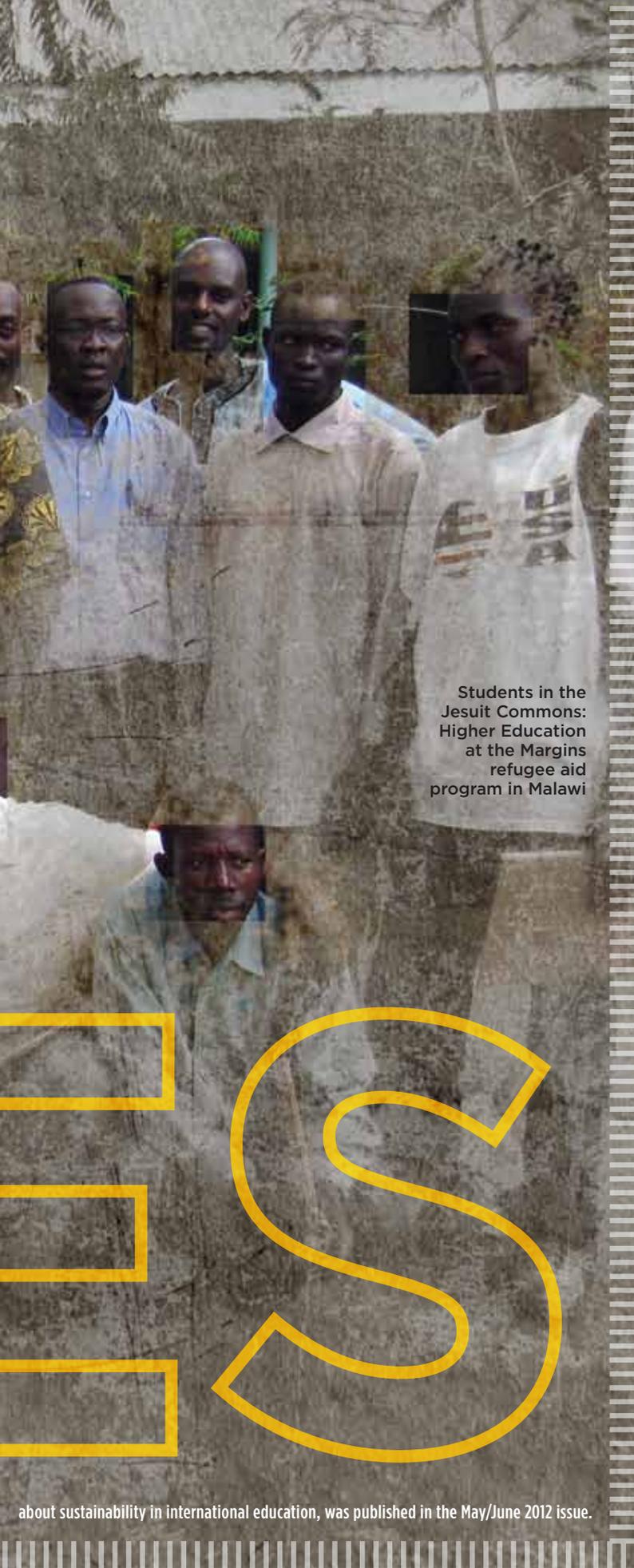


TRANSFORMING

Editor's Note: This article is the second in an occasional series of features about peace and social justice issues in international education. The first article, "Leaving Light Footprints,"



Students in the Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins refugee aid program in Malawi

about sustainability in international education, was published in the May/June 2012 issue.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Adeeb Yousif endured torture and assassination attempts before fleeing his native Sudan and receiving asylum in the United States. But instead of turning his back on his past and nestling into the security of his new residence, the PhD student at George Mason University in Virginia remains an advocate for peace.

He's co-founded the Darfur Reconciliation and Development Organization and strives to improve the lives of those who remain in his homeland. "I strongly believe that education is the key for solving all Sudan's problems. It is also the main entrance to respect, acceptance, harmonious coexistence, sustainable peace and reconciliation between all people, and stability and development."

His beliefs are shared by many U.S. university faculty and students, who see education as the gateway to bettering life for refugees around the world.

