

Refugee Transitions' "World of Difference Benefit Luncheon"
The City Club – San Francisco
November 3, 2010
Student Speech: Til Gurung

Good afternoon, my name is Til Gurung. I am a Community Navigator Intern with Refugee Transitions, where I help my community access important services and make a successful transition into their lives in the United States. For example, I help explain important documents and laws to my community members, help interpret at parent-teacher conferences and medical appointments, teach them about home safety, where to find our cultural foods in Oakland, how to use the bus, and how to drive.

I am a refugee from Bhutan. My community is Bhutanese, but we have a Nepali heritage and culture. Though we lived peacefully in Bhutan for many years, as our community grew, the Bhutanese government began to feel threatened. Thus, they initiated an ethnic cleansing program to force us from our homes. We suffered in our country Bhutan because we did not speak the language or practice the religion or culture of the royal family. Many of us were tortured and imprisoned. We had no choice but to flee to Nepal to save our lives. After twenty years in the Nepali refugee camps, we saw that there was no possibility of returning home. So we opted to apply for resettlement to the United States, hoping that we could begin our lives again.

But here in the United States, my community continues to struggle. We arrived in the U.S. when the economy was at its lowest point, so we struggle to find jobs. Many of us do not speak English, and lack of education makes it even more difficult for us to learn the language, here. Just this year, the Adult Education system in Oakland shut down; Refugee Transitions offers classes and tutoring in its place for people who have nowhere else to go. By providing this language training and other support services through the Community Navigators like myself, Refugee Transitions is filling a real need in our community.

As an example of the difference that tutoring makes in a person's life, I can talk about my wife. When we first arrived, my wife was unable to understand any English. Just taking the bus and going to the store was a challenge for her. Refugee Transitions assigned Mari to tutor my wife. After a year of tutoring, these things are no longer a big problem for her. Now she has more confidence and more language skills to help herself and our family.

Thank you Mari, thank you Refugee Transitions, and thank you to all of you who support Refugee Transitions to make these programs possible. Please continue to extend your support so that you can bring happiness to more families like mine.