

# welcome

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROGRAM

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## An American-Darfuri tale: Kendra Rinas & the Moussas

Church World Service is a key partner in the U.S. Refugee Program's work to resettle the first Darfuri refugees out of Chad. Kendra Rinas was among CWS staff to participate in this pioneering effort.

On the staff of the CWS Overseas Processing Entity for sub-Saharan Africa, Rinas spent February to June 2009 in Chad helping prepare refugees' case files for final review by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Then, in March 2010, CWS relocated her to Chad, where she leads the work to interview additional resettlement candidates and start their orientation to U.S. life. Here is some of her story:

**February 2009:** I finally arrive in Chad, hot, dusty, insecure Chad, with daily temperatures over 120 degrees. So many new challenges to tackle: a French and Arabic speaking country, the logistics of getting equipment through customs, and watching out for the safety of my staff in a region the U.N. designates as "for emergency staff only." Refugees from Darfur, Sudan, have been through some of the worst brutality imaginable. I am eager to hear their stories, understand their culture, and, I hope, help many of them begin anew in the United States.

**April 2009:** I arrive in Abeche, the third largest "city" in Chad, with one paved road a.k.a. the airport runway, mostly servicing U.N. and NGO passengers, refugees who need emergency medical treatment, and army fighter planes to patrol the border area for security. Abeche is about 100 miles west of Chad's border with Darfur, Sudan. The closest of the 12 refugee camps in Chad that host more than 260,000 Darfuri refugees is a four-hour drive away; the farthest, 12 hours.



*Kendra Rinas with Darfuri children: "April 2009, during my first mission to Abeche, the children initially were scared of my white skin, and would not come near me. After a few days of working with them and showing that I cared, they eventually became fascinated with me, and wanted to touch me at any chance they got, trying to rub my skin off and explore the texture of my hair." CWS photo.*

After many too-late nights planning convoy movements and interview schedules, I wait in the Transit Center to see the first refugees arrive for their interviews. Tired from the long journey in what was for many their first time in a car, the women step out wrapped in layers of bright fabric – red, yellow, blue, pink – the cloth

protecting their tall thin bodies from the heat and their faces from the blowing sand. The men wear long white single piece dresses and sandals. The children are miniature images of their parents.

Two of the first Darfuris I interview are Djouma Moussa and his wife Halima. What happened haunts them each night. In 2003, men on horseback yielding machetes, guns and whips rode into town and set homes on fire. As people fled their burning homes, the Janjaweed fired guns and raped some women. Halima and three of her children were shot, leaving now 18-year-old Mohammed paralyzed and wheelchair-bound; Saadyia (17) shot in the hip and with a severe limp, and Awatif (12) shot in the ankle.

Neighbors helped the family get to Eastern Chad, where they spent weeks in the hospital before settling into the refugee camp. In late 2008 they were selected by the UNHCR to be considered for the U.S. Resettlement Program – just the start of a long process.

**March 2010:** I move to Chad. I hope the excitement, challenge and opportunity to build up resettlement for the Darfuris will outweigh the loneliness, isolation and security risk of living in Chad. For now, the chance to be near the beautiful Darfuri is certainly worth it. I try to make regular trips to the Abeche Transit Center. Djouma and Halima are there, waiting for their 17-year-old daughter to give birth before they can travel. Each time I go I make a point of sitting with my Darfuri

friends. I enter the compound. "Candra!" the children shout and they run to hug me. Today the children are fascinated to see the photos on my laptop computer of Sudanese living in America.

**May 2010:** Saadyia gives birth to a beautiful, healthy girl. Now there are nine children for me to play with and learn from! Today I bring paper and pens on my visit. I give each child a pen, and write their names on a piece of paper. I show them how to hold the pen, and they copy their names.

All, from the three-year-old to the 17-year-old new mother, joyfully practice. "Candra!" they shout as they thrust in my lap their pen and paper with their name carefully written on it. "Salim!" Salim's name is written well for a nine-year-old boy who has never attended school. After our impromptu writing lesson, Halima calls me over. She is peeling the largest cucumbers I have ever seen in my

life, looking more like watermelons than cucumbers. She chops them into a large bowl, then grinds hot pepper and salt in a large mortar and pestle to pour over the chopped cucumbers. I am invited to sit under the shade of the mango tree on their mat, eating the delicious sweet and spicy dish with the other women of the family. We laugh as I attempt to explain how much smaller the cucumbers will be in America.