There are now more than 15 million refugees and 27 million internally displaced people, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Through access to education, "people feel like the life that was taken away now has been given back to them," says Father Charles Currie, president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. That group established the program Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM), through which a group of Jesuit colleges and universities is providing online higher education to refugee camp residents in Kenya and Malawi, as well as urban refugees in Aleppo, Syria, and Amman, Jordan.

Offering educational opportunities "makes a difference in the climate of the camps," says Marie Friedemann, associate dean of the College for Professional Studies at Regis University in Denver. "We believe students' lives are being transformed."

College students and faculty are helping refugees around the world.

BY SUSAN LADIKA

Jesuit Institutions Make a Difference

Through a vast array of programs, transformation of refugees' lives is taking place at schools in South Korea, refugee camps in Thailand, and a medical clinic in Texas.

Aiding the refugees also can transform the lives of those who work with them. "Through this experience, I've learned to question stereotypes and celebrate diversity, feeling empowered by the strength of our refugees," says Uri Whang, a rising senior at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, who started a program to assist North Korean refugees living in Seoul.

In some cases, working with refugees is a new experience; in others its part of a history that dates back for decades.

Through JC:HEM, the group of Jesuit schools was able to "take advantage of our international network and the historical relationship Jesuits have to refugees," Currie says. The seeds for JC:HEM were sown in 2006

during a meeting at Regis University, where deans of adult and continuing education from about 25 countries came together to discuss international adult and online learning, Currie says. At the meeting, a representative from Australian Catholic University (ACU) discussed a project undertaken by ACU and other universities to offer higher education to Burmese refugees living in camps at the Thai border. "That caught the imagination of the folks who were there," Currie recalls.

The result was the formation of JC:HEM, which works with Jesuit Refugee Services and so far has provided tertiary education to more than 250 refugees. An anonymous donor provided funding for the pilot program, which began in 2010 and wraps up in 2014.

Initially the project focused on delivering online higher education to residents of the Dzaleka Camp in Malawi and the Kakuma Camp in Kenya and to urban refugees in Aleppo, Syria. But work in Syria has been curtailed because of unrest in the country, and a program will start in Amman, Jordan this fall, primarily serving Iraqi refugees.

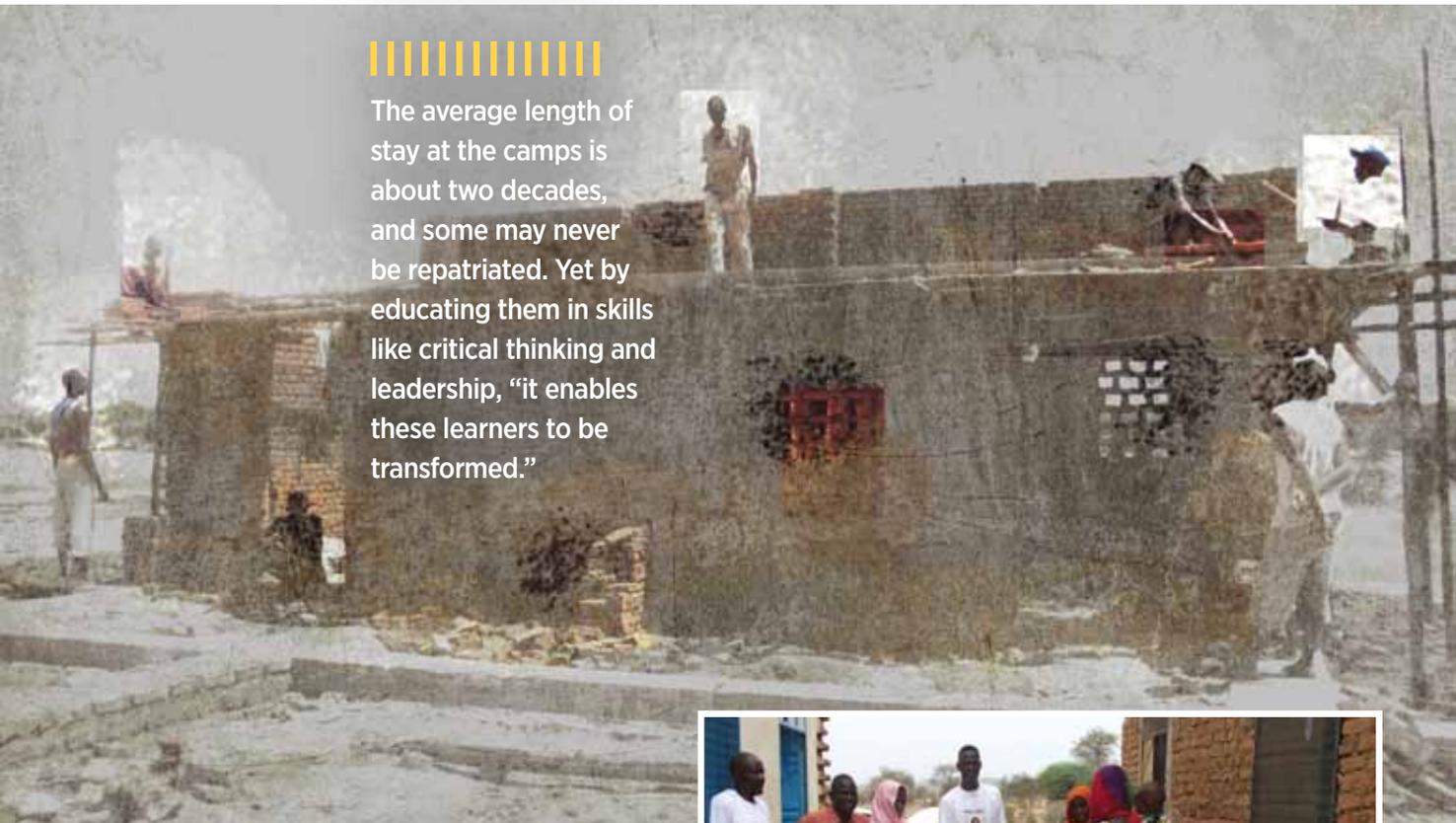
The Zalingei Nursery of the Darfur Reconciliation and Development Organization



