



Operation SOLID

(Spark of Light In Darkness)

Service-Learning Project

American Red Cross of Central Maryland*

“Young children who have resettled in Baltimore City by the International Rescue Committee are born into a life threatened by war and persecution. These children need basic items like clothes, school supplies, and toiletries. We are holding **Operation SOLID** to help these young refugees and we want YOU to be that spark of light in their darkness. YOU are the hope of these children’s lives. Help donate school supplies so a child can have the chance to get an education.” ~*Holt Chueck, Dulaney High School Red Cross Club*

Your school, after-school program, or youth group is invited to participate in an exciting **service-learning project** that benefits locally resettled refugee families. By donating much needed school supplies, students in Maryland will have an opportunity to help refugee children start school in America on the right foot and ensure them a bright educational future.

WHO—You! Students or adults, club members or youth groups – *anyone* can help!

WHAT—Collect school supplies and backpacks for refugee children.

WHEN—In coordination with your local American Red Cross chapter and service-learning coordinator, backpacks can be delivered between **MAY 24 – JUNE 4, 2004**.

WHERE—Deliver to the Central Maryland Chapter located at 4700 Mt. Hope Drive, Baltimore, Maryland, 21215. Please call to arrange your drop-off time: 410-764-7000 x 3009.

What is Operation SOLID?

Operation SOLID (Spark of Light In Darkness) is asking the schools, youth groups and Red Cross Clubs of Central Maryland to collect school supplies for locally resettled refugee children. The refugee children and families, who have come to Baltimore with the support of the International Rescue Committee, have been through war and famine, have suffered cruel injustices and arrive in this country with little – or no – belongings. Each supply-filled backpack that is collected will go to a refugee child who has recently traveled thousands of miles to find refuge in our country.

How can teachers educate their students about global issues?

The students of Maryland will have the opportunity to learn about the unstable conditions of the world and its consequences on innocent children, as well as to study specific countries where a lot of the Baltimore refugees are coming from, such as Liberia, Ethiopia, Somalia and Iran. Operation SOLID creates a perfect opportunity for teachers to incorporate "international affairs" into daily lesson plans.

- Maryland educators and students created *Guiding Questions* and activities for several subject areas that connect the project to Maryland’s content standards while allowing students to meet international needs.
- **Guest speakers are available** during school hours by appointment. *Not available in all areas, please call (410) 764-7000 x 3009 for more information.*
- The ARC web page: www.redcross.org has up-to-date information about international crises, and ARC international response and involvement. Teachers and students can log on and look through the material.

* The American Red Cross, a humanitarian organization led by volunteers and guided by its Congressional Charter and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Movement, will provide relief to victims of disasters and help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies. This project is in support of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement—humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality.

What do the backpacks consist of?

- School items should be placed inside a backpack, which should then be placed in a box for protection. If you have collected more than one backpack of supplies, you may put them all in the same box.
- All items should be new, clean, and of good quality and appearance.
- Please print the following on the outside of the box:

**This is a gift from
(name of your school, club, or group)
American Red Cross of Central Maryland**

- Once assembled, deliver the boxes to the Central Maryland Chapter located at 4700 Mt. Hope Drive, Baltimore, Maryland, 21215. Please call 410-764-7000 x 3009 to arrange a drop-off.

Operation SOLID Contents & Estimated Prices

K-6 BACKPACK		7-12 BACKPACK	
1—Backpack	\$25-40	1—Backpack	\$30-40
2—Spiral Notebooks (70-120 pgs)	\$4-6	2—Spiral Notebooks (70-120 pgs)	\$4-6
1—pad of Drawing Paper	\$3	Paper (college ruled, 100-150pgs)	\$2-3
1—Pencil Sharpener	\$1	1—Pencil Sharpener	\$1
12-pk of No. 2 Pencils	\$2	12-pk of No. 2 Pencils	\$2
2—Pocket Folders	\$1	12-pk of blue or black Pens	\$1
1—Safety scissors	\$2	1—Ruler (plastic or wood)	\$1
1—Glue stick	\$0.50	1—Protractor	\$0.50
1—Ruler (plastic)	\$1	12-pk Colored Pencils	\$2-3
24-pk Crayons	\$2		
Estimated Total:	\$42--\$59	Estimated Total:	\$44--\$58

How are the backpacks assembled?