**November 2010:** I travel to the United States for the holidays with my family. I am not sure if when I return to Chad my Darfuri friends will have left, or whether I will ever see them again.

**January 2011:** They are booked to travel! Not only that, I am still in the United States and able to meet them at JFK Airport. I anxiously watch the arrivals board. Then coming toward me, a group of 11 beautifully dressed Darfuri. I start crying and hugging them –

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*Halima and a friend Mariam prepare cucumbers for an afternoon meal in the Abeche, Chad Transit Center. Photo by Kendra Rinas.*





*Djouma and Halima (left); several of the couple's children and grandchildren upon arrival to the U.S. Photos by Kendra Rinas.*

they have finally made it! After hours of immigration procedures, we finally make our way to the connecting flight to Syracuse, N.Y. The babies get passed around to keep them occupied. Eight-year-old Said takes three identical U.S. Airways magazines and turns through each page. Pointing to every white girl, he smiles at me and says "Candra!" He points to the black men. "Me!"

We land, exit and find staff of InterFaith Works of Central New York, the joint CWS-Episcopal Migration Ministries agency assigned to help the family, an EMM case, adjust to life in America. They present all 11 family members with warm winter coats, hats, gloves.

It seems like a convoy of cars is needed to get all of us to the house. Everyone presses their faces to the windows, "America! Big!" We enter the house. Several volunteers from InterFaith Works and from Eastern Hills Bible

Church (Manlius, N.Y.), the family's congregational cosponsor, welcome us. The children are shown their rooms. Each child has his or her own bed, and on each bed is a box of school supplies and toys. The women in the family are eager to learn how to use the stove, as they no longer will need to fetch fire wood or cook on coals. More volunteers from the local church arrive with half a dozen bags of groceries, taking into consideration what foods a Darfuri might like: bread, milk, apples, rice, beef.

I return the following morning with InterFaith Works caseworkers. Several family members have their winter coats on, their bodies still in shock from the cold, snowy Syracuse weather. We discuss the basics: Children should not be left alone as in Darfur and Chad, where the community cares for everyone's children. Eat three times a day. Washing is important. How to call 911. Attend English classes. We learn the

family arrived with just one or two changes of clothes for each person, along with prayer beads and traditional cloth. Three girls feel awkward wearing shoes, but quickly realize it is too cold for sandals.

Fatna, 14 and Awatif, 12, already start asking if they can go to school. Despite all the fears Darfuri have expressed to me about moving to America, most of the fears subside when they hear how education in America is free for all children, even girls.

Later that day it is time for me to leave my friends and head back to Chad. I am touched at seeing this family welcomed by so many people in America. I am sad to leave them after working with them for 21 months, but feel blessed that I have gotten to follow their journey this far, and know that as they continue their journey, many others will touch their lives, but most of all, they will continue to touch the lives of everyone they meet.

# “New Beginnings” for refugee youth in Louisville

By Adrienne Eisenmenger

On a snowy Saturday afternoon in December, excitement and music filled the air at a neighborhood community center in Louisville, Kentucky. Twenty-three refugee youth from across the city gathered, with their tutor/mentors, to create their own drums, explore the relationship between rhythm and beat, and make music together as one around an international drumming circle.

All of the youth are student participants in the Kentucky Refugee Ministries (KRM) New Beginnings Tutoring/Mentoring Program. The program serves newly arrived refugee students, ages five to eighteen, who are facing the many challenges of starting school in a new country and adjusting to a new life and culture.

Many have arrived in the United States with gaps in their education or no previous formal schooling. Parents often feel disconnected from their child’s education because of a lack of English skills



*Adrienne Eisenmenger and Eh Tha Blay Lway at the Kentucky Refugee Ministries New Beginnings Drumming Workshop. Kentucky Refugee Ministries photo.*

or knowledge of the school system. Language barriers, cultural differences and miscommunication can often frustrate teachers, students and their families.

