



# UMOJA

NEWCOMERS FAMILY SERVICE CENTRE

# Umoja Newsletter

2015

STORIES

## Message From the Executive Director

Welcome to Umoja Operation Compassion Society annual news letter in which we bring to you our successes for the year as well as challenges. As a charitable organization, we like many others are embracing ourselves for the arrival of new immigrants from the Middle East [Syria] by the end of this year. The main challenges we face are lack of adequate staff and councillors to cope with numerous numbers of new arrivals. As we look forward to new arrivals, it is my hope that the government will work with us in equipping charitable organizations like ours with tools to help us do a good job in helping newcomers integrate well. We have challenges with our literacy program where we constantly need Arabic interpreters as well as challenges with clients who have experienced traumatic episodes and will need mental health and emotional support.

On a good note, we have had a successful outreach program both with families and youth. This year's funding

from Coast Capital Savings allowed us to reach vulnerable youth in our communities. The Out of School program and life skills for ages 6 to 12 has had increased numbers this year, thanks to the United Way of the Lower Mainland for their continuous support. We have now expanded this program to include mental health support and counselling for children.

The First Steps - Hand in Hand program reached record levels in attendance this year. Our partnership with Options and Diversecity in delivering this program has been the admiration of many and has led to the expansion of such programs in Richmond, Coquitlam and Langley.

On behalf of the Board of Umoja Operation Compassion, let me take this opportunity to thank our Provincial Government, The United Way of the Lower Mainland, CIC, Coast Capital Savings, the Kenny Foundation, the Skidmore Foundation, Variety the Children's Charity and other private

donors who have made our work successful by supporting newcomers to not just survive but truly thrive in their new communities. Our volunteers this year have been incredible, we could not accomplish much without their help.

Our international projects include the School in Uganda, the orphanage in Congo, the micro finance womens project at Rwentutu as well as the medical clinic. Without the support of Broadway church, St. Mark Church and Classrooms for Africa this work would have stalled. We extend further thanks to the Chimp Foundation and the community of Golden BC, for helping fund the Rwentutu community hub which is in its early stages of development.

Amos Kambere,  
Executive  
Director



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Funders:



**variety**  
the children's charity



RECOGNIZING COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Options Community Services
- Diversecity Community Resources Society
- Surrey Food Bank
- Progressive Intercultural Community Services
- City of Surrey
- Quest Food Exchange
- School District 36
- Surrey Libraries
- A Rocha
- Costco
- Docusystems
- RCMP
- Mosaic
- BC CEAS
- Pacific Community Resources Society
- St. Matthews Church
- World Vision
- Fraser Health Authority
- Surrey Downtown BIA
- Community Members



## Girls Empowerment

Umoja has become very rooted in the Surrey community over the years, gaining valuable insight and understanding into the needs of newcomer immigrants and refugees. Thanks to the continued generous support of the United Way of the Lower Mainland, this year Umoja was able to add an additional program component that offers a weekly girls only group for girls in grades 5-7. These few years before entering high school are a time when girls are really forming their identity, discovering who they are, what they like, and understanding more and more about the world around them. There are so many influences that can affect the way girls see themselves, media, friends, family, societal and cultural expectations which can be confusing and hard to navigate through. The Umoja Girls Group offers a safe space for girls to express themselves and engage in dialogue to better understand who they are and the world around them. Topics that girls group has focused on this year are being confident, being yourself, friendship, body image, staying safe online, messages from the media, random acts of kindness, having a voice and

speaking out. In addition girls group was able to engage in their broader community through field trips, made possible by the City of Surrey. It is amazing to see girls coming out of their shells, and feeling like they have something important to say. One parent expressed her gratitude for the program saying that her daughter is more comfortable to speak up, when before in certain social situations she was reserved and shy. There is truly something wonderful when girls come together to speak up, engage in their community and empower one another to be themselves and to love who they are.



