



# Building Bridges Building Bridges

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## Executive Director's Message

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For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome to FIRN's quarterly newsletter, "Building Bridges", which speaks to "bridging cultures and building community". In addition to providing core services – immigration counseling, information & referral, employment counseling, interpreting/translation services, and English tutoring programs for adults and youth – FIRN demonstrates this theme in many other ways. FIRN's International Gala, the Howard County Cultural Competency Summit, and the Maryland New Americans Partnership are examples featured in this newsletter. These and other accomplishments are made possible not only by FIRN's small, dedicated staff but also in collaboration with key funders, members of our FIRN Coalition, and a host of volunteers and friends from throughout our community – including those noted throughout this newsletter.

Looking ahead.... on January 20, our country will celebrate the inauguration of Barack Obama as our 44<sup>th</sup> U.S. President. This newsletter will help you learn more about the key role that the Immigration Act of 1965 has played in helping to elect Obama. I

hope that you will be inspired to become engaged in the framing of immigration policy reform. Meanwhile, FIRN is inviting nominations for its 2009 American Success Awards – nominations are due February 6. Of course, tough financial challenges also lie ahead. Funding cuts are already affecting FIRN's staffing levels, but we pledge to do our best to maintain our level of excellence as we seek additional resources to fill the gaps and address the growing needs of our foreign-born neighbors. In addition to your direct financial and volunteer support, for which we are truly grateful, we urge you to become an active ambassador for FIRN – stepping outside your "comfort zone" to seek from your employer, clubs, place of worship, professional associations and friends opportunities for FIRN to access new grants, matching gifts, donations and volunteers.

**WE NEED YOU MORE THAN EVER!!**

Jennifer L. Blake  
Executive Director



## Call for ASA Award Nominations

FIRN invites you to nominate a foreign-born individual for an American Success Award (ASA) by February 6, 2009. This award is open to foreign-born individuals who:

- live or work in Howard County, **and**
- have made a significant contribution to the ethnic or general community through volunteer services in Howard County, **and**
- are either owners of successful Howard County businesses or have achieved a high level of success in their chosen profession.

Awardees will be honored at FIRN's annual American Success Awards banquet on **May 6, 2009** at the Ten Oaks Ballroom in Clarksville, Maryland. The ASA is presented by FIRN in partnership with the Howard County Government, Howard County Economic Development Authority and the Howard County Chamber of Commerce. For Nomination Forms and to purchase tickets, please visit our website at [www.firnonline.org](http://www.firnonline.org).

## Howard County Cultural Competency Summit 2008

Only through collaborative leadership can Howard County serve our growing foreign-born community with cultural competency. Based on this premise and building off the recommendations of a study conducted for FIRN in 2005, FIRN sponsored a Howard County Cultural Competency Summit on October 6, 2008. Funded by the Howard County Department of Citizen Services and The Horizon Foundation, the Summit convened leaders of key local public agencies and nonprofit service providers to: 1) reach a shared understanding about the meaning of cross-cultural competency; 2) share ideas for how our public agencies and nonprofit organizations can promote and institutionalize cross-cultural competency and collaborate effectively on this; 3) determine how best to continue to learn and exchange knowledge related to cross-cultural competency; and 4) discuss tangible next steps, including who can be responsible for which steps. The Summit focused on language and workforce development/retention. You can access the Summit report, guest speaker's handouts and Power Point presentation, implementation guide, guidelines for assessing your organization's cultural competency, and tips for working in a culturally competent manner by visiting the "Resources" section of FIRN's website at [www.firnonline.org](http://www.firnonline.org).

## National Immigration Reform

FIRN recently joined a national sign-on letter to President-elect Barack Obama requesting that immigration reform be made a priority of his administration. An historic review of U.S. immigration policy shows how far we have come and the distance we still must travel in our quest for social justice:

