

Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc.

2010 Annual Report



W·I·S·E

WOMEN'S INITIATIVE FOR SELF EMPOWERMENT

*Empowering Immigrant Women
and Girls Since 1995*



Dear Friends of the Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment, Inc.,

According to the United Nations Women, women bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty. Women are more likely than men to be poor and at risk of hunger because of barriers they face in education, healthcare, employment, and control of assets. Through our programming, the Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment (WISE), Inc. is committed to providing immigrant and refugee women and girls, which tend to have low income, with the ability to empower themselves to succeed in life, in keeping with our mission: *Empowering Immigrant Women and Girls to Succeed*

This past year, the staff at WISE grew to meet the needs of the people we serve. In 2010, 273 immigrants & refugees were served by six employees, 35 volunteers, and 10 Interns. We hired Prisca Okeahialam-Swaray, MSW, LGSW as our new youth program's coordinator. Prisca is a licensed social worker and is working closely with the youth in our programs. We were also fortunate enough to hire two Americorps Promise Fellows, Sarah Gerdes and Rachel Johnson, to give dedicated attention to the coordination of Project Achieve and Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership (GGAL). In addition, we hired Tanaegh Haddad to start support services for the GGAL and Project Achieve girls in college. We also hired a part-time communications manager, Julie Thelen, who has increased WISE's visibility and income from individual donors and corporations.

In the fall of 2010, WISE was awarded a three-year grant from the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement to help foreign trained professionals get their re-certifications and obtain their license to work in their professional field of expertise in Minnesota.

African American Friendship Association for Cooperation and Development, in partnership with WISE, was awarded a grant from the Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Minority Multicultural Health to help eliminate health disparities in the immigrant and refugee communities with the use of the foreign trained healthcare professionals we serve.

This is truly an exciting time for WISE as we work to obtain approval by the Charities Review Council with regard to Accountability Standards. It is our goal to continue to build our capacity to serve and having the Charities Review Council seal of approval will definitely help.

With gratitude and humility, we take great pride and passion in our work and find inspiration from the resiliency, hope, and growth of the people we serve, in collaboration with state and federal organizations as well as local foundations. We express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all of our partners and program participants for making this year a success.

We look forward to 2011 as another year of empowerment!

With warm regards,

Amy Frimpong
Board Chair

Wilhelmina Holder
Executive Director

WISE Youth Programs: Working to Empower Immigrant and Refugee Youth with Higher Education, Career Development, and Academic Support

Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership (GGAL):

GGAL is a college preparation program that works with underserved and underrepresented young women in their junior and senior years of high school. The primary goal is to increase low-income immigrant/refugee girls' readiness to enter college in order for them to achieve economic well-being and independence. Significant disparities exist between first generation immigrant girls of color and other girls in Minnesota in high school graduation rates, extra-curricular participation, and higher education enrollments. GGAL offers a unique way for first generation immigrant girls to learn college options, how to apply for colleges and scholarships, individualized career paths, leadership skills, and receive academic support and English language development. With an annual success rate of 95%, GGAL's participants go on to college! Our 2010 accomplishments include:

Number of Program Participants Recruited: 48 with 24 active participants
Number of Volunteer Mentors: 25
Number of College Visits: 14
Total Number of Workshops: 45
Total Number of Seniors Who Were Accepted into College: 13
Number of Summer Program Participants: 19

During the summer, GGAL offers a summer arts program to the GGAL participants and their families. The program helps with the development of their self identities, self awareness, and English language skills. At the end of the program, WISE hosts its annual Imbizo to showcase the artwork of the participants. The participants have an opportunity to talk with the community about their artwork and the youth enjoyed arts and crafts making at several workshops hosted by 10 volunteer artists. In 2010, WISE had 250+ attendees at the Imbizo!

At the end of 2010, WISE was awarded a grant from the F. R. Bigelow Foundation to implement a GGAL Alumni Program. This program will provide support and mentorship to the GGAL alumni in college. This program is also funded by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Marbrook Foundation, and Metropolitan Regional Arts Council.

Project Achieve:

Higher Ground Academy, (HGA), is an Afro-centric K-12 charter school in St. Paul. In 2006/7, HGA requested WISE to implement a program similar to GGAL. This program, now known as Project Achieve, was initially offered as afterschool required workshops for its junior and senior students. These students are primarily Somali and Oromo first generation refugees/immigrants. 2010 marks the first year that Project Achieve is offered as a graded class during the school day! Our 2010 accomplishments include:

Number of Program Participants (junior/seniors): 26
Number of Volunteer Mentors: 4
Number of College Visits: 13
Total Number of Workshops: 98
Total Number of Seniors Who Were Accepted into College: 10

This program is funded by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education and Higher Ground Academy.

