

# MCRC NOTICIAS



Volume 2, Issue 2  
February 2012

## RETURN TO PROFESSIONAL LIFE POSES CHALLENGES FOR NEW AMERICANS

**Kadhim Muhsin, M.D.** arrived in the United States with his wife Muna and four children on August 16, 2001. Their journey seeking refuge from endangerments in Iraq led them first to Iran and then to a two-year stay in Jordan. As it has been for many who come here to find a renewed life, the adjustment for Kadhim meant saying farewell to family and friends and, in his case, to a professional career in medicine for which he had worked very hard to achieve and develop. As a physician in Basra, a large city in southern Iraq, near the Persian Gulf, Dr. Muhsin operated a private clinic in family and pediatric medicine and lectured in the medical school of the University of Basra. His wife Muna was a teacher in Basra.

The process for a foreign medical graduate to earn a license to practice medicine in the United States requires continued studies, examinations, and a residency, regardless of past experience. Kadhim Muhsin has accepted those obligations, and has kept a strong desire and determination to return to the profession he loves and respects. Although he prac-

ticed medicine for fifteen years in Iraq, Dr. Muhsin has been pursuing and has successfully earned a certificate to practice in the U.S. He is now seeking a residency that will lead to his becoming licensed. He says that in the U.S., it is hard for foreign professionals to do what



*Kadhim Muhsin, M.D.*

they have been trained for. In addition to meeting the requirements for life – finding work, attending school, managing to support a family and pay bills – he remembers the challenges of finding information about where to go to begin the education process and how to get books for study. He says that even though there have been many difficulties,

he has not been discouraged. When he arrived in the U. S., his expectations were very different from the realities he faced, but despite the challenges, living here has been good for him and his family.

He says that in Iraqi culture, support among family and neighbors is an important way of life. "In our culture," he said, neighbors are more important than friends. When one has a need, neighbors will always come to give aid and support."

He expresses gratitude for the help and encouragement he and his family have found at MCRC. Within a year of his arrival, Kadhim began working at MCRC as a caseworker for Arab language clients, and Muna assisted in MCRC's daycare program.

In time, he became a co-owner of Sara's Market at E. 12th and Reed Sts. Presently, he independently owns the New Sara's Market at 460 E. 12th St., specializing in international foods,

### Coming Events

- Feb 20—MCRC Closed
- Feb 22—Ash Wednesday
- Feb 24—Hispanic Health Conference
- Erie Free Taxes: Cal for appointment (455-0212)
- March 12 through 15—No ESL classes
- March 17—St. Patrick's Day
- March 27—Soc. Work Month Diversity Program, 4:00—7:00 pm

### Multicultural Community Resource Center of Erie

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## EDUCATION DEPARTMENT SERVES ADULT STUDENTS FROM 27 COUNTRIES

Adult education, specifically English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, has long been a part of MCRC's services. The agency began to receive funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to provide adult ESL instruction to the community in 1986. Back then, the Education Department consisted of one full-time teacher who taught four classes, each that met two days per week. The students were primarily Hispanic with the occasional classmate from another part of the world.

The students, who represent 27 countries around the world, differ in more ways than just their country of origin.

Today, MCRC's Education Department employs five full-time staff members— three instructors, an educational case manager, and a program administrator. Each day the program offers seven ESL classes at the beginning, intermediate or advanced level. In addition to these classes, there are also two daily computer literacy classes. All classes meet Monday through Thursday and operate year round.

The students, who represent 27 countries from around the world,

differ in more ways than just their country of origin. A typical student is a female around 44 years old with less than an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. It is not uncommon to find a farmer from Bhutan, a lawyer from Iraq, a housewife from Somalia, and a small business owner from Colombia together in the same class.

Although they come to school to improve their English

abilities, the reasons for doing so vary from student to student. Many students also want to improve their work skills in order to get a job, while some want to keep a job they already have. Others may come to classes because they want to become a U.S. citizen, get a driver's license, or get ready to take a GED class. Students' goals are as diverse as the students themselves.

The philosophy of MCRC's Education Department is to make the ESL classroom a safe place to practice conversation, make mistakes, ask questions and adjust to a new culture. Prior social standing, educational background, and economic status matter little here. Everyone is working toward the common goal of improving their English skills.



*Teri Amicucci*  
*Dir. Education Dept.*

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



**John Griffiths**

**John Griffiths** has a love for people and words. He has spent his professional life pursuing dynamic relationships with both, and now MCRC and our adult ESL students are benefitting from his experience and gifts as a talented educator. John volunteers as a classroom assistant with teacher **Liv Aamodt** in her ESL classes. He brings to the students nearly forty years of teaching experience as an English professor at Butler County Community College, where he was elected Outstanding Faculty Scholar in 2004. At BCC he taught composition, poetry, and other creative writing courses, as well as public speaking. He is also a poet, and has published 125 of his poems in several magazines and literary reviews.

