The Baltimore Resettlement Center
Submitted by Anna Shraga, Baltimore City Community College

A refugee is a person who has fled from his or her country and cannot return because he or she has a well founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

The Baltimore Resettlement Center (BRC) is a one-stop service center for newly arrived refugees. There are only five such centers in the country; two of them are in Maryland. Located in southeast Baltimore, the BRC provides a variety of services for refugees at a single site, including case management for adults and their children, employment assistance and English language Instruction.

The success of Baltimore Resettlement Center depends on the partner agencies – the International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area, the Maryland Department of Social Services, and Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) -- working together, each helping refugees make a new life in America.

Unlike other immigrants, refugees receive a package of services which help them become self-sufficient as quickly as possible. Self-sufficiency comes from helping them succeed in the American working world. At the BRC, case managers, employment specialists and the team of BCCC Instructors familiarize the refugee clients with proper workplace behavior. The Workstyles program is an intensive two-week employment training that prepares refugees to enter the U.S. workforce. Students learn how to complete job applications, make professional introductions, understand workplace English, answer difficult questions during an interview, identify personal talents and job skills and set short-and long-term employment and educational goals.
Learning English is key to refugee success in America. Refugees are entitled to five years of government-supported English classes. As soon as refugees arrive, they are assessed and placed according to their language level into Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) ESL classes at BCCC. English instruction is practical and life skills focused in such essential habits as how to go to the bank, ask for directions, and how to make, cancel and reschedule appointments. The instruction does not ignore important points of grammar. RAP offers free ESL classes for refugees and asylees from Literacy to High Intermediate level. Refugees are also offered free computer literacy classes.

Baltimore City Community College encourages refugee students who do not have a high school diploma to earn one by completing the GED course and taking the exam. After finishing the RAP program, many refugee students transfer to the English Language Instruction program where they improve their academic English Language skills in order to prepare for college credit classes or an occupational skills program.

Life in America is not easy for refugees. They must adjust to a new culture and work hard, but, with the assistance they get from refugee service providers, the future looks bright for them and their children.
Student Recognition – Baltimore City Community College

*Submitted by Michelle Jackson, Instructional Specialist

Waverly Family Support Center to Honor 15 Who Completed Barbara Bush Foundation for Literacy-Sponsored Coursework

BALTIMORE - Fifteen parents who completed their Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy-sponsored coursework through Baltimore City Community College were awarded computers at Waverly Family Support Center, 829 Montpelier Street, Wednesday, March 28 at 10 a.m. The computers are being provided by Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake in conjunction with the Barbara Bush Foundation.

The parents - three of whom are fathers - completed GED and pre-GED coursework as well as a computer skills and financial literacy class, a parenting class and a class on how to teach their children to use computers, through BCCC's Adult Basic Education program. The classes were conducted at the center.

Eight additional parents are expected to complete Bush Foundation-sponsored coursework by June 30, bringing the total to 23 families earning home computers.

Key speakers at the event included Lisa Rusyniak, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake; Dr. Carolane Williams, president of Baltimore City Community College; and, Baltimore City Council Member Mary Pat Clark.

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Literacy and BCCC have joined forces in Baltimore to help give city residents and families true autonomy through learning and reading. For more information, contact Michelle Jackson, Instructional Specialist in the BCCC Adult Basic Education program, at 410-986-5449.

Information about some of our honorees can be seen below:
William Smith

William Smith is a 39 year old father of five. He is the single father to two of his children. William began classes at Waverly Family Support Center on October 3, 2011. William was enrolled in the GED class (facilitated by a BCCC instructor), Computer/Financial Literacy Class (facilitated by a BCCC instructor) and Nurturing Parenting Class. He also receives Transitional Planning Services weekly (facilitated by BCCC Transitional Specialist). Initially William was skeptical about getting his diploma and participating in the services at Waverly. He said that he was too old to just be getting his diploma. Thanks to encouragement from Waverly and BCCC staff he soon shed those thoughts and sought to achieve his goals. He gives a lot of credit to his Computer/Financial Literacy Instructor whom he says told him he is never too old to learn. He also quoted that “My computer literacy teacher introduced me to an unknown world of computers and banking.”

