



# UMOJA

NEWCOMERS FAMILY SERVICE CENTRE

## Umoja Newsletter 2016

ANNOUNCEMENT: UMOJA will be moving the first week of February 2017. New office location will be:

#208 – 14888 104 Avenue, Surrey, BC, V3R 1M4

UMOJA will be closed Jan 30<sup>th</sup> – Feb 12<sup>th</sup> to accommodate the move.

STORIES

### Message From The Executive Director

To all Umoja supporters, we thank you for taking the time to read this annual newsletter. This year, Umoja was confronted with unprecedented challenges as we received newcomer refugees from Syria as well as from many other countries experiencing war and conflict. With the opening of an extra program day on Wednesday evening for the First Steps: Hand In Hand program, we have seen many Syrian families' lives transformed along with their children. A big thank you to our dedicated staff that stood the challenges of the time. Our literacy program continues to have many clients on waiting list while the challenges of supporting learners with various different languages remains prevalent. This year our youth program has taken a turn for the better to reach new young people who are confronted with the

cultural shock of technology and the dangers that come with it. With funding from TELUS and Coast Capital Savings we hope to continue delivering this service to our new young arrivals. Our partnership with the YMCA continues to grow strong as we hope to transition this youth program into the leadership program. Many thanks to SFU for offering space of the SFU-TD Community Engagement Centre as an in-kind contribution to the youth program.

At the beginning of this year, I was able to travel to Uganda to celebrate with Rwentutu community, the ten year anniversary of the elementary school, the micro finance project, the community clinic; projects that were developed by Umoja in partnership

with Broadway and St. Mark Churches in Vancouver.

Finally on behalf of our board of directors, I want to express our sincere thanks to our funders, and donors for continuing to believe in our mission and vision. Together we have seen lives of immigrants and refugees transformed as they integrate in their new communities. Thank you.



Amos Kambere, Executive Director

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Funders:



**United Way**  
Lower Mainland



## Focus On Parenting

refugee children (0-6) and their parents/caregivers, that enables a gradual transition to relevant settlement and/or community services and resources and ensure successful integration into their communities. Recent statistics have shown about 2088 government assisted Syrian refugees landing in British Columbia, with about 800 from the 2088 settling in Surrey, equalling about 40%. Certainly there are more refugee families needing support services now more than ever before and Umoja works tirelessly to support as many families as possible.

Have you ever tried to imagine moving to a completely different country that you've never been to before with no language and no family or friends around to support you? Perhaps you've travelled and experienced new places with different foods, language, culture, values, however travelling ends and you are able to return home. For our clients at Umoja, there is no option of returning home once arriving here. Parents arrive with their children and are unable to navigate their new social environment because many things are so different than their own. It is for this reason that Umoja is here to come alongside families with young children and be a support to empower parents and children to learn, understand and engage in their new community. Umoja's First Steps: Hand In Hand program has continued to be an important program for refugee families in the Surrey community. The purpose is to provide intensive early childhood and family-focused settlement and developmental support to young



### 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
- RCMP
- Mosaic
- BC CEAS
- Pacific Community Resources Society
- St. Matthews Church
- World Vision
- Fraser Health Authority
- Surrey Downtown BIA
- Community Members
- Broadway Church
- St. Marks Church
- YMCA – Tong Louie

# Discovery: A Youth Empowerment Project



It is with great excitement that Umoja is able to offer a Newcomer youth program in partnership with the YMCA – Tong Louie. Through the generous support of Telus – Community Foundation along with Coast Capital Savings, Umoja is able to continue supporting youth in digital media skills in a fun, safe, supportive environment. Newcomer youth can face many different challenges in coming to a new country such as the English language, understanding cultural norms, building friendships, peer pressure, facing discrimination and the challenges of leaving family/friends back home. Umoja and YMCA staff partner together in facilitating weekly sessions to increase computer/digital media skills and self-expression. Being supported and finding a sense of belonging means that youth can be confident in who they are and find their place in a new society which can positively impact their lives far into the future. This project has potential to break down barriers within the community by promoting inclusiveness and understanding.