- Participants can determine the manner in which they assemble the backpacks. If a school is involved, participation can include one classroom or the entire school.
- The necessary items for each backpack can be purchased and brought in by individual students, or a fundraising event can be organized to raise money to purchase the supplies. It is at the groups' discretion how to go about filling the bags. **All the items on the list must be included** to be considered a completed backpack, as each child should get the same amount of supplies.
- **Participants should not include extra items in the bags.** Extra items collected can be turned in separately in a box clearly labeled as such. The items will be distributed to the kids throughout the year.
- **Participants should adhere to the listed items as closely as possible** and try to keep items in one category consistent so distribution to the individual recipient is equal.
- Completed backpacks should be inspected and any **items not on the supplies list should be removed.**

What happens after the backpacks are assembled?

Once the backpack is assembled, several things can happen:

- Together, students and adults can reflect on the experience.
- You can hold a celebration at your site (Invite your local Red Cross!). Some groups may choose to do all day events celebrating the project, while others may simply recognize the participants.
- Call the Central Maryland Chapter to arrange a drop-off: 410-767-7000 x 3009.
- The backpacks are dropped off at the Central Maryland Chapter between **May 24 – June 11, 2004.**

For more information, please call: 410-764-7000 x 3009



Guiding Questions & Activities

Operation SOLID 2004

American Red Cross of Central Maryland

In your learning, you may wish to study a particular country or region where refugees come from. The following questions were created with that in mind. The refugees in Baltimore come from all over the world, but the following countries are most often represented:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| •Democratic Republic of Congo | •Liberia | •Ethiopia |
| •Sierra Leone | •Somalia | •Iran |

Art

- ◆ What forms of art are most common (pictures, sculpture, woodcarving etc.) in the country? Why these?
- ◆ What are the most popular themes of artwork?
- ◆ How do the art works reflect the culture and traditions of the country?
- ◆ Bring a sample (or show a picture) of artwork from the country. Discuss the artwork in terms of elements of art and principles of design.
- ◆ What are the emblems of the Red Cross? What do they mean?

Business Education

- ◆ What types of businesses are best represented in the country? Why these?
- ◆ How are businesses typically run?
- ◆ What was the effect of American capitalism in this country?
- ◆ How does an unstable economy and disease affect business?
- ◆ Design a product that will be stable in this region of the world. Defend your product and its design.

Biology/ Ecology/Geography

- ◆ Where is the country located?
- ◆ What is the climate in the region? How does it affect the ability of people to grow crops and/or raise animals?
- ◆ What kinds of plants grow there? What kinds of animals are found there? Why are these plants and animals there?
- ◆ Compare the country to your community. How are the natural environments of these two places similar and different?
- ◆ What major waterways (rivers, lakes, seas, etc.) are in the country's region?
- ◆ What are the different types of ecosystems found there?
- ◆ What are the concerns or environmental issues in this area? Why are these issues of concern?
- ◆ How have natural disasters impacted the ecology of the region?
- ◆ In how many countries does the Red Cross (American or International) assist people?

Cultural Studies

- ◆ What holidays are celebrated in the country?
- ◆ Is there a dominant religion? Are there other religions present? If so, what are they?
- ◆ What special customs observed for marriages, births, funerals, and other important occasions? Why are these rituals observed?
- ◆ What are the effects of HIV/AIDS on families and community relationships?
- ◆ What is the size of an average family?
- ◆ What are the big cities in the country? How did this area become urbanized?
- ◆ Do the majority of people live in the cities, suburbs, or rural areas? Why did they congregate in these areas?
- ◆ Do you think Red Cross societies are identical in all countries of the world? Why do some differences occur?