Following his Bachelor's studies at Slippery Rock University in 1966, John served two years in the U.S. Marine Corps. His assignment in the Marines included work as a journalist, photographer, editor and recruiter at Camp Lejeune, N.C., one of the largest military bases in the U.S. Other ventures in his very active life between 1970 and 2009 included earning his Master's degree at Indiana Univ. of PA, owning and operating a restaurant and delicatessen, and working in homebuilding and real estate.

Since his retirement from full-time teaching, John and his wife Carol have made their home in Erie. John has tutored ESL students preparing for the GED at GECAC, is active in the Men's Group at Asbury United Methodist Church, and has taught poetry writing workshops there. Carol is a photographer whose work can be viewed at galleries in the Erie area, and she works as an optician at the Wal-Mart Vision center. MCRC is grateful for John Griffiths' commitment and valuable service to our clients as they develop English language skills and prepare for new opportunities.

# MCRC CHILD CARE CENTER IS MODEL FOR APPRECIATING OUR DIVERSITY

by Carol Hofmann

If you come up to the second floor of MCRC, you will find a very busy, exciting place – our child care center! MCRC’s child care center is full of diversity and a wonderful place where you can see children and staff from all over the world work and play together.

At this time our child care program serves 105 children. We have ten full-time, and seven part-time staff who care for the children each day.

Our child care center is fully licensed by the state of Pennsylvania. We currently have four childcare classrooms for ages 6 months to 5 years and an after school and summer program for school age children ages 5 to 12. **The Erie School District** has a full-day **Pre K Counts** classroom which is located in our child care area.

The center is open to all children of the community as well as to children of our clients and staff.

During the day our kids are involved in a variety of age appropriate activities both inside and out. We have two outdoor play areas for their use and a children’s garden in the summer.

This past year, we became a satellite site for the **Young People’s Chorus of Erie**. Every Tuesday our preschool class and our school age kids have the opportunity to learn about music and singing from **Ms. Caitlin of YPC**. The children have already been part of two Young People’s Chorus concerts!

What does the future hold for us? We are working on training opportunities for our staff through the Keystone Stars program which is a quality enhancement program for Pennsylvania child care centers. We currently have three staff members working towards their Child Development Associate (CDA) certificates.

Our child care program provides a unique opportunity for children to interact with and learn about children from other cultures, and we hope to have more community children join us.



*Carol Hofmann, Child Care Center Director, enjoys a story with two of her VIPs.*



## TINA CARTER BRINGS ADVANCEMENT EXPERTISE TO MCRC CHILD CARE PROGRAM

Thanks to the **Erie Community Foundation** for a generous grant to MCRC in the amount of \$15,000. to hire a Daycare Advancement Coordinator (part-time) to help us advance our daycare service from Keystone Star 1 to a higher level.

MCRC is pleased to announce that **Tina Carter** has accepted this position. Ms. Carter brings several years of experience with the Keystone Star system and the Erie YMCA daycare program to this task. She is currently a faculty member at Edinboro University, in the Early Childhood Education Department. MCRC is fortunate to have Tina working with us in this important effort.

## MCRC OPENS COMPUTER LAB FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS!

On January 6th, 2012 MCRC opened a new computer lab offering computer literacy classes thanks to a grant from the **Erie Community Foundation** in 2011. This lab houses eight computers and operates two classes daily in four-week rotating sessions. To be eligible for classes, learners must be active ESL students. However, open lab time is available between classes for other RSS or GED students. Among a wide range of topics, the curriculum focuses on basic computer and internet navigation including email, job search, Microsoft office products, typing, and online resources for English language learning. Thank you to The Erie Community Foundation for the help in making this needed asset a reality for MCRC clients.



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**Your Donation  
is Appreciated**

To make a financial gift to MCRC, send it to **Joanna Cherpak, Director of Human Resources & Fund Development**, 554 East 10th St., Erie, PA 16503 or donate online at [www.multiculturalcrc.org](http://www.multiculturalcrc.org).

MCRC is a 501 (c)(3) charity and all donations are tax deductible.

**MCRC volunteer opportunities** exist for one-time or continuing activities.

Please visit the Volunteer tab at our Website at [www.multiculturalcrc.org](http://www.multiculturalcrc.org).

To inquire, send an email to

**MCRC@multiculturalcrc.org**. Be sure to include your name and phone number in your message.



In Memory of our friend **Jeremy Quezada**  
1984 – 2012

*"In the arms of an Angel; may you find some comfort here"* – Angel by Sarah McLaughlin

**Roll With Diversity  
Bowling Tournament**



Saturday, April 28 Eastway Lanes

12:00–4:00 PM

Three Divisions

Register Your 5-Member Team Today

Team Fee—\$100.00

Call 814– 455-0212 for information and registration kit.

**MCRC is a participating organization in the  
Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community  
Saturday, June 9, 2012 at Presque Isle State Park  
Register to walk as an individual, family, join a team, or form a team of  
your own.**

**Register today at**

<http://highmark.towercare.com/Markslist/site/displaySite.do?siteIdCode=P8N9TJIB>

(Press Control Key and click on link)

Proudly serving the needs of the Hispanic and  
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