ADEEB YOUSIF



The average length of stay at the camps is about two decades, and some may never be repatriated. Yet by educating them in skills like critical thinking and leadership, “it enables these learners to be transformed.”



The Darfur Reconciliation and Development Organization health clinic under construction



Darfur Reconciliation and Development Organization's clinic staff and patients

Mary McFarland, who had been dean of professional studies at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, left her position to become international director of JC:HEM. Earlier, she'd traveled with her husband, Tom McFarland, an emeritus professor of education, to assist with ACU's project teaching Burmese refugees at the Thailand-Burma border.

She drew on that experience, and her years involved with distance education at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho, to help establish JC:HEM, which draws primarily on U.S. faculty from various Jesuit colleges and universities to deliver the online courses, with facilitators working on the ground. Prior to the creation of JC:HEM, the camps had no Internet access.

At both of the African camps, more than 200 people applied for spots in the program, which admits up to 35 students. The program in Jordan drew 60 applicants vying for 19 spots.

To be admitted, students must demonstrate English proficiency, writing essays on topics such as: “How Do You Forgive the Unforgiveable,” and the top scorers also must complete an oral interview.

Along with English ability, students must present “evidence of engaging with the community,” McFarland says. “We’re looking for people who, with education, truly can engage as women and men for others and contribute beyond themselves.”

The students at the camps range in age from their twenties to forties and come from at least nine countries or tribes, Friedemann says. The average length of stay at the camps is about two decades, and some may never be repatriated. Yet by educating them in skills like critical thinking and leadership, “it enables these learners to be transformed.”

Students take one course at a time, and each runs eight weeks. Once they complete 15 courses in subjects such as English composition, logic, philosophy, and the history of Africa, and earn 45 credits, they'll receive a diploma from Regis in liberal studies. With that diploma, which the first group will earn in 2013, the students will have the possibility of continuing on to university.

Along with the diploma program, JC:HEM also offers community service learning tracks, designed to benefit refugees in their day-to-day lives in the camps. Those courses consist of at least 150 hours of academic learning and a practicum. At the Dzaleka Camp in Malawi, for example, the course resulted in the planting of a community garden to help improve residents' nutrition.



Washington and Lee University student Uri Wang started the The BACK Project (Benefitting All Children in Korea) to help Korean refugee children. Her project donated books in English to the Yeomyung School's library.

One student, who could not be named due to security reasons, was drawn to the program for educational reasons and to “sustain my community and its social engagement and interaction with the world outside.”

The student aims to “be committed to progressive social and political change, wherever I may be living.”

