



# Welcoming the Stranger

Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services

JANUARY 2010

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **New interfaith program begins**
- **The Mug Project**
- **Read the story of a Somali refugee**
- **Learn how to make momo**

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## Taking Root: Interfaith Sponsorship

Imagine you are a refugee fleeing persecution, arriving in Minnesota knowing no one. You are greeted at the airport and helped in your first months by a team of Muslim and Christian volunteers working together. In your homeland you only knew people of your own religious tradition, or your experience with other religions was one of distrust and persecution. But here your interfaith co-sponsors help you find a home, a job and make a successful transition to self-

sufficiency. Gradually you build a new life of hope, safety, peacefulness and connection. This unique team of volunteers has also given you a gift that may have been unimaginable to you – an experience of interfaith cooperation.

Taking Root, an innovative new program at the Minnesota Council of Churches, works towards this vision of thriving community by organizing mixed religion co-sponsorship groups to provide abundant support to some of the newest

and most vulnerable arrivals in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Council of Churches has been resettling refugees for nearly three decades. We know the greatest predictor of successful resettlement of refugees is connection to community. In addition to many family reunification cases, in 2010 MCC will begin serving refugees that have no family members or connection at all in Minnesota.

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## The Mug Project

When I started my AmeriCorps Vista year as a Housing Resource and Opportunity Developer the first thing I realized was a discrepancy between urgently needed household items and what was actually represented on donation shelves. For example, Refugee Services had very few household cleansers, but did have over 500 coffee mugs that were taking up valuable storage space.

As my first task, I quickly set to work to find a way to solve both of these issues. The solution we developed included bringing donated mugs filled with leaflets about Refugee Services to local coffee shops. Included in each mug is the story of a refugee family that started their new life in the Twin Cities. Coffee



shop customers could then 'purchase' a mug for a small donation and use it for their coffee that day, and then keep it for their own personal use. Currently, two coffee shops are participating in the program and one shop encourages this program by offering a free cup of coffee to those who contribute.

This project serves two purposes. First, it shares the stories of the families we work with and second, it frees up shelf space for needed items. With the money raised we are

able to buy natural household cleansers such as vinegar, baking soda, and club soda. When teaching our home orientation classes we are now able to give all participants these natural household cleaners and teach families how to use them in cleaning their own apartments. The program has also been enthusiastically received by coffee shop customers who appreciate the chance to learn about a specific refugee family and participate in such a unique program.

Mugs can be found at Muddy Waters and Bordertown Coffee.

**If your coffee shop might like to participate, please contact Liz at 612-230-3221 or [liz.leicht@mnchurches.org](mailto:liz.leicht@mnchurches.org).**

## Taking Root, continued

Engaged co-sponsors are essential for helping refugees progress more quickly toward self sufficiency.

For more than 20 years the Council has been engaged in work to increase interfaith understanding and cooperation. Our Muslim Christian dialogue has been operating continuously for nearly two decades. For the last three years MCC has worked with the Muslim American Society of Minnesota to bring Christian and Muslim people together in a program called Taking Heart. Taking Heart helps

neighbors get to know their neighbors, exploring common values while understanding different practices.

Taking Root is a groundbreaking fusion of the expertise of the Council's refugee resettlement and interfaith programs. "What better way to convey to newcomers that we welcome their unique experience and gifts than to offer them the robust support of mixed-faith, Muslim-Christian co-sponsorship groups." said Gail Anderson, the lead for the project.

"My experience ten years ago [before working at MCC] co-sponsoring a refugee family changed my life." Gail continued. "As I facilitate Christian Muslim understanding I continue to value learning new perspectives and building strong friendships. I am excited to offer these life-changing opportunities to others through Taking Root."

If you are interested in becoming part of one of the mixed-religion co-sponsorship groups please contact Gail Anderson, at [gail.anderson@mchurches.org](mailto:gail.anderson@mchurches.org), or 612-230-3210.

