

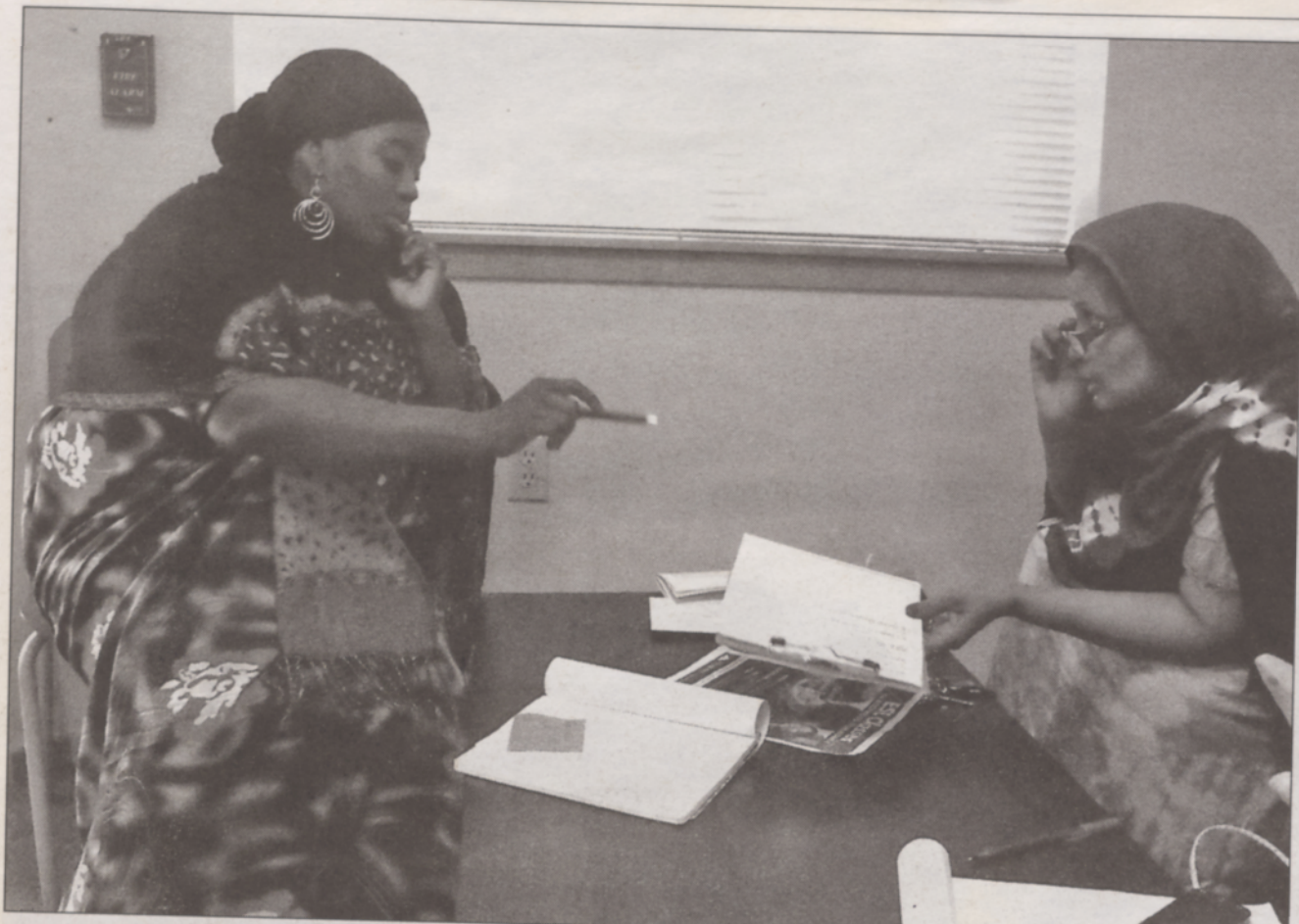


PHOTO BY AMANDA WALDROUPE

At left, Children from Lincoln Woods play their regular game of soccer. Above, Amal Ahmed, left, A Somali-language interpreter, works with a Somali resident of Lincoln Woods.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER JANSONS

so-long, Gioia says, is becoming "utterly dependent" on other people and service organizations. In many ways, that dynamic plays itself out in Ahmed's interactions with the immigrants and the seemingly endless stream of requests she receives for assistance with forms, referrals, applications and assistance, and whatever else the residents need to live secure, peaceful, and happy lives.

There are now six children and three Somali adults in Ahmed and Berenazy's office. Children run around and play with various objects, and the sounds of women speaking in Somali, a lyrical sounding language, fills the once quiet office. There is an order to the chaos, and in many ways it illustrates the roadmap immigrants and refugees have to navigate when they arrive in Portland.

Ahmed comes over to Berenazy's side of the room to help figure out Abdi's predicament. They explain that it is for her husband's sister, who appears to be covered by Abdi's insurance. Ahmed speaks to Abdi briefly in Somali. "Ask your husband if he signed something," Ahmed tells Abdi. She leaves, and Ahmed returns to finishing the woman's Section 8 application.

Ahmed comes out of the office and into a foyer with couch, chairs, and table during a brief break. But Aden comes back in, wanting Ahmed's help to find an ESL class. The program Aden is currently enrolled in is ending. She also wants help with an application for a Section 8 voucher that would allow her to move. But Abdi has come back with a letter from the Department of Human Services stating that her

reapplication for food stamps was incomplete, meaning that she might not receive food stamps next month.