# Welcoming New Arrivals

Since election time which resulted in a Liberal Government, there have been a lot of commitments made to supporting Syrian Refugees coming to Canada. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has committed to bringing 25,000 Refugees by the end of February, 2016. At a community level here in Surrey there have been many conversations between service providers in order to develop strategies to support this large influx of new arrivals. Umoja has been working with newcomer immigrants and refugees for over a decade, with a deep understanding of what newcomers needs are and the importance of strong support systems upon arrival. Umoja's hope is to continue to offer necessary services that support newcomers in getting connected to their community as many new refugees arrive over the next couple of months. With such an increase of new arrivals in such a short period of time Umoja is certainly in need of additional resources to increase staffs capacity to take on more clients in programs and for outreach services. Many of us cannot really understand what it's like to flee our homes in fear of whether you or your children will see another day, and then on top of that settle in a foreign country. War is the reality in Syria and many other countries in the world today and Canada has an opportunity to provide a home to

those who have lost theirs. Umoja is ready and willing to stand alongside newcomer refugees from around the world to be a helping hand and a place of hope and comfort, will you join us? If you are interested in donating to Umoja please visit our website and click, 'donate'



## Umoja Youth Scholarship Announcement



Umoja would like to recognize and announce the commencement of the first ever Umoja Youth Scholarship Awards. The family of Michelle Sutter and Robert Elmore together with Umoja would like to award scholarships to Umoja Youth who came to Canada as immigrants or refugees. ***The mission is to provide a post-secondary education to new immigrant and refugee youth that would not be able to otherwise afford an education.*** The Youth Scholarship Award will cover the costs of registration and tuition fees for a maximum of 4 years to obtain a Bachelor's Degree. To qualify for this scholarship program you have to either be a dependent of a

Current or former Umoja client, or have participated in the Umoja out of school program or youth program or have volunteered during Umoja offered programs for at least 6 weeks. Umoja is thrilled about this opportunity, finances to attend post-secondary education should never inhibit anyone from going to school. Should you or someone you know be interested in applying, please email: [info@umojaoperation.ca](mailto:info@umojaoperation.ca) for an application package or visit [www.umojaoperation.ca](http://www.umojaoperation.ca)



## The Gift of Time

It's hard to express into words the value and importance that the gift of time has for Umoja. As a small non-profit organization it can be challenging to manage the need within the community vs. the resources to do it. This is why volunteers in all capacities are so essential to the operations of Umoja and ensuring that families are given adequate support. This year we've had volunteers support us in marketing, social media, website development, literacy classes, homework club, administration and outreach. Laura and Mariah, two of our practicum students in the children's afterschool program express what their time at Umoja meant to them: "Seeing how resilient kids are has inspired me to be the same. The message of acceptance that Umoja promotes is clearly shown in the work in the children's program and it was an honor to be a part of." "I have loved my time spent volunteering with the children's programs at Umoja. I am thankful for the opportunity I've had to build such special relationships with each of the children that attend these programs. I was always encouraged



during the time I spent with them. It brought me such joy to see the excitement in the eyes of a child as they finally figured out how to solve the math problem they had been stuck on or as they found a word that seemed especially hidden in a word search. I loved their eagerness to share stories, like of their first time in an airplane during journey to Canada or a funny story of something that happened at school. There was never a day where they were not enthusiastic to do a craft or play another game of silent ball. The laughs seemed endless. I loved seeing the bonds that they have formed with others within the program. It was beautiful to see them learn and grow together and encourage each other along the way. They have formed a special community that I have been so fortunate to be a part of."

### A special note...

With over 20 volunteers supporting Umoja this year in various capacities, this work wouldn't be possible without you!!



## International Projects

### RWENTUTU COMMUNITY SCHOOL

All initiatives have to start somewhere and for Rwentutu youth its right in their own backyard. Previous graduates of Rwentutu Community School have started an initiative to better support their community while also generating income to support their group initiatives. Within the trading centre of Rwentutu the Gallant Life Against Dropout (GLAD) Youth group have started bee keeping as well as rented a small office space to provide printing, copying, internet, scanning and phone charging services. In a community with no power or electricity to the majority of its population, GLAD has been able to provide a service that is the first of its kind in this area. The purpose of the GLAD youth group is to recruit youth who have dropped out of school and teach them how to work on community building initiatives to fight ignorance, poverty and hunger within the community. With this youth teaching youth model, GLAD hopes to focus on community outreach and workshops. What a huge inspiration the Rwentutu Youth have become! Interested in supporting GLAD? Contact: [info@umojaoperation.ca](mailto:info@umojaoperation.ca)