



## Annual Report 2010

*Each year the International Institute of Connecticut assists thousands of people across Connecticut to integrate into American life, rebuild their lives and achieve sustainable self-reliance.*

## Our Purpose

The purpose of the International Institute of Connecticut (IIconn) is to help new Americans become self-sufficient, to ensure that low income persons in Connecticut have access to affordable immigration services and to strengthen families by helping them to obtain US citizenship and reunite with family members.



All photos Darrell Koh unless otherwise noted;  
Photo p. 3 supplied by A. Zurowski.



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## Our Work

IIconn is a non-profit, non-sectarian social service agency dedicated to helping thousands of foreign-born persons and immigrants each year in Connecticut to achieve self-sufficiency. IIconn's broad services range from helping new arrivals meet their most basic needs including, adequate food and shelter, to English classes, refugee resettlement, job training, job placement, employment counseling, translation and interpretation, services to victims of human trafficking, and immigration legal assistance. As a cornerstone of our work, the International Institute of Connecticut is dedicated to promoting full civic participation in our culturally diverse communities and to ensuring fair and humane public policy for all.

## 2010 Highlights

In 2010, IIconn's experienced, multicultural staff of approximately 25 full and part-time employees offered our clients a broad range of programs, including: Refugee Resettlement & Employment Program; Project Rescue, Anti-Human Trafficking Program; Citizenship Preparation Classes & ESL; Interpreter/Translator Services; Immigration & Naturalization Services.

### **In 2010:**

- IIconn assisted 346 people to become naturalized US citizens;
- The Refugee Resettlement and Employment Program provided job services to 56 clients;
- Project Rescue formed 17 new community-based program partnerships;
- IIconn provided ESL training for more than 90 people in reading, writing and speaking;
- IIconn's Hartford office offered approximately 100 legal consultations through the Court Representation Project;
- IIconn conducted US citizenship classes for 72 individuals;
- Staff in our Stamford office assisted over 1300 clients from 20 countries with low- or no-cost immigration services for green cards, US citizenship and family reunification.

## Leadership Message from the President and Executive Director



*2010 was a year of transition for the International Institute of Connecticut and for the nation at large. 2010 ushered in a continuation of the crippling national recession, which all too often hit the most vulnerable in society the hardest, including immigrants, refugees and minorities. Across the nation, there were troubling signs of an increase in intolerance and xenophobia, while refugee program funding remained under constant threat. But, there were also signs of hope. Financial indicators pointed to an economic upswing in the latter part of the year. IConn, for its part, continued to demonstrate its strength in the face of challenges. We are pleased to report that, in 2010, IConn fulfilled its mission, making a difference in the lives of thousands of people.*

*IConn continued to be an exceptional provider of services across Connecticut in 2010. Our dedicated staff worked tirelessly to ensure a safe and supportive transition to life in the US for the newest Americans through the provision of essential services, access to healthcare, education, job training, and immigration and legal support, and advocacy for fair and humane public policy. Our service capacity grew through the expansion and restructuring of our refugee resettlement program in the Valley, and the opening of an office in Derby. IConn's anti-human trafficking program, Project Rescue, served a number of victims of human trafficking and provided significant support to the victims of sexual exploitation who testified in the Douglas Perlitz Case.*

*Internally, 2010 saw changes at the helm of IConn's leadership, culminating in the appointment in December 2010 of Angela Rossi Zurowski, a longtime staff member, as Executive Director. We are enthusiastic about the great opportunities for IConn in the coming year, and*

*we are energized to take the organization forward. We will continue to be guided by our mission, strategic planning and careful resource management. We will continue to provide the highest level of support to our clients while working to strengthen our local communities.*

*As always, our staff, dedicated board members, interns and volunteers are our greatest strength. And we could not succeed in our efforts without the crucial, ongoing support of our donors, local communities, partner agencies, and advocates. We are grateful for your continued support.*

*Thank you.*



*Robert Maresca, Esq., President*

*Angela Rossi Zurowski, Executive Director*



## The Refugee Program

Refugee Program saw great expansion in 2010 with an increased staff that has gone through extensive training. Our strong partnership with the University of Bridgeport provided us with 2 interns who went on to become staff members at IConn.

In 2010, IConn opened a fourth office, in Derby. Here, IConn restructured and expanded its Refugee Program for the Valley. The program, overall, settled almost 50 new refugee families from Eritrea, Bhutan and Iraq and served an additional 100 refugees, asylees and trafficking victims with supportive services, including case management and employment assistance.

IConn's annual fundraiser held in October was a huge success. The cocktail buffet at Fairfield Café was a fun event and we also managed to surpass our fundraising goals! Thanks to all who donated their time, energy and money to make this a highlight of the year. And a special "thank you" to keynote speaker Assistant US Attorney Krishna Patel, whose story of coming to the US from Kenya enthralled the crowd. In speaking of her path to public service, she noted the strong working relationship between the US Attorney's Office and Project Rescue, IConn's anti-human trafficking program.