- The first U.S. citizenship regulation, the 1790 Nationality Act, gave citizenship to “free white persons” who had lived in the U.S. for two years – excluding people of color and non-property persons such as women and indentured servants.
- After the Civil War, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution extended the right of citizenship to freed slaves and all people born on U.S. soil – but not to Native Americans born on tribal lands.
- In 1870, the Nationality Act extended the right of citizenship to include “persons of African nativity or descent.”
- The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act barred new Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. and made those Chinese who were already here ineligible for U.S. citizenship. The Act later applied to all Asian peoples except for the Japanese. Birthright citizenship was not established for Asians until 1898.
- The Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 instituted quotas that favored Western Europeans and excluded non-white people.
- The 1921 and 1924 quotas implied for the first time that “illegal” immigration was a danger to national security. The statute of limitations for unlawful entry was lifted, and in 1925, the U.S. began actively deporting undocumented immigrants – even if they had entered the U.S. before it became illegal to do so without documents.
- In 1954, during an economic boom and the Bracero program that brought millions of “guest workers” from Mexico from 1942 to 1964 — over 1 million undocumented immigrants were expelled in “Operation Wetback”. In contrast, 200,000 European immigrants were able to overturn their illegal status between 1925 and 1965.
- The Immigration Act of 1964 created a new immigration structure that was no longer based on national origin. This added many Asians, Latinos and African immigrants.

In recent years, the threat of deportation has deprived some foreign-born communities (including U.S. citizens) of their political and labor rights and characterized them as “illegal” people. FIRN urges you to help our politicians define the goals of U.S. immigration policy and the standards of treatment for all human beings on U.S. soil. This may be our opportunity to get it right!

## Maryland New Americans Partnership

As a co-founding member of the Maryland New Americans Partnership (MNAP) steering committee, FIRN is demonstrating the power of cross-cultural collaboration at the state level. Organized in 2008, MNAP is a statewide coalition committed to help eligible immigrants to become U.S. citizens. Our goals are 1) to promote the enactment of the New Americans Initiative in Maryland, and 2) to provide the structure for organizations doing naturalization work in Maryland to support and learn from one another.

What is The New Americans Initiative? This proposed state legislation would establish Naturalization Support Centers at FIRN and other organizations throughout Maryland, where immigrants could obtain basic information about the application process; referral to ESOL classes; citizenship clinics; citizenship classes; legal assistance; and post-naturalization support such as voter registration, citizenship engagement and review of family members' eligibility. MNAP's first success is in Maryland Governor O'Malley's signing of Executive Order 01.01.1996.18 on December 3, 2008 to create a Maryland Council for New Americans that will "review and recommend new policies and practices to expedite immigrant integration into the economic and civic life of the State"; the Council's report is due on September 3, 2009.

Besides FIRN, other MNAP members in Howard County include Conexiones Howard County, the Howard County Muslim Council, the Kaur Foundation and the Maryland Association of Nigerian Physicians. If your non-profit organization, educational institution, business, union, or faith community would like to join MNAP (no dues!), please send your contact information and request to [jblake@firnonline.org](mailto:jblake@firnonline.org).

## FIRN Addresses Literacy Needs

Staff and volunteers at FIRN are working hard to meet the increase in demand for English language assistance for foreign born residents of Howard County. FIRN helps both students and adults learn English through its "family" of LEAP literacy programs.

Club LEAP tutors meet with students after school to provide language activities designed to help them improve their English skills. There are 100 students in eleven Howard County Public Schools enrolled in Club LEAP. FIRN is very grateful for the support of Club LEAP from the Local Children's Board for a \$15,000 grant, the Verizon Foundation for \$5,100, Comcast Cable for \$20,000 over two years, and 40 very dedicated volunteers.

Foreign born adults seeking to improve their English skills while learning American culture are served by Adult LEAP. Sixty-three adults were matched with tutors during the most recent 13 week semester. FIRN tutors also help students study for citizenship and GED examinations. Students often request assistance customized to their employment needs. FIRN works with community partners such as Bridgeway Community Church to provide volunteer tutors.

[Volunteers](#) are always welcomed for **FIRN's** Club LEAP and Adult LEAP programs, and training is provided. If your organization is interested in becoming a community partner for Adult LEAP, please email [adulthoodliteracy@firnonline.org](mailto:adulthoodliteracy@firnonline.org).

## THANK YOU!!

FIRN is deeply grateful to everyone who participated in FIRN's International Gala at the Sheraton Hotel on October 30, 2008. A very special thanks to the following sponsors, nonprofit partners, restaurants, entertainers and volunteers for their generous contributions to the success of the event:

### Sponsors and Nonprofit Partners:

Ameriprise Financial Services / Fred Casper  
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 Howard County Poetry & Literature Society  
 Candlelight Concert Society  
 The Greene Turtle

### Entertainers:

The Peabody Institute  
 Howard County Chinese School Dance Troupe  
 Hee Kyung Lee Korean Traditional Dance Group  
 Ponti Del Mercado and Zuli Russi