Through the New Beginnings program, at-risk students are

identified by teachers, parents, and KRM staff, and trained volunteer tutor/mentors are matched with students. Tutor/mentors meet with students and their families once a week in the family’s home throughout the academic year to assist with language learning, offer homework

## New “Print and Go” Refugee Resettlement Information Packet

The Web pages at [www.churchworldservice.org/refugees](http://www.churchworldservice.org/refugees) are chockful of useful resources for organizations and individuals active in helping refugees resettle to the United States and/or wanting to learn more about refugees and resettlement. They are useful for new staff, board members and volunteers; for information tables and packets for presentations to church and community groups including potential and new cosponsors; for potential employers, and more.

Now key pieces have been compiled into a single “information kit” – so it’s easier than ever for you to “print it and go!” There are two versions – one for churches (“Church Packet 2011”) and one for others in the community (“Community Packet 2011”). Pick the one you want, print it and go!

help, support cultural adjustment to life in the United States and a new school, and encourage and empower parents to be more involved in their student's education.

KRM Youth Services workers connect parents and tutor/mentors with each student's teachers so that increased communication between home and school can be forged. These volunteers build strong relationships with the families, and everyone looks forward to their sessions together each week.

Field trips, such as the drumming workshop, are another important part of the New Beginnings program, giving students and their tutor/mentors a chance to build relationships with each other and other participants in the program while also discovering more about themselves, their community, and the world around them.

Field trips are offered at no charge to students and their families. During the December workshop, tutor/mentors assisted students in creating drums and

then students used their new creations in a drumming circle led by a local music therapist who challenged them to find themselves in the music.

Other recent field trips include a community-wide hike at a local forest in Louisville. Students investigated the natural world with their tutor/mentors through nature walks and animal encounters, and even discovered more about local government through a personal meeting with the city mayor, learning firsthand about his leadership role in the city.

Through these activities and consistent, one-on-one time with volunteers, students receive greater emotional and educational support, and they, along with their families are welcomed and encouraged to become more engaged in their new community.

***Adrienne Eisenmenger is Youth Services Coordinator, Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Louisville.***

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*Looking for signs of life. Refugee students and their tutors on a pond life search. Photo by Linda Golden for Kentucky Refugee Ministries.*



# Save the date! Special event July 21 in New York City

From the day it was founded in 1946, Church World Service has worked continuously to find durable solutions for refugees and relieve hunger worldwide.

CWS brought together a chaotic proliferation of humanitarian agencies for coordinated relief and reconstruction following World War II. In fact, in 1946, CWS provided 80 percent of all relief goods shipped from U.S. voluntary agencies to Europe and Asia.

Church World Service also was instrumental in developing the use of voluntary agencies for resettlement of refugees. Before the end of 1946, CWS had resettled 1,488 refugees from war-ravaged Europe to communities across the United States.

Fast forward to 2011. You'll find a CWS that continues to mobilize resources for a now global program of support for refugee assistance, hunger relief and emergency response.

The evening of July 21 at the Museum of the City of New York, CWS will celebrate its achievements over the past 65 years, especially in the area of refugee protection. It's not an exaggeration to say that countless millions of lives have been saved because of the work of CWS. These include the nearly 500,000



*Since 1946, Church World Service has resettled nearly 500,000 refugees from around the world to the United States. These World War II refugee children were among the first. CWS historical photo.*

refugees from around the world whom CWS has helped resettle to the United States since 1946.

The July event will be held in conjunction with the CWS Immigration and Refugee Program 2011 National Conference (July 19-21), and will also mark milestone anniversaries of two international legal instruments that undergird the program's work:

- \* The 60th anniversary of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- \* The 50th anniversary of the U.N. Convention on Reduction of Statelessness.

The event also will celebrate the 150th birthday of Fridtjof Wedel-Jarlsberg Nansen, who in 1922 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work as the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees on behalf of the displaced survivors of World War I and related conflicts.

Want more information/an invitation to the July 21, 2011, CWS anniversary event? Write the CWS Immigration and Refugee Program, Attn. 2011 Event Team, Suite 700, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, or send an email to [irp@churchworldservice.org](mailto:irp@churchworldservice.org). Please include your postal address.

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE PROGRAM [www.churchworldservice.org/refugees](http://www.churchworldservice.org/refugees)

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