

Newsletter

Vol I, No. 2
Summer/Fall 2013



Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Center Alliance



UPCOMING FUNDRAISER

**Around the World
in 5K Family Fun
Run/Walk**
Saturday, Sept 28
Register by Sept 12
to get this t-shirt!

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 in Baltimore who have fled 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.

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://www.ERICA-baltimore.org>



JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL EVENT: AROUND THE WORLD IN 5K FUN RUN/WALK

Join us for our inaugural Around the World in 5K Family Fun Run/Walk on Saturday, September 28, featuring international music, food, and family festivities. All proceeds go toward our Family Reunification Program of travel loans, casework, and emergency funds in support of refugee and asylee families who have come to ERICA for assistance. The Run/Walk will take place on Johns Hopkins Homewood Campus Upper Quad, and parking will be available in the Cathedral parking lot. To register:

visit www.ERICA-baltimore.org or call (410)467-3750 ext. 224



HIGHLIGHTS

In August, ERICA issued 2 new family loans to reunite 8 children and 4 spouses. Since September 2012, ERICA has served 30 new clients in our case management and/or loan programs.

On June 20, we held a **Refugee Evensong**, a prayer service in celebration of **World Refugee Day**. All participants felt it was a special moment of connection for ERICA. To be repeated!

This summer, ERICA reached within our community of supporters and **found temporary housing** for a homeless **Nigerian asylum seeker**.

STORY FROM A.R. WILLIAMS

Below is a personal story by A.R. Williams, a journalist from Sierra Leone who came to ERICA in June 2012 asking how to apply for asylum. ERICA helped him find legal representation through Human Rights First in Washington, D.C. and housing through the Asylum Seekers Housing Network in Baltimore. After receiving asylum, he was supported by the resettlement services of the International Rescue Committee and Lutheran Social Services.

I'm a Sierra Leonean asylee in the US, and as I squatted in my cigarette-box rented room in Maryland, which barely has a space to accommodate my weary legs, childhood memories raced across my naked mind. Unlike kids with colourful childhood fantasies, mine was blotted out at 14 with gruesome images of war, depression and doubt.

Our country's 11 year civil conflict left over 50,000 people dead, including women and children, while many are still struggling with both physical and emotional scars.

Emotional scars like a 3 year old girl whose neck was bloodily rippled by a bullet and she somehow hung lifelessly on her mother's back. Hopelessly, her mother dashed across the freeway, stooping low to avoid flying bullets, not aware of the devastation behind her back. As I write, the memory looks real. Her face is like a wide screen displaying anguish, torment and hope that are tinted in a dripping sweat of hopelessness. Where is she now as I write? Assuming I was that poor child, I would not have had the opportunity to write this piece. My heart goes out to that poor little child that never had the chance to reach adulthood.

The war ended after International coalition forces fought to reinstate our democratically elected government and a UN backed court (Special Court for Sierra Leone, SCSL) was established in The Hague, Netherlands to try the rebel leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT: JAMES BYUN, OUR NEW VISTA

ERICA is happy to announce that staff member **James Byun** will be serving as a full-time Americorps Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) for one year starting on July 26. James' primary work as a VISTA for ERICA will be to expand our volunteer program.

Email James at outreach@erica-baltimore.org to get involved.

Please extend your warm greetings to James and welcome him to the ERICA team!



ERICA Workshop

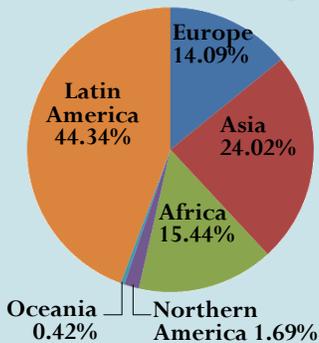
Immigrant Women Starting their own Business

This workshop will be focused on finding funding sources, building a customer base, and financial planning/retirement. It will be held in October and will be an excellent resource for women who are just starting their business or who have had it for less than five years. Any ideas, resources, and support would be much appreciated!

DID YOU KNOW?

There are **44,449** immigrants living in Baltimore City, 7.2% of the population.

Here's where they are from:



From the 2010 Census



Click [HERE](#) to donate or visit www.erica-baltimore.org.

INTERNS AT ERICA

Joining the ERICA team this fall is SOURCE Service Scholar **Lindsey Leslie**. SOURCE is a joint program of the JHU Medical, Nursing and Public Health Schools that connects graduate students with community service opportunities. Paid by SOURCE, Lindsey will join us for 150 hours of work over the academic year focusing on our workshops. Lindsey recently returned from the Peace Corps in Nicaragua, where she worked on community health education. Her predecessor, **Emma Hiza**, was ERICA's first SOURCE Scholar. Emma now works for Partners in Health in Rwanda. **Katherine Robinson**, a JHU Center for Social Concern Community Impact Intern, has interned for ERICA the past two summers, focusing on the DREAM Act and outreach, and will return in September part time. **Anne Cullen**, a Haverford College student, also interned with ERICA this summer, focusing on immigration demographics in Baltimore and the progress of immigration reform.

ON THE IMMIGRATION BILL: HOW WOULD MARYLAND BENEFIT?

In an attempt to boost support for the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013, the White House released a report outlining the economic benefits each state would see in the event of the bill's passage.

In Maryland, the report states that this legislation would create 8,521 new jobs as well as increase the state's economic output by \$740 million in 2014. The report also suggests that "commonsense immigration reform" would increase the amount of state and local taxes paid by immigrants in the state by approximately \$163 million, lead to an increase in the total personal income of Maryland families by \$2.9 billion in 2020, and increase home values and tourism.

The bill was passed by the Senate on June 27th with a vote of 68-32, and will be brought to the House floor for debate this session.



A.R. WILLIAMS STORY CONTINUED...

I ultimately got a job as a Communication Officer at the SCSL sitting in The Hague. One of my numerous responsibilities was to proactively disseminate and broadcast witnesses' testimonies about the war. A new democracy was born as witnesses recounted behind the scene plots, terrors, horrors and agony of war. With fear, I left my home town after my contract with the Special Court of Sierra Leone in The Hague ended, and I'm now living in the USA after I was granted an asylum in early January 2013.

When I arrived, I was homeless! When I stepped into the shoe of a homeless man then I knew where a homeless man's shoe pinches. Due to my homelessness, I bumped into ERICA and they listened to my story, gave me food as I was starving and they clasped my muddy hands and lead me to temporal housing center. My Heartfelt thanks goes to ERICA management and Board for being highly human.

My worry is the ticket fare for my two teenage daughters and wife who are worried of my absence in their lives as a father figure and a husband. The part-time job I have can barely cover my basic needs, but once there is life there is hope because the great book of Jeremiah 29:11 reminds me *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."*