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Akbar Restaurant  
 Asian Court  
 El Azteca  
 The Elkridge Furnace Inn  
 La Madeleine  
 Nora Café & Bakery  
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 Zapata's

### Gala Committee Volunteers:

Jutta Alberts  
 Nanjui Awunti  
 Mei-Ling Jones  
 Sharon Jones  
 Bonny Knight  
 Ruth Paine

### Master of Ceremonies:

Bob McAllister

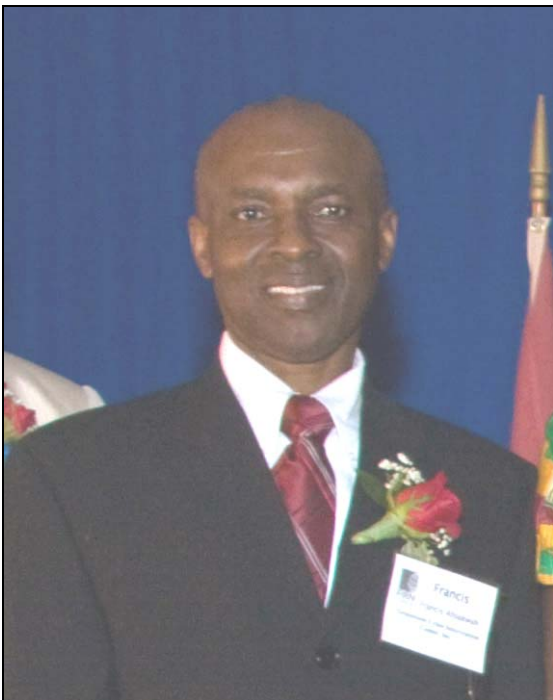


## Thanksgiving and Holiday Program

Thanks to some very special supporters, FIRN made the holiday season happier for many of our neediest families.

For FIRN's Thanksgiving Program, First Presbyterian Church adopted 25 families, each of whom was given \$75 Giant Gift Cards; 12 of these families also received clothing and/or other household items that FIRN collected from individuals. For 50 families on the waitlist, Bridgeway delivered Thanksgiving dinner to 41 families, and Ilchester Elementary School donated pies for 20 families.

For our Holiday Program, First Presbyterian Church adopted 25 families, providing each family with a \$50 Giant Gift Card and each child with a personalized stocking and age-appropriate toys. Two of these families also received a clothing donation from FIRN. Of the 63 families on the waitlist for the Holiday program, 52 families received something for the Holidays – a combination of: clothing, shoes, toys, stuffed animals, household items, and food that FIRN collected from individual donors. One individual donated \$200 in gift cards for a particular family that was not on the waitlist. Many, many thanks to these donors who demonstrated the true spirit of the holidays!



The FIRN family is saddened by the death of Mr. Francis Afoakwah, a recipient of the 2008 American Success Award and a founding member of the FIRN Health and Human Services Coalition. His dedication and service to the community will have a lasting impact for generations to come. Our condolences to his wife, Joyce, co-recipient of the ASA, and his family, friends, and colleagues.

FIRN mourns the passing of Mr. Francis Afoakwah.

## Upcoming Events

### Save the Date!!

You and your friends and associates are invited to the

## 7TH ANNUAL AMERICAN SUCCESS AWARDS DINNER

This event honors and recognizes the achievements and contributions of the foreign-born community in Howard County.

**Date: Wednesday, May 6,  
2009**

**Venue: Ten Oaks Ballroom,  
Clarksville**

**Time: 6 p.m.-8:30 p.m.**

**Cost: \$75**

For questions about the event please contact  
FIRN at 410-992-1923.

**Donate:** Private sector donations from corporations, foundations, community-based organizations, local businesses, individuals and others are critical to sustaining FIRN's capacity to bridge the language and cultural gaps of a growing foreign-born population. Generous contributions enable FIRN to provide a growing array of high-quality services that acclimate and strengthen our foreign-born neighbors and build the capacity of local agencies, businesses, and organizations that serve and employ them. FIRN counts on your support to help prepare our foreign-born neighbors to be strong workers, high-achieving students and effective leaders - strengthening our community for all. So, please, give as generously as you can for a stronger Howard County! FIRN is a registered 501(c)(3) organization. Our tax number is 52-1397480.

**Credit Card Donations:** Donations may be made online through [Network for Good](http://Network for Good) or by calling FIRN at 410-992-1923.

Credit card donations can also be made through our website, [www.firnonline.org](http://www.firnonline.org), using Pay Pal.