Another outgrowth of the program is that it “helps bridge the digital gap between the first and third worlds,” Currie says, and he expects it to spread to other locations.

Teaching Refugees

A similar effort is taking root at York University in Toronto. Already, associate geography professor Robin Roth

is teaching a class on global environmental change through the ACU's 18-month diploma program at the Thailand-Burma border.

She first taught the course in fall 2011, with 120 York students and 39 in Thailand. The course featured simultaneous learning using Moodle, and the students could interact in discussion forums.

Roth says she had expected the Burmese students would have more problems with English comprehension, but in reality, some Burmese students outperformed those from York.

The course will be taught again this fall, and Roth plans to add small group sessions involving four Canadian and two Burmese students. “We hope to increase the amount of intercultural learning,” Roth says. “We don't have to study refugee issues to learn about refugees.”

York also is developing a project, Borderless Higher Education for Refugees, which would serve refugees in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. Together the three camps house about 450,000 people, primarily from Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

The camps offer primary and some high school education, and about 50,000 children attend school, says Wenona Giles, a professor of anthropology and deputy director of the Centre for Refugee Studies. The camps have one teacher for every 68 students, and the vast majority of teachers have had no formal training.

The program, which Giles hopes will be up and running by year's end, is partnering with Kenyatta University in Nairobi and African Virtual University and intends to offer online degree, diploma, and certificate programs to residents of the camps and those in surrounding areas, who are extremely poor. Plans call for building a learning center and possibly computer labs.

Giles hopes offering “access to education can work against the violence that exists in the region. It's a vicious cycle unless we can introduce education in some way.”

She says the camps had been fairly peaceful until members of Al-Shabaab, an Islamist militant group based in Somalia, slipped into the camps with refugees fleeing drought in the fall. Education can help mitigate the potential attraction to living as drug runners or pirates and help the refugees develop new skills.

The first courses will be aimed at teachers. The first year will be spent helping teachers improve their skills, and the following two years will introduce them to university-level classes. After that they can potentially move into a degree program. Plans are in the works to develop bachelor degrees in fields like public administration, business, and health.

Educating refugees “is critical for their success and for them to be able to contribute to post conflict society,” Roth says.

Student-led Nonprofit Helps Children in Korea

Others are using less formal measures to improve the lot of refugees.

Whang, the Washington and Lee student, is tackling the unexpected—using education and mentoring to help North Korean refugees integrate into South Korean society through her program Benefitting All Children of Korea (BACK).

The politics major, whose own grandparents fled North Korea after the war, first began thinking about creating an initiative after hearing a North Korean who had defected to the United States speak on campus during the fall of 2010. Hearing of his experiences “helped me think about what I could do to break down barriers and stereotypes that North Koreans have of Americans and that Americans have of North Koreans,” ultimately leading to the creation of BACK.



Students participate in the Emory-Tibet Partnership in spring 2012. Here they are with Tara Doyle, outgoing director of Tibetan Studies in Dharamasala and senior lecturer of religion at Emory University and Lobsang Sangay, the Kalon Tripa (equivalent to Prime Minister) of the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Reaching Out to Tibetan Refugees

They don't fit the typical perception of refugees, but by living and studying among Tibetan exiles in India, U.S. students receive a unique insight into their world through the Emory-Tibet Partnership.

"It's a remarkably successful refugee community," says Tara Doyle, outgoing director of Tibetan Studies in Dharamasala (India) and senior lecturer in the Religion Department at Emory University, in Atlanta.

They've set up schools, medical facilities, and businesses, and many people tend to forget the Tibetans living in Dharamasala, India, are actually refugees.

Through the Emory-Tibet Partnership, students live in dorms at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics' (IBD) Sarah campus with Tibetan students. For one assignment they interview their roommate for a life history project. "That really wakes them up. They realize so many people they encounter have these incredible stories of exile, flight, suffering, loss and resilience," Doyle says.

Her time in India had a major impact on Colorado College rising senior Lindsey Pointer, who took part in the partnership, which is open to

students from various universities.

Her relationships with Tibetans "touched the strings of my heart," says Pointer, a religion major with a minor in nonviolence. "You gain the depth of learning from emotional attachments and that makes it feel so much more real."

Pointer spent four months in India. That included a home stay with a Tibetan family, volunteering to teach English to former political prisoners, and conducting research on the role of women as activists in the community and preserving Tibetan culture.