Foreign Language

- ◆ What language(s) do people speak in this country? How did this language become the dominant one?
- ◆ What kinds and how many dialects are spoken in this region?
- ◆ What foreign languages do people from the country learn?

Health/Physical Education

- ◆ What are some major health concerns in the country?
- ◆ What are some of the major causes of disease in the region? Why?
- ◆ How is HIV/AIDS spread through a community? What are the correlations between disease and economy?
- ◆ What assistance can residents of the country get when they are ill? Compare this to medical assistance in the United States.
- ◆ How have natural disasters affected the health of people in this region?
- ◆ Is physical education compulsory in schools? Do you think it should be compulsory? Why or why not?
- ◆ What kinds of sports are commonly played in schools? Compare this to the sports played in American schools.
- ◆ What sports are not popular among the people of the country? Explain your answer.
- ◆ How is the American Red Cross involved in health awareness? Why is this important?
- ◆ What is the role of the American Red Cross in responding to the health concerns of the most vulnerable people in the country (local/international)?

Language Arts

- ◆ What types of stories are told in the country? How do they reflect beliefs of the people? What were the main themes of the stories/songs?
- ◆ Discuss the oral traditions of the country.
- ◆ How did the modern culture and media affect oral traditions of this region?
- ◆ Who are the premier authors in this country? What genre is most popular?
- ◆ How do the stories told or written reflect the culture/politics of the nation?

Mathematics

- ◆ Is math education available to all people in this part of the world? Why or why not?
- ◆ How does the inability to get math education limit one's opportunities?
- ◆ Do math tasks (calculations, charts, graphs, etc.) related to the size of the country, its population, literacy rates, or other demographic information.

Music

- ◆ What style of music is popular in the country? What are their most common instruments?
- ◆ What is the main style of music younger people listen to? What do older people listen to?
- ◆ Who are the famous musicians from this region?
- ◆ Play a sample of music for the class.

Nutrition

- ◆ What are some types of food or meals commonly eaten in the country? Why do they eat these foods?
- ◆ Are there any similarities between their food and American food? What are they?
- ◆ What are the major crops in the region? Why?
- ◆ What effect do natural disasters, wars, and economical crises have on people's ability to feed their families?
- ◆ How can we help those who starve in other countries? What does Red Cross do to help?

Social Studies

- ◆ Where is the country located?
- ◆ What type/form of government do they have? What system?
- ◆ What are the major employment areas?
- ◆ What is the name of their currency? How stable is its value? Why?
- ◆ What kinds of trade are found inside and outside the country? With which countries do they trade?
- ◆ Is the economy of the country prosperous? Explain your answer.
- ◆ Discuss economic trends there. How is economy affected by disaster?
- ◆ What natural resources significantly affect the development of economy in this part of the world? How?
- ◆ Were there any important political uprisings? What were the outcomes? Are political uprisings frequent in this area?
- ◆ Are there a lot of freedoms and opportunities in the country? Does the government protect freedoms? Is the government able to establish and preserve the order?
- ◆ Is there poverty in this region? Why do you think so? What causes it?
- ◆ Is the country affected by war or armed conflict? What is the role of the Red Cross in responding to the needs of the people who were struck by adversity?
- ◆ Who are the most vulnerable groups of the country? How do the basic principles of International Humanitarian Law (humanity, impartiality, neutrality, etc.) help to provide protection to these groups?

Technology

- ◆ What kind of equipment is commonly used in houses/offices?
- ◆ What technology is available for students in their schools? Why?
- ◆ Is there evidence of technological progress? Compare the availability of the Internet in the US and the country.
- ◆ Identify and discuss a connection between technological progress and economy.
- ◆ What type of technology should countries with severe health problems have? Why?
- ◆ What Red Cross Fundamental Principle applies to the distribution of medical assistance and emergency relief supplies?



