



# Community Conversation

March 10, 2019

## Teenage Refugees: Their MLK Pilgrimage

*“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter”*

*This evening's Community Conversation is generously supported by the Norma and Natale Sestero Fund administered by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving*

*The Norma and Natale Sestero Fund was created through the estate of Natale and Norma Sestero, longtime residents of Glastonbury, with the goal to benefit the people and institutions of the town. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region and is dedicated to improving the quality of life for area residents.*

[www.glastonburymkci.org](http://www.glastonburymkci.org)

## **Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative**

The Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization, that was formed in 2001. Since then, the GMLKCI has sponsored up to three Community Conversations per year. GMLKCI works to increase Glastonbury residents' knowledge and understanding of the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King and to provide leadership and active engagement to build an inclusive community.

A goal of GMLKCI is to bring people together to discuss social justice issues which are as important to us today both as individuals and as members of our community as they were to Dr. King. As Dr. King noted, **"...whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly..."** and **"...the quality of a community is determined by how members of the community relate to one another."**

The goal of this Community Conversation is to inform and inspire Glastonbury residents to become actively involved in social justice issues by discussing in an open and congenial manner issues which may divide us or bind us together as individuals, families and a community.

All of the social justice issues discussed during this evening's Community Conversation are addressed in light of Dr. King's principles.

**"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."**

[www.glastonburymlkci.org](http://www.glastonburymlkci.org)

## **Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS)**

IRIS is a non-sectarian, independent nonprofit refugee resettlement agency that has welcomed more than 5,000 refugees to Connecticut since 1982. IRIS has undergone dramatic growth and transformation over the past 37 years, but its goal has remained constant: to provide a new haven to refugees and other immigrants.

[www.irisct.org](http://www.irisct.org)

## **Program**

**Reception** - Meet the Panelists

**Welcome** - David O'Connor

**Introduction to the Program** - Chris George

### **Panelist Presentations**

**Gladys Mwilelo**

**Mariame Kazadi**

**Deyana Al-Mashhadani**

**Divine Mahoundi**

**Lola Mwilelo**

**Noor Roomi**

**Ashley Makar**

**Conversation—Questions and Answers**

**Closing Remarks** — Chris George

**Thank you**—David O'Connor

**Please visit the advocacy tables—the work these organizations do is important to our communities.**

**Please complete and return the program evaluation feedback form. Your opinions are important to our programming and fundraising efforts.**

## Chris George

For the past 14 years, **Chris George** has been the Executive Director of the Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS), the New Haven-based refugee resettlement agency that welcomed more than 5000 refugees to Connecticut since it's founding in 1982. Chris has spent most of his professional life living in, or working on, the Middle East. Before returning to Connecticut in 2004, he worked seven years in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Chris directed a legislative strengthening project with the Palestinian Parliament and later established an emergency assistance program for Palestinian nonprofits. From 1994 to 1996, Chris was Executive Director of Human Rights Watch – Middle East. Prior to that, he worked with Save the Children for nine years (mostly in the West Bank and Gaza) and three years with American Friends Service Committee (mostly in Lebanon). Chris began his international career in 1977 as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Muscat, Oman. Altogether, he spent more than 16 years living in the Middle East. He speaks Arabic.

## Gladys Mwilelo

**Gladys Mwilelo** is a 20-year-old Sophomore at Central Connecticut State University majoring in Strategic Communication who would like to work with people from all different backgrounds. Gladys and her sister Lola were born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but lived in Burendi until arriving in the United States in 2013. She spoke no English when she first arrived.

## Mariame Kazadi

**Mariame Kazadi** is a 17-year-old Junior at Old Lyme High School who arrived in the United States in 2016 from Republic of the Congo after spending four years in Kenya. When Mariame arrived in the United States, she spoke some Kenyan English. Mariame intends to major in International Affairs and attend law school.

## **Deyana Al-Mashhadani**

**Deyana Al-Mashhadani** is a 20-year-old graduate of Hillhouse High School in New Haven who attends Albertus Magnus College. Upon completion of her undergraduate studies, Deyanna intends to attend medical school. Deyana and her family fled from Iraq to Turkey, where they remained for three years before arriving in the United States four years ago. Upon her arrival here, Deyana spoke no English.

## **Divine Mahoundi**

**Divine Mahoundi** is an 18-year-old Senior at Hillhouse High School in New Haven and expects to study archeology in college. Upon completing her studies, she plans to pursue a career either in law or medicine. Divine and her family fled the Republic of the Congo in 2016. Upon her arrival in the United States, Divine spoke no English.

## **Lola Mwilelo**

**Lola Mwilelo** is a nineteen-year-old freshman at Gateway Community College. She and her sister Gladys were born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but lived in Burendi until arriving in the United States in 2013. Lola is studying fashion retailing and merchandising and wants to become a fashion designer.

## **Noor Roomi**

**Noor Roomi** is a refugee from Iraq, graduated from Hillhouse High School, and is a freshman at Gateway Community College. Noor intends to pursue a career in nursing and would like to work for the United Nations in the medical field.

## **Ashley Makar**

**Ashley Makar** is the Community Liaison at IRIS, studied Literature, Theology, and Social Ethics at Yale Divinity School. Ashley was instrumental in the planning and implementation of the Civil Rights field trip in June of 2018. She is currently recruiting community groups to work with refugee families as they resettle to Connecticut through IRIS's Community Co-sponsorship Program.

**Many thanks to:**

**Roushan Abdi**

**Laila Baravi**

**Wahiba Benkooussa**

**for today's expertly prepared refreshments**

**Town of Glastonbury Human Relations Commission** is available to assist any resident who, because of race, color, age, sex, national origin, ancestry, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or intellectual, mental or physical disability, has been discriminated against in a manner prohibited by the laws of the State of Connecticut or the Town of Glastonbury. For additional information visit the Town's website or contact the Commission through the Human Resources Department, (860) 652-7501.

**Please consider supporting the Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative through the Amazon Smiles program.**

**Thank you for attending today's program.** Your presence encourages the work we do as members of the Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative to make Glastonbury a more inclusive place to live and visit.

This project was accomplished by a handful of committed community members but the work does not end tonight. We must each play our part.

While all of our programs are free, we are dependent on you for financial support. The Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative is a 501(c)(3) corporation and all donations are tax deductible. Please consider supporting our efforts with a financial contribution.

**The programs presented by the Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative are made possible by our financial supporters including:**

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