### To donate items,

contact:

Dan Huynh  
612-230-3227  
dan.huynh@  
mchurches.org

## Current Donation Needs

As refugees arrive in Minnesota, they do not have access to some important items that make a house a home. Some things they are not able to bring with them are linens and furniture. Consequently, too many families go to bed every night on the floor of an

empty bedroom without a blanket or pillow or sit on the floor for dinner. You can be part of the solution by organizing a donation drive at your church, workplace, or community group. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

**Linen Drive** – Collect blankets, sheets, towels, and pillows for newly arrived families.

**Furniture Drive** – Beds with mattresses and box springs and dining room tables and chairs are always especially needed.

## Preparing Refugees for Jobs

Refugees have much to become acclimated to when entering a new country and culture. In the United States, refugees learn that to thrive in this culture, employment has to be a top priority. However, learning about the US job market and employment process can be overwhelming, especially in a down economy. In order to help refugees succeed, Refugee Services gives its clients the necessary tools to find and retain a job and build the skills to help them advance in the future.

Refugee Services offers its

clients several educational opportunities beginning with an orientation about why it's important to begin working right away, and explaining the short term nature of public assistance. Additional opportunities include Job Readiness and Job Retention workshops as well as basic and intermediate level computer classes. The Job Readiness workshop prepares refugees for their first job in the US. They learn about the US job market, culture, and employment process. The Job Retention workshop

helps recently employed refugees learn how to navigate the American workplace and how to develop professionally. Refugees also have the opportunity to learn computer skills in an onsite computer lab. The basic computer class teaches students how to use the computer, internet, email and how to type, while the intermediate class focuses on Microsoft Office programs as well as how to perform job searches and fill out online job applications.

# Learn about Refugees: Public Health Forum

On an annual basis, local public health and resettlement agency employees meet together to discuss new refugee populations and common concerns. The 2009 forum was held in December and focused on refugees and mental health, as well as the advent of free case refugees in MN. Refugee Services staff member Sue Johnston, Refugee Mental Health Liaison, participated in the forum as one of the speakers. She spoke about the sensitivity required in addressing mental

health within refugee communities. Although in the United States mental health is considered to be very important to everything we do on a daily basis, some other cultures do not have specific vocabulary to describe mental health, which often leads to mental health issues going unresolved. Something as basic as food can have a significant effect on the mental health of a refugee. For example, being able to purchase, prepare, cook, and eat the foods that are commonly

eaten in a refugee's home country can positively affect their mental health and attitudes when adjusting to living in a new place. In addition, a panel of refugee mental health professionals shared their stories and thoughts on mental health issues and language and participated in a very helpful open discussion. The forum was very informative and provided Refugee Services staff with many good insights on how to address and improve the mental and physical health of our clients.

As Refugee Services begins to resettle free case refugees, keep your eye out for regular updates about the families that are coming and what their specific needs are.

*"The journey was dangerous because the boat was very small and shallow, crowded, many people got sick, and the sea was treacherous."*

## Client Story: Jamal Hassan (name changed)

In 2002, Jamal Hassan, began an incredible journey to ensure his family's safety. In his native Somalia, his family had been attacked by the militia, and they had to flee. Jamal and his wife had four small children, which made leaving even more complicated. In order to make the journey easier, they made the difficult decision to leave their three older children behind with their grandmother.

In September 2002, Jamal and his family arrived at the Somalia/Ethiopia border. From there, they took a bus to Sudan where they lived for three months. Next, they made an exhausting 7 day journey across the Sahara Desert to get to Libya. In January 2003, they arrived in Tripoli, Libya with no money. They worked to earn enough money to leave for Malta, but the Libyans seized their money. Again, they had to earn enough, and in June 2005,

Jamal ultimately was able to get his wife and baby on a boat to Malta. Three months later, Jamal boarded a boat for Malta. The journey was dangerous because the boat was very small and shallow, crowded, many people got sick, and the sea was treacherous. Fortunately, Jamal arrived safely, but the police were waiting when he arrived. He spent three months in a detention camp until he was finally released to be with his family.

In 2006, they were given protective status and work permits in Malta. They also contacted their family in Somalia and received the unfortunate news that one of their daughters had died during a bombing. It was hard for them, but they were consoled by the birth of two more sons during their three and half year stay in Malta. They also found comfort with their supportive Somali community. Throughout their

time in Malta, many hate groups arose and treated foreigners badly, and the family decided to leave.