Service-Learning Best Practices Project Guide

Operation SOLID 2004

American Red Cross of Central Maryland



Thank you for choosing to help families who have been forced to leave their homelands and resettle in Baltimore. This project can be a great service-learning experience for your group. Service-learning is a method of experiential education that links academic learning with student service that benefits the community. The Maryland Student Service Alliance, in partnership with the American Red Cross and Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism, offers the following project guide to help you prepare for, carry out, and reflect on this project. This project guide follows Maryland's Seven Best Practices for Service-Learning in an effort to help you craft a meaningful, academically and globally relevant, and engaging project.

1. Meet a recognized community need

Explore with students what educational need(s) the project will meet. For more information on refugees and their plights, visit www.redcross-cmd.org and www.theirc.org.

2. Achieve curricular objectives through service-learning

Examine your course or team goals, outcomes, and indicators to identify ways to integrate the project into classroom lessons. The Guiding Questions and Activities handout can get you started.

- ◆ Does this connect to geography or science outcomes?
- ◆ Could you connect the collection activity to math indicators?
- ◆ Could you have students engage in reading, writing or researching about the project in language arts or social studies?

3. Reflect throughout service-learning experience

Assist students to engage in creative and meaningful reflection strategies by creating a video or photo documentary of the project, creating artwork or poetry to express what they have learned through the project and how they felt about it, or reading articles and stories related to the topic and discussing them. Hold classroom discussions on the project periodically to reflect. Reflection questions could include:

- ◆ How will this project impact the lives of the refugees?
- ◆ Do we have an obligation to help others who are in need?
- ◆ What are you learning through this project?
- ◆ Imagine that you have survived a human disaster and someone from far away tried to help you...

Refer to the Reflection Ideas for additional possibilities.

4. Develop student responsibility

As an adult sponsor of this project, your role should be to help students discover how to organize and execute the project. Encourage students to be creative and take leadership and ownership of the project. You might consider having students' form various committees to work on different parts of the project. For example, they could conduct outreach to the community to collect donations from citizens and businesses.

5. Establish community partnerships

Work with students to identify partners, in addition to the American Red Cross, who could provide information or resources for the project. Maybe a student or their family has been a refugee (or knows someone who was) and you can arrange for a guest speaker. Students could also solicit local businesses for donations.

6. *Plan ahead for service-learning*

Review your curriculum to look for possible links to this project. Peruse the Guiding Questions and Activities resource to stimulate your thinking of how to link the project to your curriculum.

Visit our website www.redcross-cmd.org for more details on the project.

7. *Equip students with knowledge and skills*

Students need to be prepared to engage in the project in two ways:

- ◆ Students should spend time exploring the concepts of citizenship, civic duty, and responsibility. Students should be aware that the project they are about to engage in is a service-learning project that will address a very real global-community need while helping students develop academic and personal knowledge and skills at the same time.
- ◆ Students should develop an understanding and appreciation of the country they are studying (refer to Guiding Questions and Activities for assistance), disaster, international relief, as well as teamwork and project execution skills.

Reflection Ideas

Operation SOLID 2004

American Red Cross of Central Maryland

The following questions can be used for reflecting on the project. You can also adapt them to fit other service-learning projects.

- ◆ Why do the refugee families need these supplies? Why do some people and countries have less than others do?
- ◆ What are my fears, doubts, or judgments about the refugees and myself? What are my judgements about people who have less – and more than – I have?
- ◆ How are the refugee families helping me/us by accepting these supplies? How does helping them help me?
- ◆ Under what conditions am I willing to receive? How might it feel to receive things from students in your new home country?
- ◆ Do I believe that one form of service is superior to another? Are there better ways to help the refugee families? Do I think it is worthwhile to help others?
- ◆ What are my/our motivations for helping refugees through this project?
- ◆ What would I change to make this chest project a better service-learning experience? Would I be involved in this kind of a service-learning project again in the future? Why or why not?



Frequently Asked Questions About Refugees and Resettlement

Operation SOLID 2004

American Red Cross of Central Maryland

Who are refugees and displaced persons?

They are men, women and children fleeing war, persecution and political upheaval. They are uprooted with little warning, enduring great hardship during their flight. They become refugees when they cross borders and seek safety in another country. They are displaced when they are forced to flee their homes, but remain within the borders of their native country.

