



## Upcoming Events:

- 2/21**      **Real Saturday:**  
11-1      Boys' Hip-Hop  
PM
- 2/22**      **Cultural**  
12-4      **Celebration**  
PM
- 2/28**      **Real Saturday:**  
11-1      Girls' Hip-Hop  
PM
- 3/28**      **Real Saturday:**  
SEM F Science
- 3/29**      **Refugee**  
1 PM      **Simulation Day**
- 4/4**      **Real Saturday:**  
African  
Drumming
- 4/11**      **Spring Picnic**
- 4/12**      **Camp to Care**  
2 PM      **Potluck**

Pictures from our Pitt Med Real Saturday! Check it out on page 3.

## Message from the Presidents

Hello,

Keep It Real is off to the start of another great semester of tutoring and fun! We've had students accepted to colleges, admitted into prestigious charter schools in the Pittsburgh public school system, and achieve honor roll. Our events and Real Saturdays from first semester were great successes and we are hoping for the same with our upcoming Cultural Celebration. We can't wait to keep you updated about the great things our tutors and students are up to this semester!

Keep it Touch,

Brett Orren and Lauren Benish

## **Camp To Care Simulation**

by Brett Orren, Co-President

After months of hard work and a lot of hard work still to come, it is with great pleasure that I can officially announce an upcoming event. Keep It Real, in partnership with the American Red Cross and numerous student organizations, as well as organizations around Pittsburgh will host Camp to Care. Camp to Care is a simulation that will bring 400 college students to the University of Pittsburgh where they will embark on a journey through several stations that will simulate a day in the life of a refugee. Too often Keep It Real tutors have noticed the lack of knowledge and empathy from college students regarding refugees in Pittsburgh and this event is an opportunity for students to learn more about the plights of refugees.

The stations will include:

- A video showing the journey that refugees make from country to camps.
- A simulation of food rations.
- A hands-on health evaluation of students.
- An opportunity to build refugee tents from top to bottom.
- A cultural emersion class.

Keep It Real has received a grant from the Sprout Fund to make the Camp To Care Simulation possible. The event will be on March 29<sup>th</sup> at 1pm in the Cost center, but is only open to students with a valid student ID. However, we are also hosting a Potluck Supper on April 12<sup>th</sup> at 2pm at the Union Project that is open to the public (and former Keep It Real alumni). The Potluck Supper is designed to connect community members, college students, and refugee families together to remove the feeling of “otherness.” Please check out our website ([camptocare.com](http://camptocare.com)) and let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

## **More College Acceptances!**

By Brett Orren, Co-President

Keep It Real is very proud to announce the success of another student. Mohamed Mugasa has been officially accepted by both Duquesne University and Drexel University for next year. Mohamed is one of the hardest-working men I know, and I know that all of the tutors that have helped him describe his intelligence, work ethic, and compassion as exceptional qualities. It was only a matter of time before he got selected somewhere and now it comes the decision time. If any of you see Mohamed or are Facebook friends with him, wish him good luck. I know that the whole Keep It Real family is so proud.

We asked Mohamed how it felt to be accepted into college and to be given the chance to succeed. He said it was very difficult to answer and continued,

"I CAN is a 100 times more important than IQ". This motto really expresses my personality. I believe that as long as I believe in myself and work hard for it, then I CAN and WILL achieve it regardless of my knowledge. With hard work and perseverance, [my letter came] that read the only words that appear in big font: "CONGRATULATIONS. YOU HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED!"

As I have grown older, I have learned the importance of education. My parents have always placed a high value on education, even though they have never received formal education themselves. Everything I do, I do to succeed for my family and community, so that I can be [a] role model and help others in my community succeed as well. But this [is] only the beginning. I will continue to search out answers, pursue my intellectual curiosity, one step at a time. The past (of the Somali-Bantus) has taught me to envision the future of my community. It is not [only my] potential [that I will be able to reach], but the promise [I will fulfill] to the future [of my community.]"

