me up with the CAIR Coalition and communicated with my Unit Manager at work about my detention ordeal. Betty and Katherine Robinson, ERICA's summer intern, arranged to get access to my apartment, and just prior to eviction they collected all my personal papers, clothing and important belongings. Betty also assisted in contacting my brother to alert him of my plight, and she and James worked continuously with him and the additional counsel he hired to seek my release from ICE detention. After 6 months of an ordeal I can't put into words, the Motion to Reopen my asylum case was granted. Dean Hayek reached out to me when I was released from detention, and ERICA assisted me with emergency accommodation. ERICA has now linked me up with Catholic Charities and given me a small loan to help pay their fee to represent me going forward with my asylum case. ERICA has been like a family to me and I greatly appreciate all the Management, Staff and Volunteers of ERICA. I pray that God will bless them all abundantly.

Mosaic by Refugee Youth Program, a joint program of Baltimore City Community College and the International Rescue Committee.