The 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as amended by its 1967 protocol defines a refugee as a person who *"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."*

The U.S. will not recognize persons who have participated in war crimes and violations of humanitarian and human rights law, including the crime of terrorism, as refugees. They are specifically excluded from the protection accorded to refugees.

How many refugees and displaced persons are there, and who makes up the majority of the refugee population?

80 percent of the world's refugees are women and children who are more vulnerable to their unstable conditions. At the start of the year 2002, there were an estimated 14.5 million refugees in the world and over 20 million displaced persons *. There are over 2 ½ million refugees from Afghanistan who have sought refuge in neighboring Pakistan and Iran. Other large refugee populations are Kurds, Burundians, Sierra Leoneans, Burmese, Colombians, Serbs, and Angolans.

The UNHCR reports as of January 2001, that 19,783,100 "persons of concern" fall within the agency's mandate. The U.S. Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey 2002 reports 14,921,000 refugees and asylum seekers and over 22 million internally displaced persons.

What are the options for resettlement?

Most refugees and displaced persons return to their communities when peace and stability return to their country. When conditions in countries of origin remain unstable or there is a danger of persecution upon repatriation, some refugees are able to stay in a refugee settlement in another country. Unfortunately, many host countries are unable to accept refugees permanently. Resettlement in a third country, such as the United States, is the last option, and is available to only a tiny fraction of the world's refugees.

The United States has a tradition of offering refuge to those fleeing persecution and war. The U.S. government maintains a long-established humanitarian program that grants sanctuary in this country to a limited number of refugees who cannot safely return home or stay in a host country. The IRC annually helps as many as 10,000 refugees resettle in the United States.

How many refugees have the opportunity to resettle?

Very few refugees are ever even considered for resettlement. There are three internationally accepted durable solutions for refugees:

- **Voluntary repatriation.** Refugees return to their former country of nationality when conditions prevail that allow return in safety and dignity;

- **Local integration.** Local settlement and integration of refugees in their country of first asylum upon receiving agreement from the host country;
- **Resettlement.** Most frequently used for refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or human rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge. Resettlement to a third country becomes the primary objective or priority when there is no other way to guarantee the legal or physical security of the refugee.

How does the U.S. determine if a refugee is eligible for resettlement?

Applicants for refugee admission to the U.S. must satisfy the following criteria:

- The definition of a "refugee" as determined by U.S. government officials.
- Be among those refugees determined by the President to be of special humanitarian concern to the U.S.
- Be otherwise admissible under U.S. law.
- Not be firmly resettled in any foreign country.

Although a refugee may meet the above criteria, the existence of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program does not create any entitlement for that person to be admitted to the U.S.

How many refugees does the U.S. accept for resettlement?

The United States accepts a limited number of refugees each year. The President in consultation with Congress determines the authorized target for refugee admissions through a Presidential Determination. In FY2002, for example, 70,000 refugees were authorized to come to the U.S. The total number of refugees authorized for admittance is then divided among different regions of the world. For FY2003, the numbers are determined as follows:

- Africa 20,000
- East Asia 4,000
- Europe/Southeastern Europe 2,500
- Former Soviet Union 14,000
- Near East/South Asia 7,000
- Latin America/Caribbean 2,500
- Unallocated Reserve * 20,000

*The Unallocated Reserve is to be used if/where the need for additional numbers develops and only upon notification to the Congress. Historically, this unallocated reserve is rarely, if ever, used. (*Proposed Refugee Admissions for FY2003: Report to the Congress*) Nearing the end of FY2003's second quarter, admissions numbers hover for a second year at an all-time low.

How do refugees make it to the United States?

The Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) oversees the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program through U.S. embassies worldwide. The State Department develops application criteria and refugee admission levels and presents eligible cases for adjudication by officers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

INS officers travel to the country of asylum to interview refugees who fall within the priorities established for the relevant nationality or region. The INS officers interview potential applicants to determine whether or not they are refugees as defined under U.S. law. A refugee of any nationality may be referred by UNHCR, however this does not guarantee admission to the U.S., for they must still qualify under U.S. law.