### **Pitt Med Real Saturday Recap**

By April Myung, Real Saturdays Coordinator

RealSaturdays had its first event of the spring term on January 24. This was our second collaboration with The Refugee Health Advocacy Project of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and the increase in attendance and scope of the topics since last year was substantial and encouraging. Fourteen of our tutor's kids and eight members of the Bhutanese community participated. After breaking up into groups, we attended mini-seminars about dental health, sexual health, sports medicine, exercise, and yoga. Most of our kids recalled some of what they learned last year, and listening to them finish some of the dental students' and physical educator's sentences was awesome and entertaining. Having younger medical students talk about sexual health within a smaller and more casual atmosphere was really helpful to keeping the conversation open for questions are often difficult to ask teachers in impersonal gymnasiums. It was great to listen to some of our students' opinions on health in general and to see them take initiative in sharing how they agreed or disagreed with current dogma. The loud and correct answers to the trivia at the end of the day indicated that the day was as educational for them as it was for me, and I hope to see another collaboration of this kind next year.

### **Keep it Real's Very Own Poet**

By Erica Jackson, Tutor

Siraji Hassan spent this past Martin Luther King's Day at Carnegie Mellon, where he recited his award-winning poem at an annual contest that honors the writing of local students. Siraji's poem, "I am Different," placed third in the high school poetry category. In it, he discussed his experiences as a Somali-Bantu as well as an American, and his journey to be different in a country too-often defined by stereotypes. Siraji continued to share his story in a discussion panel this past week at Pitt's campus, joining a group of international students, all of whom were born in countries facing conflict. The panel highlighted the misrepresentation that immigrants in the United States often face, particularly when their home countries are divided by political/religious

dissent and are negatively portrayed in the media. Siraji's efforts to educate others on the hardships and accomplishments of refugees have undoubtedly impacted the lives of many, and we are all very proud of his achievements!

(Siraji pictured in the top row, second from the right)



## **Alumni Spotlight:** **Julie Hawthorne**

My name is Julie; I'm a 2013 Pitt grad and former Keep It Real member! I tutored from October 2010 until December 2011. Part of my time with the organization was spent serving on the board as the Community Outreach Coordinator, but primarily I was an in-home tutor. Though my time with Keep It Real was essentially limited to four short hours a week, I can confidently give the credit to KIR for helping me to establish what I wanted to do with my degree during and after college.

The passion for working with refugees that I derived from my time with KIR took me to Rwanda on a study abroad trip. I wanted to research refugee return policy in the rehabilitating country. When I returned home, I interned at the International Institute of Erie as a Resettlement Activities Intern. Some time after graduating from Pitt, I became a caseworker with Jewish Family and Children's Service of Pittsburgh. I work particularly on reception and placement, helping to meet refugees' core needs in their initial weeks of resettlement. There is never a dull moment, and it is an inspiration every day.

A huge part of that inspiration has been getting the chance to see the other side of what groups like Keep It Real accomplish every day. Resettlement agencies and supporting organizations are stretched thin. It's an uphill battle for resources and there isn't enough time to accomplish all that we dream of for our incoming families. Luckily, we as an agency work with volunteers like yourselves, who have big hearts and open minds, and who are willing to make refugees feel at home and thrive. It is an amazing thing to witness.

A big thanks to everyone who dedicates time and energy to this wonderful organization. I loved volunteering with Keep It Real, and wouldn't have found my way during college or after college without it. Enjoy the time you spend with your families, and know that you are not only helping individuals establish their lives here, you are making our community a welcoming, comforting, and ultimately a beautiful place to live.

**Check Out Our Brand New Website!**

<http://keepitrealpitt.wix.com/keepitreal>

**Keep it Real in the News:**

<http://www.wesacelebrates.org/difference/keep-it-real/>

<http://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com/2014/06/26/young-brothers-from-somalia-learn-about-the-joys-of-baseball/>