Our annual Mass Naturalization Ceremony, held at Fairfield University in partnership with USCIS, was successful and emotionally-uplifting, as always. 190 New Americans from 58 nations took their oath that day!

## Employment Program

IConn's Refugee Resettlement and Employment Program offers employment services to assist refugee clients with orientation to the American labor market and workplace, job readiness training, application assistance, and interview skills.

The Employment Program strives to directly benefit both our refugee clients and our employer partners in the community. Our services to employer partners include: screening, matching and referring qualified applicants; providing interpretation and translation services; furnishing on-site, job-specific English language training; and offering mediation and retention support.

*"They are good, hardworking people. Good people. The best... day by day they are learning and doing well."*

- Ram Shresstha, SUBWAY sandwich shop owner and employer of two IConn Employment Program clients.

## Project Rescue, Anti-Human Trafficking Program

Project Rescue offers comprehensive assistance to victims of human trafficking in Connecticut and works to raise awareness about the issue of trafficking in persons. Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery, involving victims who are forced, defrauded or coerced into labor or sexual exploitation. It is estimated that 14,000 to 17,000 victims are trafficked into the US each year. While the extent of the problem in Connecticut is, by its secretive and unlawful nature, difficult to know, it is certain that there are victims of trafficking present in the state. Project Rescue is funded under a grant from the Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, which partners IConn with local and federal law enforcement.

In 2010, staff screened 16 potential victims and identified 9. Program staff held 12 trainings and a further 8 community outreach events. In 2010, Project Rescue played an active role on the federal Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons Investigative Task Force, and as co-chair of the Connecticut Coalition Against Trafficking. Project Rescue staff successfully collaborated with law enforcement throughout 2010 to orchestrate support services for 6 young male victims of sexual exploitation who were street children in Haiti, culminating in the December sentencing hearing of their abuser in US District Court in New Haven where they gave victim impact statements.

## Advancing Fair and Humane Public Policy



In 2010, IConn continued its essential work to ensure that some of the most vulnerable members of our society - immigrants and refugees - are adequately protected by legislation that is fair and humane. IConn operates within the framework of the Connecticut Immigrant and Refugee Coalition (CIRC). As a member of CIRC, IConn advocates for the passage of Connecticut State Bill 6390 to extend in-state tuition rates to undocumented immigrants. At the federal level, IConn has been a long-time supporter of the DREAM Act and has also advocated through US Senators and Congressmen against some of the proposed cuts to refugee funding, which would cripple programs in Connecticut and nationwide.

### Spotlights on IConn

#### Nettie Parker, Esq., *Coordinator, Court Representation Project, Hartford*

Nettie Parker joined IConn in 2005 as a volunteer assisting with immigration and asylum applications in Hartford. Nettie's outstanding legal skills and equally-matched dedication to and empathy for her clients made her an asset to the immigration team. She was soon asked to become *Coordinator* for the Court Representation Project in Hartford, a position she still holds. Nettie hails from New Orleans, Louisiana, where she trained as a lawyer. She started out in general practice before taking time to raise a family and explore her passion for writing and poetry. She has since found a calling in immigration law. In Nettie's words, "*asylum is my first love.*" Exceptionally energetic and dedicated to her work, Nettie gravitates toward some of the neediest and riskiest cases by placing them with no fee or *pro bono* attorneys. Each year, she holds over 200 phone consultations and personally accepts approximately 50 cases- often ones that she has been told are unwinnable. Nettie's philosophy is, "*if there's a chance, we have to try if we can.*" And Nettie wins.



Nettie Parker, with Sudanese author, Francis Buk and Dr. Abdel Gabar Adam, founder of the Darrfur Human Rights Organization. Photo supplied by Nettie Parker. Nettie is actively involved in efforts to promote reconciliation in Sudan.

#### Muneam, *Client, Refugee Resettlement and Employment Program*

Muneam, along with his wife and children, ages 15, 13 and 9, came to the US from Iraq in February 2010 under a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) for Iraqi and Afghan translators. Muneam served in the Iraqi Army for 11 years as an officer and a lieutenant, first training at the Iraqi Military Engineer College then earning a helicopter co-pilot's license. In 2003, Muneam began assisting the US forces with translation services.

Muneam is self-taught in English through his fondness for action movies. As he says, "*I honestly believe that America came to help my country.*" Finding his family in danger because of his work with the US forces, Muneam and his family initially fled to Jordan before eventually coming to the US. When he arrived in the US with his family, he expected that they might find themselves sleeping in a tent some where in the early days, forced to find their own way in a new land. Instead, Muneam found IConn staff supporting his family's first steps. As he says of IConn, "*from the beginning until now, I have someone who cares about me.*"



Photo by Whitney Ball



## Financial Statement — 2010

### Statement of Assets

#### Current Assets

Cash	22, 497
Grants Receivable	39,266
Prepaid Expenses/Other Assets	—
Investments	8,867
Deposits	1,600
Accounts Receivable, net	16,943
Property and Equipment	193,708