Upon completion of security and medical screening, the INS officer may approve the refugee's application for U.S. resettlement. After approval, arrangements are made for his/her placement with a U.S. voluntary agency and travel to the U.S.

What happens to refugees when they come to the United States?

Refugees must rebuild their lives from traumatic and tragic circumstances. The majority embrace their newly adopted homeland with tremendous energy and success. They go on to work, attend universities, build professions, purchase homes, raise children and contribute to their communities. Ultimately refugees obtain citizenship and become fully participating members of society. They become Americans.

Many refugees come to the United States without any possessions and without knowing anyone. Other refugees come here to be reunited with family members. All refugees receive limited assistance from the U.S. government and non-profit organizations like the IRC. We help refugees find housing, learn about life and customs in America, secure jobs, learn English, and become citizens. We provide most of the basic things they need to restart their lives here and we help them overcome cultural barriers so that their adjustment is as easy as possible.

What benefits do refugees receive?

The circumstances under which refugees leave their country are different from those of other immigrants. Often in fleeing persecution, they are without the luxury of bringing personal possessions or preparing themselves for life in a new culture. Recognizing this fact, the federal government provides transitional resettlement assistance to newly arrived refugees. In the first 90 days, agencies such as the IRC contract with the Department of State to provide for refugee's food, housing, employment, medical care, counseling and other services to help the refugee make a rapid transition to economic self-sufficiency.

How can I help refugees?

Everyone can help refugees be welcoming them as new and valuable members of American society. You can help refugees by volunteering at a local resettlement agency, becoming an English tutor, a tour guide, a mentor to a family, donating money, furniture and household items, teaching other people about refugees, and employing or encouraging local businesses to employ refugees. You can also support the work of the IRC financially.

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**For more information, visit the IRC's website at
www.theirc.org**

Famous Refugees

Operation SOLID 2004

American Red Cross of Central Maryland

- Josef Albers, Artist
- Madeleine Albright, former Secretary of State
- Hannah Arendt, Philosopher and Author
- Mikhail Baryshnikov, Dancer
- Max Beckmann, Artist
- Hans Bethe, Physicist and Nobel Laureate
- W. Michael Blumenthal, Former Secretary of Treasury, current IRC Board Member
- Marc Chagall, Artist
- Nadia Comaneci, Olympic gymnast
- Salvador Dali, Artist
- The Dalai Lama, leader-in-exile and Nobel Laureate
- Peter Drucker, Author and Management Consultant
- Albert Einstein, Nobel Laureate
- Max Ernst, Artist
- Gloria Estefan, Singer
- Lion Feuchtwanger, Author
- Andy Garcia, Actor
- Alexander Ginsburg, Russian dissident during the Cold War
- Roberto Goizueta, former CEO of Coca Cola
- Elián González, Cuban schoolboy
- Walter Gropius, Artist
- George Grosz, Artist
- Andrew S. Grove, Chairman of Intel Corp., current IRC Board Member
- Henry Grunwald, Former Editor-in-Chief, Time Inc., current IRC Board Member
- John Heartfield, Artist
- Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Buddhist Master

- Wassily Kandinsky, Artist
- Henry Kissinger, Former Secretary of State, current IRC Board Member
- John G. Kemeny, computer pioneer and President of Dartmouth College from 1970-81
- Andre Kertesz, Photographer
- Oskar Kokoschka, Artist
- Madeleine Kunin, former U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland, former Governor of Vermont
- Tom Lantos, U.S. Congressman (Calif), current IRC Board Member
- Fernand Leger, Artist
- Jacques Lipchitz, Artist
- Andre Masson, Artist
- Andre Meyerhoff, Scientist and Nobel Laureate
- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Architect
- Dith Pran, Photographer, current IRC Board Member
- Gen. John Shalikashvili, Former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Author
- Elie Wiesel, author and Nobel Laureate, current IRC Board Member

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Refugees in U.S. Grateful for Chance to Start Over

By Chuck Olbricht

After fleeing persecution in their homelands, refugees who have the chance to start a new life in the United States deeply appreciate the opportunity - and invariably work hard to make the most of it. Here are the stories of two such refugees.