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| January 13  | Citizenship Eligibility Determination Night<br>7:00-8:30pm at FIRN<br>Registration requested  |
| January 13  | Adult LEAP New Tutor Training<br>6:30-7:30pm at FIRN  |
| January 21  | FIRN Health and Human Services Coalition Meeting<br>6:00-7:30pm at FIRN   |
| January 27  | FIRN Citizenship Test Prep Classes Begin<br>7:00-8:30pm at FIRN<br>Call FIRN for more information   |
| January 27  | Adult LEAP Tutoring Begins<br>At Bridgeway Community Church<br>Call FIRN for more information   |
| February 4  | FIRN Youth Coalition<br>6:00-8:00pm at FIRN   |
| February 5  | Primary Adult Care Workshop<br>2:00-4:00pm at FIRN<br>Co-Sponsored with United Healthcare   |
| February 18 | FIRN Health and Human Services Coalition Meeting<br>6:00-7:30pm at FIRN   |
| March 4     | FIRN Youth Coalition<br>6:00-8:00pm at FIRN   |
| March 9     | International Women's Day Observance<br>12noon-1:30pm at the Howard County Central Library<br>Foreign-born women are invited to join us for lunch, film and a panel discussion on Human Rights. Co-Sponsored with the Howard County Library<br>Pre-registration is requested. Call FIRN |

**Inclement Weather Policy:**  
**FIRN activities are postponed when Howard County Public Schools have early dismissal or are closed due to weather.**

**Donate By Mail:** To donate by mail, please make check payable to: FIRN, Inc.  
**Mail to:** FIRN, Inc.  
5999 Harpers Farm Rd, Suite E-200  
Columbia, MD 21044

**Supporters:** FIRN is grateful to be part of a community that has long valued diversity and supported the foreign-born. Longstanding supporters have included Howard County Government – Community Service Partnerships Program and CDBG Program, The Horizon Foundation, The Columbia Foundation and The Rouse Company Foundation.

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Website [www.firnonline.org](http://www.firnonline.org)

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#### Executive Director

Jennifer L. Blake  
[jblake@firnonline.org](mailto:jblake@firnonline.org)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- FIRN is partnering with Goucher College to create “**Voices of America through Portraiture**”. The project is designed to bring greater awareness of the immigrant experiences in our community through various media. Interviews, round-table discussions, portraits, and a booklet will make up the final exhibition, set to unveil in May, at Goucher College. If you would like to share your experiences and the impact FIRN had made in your life in Howard County, please contact Kristin Lilly at (410) 992-1923 ext.12.
- FIRN is seeking donations for food and gas gift cards to assist clients. Please contact Kristin Lilly at (410) 992-1923 ext. 12.
- Club LEAP is in need of cassette players with and without headsets. Please contact Catherine Hester at (410) 992-1923 ext. 28.
- Adult LEAP is in need of portable CD players with headsets. Please contact Paula Blackwell at (410)9 992-1923 ext. 14.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

### **Spread the Word...**

#### **Tutors for Club LEAP after-school program**

Club LEAP is seeking lead and assistant volunteer tutors for the 2008-2009 school year. The time commitment is twice a week for 1 to 1.5 hours, directly after school. Training is provided. A criminal background check is required for this position for all tutors who are age 18 and older.

#### **Site-Supervisors for Adult English Tutoring Academy on Tuesday nights or Saturday afternoons**

Seeking to gain experience or enhance your skills in program management and supervision? Dedicated volunteers are needed to set-up, register and monitor students and tutors at English tutoring sessions on Tuesday nights or Saturday afternoons. Time commitment: 2 hours per week plus periodic leadership meetings for a minimum of 4 months. ESOL experience is helpful.

#### **Tutors for the Adult English Tutoring Academy**

Volunteers are needed to tutor Adult English learners one-on-one or in small groups on Tuesday nights or Saturday afternoons for 1 ½ hours per week for a 12-week session.

#### **FIRN Ambassadors**

Serve for an hour or two a month assisting FIRN staff provide information about our services at health fairs, community events, and cultural activities.

#### **Join a FIRN Committee**

##### **FIRN Health and Human Services Coalition**

Foreign-born volunteers are needed for health and human services advocacy, education, and outreach committees. Time commitments will vary but average about 3 hours per month.

##### **FIRN Youth Coalition for Intercultural Understanding**

Howard County high school students meet at FIRN once a month to discuss issues that impact them from a cultural perspective and to work together to develop solutions for their day to day intercultural issues.