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Lori Wright
UNH Media Relations

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UNH Celebrates Immigrant And Refugee Support Day May 1

Contact: Lori Wright
603-862-0574
UNH Media Relations
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DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire will celebrate Immigrant and Refugee Support Day Tuesday, May 1, 2007, to recognize student work in diverse communities.

One student who will be recognized is Justin Carr, a junior from Rollinsford who participated in the Refugee Resettlement project. He worked with refugees from Africa to teach them English and help them understand governmental procedures and paperwork. This summer he will coordinate volunteers and tutoring services for immigrants and refugees.

“Many of the refugees are very fluent in their tribal language(s), usually Swahili and Spanish or French. Learning English can be difficult while trying to create a new life in America, finding employment, and raising your family. So our goal was to teach them enough basic English to get by in a world driven by communication,” Carr said.

Carr has been struck by the courage of the families to leave Africa to escape the terror of corrupt governments. His work has exposed him to the difficult situations refugees find themselves in once they reach America; their challenges include learning English and not understanding governmental processes to apply for benefits and legal status. Even seemingly simple processes such as paying bills, scheduling medical appointments and applying for health benefits are challenging.

“The most rewarding part of this experience is meeting the families, developing relationships, and watching their progress continue to grow. It is such a relief for them when we are able to really answer their questions, finish paperwork and drop it off in the mailbox. It is awesome to help such people who are so kind, just trying to assimilate to life in America,” he said.

The day begins with a seminar with Dereje Feyissa Dori titled “Seeking Refuge and Finding Identity: Southern Sudanese in Ethiopia and Minnesota.” It starts at 12:30 p.m. in the Center for the Humanities Seminar Room on campus. At 4 p.m., the Immigrant Rights Task Force will hold a rally at Manchester City Hall in support of keeping families together by speaking out against raids and deportation.

At 7:30 p.m., UNH will recognize students who have participated in a number of immigrant and refugee projects, including work with Rock Rest Preservation Project, Portsmouth African Burial Ground Research Project and NH Immigration and Refugee Research Project. It will be held in the Memorial Union Building Theater I on campus.

Hubert Simwerayi and Helene Batyo will speak at the evening event. The topic of their talk is “A Personal Narrative: Settling Here and Helping Those Left Behind.” UNH students were instrumental in reuniting Simwerayi and his wife Helene with their seven children in 2004. For more information on that effort, visit http://www.unh.edu/news/news_releases/2004/september/lw_20040902reunite.html.
The event is sponsored by the UNH African-American Studies Minor; Anthropology Department; Center for the Humanities; Race, Culture, and Power Minor; and UNH-Black Heritage Partnerships.