



## What is ASHN?

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North Baltimore Mennonite Church began housing refugees at the Reservoir Hill House of Peace (RHHP) in 2003. As RHHP hosted refugees from countries such as Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Azerbaijan, they began identifying an acute need for temporary housing for asylum seekers. Because asylum seekers have difficulty obtaining permits to work while their case is being decided, they often face either homelessness or detention in government-run facilities.

In recognition of this need, NBMC started the Asylum Seekers Housing Network (ASHN) in March 2004. The only organization of its kind in the Baltimore / Washington, DC region, ASHN provides asylum seekers local housing; stipend for rent, food, and transportation; links to local resources; orientation to Baltimore city and US culture; connection to a social network; and advocacy.

ASHN receives most of its referrals through nonprofits who work with asylum seekers during their application process. Each candidate is then screened for issues of security and suitability. The RHHP has rooms reserved for asylum seekers. In addition, ASHN has identified individuals willing to host asylum seekers in their home.

### Our Mission

To provide shelter and a welcoming community for the most vulnerable immigrants such as asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking, sharing in Christ's love, advocating for justice and acting as cultural guides.

## Program Coordinator—Job Opportunity

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We are seeking an individual to provide administrative support and coordination of casework for the ASHN program. Please help us spread the word.

### Responsibilities:

- Provide or coordinate support services for clients (asylum seekers)
- Coordinate housing placements
- Act as a liaison with various immigration service agencies who refer clients to ASHN
- Maintain relationships with immigration agencies in Baltimore
- Provide support to persons hosting clients

### Qualifications:

- BS in social work or helping profession or related experience
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Experience managing programs

### Terms:

This is a part-time position (15 hours per week). The hourly wage is \$12-15.

This position is not eligible for benefits and will be re-evaluated at the end of the fiscal year.

# Stories from Asylum Seekers: Maria

*Editors Note: Names have been changed in order to protect the privacy of the asylum seekers.*

Maria describes her life as a “long story.” Two weeks after Maria got married, her husband, Carlos, hit her for the first time. Throughout their marriage, Carlos would beat Maria and their children on a frequent basis. Carlos' beatings were severe enough that on one occasion, Maria said she was “left more dead than alive.”

Maria tried unsuccessfully to involve Guatemalan law officials in hopes that they would intervene. Guatemala has some of the most severe levels of gender-based violence in Latin America. Guatemalan women are frequently the victims of domestic violence and murder. When government and law officials fail to protect these women, they are left with no other option than to seek refuge in neighboring countries.

When law officials failed to protect her from Carlos, Maria left her children in care of her relatives, and fled to the United States. Maria described the most harrowing part of her journey as her trek through the Arizona desert. Terrified of attacks by snakes, coyotes, and other people, Maria crouched under a bush every night, pulled her knees against

her chest, and rocked back and forth in an effort to comfort herself. Maria made it through the Arizona desert, and progressed to Delaware, undocumented.

Once in Delaware, Maria's cousins were unable to house her. Consequently, Maria went to a nearby homeless shelter where she stayed for almost eight months. While at the shelter, Maria learned about a Washington, DC group called the Tahirih Justice Center (TJC), an organization that provides aid to women escaping gender-based persecution. TJC assigned Maria a pro bono lawyer, a case manager, and referred her to ASHN for housing.

ASHN's services came at a critical time for Maria as the shelter could no longer house her—she had already stayed months over their limit. The TJC pro-bono attorney generously used her own money to pay for a hotel room while ASHN found a suitable host in Baltimore. ASHN not only found Maria a place to stay, but also connected her to several area Spanish-speaking Catholic churches (where she received coun-

seling) and the Hispanic Apostolate/Immigration Legal Services where she took English language classes.

Maria's asylum status was approved almost a year ago. Unfortunately,

Maria's papers were sent to the wrong office, delaying her ability to legally find work. Recently, a volunteer from ASHN accompanied Maria to the local

immigration office to advocate as well as to translate. To their surprise, the immigration official went out of her way to provide Maria with the papers she needed that very day.

Maria now works as a housekeeper in a Baltimore hotel with daytime hours and benefits. Her salary allows her to finally send financial assistance to her children. However, her children are still in danger from Carlos. Her husband recently attacked their son and kicked his teeth in. Maria hopes to bring her children to the U.S. and due to the circumstances, she may have a good chance. Maria has “graduated” from ASHN and now lives with friends, leaving room for the next asylum seeker to come through the program.

**Fact from Amnesty International:**  
*In 2006, 560 women were murdered in Guatemala. Of those murders, only 6 were prosecuted.*

## Did You Know?

Asylum applications are subject to stringent review procedures by adjudicators in the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice and to rigorous background and security checks. And in the end, most applications are denied.