## Umoja Youth Scholarship Recipient

For many youth finishing high school, post-secondary education is a very natural next step. However, it can be a daunting thought for newcomer youth especially because of the costs associated with attending post-secondary education. In order to break down barriers and to support youth, Umoja has partnered with The Change Project to award scholarships to newcomer immigrant and refugee youth who have participated in programs/volunteered with Umoja. The mission is to provide a post-secondary education to newcomer youth that would not be able to otherwise afford an education.



Scholarship recipient: Eyobel

The scholarship program was officially launched in 2015 and Umoja along with the The Change Project are so pleased to announce that Eyobel is the first recipient of the Umoja Youth Scholarship Award! Eyobel came to Canada in 2012 from Eritrea and is now finishing his first semester at KPU in the business program. We are delighted to support Eyobel in reaching his goals and we look forward to supporting more youth in reaching their educational goals in the coming years. For more information about the scholarship guidelines, or to apply please visit: <http://umojawordpress.apps-1and1.com/youth-scholarship-award>







## Sharing His Story

Shwe is a recent grad from the Umoja literacy program and through support from staff and volunteers, Shwe was able to write out and read his story for his graduation from literacy class. He writes “Hello my name is Shwe. I am from Burma. I came to Canada 5 years ago. This year I became a Canadian citizen. I feel good, Canadian people are good and loving. I was born in Burma and have 4 brothers and 2 sisters. In Burma when I was a teenager my family had only a little bit of food - only salt and rice and I was not safe. I never went to school in Burma. In Burma I was an elephant driver. Sometimes, my village would hide from the government in the jungle, by the river or in the mountains. It was very scary. No food, no job, I was scared. One of my brothers when he was 11 ran from a government soldier and he shot him. Another brother was killed by a land mine. My Mother and Father got sick and died in Burma. I had to leave my parents and go to a refugee camp with my sisters and brother when I was 20. I lived in refugee camps for 20 years.



**Did You Know?!** To date Surrey has welcomed the largest number of Syrian refugee families out of all British Columbia!

When I was 25 I met a beautiful, tall, and perfect woman her name was Blehsay. We were married in the refugee camp and had 3 children. We lived in a small 1 bedroom home. It was a little bit ok. We ate beans, rice, salt, chili pepper and sometimes fruit and vegetables. Everyone wants to leave the refugee camp. There was no work in the refugee camp. Sometimes I would help to prepare the road for the food trucks to come. In 2010 I was happy to come to Canada with my family. Some friends and family are still in the refugee camp and it is sad for me. In Canada I feel safe, In Canada I feel good, my friends, church and family are good and I am happy.” Schwe continues to be involved at Umoja now volunteering during literacy class and supporting other students in learning English.

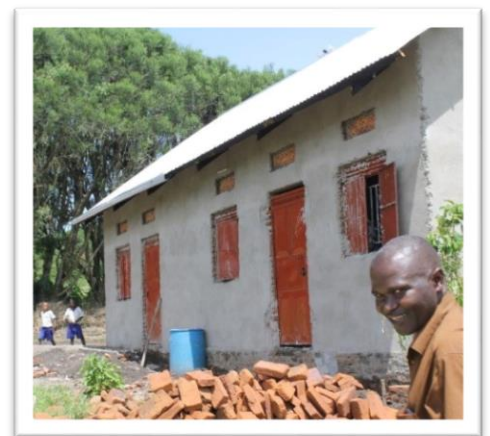


Above: Shwe's wife Blehsay

## International Projects

RWENTUTU COMMUNITY SCHOOL

We are happy to announce that with the support of Broadway Church, the staff house at Rwentutu School has been completed! Ensuring suitable housing for teachers at the school was a long overdue necessity to better support staff and ensure their wellness. Staff were often having to travel home at late hours which can often be unsafe. The staff housing allows teachers to stay on campus and are more accessible to students during exam time when extra study support is needed. We would like to recognize and thank all of the teachers and staff at the Rwentutu Community School for their constant, unwavering dedication to the Rwentutu community and students. Truly they are role models for the students and so many students receive the help they need with their schooling because of teachers and staff who are passionate about learning and community.



Above: Completed staff house