WISE Financial Literacy Program: Working to Financially Empower Immigrants and Refugees with Workshops about the American Banking System

The principal goal of the Financial Literacy Initiative is to improve the economic conditions of immigrant/refugee families by providing them with information and skills needed to achieve economic self-sufficiency and social/civic integration into their new communities. This program provides immigrants and refugees with information about financial literacy, asset building, and consumer protection skills needed to help them make rational decisions towards their self-sufficiency and civic integration into their new communities. The program uses the “Becoming Part of Wealth in America” curriculum which allocates a total of 40 hours of training, financial counseling, referral services, and follow-ups. The program maintains its partnerships with the Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) which support Individual Development Accounts (IDA) by contributing matched funds to eligible working-poor families to enhance their monthly savings to build long-term assets in education, starting a business or buying a home.

In 2010, WISE conducted nine workshops and reached 117 adult participants from various countries and ethnic groups including: Asians, Karen, Africans from Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea Mali, and Oromo. Through a referral to Account Ability Minnesota, 44 participants received free tax assistance and 20 participants expressed interest in the IDA program and were referred to that program. Pre and post tests and impact evaluation survey analysis conducted showed a significant increase in participants’ financial knowledge and their activities and behavior.

This program is funded by McKnight Foundation, Otto Bremer Foundation, and St. Paul Foundation.

Race/Ethnicity	Gender		Geographic Location
	Male	Female	
Oromo	12	7	Minneapolis
West African (Sierra Leone, Gambia, Mali, Liberia, Guinea)	0	15	Northern Suburbs (Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center, St Francis)
Somali	0	17	Saint Paul
Karen	25	34	Saint Paul
Hmong	0	7	Saint Paul
Total	37	80	

WISE Foreign Trained Licensed Professionals Program: Empowering Immigrants and Refugees Who Were Trained and Licensed in Other Countries to Obtain Their Licensure

Since October 2007, WISE, in collaboration with the African and American Friendship Association for Cooperation and Development (AAFACD), Inc., was granted funding of \$168,370 per year for three years from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children & Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), to implement the **Integration of Foreign Trained Health Professionals for Self Sufficiency (IFTHPSS)**. The goal of this program was to educate and empower 80 multi-ethnic refugee nurses and doctors (from Asian, Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin American and the Middle East) to obtain their licensure and integrate into the US healthcare system. In addition to advocacy for system changes in order to remove the barriers in the licensure process, this funding provides participants case management, on-going career exploration, employment development, mentorship, re-training, and scholarships for study courses and exam fees. In October 2010, ORR provided another three year grant of \$200,000 per year to expand the target population to include other professionals such as teachers, lawyers, accountants and engineers. The program name was changed to FTPRR Program and the target population increased to 200 refugee professionals with a goal to recertify and get integrated in MN workforce.

Other funders of this program included local foundations and organization: Women's Foundation of Minnesota, AAFACD, Inc, via the EHDI grant from the MDH, Office of Multicultural & Minority Health (OMMH); Powell Center for Women's Health of the University of Minnesota and the Family Partnership, Inc. Collaborators included, MN Health Literacy Partnership, Vital Aging Network; St. Paul Workforce Center, Center for Cross Cultural Health, Global Language Institute, International Institute of MN, Eastern European Medical Association, West Metro Medical Association, and the University of Minnesota, medical and nursing schools., as well as other local stakeholders.

By the end of 2010, the program had 220 foreign trained health professionals (FTHPs) (80% immigrants and 20% refugees), from 40 countries in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The participants were mainly doctors and nurses, enrolled in the program and in different stages in the licensure process. During the year, 100 of the enrollees were active participants:

- *53 FTHPs participated in advocacy and support groups and received customized train-the-trainer health education training;

- *20 of these completed 80% of the training sessions and were certified as community health agents: and

- *25 participants were refugees who have been in the US for less than five years.

The outcomes of the program included the following:

- *17 passed USMLE steps I and II completed all the three required exams and applied for residency;

- *Seven obtained medical residency;

- *12 passed step I, preparing for step II;

- *24 preparing for Step I;

- *19 processing evaluation or considering alternate pathways;

- *15 FT doctors who have completed all required exams but were not able to get into residency and are in search for alternative health professional pathways;

- *Three doctors passed the NCLEX exams and began search for positions as RNs;

- *One nurse passed the NCLEX nurses licensure exam; and One nurse was studying for the NCLEX exam.