To win legal protection from being deported, asylum seekers must:

1. *Be outside their country of nationality.*
2. *Be afraid of persecution.*
3. *Be harmed or fear harm by the government or others.*
4. *Be affected by at least one of several defined conditions: political opinion, race, religion, nationality, and social group.*

5. *Not be a dangerous person.*

Excerpted from a 2006 Report by TRAC (of Syracuse University) “Asylum Law, Asylum Seekers and Refugees: A Primer” <http://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/161/>

# International Potluck at Reservoir Hill House of Peace

In April 2007, the Reservoir Hill House of Peace held another International Potluck. The potlucks bring together members from Reservoir Hill House of Peace, North Baltimore Mennonite Church, ASHN, and the community to share food and build relationships. Close to fifty people gathered around tables filled with hummus and pita, Vietnamese fried rice, baklava, fried plantains, and enchiladas while sharing stories of their international experiences. Someone shared a story on their brief trip to Latin America. Another spoke of her childhood growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A third person spoke about the war that continues to tear apart Sudan.

After dinner, everyone gathered in the living room for informal time of sharing stories, rituals, songs and dances from the many cultures represented. There were fables from the Congo about how the turtle got cracks in its shell, a Zambian friend demonstrated a traditional wedding dance, a Ghanaian woman described how she worshiped God in the middle of her suffering, and everyone learned a Guatemalan children's song. One artist shared her poetry that

reflects her emotions on coming from Afghanistan to America.

The International Potluck continues a tradition that brings people together and provides space to share about their diverse experiences. The interaction at the potluck gives the community a chance to know and appreciate each other better. Please join us for the next one on January 19<sup>th</sup> at Reservoir Hill House of Peace, 2401 Eutaw Place, Baltimore, MD.



Reservoir Hill House of Peace

## The Challenges to Winning Asylum

Many asylum seekers face substantial difficulties in presenting evidence that proves they meet the five requirements for asylum. In the rush to leave their homeland, and because they are so far from their homes, they often lack documents or witnesses to prove who they are, why they left home, or what dangers await them upon return. Usually, their own oral testimony is the only "proof" they have. It thus is up to the decision-maker to determine whether this testimony is sufficiently detailed and believable to justify

granting asylum.

The consequences of an incorrect decision can be severe — wrongfully sending someone back home to possible torture or death. And, while asylum seekers can have lawyers to prepare their cases and appear with them in court, legal representation is not provided by the government as it usually is in criminal matters. Most asylum seekers lack the money to hire

lawyers and there are not enough non-profit organizations to meet the demand for free legal services. A

*"The consequences of an incorrect decision can be severe — wrongfully sending someone back home to possible torture or death. "*

Syracuse University report examining asylum decisions in recent years found that the assistance of an attorney substantially increases the chances that

asylum will be granted.

Excerpted from a 2006 Report by TRAC (of Syracuse University) "Asylum Law, Asylum Seekers and Refugees: A Primer" <http://>

## How Can You be Involved?

ASHN is always looking for volunteers! Opportunities include:

- Hosting—You can host an asylum seeker in your home or assist one of our current hosts by occasionally providing childcare, transportation, or grocery store-post-office orientation.
- Friendship Club—You can "walk

beside" asylum seekers as they navigate their way through U.S. culture, and in the process, learn about another culture. Invite someone over for dinner, take them to a cultural event, etc.

- Financial Contributions—You can contribute to our work. Financial contributions are always welcome. The ASHN program

depends on the generosity of foundations and individual giving. And your donation is tax deductible.

- Donations—ASHN is looking for a computer, a printer, a fax machine, and comfortable chairs. If interested in donating, please email [ASHN.office@gmail.com](mailto:ASHN.office@gmail.com).

**ASYLUM SEEKERS  
HOUSING NETWORK**

Reservoir Hill House of Peace  
2401 Eutaw Place  
Baltimore, MD 21217

Phone: 443-388-0183

E-mail: ASHN.office@gmail.com

We ask you to consider contributing to the valuable work being done with this most vulnerable population of immigrants. If you would like to make a donation, please write your check out to "NBMC Refugee Fund" and send it in the enclosed envelope to ASHN. Your gift is tax deductible. Thank you.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

**Amount Donated:**

**\$25** \_\_\_\_\_ **\$50** \_\_\_\_\_ **\$100** \_\_\_\_\_ **\$250** \_\_\_\_\_

**Specify Amount \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Website coming  
January 2008!**

Asylum Seekers Housing Network  
c/o Reservoir Hill House of Peace  
2401 Eutaw Place  
Baltimore, Maryland 21217