**Total Assets** **\$282, 881**

### Liabilities and Net Assets

Accounts Payable/ Accrued Expenses	28,173
Refundable Advances	—
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>28, 173</b>

#### Net Assets

Unrestricted	252,324
Temporarily Unrestricted	2,384

**Net Assets** **254,708**  
**Total Net Assets** **\$282,881**

\*results of 2010 audited financial statement

## IICONN Staff & Directors

### Board of Directors — Officers

**Robert Maresca, Esq., *President***  
Franck Adjisegbe, *Vice President*

Jorge Atencio, *Treasurer*  
Richard Ryscavage, SJ, *Secretary*

### Board of Directors — Members

Viviana Atienzar  
Carol Dreznick, Esq.  
Barbara F. Green, Esq.  
Sharon Kish  
John J. Lacava, Esq.  
Jane Norgren

Peter Penczer, Esq.  
Elizabeth Seeley, Esq.  
Poonam Sharma  
Joseph K. Venishnick, Esq.  
Heidi Werth  
Laura M. Wilbur  
George Wolf, Esq.

### Staff Members

#### **Angela Rossi Zurowski, *Executive Director***

Marisabel Asef, *Immigration Specialist*  
Sue Bechalany, *Mail Clerk*  
Marina Castillo, *Immigration Specialist*  
Christie Chavarria, *Immigration Specialist*  
Leonela A. Cruz, *Case Manager, Project Rescue*  
Claude Delva, *Immigration Specialist*  
Alicia DeSouza-Rocha, *Immigration Attorney*  
Carmen Goiricelaya, *Immigration Specialist*  
Raquel Goncalvez, *Immigration Specialist*  
Marketa Gregorovicova, *Intern*  
Adriana Jimenez, *Receptionist*  
Harrison Kessler, *Employment Specialist*  
Jorge Laque, *Immigration Specialist*

George Leo, *Accountant*  
Angelita Manning, *Director of Client Services*  
Ramona Ollivierre, *Child Care*  
Nettie Parker, *Court Representation Coordinator*  
Bernice Perez, *Receptionist*  
Danelle Ragoonanan-Storph, *Director, Project Rescue, Anti-Human Trafficking Program*  
Pranaya Rana, *Refugee Case Manager*  
Jane F. Rodas, *Consultant*  
Donna Santos, *Immigration Specialist*  
Theresa Santos, *Receptionist*  
Jayna Stonick, *Administrative Assistant/Translation & Interpretation Coordinator*

## Supporters



### Major Foundation and Corporate Support

US Committee for Refugees & Immigrants  
Carstensen Foundation  
Fairfield County Community Foundation GE

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving  
People's United Bank  
Pitney Bowes

### Partner Organizations

Adecco  
Ansonia Board of Education  
Ansonia Community Action  
Ansonia Middle School Human Relations Club  
Birmingham Umbrella Group  
Bridgeport Regional Adult Education  
Community Closet  
Connecticut Bike Project  
CT Works  
Diaper Bank  
Fairfield Cafe  
Fairfield University  
First Congregational Church of Ansonia  
Hindu Cultural Center  
Kennedy Transportation Center  
LaQuinta Inn & Suites, Stamford

Literacy Volunteers of America  
My Sister's Closet  
Post University  
Sacred Heart University  
Salvation Army  
Southern CT Church of Christ  
Southern CT University  
Southwest Community Clinic  
Subway  
TEAM  
Toys for Tots  
University of Bridgeport  
University of Connecticut  
Valley Council of Health and Human Services  
Valley Regional Adult Education  
Valley United Way

### 2010 Volunteers/Interns

Sarah Afifi  
Gabriella Arens  
Sachet Baral  
Silvinci Bejleri  
Pema Bhutia  
Nick Biagi  
Sonia Castelan-Ramires  
Rosanna Corvino  
John Coon  
Kristen Cothran  
Leonela Cruz  
Cherry Cwalina  
Kris Cwalina  
Clarvdia Dunn  
James Dunn  
Katelyn Feige

Jasmine Mari Fernandez  
Robert Goelz  
Dr. Mona Gohara  
Marketa Gregorovicova  
Sarala Gurung  
Brianna Healy  
Jimna Hilaire  
Holly Jean Kenneday  
Daniel Jones  
Justin Jossick  
Kimberly Kerr  
Cori Lantz  
Lionel Lerebours  
Stephanie Luciano  
Kofi Manning  
Mariella McLachlin  
Sanya Moshini

Georgia Nackley  
Beatriz Narbon  
Shane O'Brien  
Brendon O'brien  
Sam Olyaei  
Joseph Polletta  
Sadiksha Rana  
Adriana Reyes  
Claire Rothschild  
Mitch Samedy  
Mounouscheka Samedy  
John Sember  
Lauren Spatz  
Tara Tropeano  
Riocco Zaino

***\*If Conn is truly humbled by the help that we receive from so many generous individuals and organizations and we sincerely apologize if we have inadvertently left out any individual or organization.***

## Contact Us



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