The Emory-Tibet Partnership was formed in 1998. In 2007, the Dalai Lama was named presidential distinguished professor at Emory, and he'll teach the students during their time among the Tibetan community.

Along with the spring semester program, U.S. students can take part in the Emory Tibetan Mind-Body Sciences summer term, studying and discussing Buddhist philosophy, culture, medicine, and science.

"It opens so many doors for our students," says Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, who came to Emory to help establish Drepung Loseling Monasteries Inc., a center for Tibetan

Buddhist studies in Atlanta, and pursue graduate studies in psychology at Emory. ["Geshe" is an academic title for monks."] He now is a senior lecturer in the university's religion department and director of the Emory-Tibet Partnership.

Tibetan students also benefit from the partnership, says Geshe Kelsang Damdul, IBD assistant director. "The Tibetan students get firsthand knowledge of life in the West."

He says the Tibetan students "are very inspired by democratic values. America is viewed as the most democratic country in the world."

The partnership also brings a Tibetan student to Emory for four years. Dawa Tsering, a rising junior at Emory, is studying math, computer science, and physics, and intends to return home when his studies are completed. "There are only a few Tibetan science teachers. I can help fill that gap."

Kari Leibowitz, who recently graduated with a degree in psychology, is spending her second summer in India, and relishes her experiences studying among the Tibetan exiles.

"We might forget this is a refugee community, but it's always on their minds," Leibowitz says.



She began working on the project while studying in Seoul in the winter of 2011 as part of the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) program, and she remained through the summer of 2011 to get BACK up and running. Through the program, U.S. students who are studying or working in Seoul tutor and mentor the refugees.

CIEE's Korea Program Director Suzanne Han worked with Whang to recruit U.S. students to participate in the program and to establish ties to schools that educate North Korean refugees. So far, BACK has worked with two refugee schools—one geared toward high school students and the other to young adults—and aided more than 40 refugee students.

For her work, Whang has received both a 2010 Johnson Opportunity Grant from Washington and Lee, which helps cover living, travel, and other costs, and a \$10,000 grant from the Davis Projects for Peace. Those funds are designed to help young

people pursue their projects for peace. With the grant money Whang purchased English-language reading materials to be used by BACK participants.

The North Koreans meet with their U.S. counterparts once a week, where they focus on improving their English. They also learn about American culture and receive counseling from their peers. The groups also meet less formally, and have had movie nights, attended a cooking class featuring North Korean foods, and gone kayaking. Whang says pairing up the two groups “created greater understanding between two very different cultures.”

Assisting Refugees in South Africa and Israel

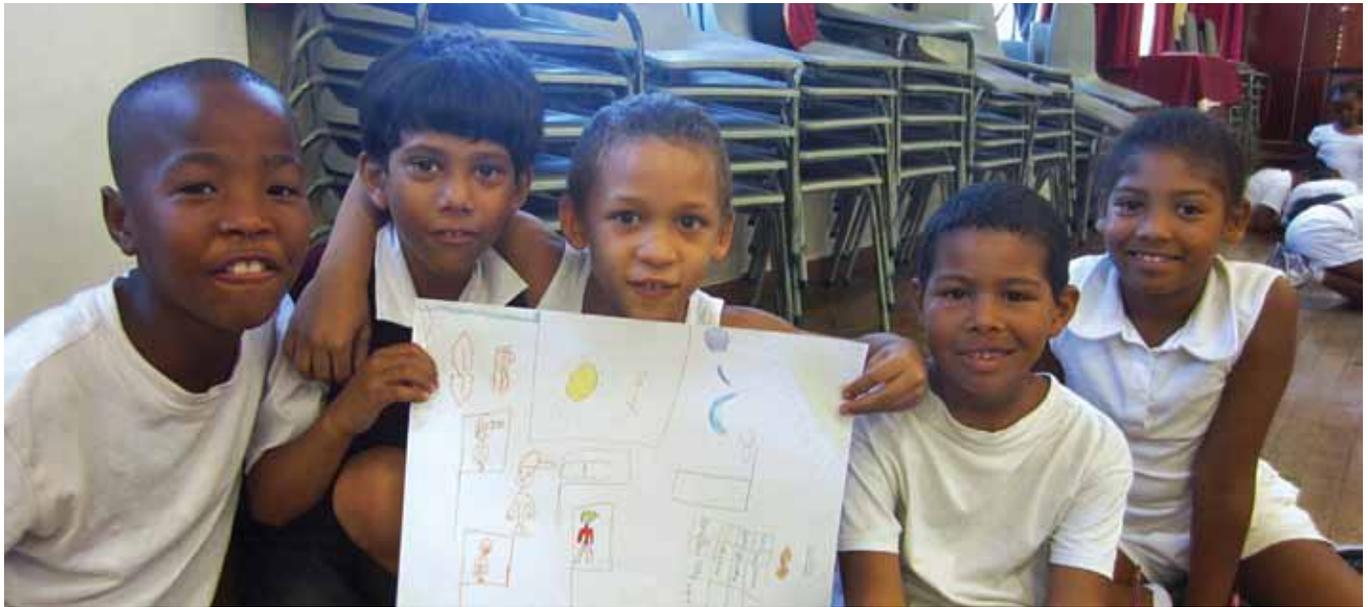
Sarah Lucey, a student at Northeastern University in Boston, also worked to build cultural understanding while interning at the Cape Town Refugee Centre in Cape Town, South Africa.