Ahmed calls the Department of Human Services to make an appointment for Abdi. "Hi, I'm Amal Ahmed from Lincoln Woods," begins her usual script. "I'm calling for Sulehka Abdi, and she received a letter saying her benefits will be suspended, and wants to make an appointment. You can give her a translator. She speaks Somali."

Ahmed hands the phone to Abdi, and focuses back on Aden's housing application. Abdi gives the phone back to Ahmed, who finishes the conversation and hangs up.

Destiny

by Richard Wolfe

Everybody has one,
mine crystal clear now
Lord willing
and the creek don't rise
funny how your life
evolves over time
Precious few ever reach
the final decision
Anything else would fall far short,
Just like Mickey and Minnie
in Disneyland
Some places you just know you
belong,
I think I know where
my Magic Kingdom is now.

"It's difficult for them to trust somebody because of the corruption in Russian and Ukraine"

— VIKTOR BEREZNAVY
RUSSIAN-SPEAKING RESIDENT SERVICE
SPECIALIST FOR LINCOLN WOODS

taking considerable time to learn English or go to school.

"They are trying to get everything really quick," Bereznavy says.

They instead settle for work as truck or cab drivers, in construction, or in auto body shops, feeling that they still make "good money." Bereznavy says that he and Ahmed are encouraging the resident's children to perform well in school and instilling the idea that going to college is a good thing.

Acclimating to American culture for the Russian-speaking adults is slow. Bereznavy says language is the biggest problem. "Everything depends on your ability to communicate," he says.

The children do not struggle with language because they go to school and have English-speaking friends. It is more difficult for adults to learn a second language, and Bereznavy also says that the adults struggle to learn English because they are concerned about retaining their Russian culture.

"The kids assimilate much faster," Bereznavy says.

Life at Lincoln Woods, says Boris Gordiyenko, 43, would be easier if the adults spoke English as well as their children. Gordiyenko will have lived in Lincoln Woods for two years this October, with his wife and four children. What he appreciates most about living at Lincoln Woods is its affordability. He likes living with fellow Russian-speakers, but says it doesn't help his English improve. "This really affects my life and the other adults," he says. If there is a problem when Ahmed or Bereznavy aren't there, he says, they have to wait to sort things out. "We don't have any other choice," he says.

"We are trying to solve those problems peacefully," Bereznavy says.

Zoya Arakelyan, 52, has lived at Lincoln Woods for almost four years with her husband, Rafael. They were refugees for 15 years in Moscow as a result of ethnic tension in the bordering country Azerbaijan.

For the first time in many years, they feel safe, Zoya Arakelyan says. They, like the other residents at Lincoln Woods, do not mind living with a culture and people as different as the Somalis. Zoya Arakelyan's feelings about it are mostly ambivalent.

She says she and her husband always say "hi" to anyone they pass by, but that is the extent of their interactions.

The Somali immigrants celebrated Ramadan in September. The Islamic holy days of fasting is the most important religious rite Muslims celebrate all year. Fasting during the day and cooking, eating, and celebrating only at night — the noise would keep the Arakelyans up sometimes until one in the morning. But they were not annoyed, and it was because their upstairs Somali neighbors explained to them as best they could that they would be louder than usual at night.

A few years ago, Ahmed says, that interaction would have been unheard of.

"We're trying to get them to interact with each other," Ahmed says. Ahmed says that Muslims are required by their religion to know their neighbor, and to at least be respectful. Ahmed and Bereznavy are planning to start potluck dinners in the coming months, and hope they can start an onsite ESL class so the adults can learn English. A twice-weekly homework club that children of both immigrant groups use is starting again in early October. Ahmed and Bereznavy hope that through the various events, like weekly soccer matches, can break down the tendency to distrust and be closed off from other people, and to create a culture of living together in a new community.

Ahmed and Abdi quickly debrief, and Abdi leaves.

Ahmed checks Aden's application for any missing information or mistakes, and fills out a couple more spots. She leaves, and in comes another woman who Ahmed helps enroll the child in after-school homework classes.

"Today is a busy day," Ahmed says, laughing.

The Somalis main struggle at Lincoln Woods is simply dealing with the ins and outs of living in Portland, and finding ways to live, eventually, independently. And though many of them would like to know their Russian-speaking neighbors more, it is not a priority. "We are OK with each other," Aden says. It doesn't frustrate me or effect me in many ways."

The most important part, Aden says, is living peacefully. "This is a normal life," she says. "There is no war. I can sleep in peace and wake up in peace in the morning."

Lincoln Woods' Somali immigrants escaped to Portland from a war. The Russian and Ukrainian immigrants living at Lincoln Woods escaped from a more subtle misery: persecution and oppression related to their religion and ethnicity.

Portland has a large Russian immigrant population. According to the Russian Oregon Social Services, a branch of Lutheran Community Services, more than 100,000 Russian immigrants live in the Portland area, and Russian immigrants are the second largest group of immigrants in Oregon, next to Latino and Hispanic immigrants.

Bereznavy says growing up in Communist regimes has had far reaching effects on the Russian-speaking immigrants at Lincoln Woods and how they approach life in Portland. Bereznavy describes the Russian-speaking community at Lincoln Woods as "kind of closed."

"It's difficult for them to trust somebody because of the corruption in Russia and Ukraine," he says.

Bereznavy says many of the Russian-speaking residents at Lincoln Wood were poor in their homeland, and came to Portland with little or no financial security. Survival and income become a priority over