Sahar Adish, from Afghanistan, Now a Student in Charlottesville, Virginia

"Thanks to our parents," says Sahar Adish, a high school senior in Charlottesville, Virginia, my brothers and I understood at an early age that education is a high priority." But then the Taliban came to power.

Sahar's father, a geologist and top official in Afghanistan's Department of Mining, and her mother, a teacher, were deeply frightened. Their fears were confirmed when the authorities ruled that women and girls could not leave home without a male relative.

"We were prisoners in our own house," recalls Sahar.

Undaunted, Sahar's mother began teaching Sahar and other young girls at her home. But not for long. Apprised by informants, authorities confronted both wife and husband, detained Sahar's father in jail for two days and severely reprimanded her mother.

In 1998, the Adish family fled Kabul and reached Pakistan, where they lived as refugees. Four years later, they were approved for resettlement in the United States.

"Suddenly, it was like a beautiful dream," says Sahar, who along with her parents and brothers, were welcomed at the airport in Charlottesville in September 2002 by IRC case workers, who quickly helped the family settle-in to their new home and community.

Within days Sahar and one brother were enrolled in Charlottesville schools while her older brother started classes at a community college.

Soon after, the IRC helped Sahar's father find a job at the Courtyard Marriott Hotel and her mother a teaching position at a day care center. "We are very happy," says 16-year-old Sahar. "My father is improving his English, my mother enjoys her teaching and my brothers and I are very grateful to be in school."

Last year, Sahar completed as an extracurricular media project a short documentary film about Afghan culture as seen through the eyes of an Afghan refugee. It was screened at a University of Virginia film festival and, according to Susan Donovan, IRC's regional director in Charlottesville, was warmly received. "It had a profound and positive effect on the audience," she said.

But Sahar does not have her eye on Hollywood.

"My parents want me to be a doctor, and really, that's exactly what I want to do," she says. "And perhaps someday I can return to Afghanistan as a physician and help the people who were left behind." Towards that end, she has applied to the University of Virginia with hopes of entering in the fall.

Arijana Topic, a Refugee from Bosnia, Says She's Grateful to Be Living in Boston.

In March 1994, Arijana Topic, then 21 and living in northwest Bosnia, appealed to the UN refugee agency for assistance in leaving the country. Writing on behalf of herself, her parents and older sister - without their knowledge - Arijana expressed fear for their safety.

Her father is a Muslim and her mother is Serbian Orthodox. Their mixed marriage put them in grave danger. Mindful of the volatile nature of her family's circumstances, Arijana realized that leaving Bosnia was a matter of life and death.

Six months later, the IRC was helping the family resettle in Boston under the U.S. Refugee Program. It was the start of a new life.

Arijana immediately began English classes arranged by the IRC. Soon she got a job at a delicatessen and food bar at Boston's Logan Airport operated by Host Marriott. She worked there for more than six years, first as a sandwich maker, then as a supervisor and finally as assistant manager.

Arijana, by now fluent in English, continued her education at a community college. And with a growing interest in the financial world, she got a job with Fleet Bank. Starting in a clerical position, she soon attained the rank of senior bank officer. In January 2004, Arijana enrolled full time at the University of Massachusetts, pursuing degrees in finance and business.

The rest of her family has also fared well. Her father, a school teacher in Bosnia, secured employment in the automotive parts industry and her mother has been working at the IRC's Boston office, where she is case-manager coordinator. Sonia, her older sister, has married and now lives in Arizona.

"I often get very emotional about how our lives changed so much," says Arijana. "We faced religious persecution so terrifying that it was impossible for us to work or live safely in our own home. I am so glad I wrote that letter and I am so grateful to be in this country."

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**To read more articles like this, visit the IRC's website at
www.theirc.org**