

Voices of Wisdom: *Newcomer Stories*

A partnership between Connecticut Historical Society and the AHNA Welcoming Committee began planning in the Fall of 2017. With grant support from the National Endowment for the Arts, The CT Office of the Arts/DECD and the Greater Hartford Arts Council the fruit of their labor was presented on March 29th with the two hour of **Voices of Wisdom: Newcomer stories**.

The evening began with refreshments and a delicious assortment of Syrian food prepared by Adeebah Alnemar, a recent refugee from Syria, who besides being a master chef is also a graphic artist. Several displays were set up showing jewelry, and basket making.

The program began with a warm welcome from Lynne Williamson, Director of the Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program. She then turned the program over to Georges Annan Kingsley, a long time member of the Welcoming Committee who introduced the first

performers, **Gentle Boy** from the Democratic republic of Congo. The performed several songs, and were followed by four speakers, Has Ku Soe, a Karen refugee from Burma; Lejla Korkutovic, from Bosnia, Ahmed Hamzah from Iraq, and Aiti Rai a Bhutanese - Nepali. Each of them told their stories of life either in their native country or in some cases the refugee camp where they were born, before coming to America and Hartford. They shared they challenges they faces and the determination that has sustained them thus far.

The second performance was a dance by Soneya Regmi, also a Bhutanese - Nepali refugee. After that the second set of speakers followed. Solomon Fissha from Ethiopia, Clerona Cain from St. Lucia, Adam Romo, from Mexico and Las Vegas and finally, Georges Annan Kingsley, who gave an impassioned speech about his reactions to life here in America, punctuated with brief drumming. As is often the case, there were many who were not on the stage, but contributed greatly to the success of the event. Jennifer Cassidy who, along with Georges from the Welcoming Committee and Lynne Williamson did much of the planning. Technical assistance was provided by Pramod Pradan. Ibrahim Nuru and Melica Bloom were also helpful in the effort. Gil Martinez and the staff of Hartford Public Access TV were there to record the event, as was Vanessa de la Torre from Connecticut Public.

Photos of the event are available at: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/ZN5EzStw6L3E0URX2>

