Ending The Year Strong, 
Preparing For a Better Tomorrow

It is hard to believe that it is already December! While the weather is getting colder and the days are getting shorter, we are as busy as ever here at The Welcome Project. Our LIPS program has seen tremendous growth over the past few months, with almost forty high school students learning interpretation skills and how they can facilitate change in their community through organizing and assisting those who lack their bilingual language skills. Meanwhile, our fall semester is ending on a high note for our ESOL and EFP classes, with over two hundred immigrants participating in our programs.

As the year comes to a close, we want to take a moment to thank all members of our community, from our proud constituents to our generous donors. It is so truly heartwarming to see how our network grow and show the world that Somerville has and will continue to be a place that welcomes all.
Message from the Executive Director, Walter Mena

The power to build a welcomed community today

Welcome to The Welcome Project newsletter. As we approach the holiday season and end-of-year celebrations, we at The Welcome Project are celebrating the presence of our community: The presence of all of those who, during this year 2023, have been part of our community: Students, teachers, volunteers, staff, allies, and supporters.

In our last issue, I shared with you the challenges The Welcome Project faces while building a more inclusive and diverse society and invited you to reflect on how we all can work towards the goal of a community where immigrants feel protected, promoted and integrated.

I am happy to share that we have seen a major response from you all, with hundreds of new students for our classes and dozens of people, both immigrants and those born American, volunteering to help our work in any way they can. It warms my heart to see this progress and how it fills our team with confidence and hope that our work is making a difference.

We must continue learning how to live and walk together, seeking peace and justice. I’m inviting you to welcome the new year 2024 with an open heart and clear mind to decide to participate in this process of change that we need. This a time to be together. This is a time to build bridges; this is a time to recognize the connectedness with one another. This is what the new year calls us to do; let’s embrace the new with new perspectives and move towards it with a much better sense of an inclusive community that celebrates diversity and takes the best of each of us.

Happy holidays and a great and blessed new 2024!

Announcements from The Welcome Project

YUM: A Taste of Immigrant City is returning to live event!

We could not be more excited to be returning to The Armory this spring and have the opportunity to share with you all the vibrant tastes and cultures of our diverse community. Make sure to check back with us for the official date and to buy your tickets!
In Massachusetts, the only state with a right-to-shelter law that guarantees families with children a place to stay if they meet certain criteria, the crisis has been accelerating, with more than 80 cities and towns receiving migrants to date...The number of families living in emergency shelters and hotels statewide has doubled in the past year, to nearly 6,300 last week; the cost has ballooned to an estimated $45 million per month.

Massachusetts officials are seeking residents willing to host newly arrived families in need of shelter. Hosts are asked to provide a room or apartment for a few days, until longer-term accommodations can be arranged. A significant portion of the families in need of housing in the state are new immigrants. Many of those arriving in Boston have fled violence in Haiti and traveled through other states before coming to Massachusetts.

The new host family strategy comes as the state scrambles to expand shelter capacity and provide for an increasing number of homeless families. The state’s Family Welcome Center in Allston is tasked with recruiting, vetting and onboarding host families, as well as pairing them with the families in need.

As Migrants Are Placed Around Massachusetts, Towns Are Welcoming but Worried - by Jenna Russell for the New York Times

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Officials estimate that as many as half of currently sheltered families are recently arrived migrants from other countries; most have come from Haiti, drawn by word of mouth and the pull of the state’s well-established Haitian community.

Gov. Maura Healey declared a state of emergency on Aug. 8 in a bid for federal help, joining New York, Chicago and Washington, D.C., which have taken similar steps. On Aug. 31, Ms. Healey authorized more than 200 National Guard members to assist the more than 2,500 families living in hotels, a step meant to address a shortage of social service agencies to help incoming migrants.
Of all the assistance Lino Covarrubias thought he needed to provide for new immigrant families resettling in Massachusetts, protection from extremist groups was not high on his list. Until now.

In January, as the security situation worsened in Haiti ... President Joe Biden designated Haiti for the Parole Process for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans (CHNV).

This Parole Process, also known as CHNV, the Humanitarian Parole Program, or simply “Biden” in Haiti, allows Haitians to reside and work in the U.S. for two years. After the program was launched, thousands of Haitians rushed to the immigration and emigration offices in Haiti to apply for passports. Thermitus had a sponsor in New York (a requirement for eligibility) who filed a letter of financial support for his application and eight months later, Thermitus got his “Biden” approved through a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) confirmation email and traveled to New York on Aug. 30.

At hotels sheltering migrants, fears about neo-Nazis grow - by Deborah Becker for WBUR

Of all the assistance Lino Covarrubias thought he needed to provide for new immigrant families resettling in Massachusetts, protection from extremist groups was not high on his list. Until now.

Covarrubias, head of Jewish Family Services of Metrowest, helps coordinate resources for some of the thousands of migrant families that have arrived in Massachusetts over the past several months.

His organization serves as the main liaison for 22 families, or about 65 people — nearly half of them children — initially placed in a Framingham hotel. But, the families recently had to move after a hate group gathered outside the hotel to demonstrate, holding signs with messages such as "Invaders: Go home." The neo-Nazi organization NSC-131 claimed responsibility for the action on social media. No arrests were made, but Covarrubias said after the demonstration, the hotel did not renew its contract to house migrant families.

"This is an opportunity for this group to advance what they want to accomplish and, you know, build allies with misinformation and fear," Covarrubias said. "Right now, they're just demonstrating ... but we don't know if that might change." In the past few weeks, authorities say NSC-131 has staged more than a half-dozen demonstrations at locations where the state is providing housing for migrant families, including sites in Quincy, Woburn and Marlborough.
EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

ROOTED Café Sunday Brunch with Live Music
- December 17th, January 7th & 14th, 11am to 1pm
- Rooted Cafe @ the Armory,
- 191 Highland Ave, Somerville, MA 02143
- Flamenco on the 17th, American Roots Music on the 7th, and Jazz on the 14th

Somerville Housing Board Meeting & Public Hearing
- December 21st, 4pm to 5pm
- This will be a virtual meeting
- Please download the go.to app@https://meet.goto.com/install to join
- You can also call 877 309 2073 to join
- Meeting code is 972-737-485

GET YOUR FLU SHOT

Free Flu Shot Clinic
- December 19th, 3pm to 5:30pm
- City Hall Annex, 50 Evergreen Ave Somerville 02145

Winter Farmers Market
- Every Saturday from now until April 6th, 9:30am to 1:30pm
- The Armory, 191 Highland Ave, Somerville, MA 02143
- 71+ local food vendors with the best locally grown and regionally produced foods
As this year draws to a close, The Welcome Project wanted to take this time to honor the memory of Arif Sayed Faisal, one of our former LIPS students and a member of the Bangladeshi community of Cambridge.

Arif had much in common with the millions of immigrant and first-generation Americans trying to find a sense of belonging in a new country while dealing with the pressures of being a teenager. These trials weigh heavily on immigrant youth, with many suffering anxiety and depressive episodes due to the sense of not belonging and major cultural differences. The Cambridge Police Department killed Arif during a mental health crisis. When he needed counseling and support, he was met with force.

As we approach the first anniversary of Arif’s passing, we at The Welcome Project call on the community of Somerville and all of Boston to take steps to address the lack of mental health resources tailored to the needs of the immigrant community. Our neighbors are suffering in silence, and more significant investment in support services will go a long way towards making our communities safer and healthier. We must do this for Arif and all immigrants.