William has become a leader and motivator at the center. He has excellent attendance and has won several awards and certificates for his attendance. He took and passed his GED exam in January. He has participated in the BCCC college tours that were arranged by the transitional specialist, the center’s trip to Annapolis to lobby for continued funding, spoken at several focus groups at Goodwill and was honored as a Goodwill Graduate on 3/19/12 because of his achievements at Waverly. In addition, William was one of fifteen Waverly students who received refurbished desk top computers for their achievements on 3/28/12. Waverly Family Support Center and BCCC collaborated to receive grant funding from the Barbara Bush Foundation for Literacy. In addition to other things, the funding expanded the center’s services and allotted for the purchase of the computers. William spoke at that ceremony as well.

William’s toddler daughter also attends the center with him. He has talked about the impact that the programming at Waverly has on her as well. Initially, he was uneasy and stated that his daughter would not stay with anyone other than him. To his surprise she quickly adapted to the program and is flourishing in the toddler classroom. He remarks about improved social skills, speaking, singing and love for books. William finished an essay about his experiences at Waverly by saying, “At the Waverly Family Support Center I have learned a lot of things that will aid me in being a better man educationally and as a better parent. It has begun to transform my life in a positive way.”

Edouard Laguerre

Edouard Laguerre is a thirty-one year old father of two sons. Edouard is from Haiti and his birth son is in Haiti. He attends Waverly Family Support Center with his toddler step son. Edouard began classes at Waverly on October 11, 2012. He enrolled in the Pre GED class (facilitated by a BCCC instructor), Computer/Financial Literacy Class (facilitated by a BCCC instructor), Nurturing Parenting and transitional planning (facilitated by BCCC transitional specialist).

Edouard has been a delight since enrolling in the program. He has won numerous awards and certificates for perfect attendance. He always comes to the center with a pleasant attitude and drive to excel. Edouard has increased three grade levels in his CASAS math score since enrolling in the program. He says he is thankful that such a place exists and is highly invested in programming. His native language is French and he has taught the center a French lesson and plans to do more. Edouard developed his own lesson plan for the day which covered salutations, conversational phrases and vocabulary. He is a member of the yearbook committee and has formed a bond with the other fathers at the center.

Edouard has participated in the BCCC college tours and utilized the services of the Transition Specialist. He also received information from the center’s Service Coordinator and BCCC Transition Specialist to assist him in his efforts to become a U.S. citizen. Edouard was one of fifteen students who received a reconditioned desk top computer on 3/28/12. Waverly and BCCC collaborated to receive funding from the Barbara Bush Foundation for Literacy. In addition to other things the funding expanded the center’s services and allotted for the purchase of the computers.
Dorothy Flintall

Dorothy Flintall is a twenty-three year old mother of two. Dorothy initially attended Waverly Family Support Center several years ago with her son. He has now transitioned to elementary school. Dorothy reports that he is an honors student and attributes a lot of his success to the early literacy foundations he received while at Waverly. Dorothy returned to classes at Waverly in July of 2011. She was pregnant with her daughter. She worked diligently towards getting her diploma before being forced to leave the program due to health reasons. She returned to classes this February. She is enrolled in the GED class (facilitated by a BCCC instructor), Computer/Financial Literacy class (facilitated by a BCCC instructor) and transitional planning (facilitated by a BCCC transitional specialist). Although Dorothy was not physically in the program for several months she utilized the center’s home based services and maintained contact with staff and her instructor. She submitted her GED application along with her peers and took her exam in February. Dorothy is currently awaiting her results.

Dorothy is very active and vocal around the center. She is a member of the Prom committee and is always happy to motivate her classmates by discussing the benefits of the services offered at the center. Dorothy won third prize in Maryland Family Network’s Essay contest (students had to write essays based on their experiences at Maryland Family Support Centers). In her essay she describes the center as a “comfort zone and safe place to learn”. She says that she has learned from the program that you can better yourself, your life and your child’s life.

Dorothy has participated in the BCCC college tours and utilized the services of the transitional specialist to help her plan for her transition from Waverly. Dorothy was also one of fifteen students who received a reconditioned desk top computer on 3/28/12. Waverly and BCCC collaborated to receive funding from the Barbara Bush Foundation for Literacy. In addition to other things, the funding expanded the center’s services and allotted for the purchase of the computers.

Dorothy’s infant daughter is also now at the center. She is a bright baby who is already benefiting from the early literacy services offered at the center. Although she is a young infant she is very alert and loves to be talked to, read to and sang to. It is evident that her mother spends quality time in with her at home.