Jamal had an aunt living in Minnesota, which helped Jamal and his family to resettle as refugees in the US. At the end of June 2009, Jamal and his family were met at the airport by his aunt and Said Mohamed from Minnesota Council of Churches-Refugee Services. The family was so happy to be greeted by Somalis, and they immediately felt very welcomed. During the next few months, Jamal worked with Refugee Services to find housing and employment. He is especially thankful for the efforts of his employment counselor, Sonja Ausen, who helped him find a job, better housing and even a car. Currently, he is working with Refugee Services Immigration Coordinator Nina Vang to reunite his daughters with the rest of the family.



Visit our Website! [www.mnchurches.org](http://www.mnchurches.org)

## Minnesota Council of Churches Refugee Services

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**Minnesota Council of Churches**  
manifests the unity of the body of Christ and builds the common good in the world in partnership with 24 member Protestant, Historic Black, and Orthodox judicatories representing more than 2000 congregations and their one million members.

### Refugee Services Our Mission Statement:

Refugee Services is an ecumenical ministry welcoming persecuted people from around the world into new lives of freedom, hope, and opportunity in Minnesota.

### Our Vision:

Refugees are abundantly supported as they move from addressing basic needs to achieving their dreams. *And* faith communities are transformed by partnering in this ministry of hospitality.

## Recipe Corner: Nepalese Momo

### Dough for wrappers:

3 c flour  
1 T oil  
1 c water  
Pinch of salt

### Filling:

1 lb. lean ground lamb or chicken  
(Note that beef is not eaten in Nepal, the world's only Hindu Kingdom)  
1 c onion, finely chopped  
1/2 c green onion, finely chopped  
1/2 c cilantro, chopped  
1 tsp garlic, minced  
1 tsp fresh ginger, minced  
1/2 tsp timur (Szechwan pepper)  
1/2 tsp turmeric  
1 tsp cumin powder  
1 tsp coriander powder  
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper  
3 fresh red chilies, minced  
1 c Nepali cheese (homemade paneer), roughly crushed (optional)  
2 T clarified butter  
Salt to taste

### Dough:

In a large bowl combine flour, oil, salt and water. Mix well, knead about 8-10 min. Cover and let stand for 30 min.

### Filling:



[http://www.ifood.tv/recipe/momo\\_cha\\_nepali\\_meat\\_dumpling](http://www.ifood.tv/recipe/momo_cha_nepali_meat_dumpling)

In a large bowl combine all filling ingredients. Mix well, add salt/pepper. Cover and refrigerate for at least an hour.

### Assembly:

Give the dough a final knead. Prepare 1-in. dough balls. Take a ball, roll between your palms to make ball. Dust working board with dry flour. On the board gently flatten the ball to about 2-in circle. Make a few circles, cover with a bowl. Use a rolling pin to roll out each flattened circle into a wrapper. For well executed momos, it is essential that the middle portion of the wrapper be

slightly thicker than the edges to ensure the structural integrity of dumplings during packing and steaming. Hold the edges of the semi-flattened dough with one hand and with the other hand begin rolling the edges of the dough out, swirling a bit at a time. Continue until the wrapper attains 3-in diameter circular shape. Repeat with the remaining semi-flattened dough circles. Cover with bowl to prevent from drying. For packing hold wrapper on one palm, put one tablespoon of filling mixture and with the other hand bring all edges together to the center, making the pleats. Pinch and twist the pleats to ensure the absolute closure of the stuffed dumpling. This holds the key to good tasting, juicy dumplings. Heat up a steamer, oil the steamer rack well. This is critical because it will prevent dumplings from sticking. Arrange uncooked momos in the steamer. Close the lid, and allow steaming until the dumplings are cooked through, about 10-15 min. Take the dumplings off the steamer, serve arranged on a platter. Recipe credit:

[http://www.visitnepal.com/restaurants/how\\_to\\_make\\_momo.php](http://www.visitnepal.com/restaurants/how_to_make_momo.php)

Tulsi Regmi