



Exhibit details lives of Phoenix refugees

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The struggles and triumphs of refugees aren't often visually apparent. An exhibit presented by Community Outreach & Advocacy for Refugees at ASU Anthropology Museum validates the refugee experience and honors them in a way that fosters a deeper sense of belonging in the community.

"Fuse: Portraits of Refugee Households in Metropolitan Phoenix" opens Thursday, April 3, and runs through Oct. 1. Its 25 or so 30- by 36-inch color photographs of 10 families were taken by Eliza Gregory during the past few months. The portraits were taken inside or just outside their homes.

"I'm trying to build community through visual education," said Gregory, who received a grant from Arizona Commission on the Arts for the project. "At a basic level, these refugees are living in Phoenix, and they are worth getting to know as newcomers. We are trying to simultaneously represent the challenges these people have faced."

Cara Steiner Kiggins, COAR's executive director, said: "The photos show a diverse part of our community, and also show what they bring to our community."

According to Steiner Kiggins, more than 2,000 refugees are resettled in Arizona each year. Countries of their origin differ each year; these days, most refugees to metro Phoenix arrive from Burma, Burundi, Eritrea, Iran and Iraq.

COAR programs director Dolma Roder sees the portraits as a subtle way to engage with issues on a much more personal level. "It's about making refugees visible as well as encouraging people to see them as part of their community," she said.

Tempe-based, non-profit COAR works with at least 700 federal government-sponsored refugees at any given time. The Volunteer Anchor program offers mentoring to refugees who have arrived recently; Reaching Higher is a college preparatory program for high-school kids offering scholarships and mentors; and Awareness and Advocacy disseminates information about the refugees through films, panel discussions and other events.

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