She was linked up with the refugee center through Connect 123, a Cape Town-based organization that links up students with volunteer and study abroad opportunities.

Northeastern University student Sarah Lucey worked with children in South Africa as part of the university's Peace through Play program.



COURTESY OF SARAH LUCEY



Students who work through Connect 123 can be involved in a structured program and earn academic credit, enroll in a study abroad program, or just volunteer, says program coordinator Jackie Palmer.

Connect 123 recommends students spend at least two months with an organization. That way, “the student gains valuable learning experience and the organization gains from them,” Palmer says.

At the Cape Town Refugee Centre, Lucey, a fifth-year student who will graduate in December with a major in human services and a minor in international affairs, served as a social work assistant. At the center, many of the clients are from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Lucey spent four months working at the center, and her time there counts toward experiential educational credits. One of her key projects was taking part in an advocacy program in primary schools aimed at surmounting xenophobia in schools marked by racial tension and violence. Tensions “between blacks, whites, and coloureds are still underlying issues,” she says. [The term “coloured” in South Africa refers to an ethnic group of mixed European and African ancestry; This group makes up 9 percent of South Africa’s population.]

Lucey used educational games from Peace through Play, a student organization at Northeastern University that strives to counter youth violence on campus, locally and internationally. The games are designed to promote peace, cooperation, and teamwork.

The youngsters were divided into interracial groups, and each group was made up of “aliens” from another planet who had to develop their own language, culture, and flag. After presenting their “planet”

to the rest of the students, the youngsters talked about each group’s differences. The goal, Lucey says, “is to respect cultural differences. Everyone’s unique.”

She found that in Cape Town, there was a fear that the refugees from other parts of Africa would come and steal the local residents’ jobs. The situation was tense between refugees and locals, and Lucey found the refugees “weren’t even welcome by the poorest of poor.”

Alex Mandel, who graduated this spring with a degree in international relations from American University in Washington, D.C., encountered a similar experience in Israel, where she spent 15 months in a study abroad program at Tel Aviv University.

Although Mandel had spent much time in Israel over the years, she hadn’t expected to encounter African refugees. “When I got there I knew nothing about African refugees. The south part of the city is almost like another country.”

Since 2005, about 60,000 African refugees have poured into Israel, many from Eritrea and Sudan. She quickly learned “Israel is unprepared to deal with it.”

Tel Aviv has been rocked by race riots, and African refugees and their property have been attacked. Many are homeless.

During her time studying in Tel Aviv, Mandel served as an intern assisting with asylum applications at the African Refugee Development Center. She collected testimony and information from refugees because many have no identity papers.

Mandel, whose father is from Israel, says of the refugee situation, “to me it feels personal.”

Mandel was so impacted by the experience, when she returned to the United States she and her room-

Child refugees participate in Northeastern University’s Peace through Play Program in Cape Town, South Africa.

mate Emma Giloth, who also graduated with a degree in international relations this spring, planned an alternative spring break trip to Israel so American University students could learn about the refugee situation. The two did everything from planning the logistics to organizing the itinerary to raising funds.

