



Nashville International
Center for Empowerment

Annual Report 2015

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Letter from the President & CEO

Refugees know that coming to this country gives them a second chance to rebuild their lives and their families' lives. This gives them hope of recovery from the ruthless destruction of wars and persecution that they lived through in their former homes. Refugees are mothers and fathers, many of whom work two or three minimum-wage jobs to support their families and live a better life in their new home. They work even harder to integrate in their community.

Integration is complex. I think it is significant to recognize what it takes to create an integrated community: a place where integration is accessible. The task for integration requires knowledge of processes and resources. Successful integration is part of a "New American Dream", and is a role both hosts and New Americans should play together. Even though resettlement agencies, both at the national and local levels, play their roles by providing refugees pre- and post-resettlement services, successful integration is not accomplished in a few months or even years.

Lack of cultural knowledge as well as not knowing where to go for support constrain integration. Knowledge of the English language is one of the most important things to become integrated, and this is why the NICE English program remains the core component. When I first arrived in this country, I didn't know English. It was difficult for me personally to navigate the complex American systems. I pledged to do everything I could to change it. So, I committed to learn English well enough and enrolled myself in a learning center in Nashville before I transferred to a community college and then Tennessee State University where I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science with a minor in Mathematics. This was a challenging time because I had to work two jobs while attending classes.

Part of the "New American Dream" for refugees and immigrants is successful integration into mainstream American society. They want their children to succeed academically. Their families want to stay in communities that embrace them. They need jobs that can help them overcome financial barriers.

This is what successful integration or self-sufficiency means. Integration does not mean to assimilate with a new culture or avoid one's own cultural heritage. Instead, successful integration is a long-term process through which refugees and host communities work effectively together in order to improve each other's lives by expanding opportunities, developing mutual respect, and understanding each other's culture. This is why NICE is in business to ensure refugees and immigrants are welcome in their community through involvement and partnerships with community organizations.

In our 2014 annual report, I am personally delighted to share with you the work the NICE team and partners have done to positively impact the lives of our refugee and immigrant families in Middle Tennessee. On subsequent pages, please read detailed information about NICE's programs. It is imperative to acknowledge the effort put forth by outstanding members of the NICE team. Most programs met or exceeded their strategic objectives set for 2014!

Thanks to our outstanding donors, board members, volunteers and staff. I also want to thank members of the Greater Nashville community for welcoming and supporting our New Americans in their transitions into an integrated community. I am looking forward to continue to partner with you now and for years to come.

Thank you!

Dr. Gatluak Thach

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Mission



Fundamental to the mission of NICE is the elimination of the root causes of poverty within greater Nashville's refugee and immigrant community, the creation of opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility, and the social integration of those it serves. Clients are encouraged and even challenged to think beyond their current circumstances and discuss long-term goals. NICE makes every effort to establish the foundation necessary to achieve these goals by placing clients in educational and employment environments that are conducive to ultimate success.