The trip drew 10 American University students, who volunteered at the African Refugee Development Center's homeless shelter for women and children, teaching English and playing with the children. They also spent time with the refugees, "sitting with them and talking to them so people (students) hear their stories and show we're here in solidarity with them," Mandel says.

They also met with everyone from the leaders of the Eritreans' refugee community to members of the Israel Parliament, or Knesset, who oppose the refugees' presence in Israel, to leaders of the South Tel Aviv community where many of the refugees live.

"All these different groups have different ways of viewing the situation," Giloth says. By spending time with members of each group, the students learned "how complex Israel is and how complex the refugee situation is. It's not black and white."

Since their return to the United States, one of their key goals is continuing to spread awareness about the refugee problem in Israel.

A Refugee Gives Back

Yousif, the George Mason student who fled Darfur, also wants to share the situation of his people and work to attain peace. He graduated from the University of Dongola in Sudan in 2000 with a bachelor of arts in education, focused on the role of women in education and development in rural Darfur.

He founded the Sudan Social Development Organization in 2001, working to empower local communities in rural areas to demand their rights from the government. After war broke out between the government and rebel groups, he began documenting human rights abuses and providing humanitarian assistance to those displaced by the conflict.

He was jailed and tortured for his work and was the target of assassination attempts before applying for asylum in the United States. He wound up in a master's degree program in international studies at the University of San Francisco, graduating in 2011.

Yousif and Anne Bartlett, a sociology professor



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and director of the graduate program in international studies at the University of San Francisco, then formed the Darfur Reconciliation and Development Organization. The group oversaw construction of a small hospital in Darfur to serve those on both sides of the war. Along with providing medical care, the hospital is also intended as a way to help build trust between the factions.

The organization also supports efforts to educate children who are now in displaced people's camps in Darfur, and strives to promote peace and reconciliation. Part of Yousif's goal is to have those at the grassroots level participate in conflict resolution and problem-solving efforts.

Assisting Diverse Populations

Another student working to improve the lives of those who have been displaced is Betsy Fisher, a law student at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Fisher is spending the summer working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Iraqis who have been displaced to Kurdistan.

Fisher first started working with refugees while studying Arabic as an undergraduate at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, and she headed to Jordan in 2009 to bolster her language skills. She stayed on to teach English to Iraqis through Care International.

After graduating she returned to Jordan as part of the Fulbright Program, where she taught English and started working with the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), which was founded by a group of U.S. law students in 2008 to provide legal assistance to refugees applying for resettlement and to improve the resettlement process. While there, she supervised University of Jordan students conducting intake interviews with prospective IRAP clients.

Although she planned to spend this summer interning at a domestic resettlement agency, a request for her to return to the Middle East “was too much to resist.”

She’s spending about eight weeks in Kurdistan, trying to figure out how to assist gay Iraqis, who face a higher risk of persecution, find new homes. She’s also evaluating if there are safe evacuation routes for Iraqis through Kurdistan and into Turkey.

Refugees Face Challenges Once They Leave Home

Those refugees who have made it to other countries, such as the United States, face their own set of challenges. They may have limited English-language skills and limited economic resources.

At the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio, students run a number of free health clinics under the supervision of faculty, and in 2011 they added a new one to the mix—treating refugees in the community.

A group of medical, dental, nursing, and physician assistant students who belong to the university’s chapter of Physicians for Human Rights advocated opening the new clinic.

About 5,000 to 6,000 refugees live in the vicinity of the Health Science Center, says Ruth Berggren, MD, a professor of medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases and director of the Center for Medical Humanities & Ethics. The refugees come from such far-flung countries as Afghanistan, Cuba, and the Republic of Congo.

Although the refugees receive Medicaid and other services for the first eight months they’re in the

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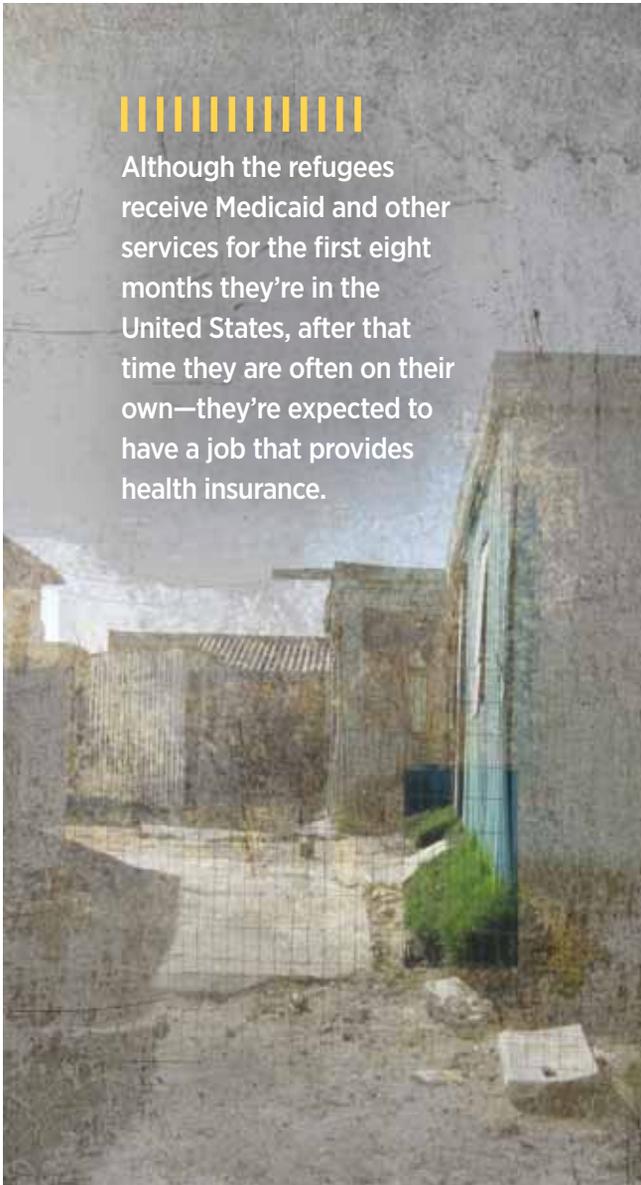


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Although the refugees receive Medicaid and other services for the first eight months they're in the United States, after that time they are often on their own—they're expected to have a job that provides health insurance.



United States, after that time they are often on their own—they're expected to have a job that provides health insurance.

"Inevitably what happens is that they fall out of the safety net right away," Berggren says.

The students conducted a needs assessment survey and found that although Bexar County, where San Antonio is located, provides a program called CareLink that prorates the medical bills of those who are poor and uninsured, many of the refugees weren't in the program, she says.

Nearly one-third of the refugees have no formal education and the percentage of people who could function in English is quite low, Berggren says.

By establishing the free, student-run clinic, the refugees receive basic medical care and are referred to other facilities for further treatment.

Third-year medical student Anna Haring recalls one 43-year-old Congolese mother of nine who came in for allergy treatment and requested a pregnancy test, which proved positive. The woman then miscarried and was taken to the hospital, where she didn't understand what was happening because of the language differences, and thought she was dying.

The doctors and students at the clinic helped her understand what had occurred. "It's a tough population to talk to in an emergency room setting. I'm glad the clinic can provide that one-on-one service," Haring says.

Now the clinic is establishing a program in which students "will do whatever it takes to help people achieve health and wellness," Berggren says. That could mean accompanying them to medical or CareLink appointments.

Other universities have taken an active part in tutoring refugees to improve their English skills. At Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, students have been involved in tutoring refugees through a number of programs.

Diane Baldrige, a senior majoring in general studies, is a nontraditional student who has worked extensively with refugees when she was employed by the American Red Cross. Now she volunteers with various international programs, including Asian Services in Action Inc.

Tutoring helps youngsters who have problems with certain subject areas, she says. "It's very hard for parents. Most don't speak English or don't speak it well, so it's hard to help them with their homework."

Baldrige also has been involved with a wide range of other programs, from Scout troops to summer camps, and she incorporates her work with refugees into her studies whenever possible. She revels in what she's been able to learn about those from other cultures, as well as about herself.

"I have the opportunity to touch a world I would never have an opportunity to touch," she says, and with the mutual learning experience she's found, "we're all the same. By learning to respect each other and love each other it's a chance to bring peace to our country and our world." **IE**

SUSAN LADIKA has been a journalist for more than 20 years, working in both the United States and Europe. She is now based in Tampa, Florida. Her last article for *IE* was "Women in Latin America—Opportunity Through Education" in the March/April 2011 issue.