

Pictures from our event, Camp to Care! Read about it on page 2.



Message from the Presidents

Hello, Keep it Real!

We can't believe we're almost at the close of another great year of tutoring. Tutors have taken ownership of this program in amazing ways. Their dedication to these kids is inspiring and the club is thriving because of them. I (Lauren) am also incredibly proud

of my co-president, Brett, for dreaming up and hosting Camp to Care. Read on to learn about the amazing successes of our students and tutors this year!

Keep in touch!

Lauren Benish and Brett Orren



Keep it Real tutors facilitating the food rations station with participants

Camp to Care

Claire Gillooly Dempsey

On Sunday, March 29, Keep it Real teamed up with the American Red Cross to present a simulation of a typical refugee camp and an average journey that a refugee is likely to endure. Spearheaded and hosted by co-president Brett Orren and recruitment manager Emily Mortner, Camp to Care was a huge success that educated the Pitt community on the burdens of refugees, particularly those in the Pittsburgh area.

Participants arrived at

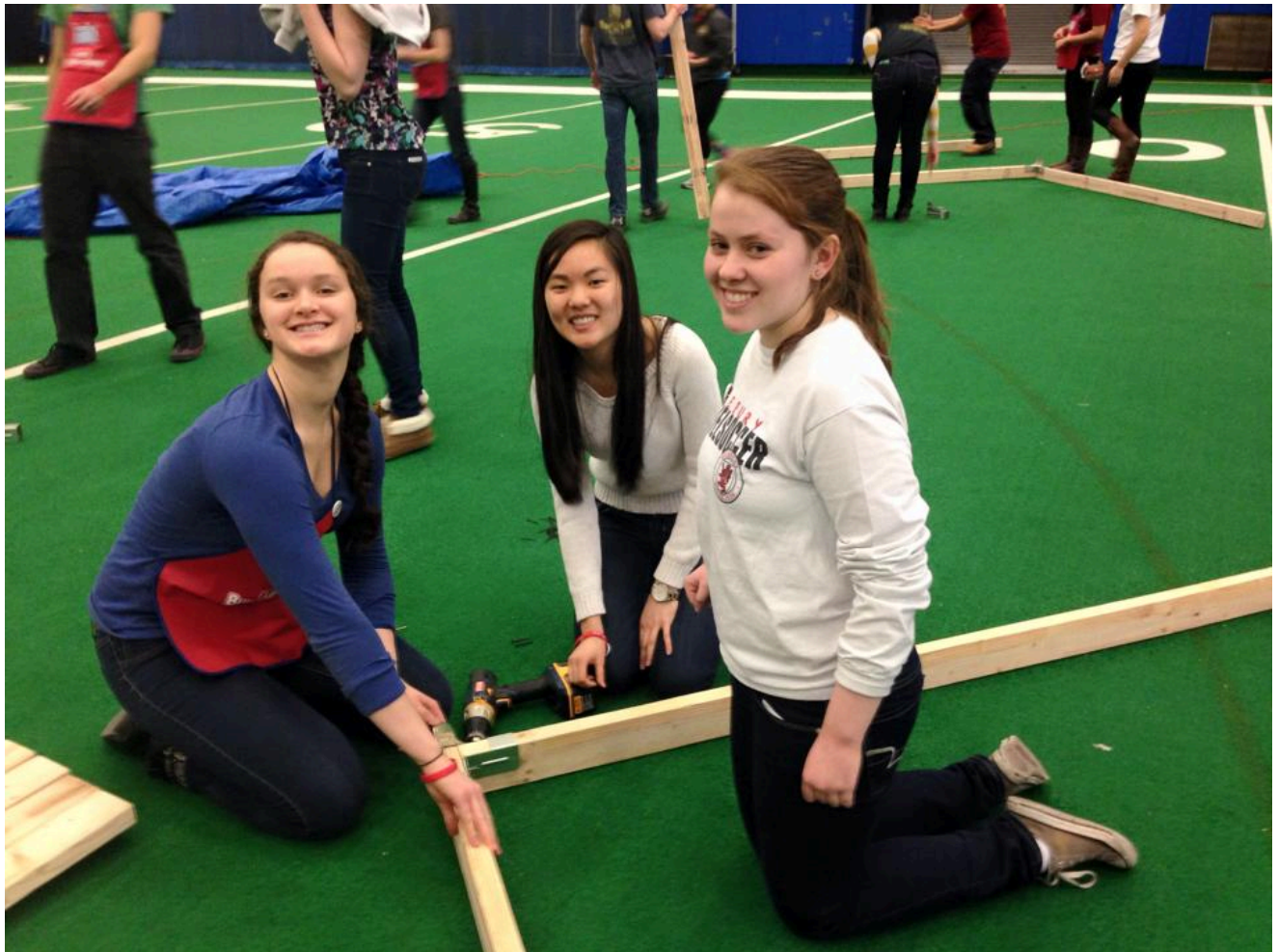
the Cost Center, where they were greeted and given the chance to travel from station to station to experience each aspect of refugee life. Each participant was handed a “dignity” or a “health” pin, which he/she carried with him/her throughout the journey. At a certain point in the journey, guests were given a hypothetical situation such as losing resources or a family member, or being diagnosed with cholera, and were stripped of their pins to represent their loss of dignity or health.

The simulation began with a video of a current Pitt student and refugee telling his remarkable story of his family’s journey to the States. Participants then learned about typical shelters in refugee settlements, and with the help of Habitat for Humanity, were given the opportunity to build a tent. The journey continued with a station devoted to healthcare. The American Red Cross set up a replica of a medical tent that you are likely to see in a refugee camp, complete with cots and a volunteer ready to take your

blood pressure!

In the next station, participants learned about food rations and malnourishment in refugee camps. Everyone guessed what the portions of beans and rice were for each meal and then were shown the actual food ration (about a ½ cup total!) This meal was displayed next to a typical American meal of a cheeseburger, soda, and pie from Burger King.

After gaining the knowledge of all of the obstacles that stand between escaping refugees' home countries and safely reaching their new homes, participants learned about resettling in the United States and in Pittsburgh. They were presented with information about the work that resettlement agencies perform and about all of the aspects of assimilation. Participants really seemed very engaged and eager to learn about refugee and resettlement issues. Huge shoutout to our co-sponsors and everyone who came out to support! We couldn't have done it without you.



Participant (left) with Keep it Real tutors, Julia Deng (center) and Ali McCrorey (right)

Freshman vs. Senior Perspective

As the year comes to a close, Morgan Buck and Brett Orren (both tutors of the Bamira family) reflect on their experiences with Keep it Real.

When I joined Keep It Real in the fall, I didn't know what to expect. All I knew about the community was that it was in Northview Heights and that there were a ton of adorable kids. I was a little nervous about the area, but at the same time excited to be a part of Keep It Real and to meet the Bamiras and the Hajis. What first struck me when I entered the homes of my families was the feeling of walking into a new world entirely. I was greeted with hugs from more children than I could count. They were all beyond excited to see a new tutor despite having never met me before. There was no furniture at all except a massive plasma screen television mounted in one corner of the room. Instead of tables and chairs, we all sat on the floor underneath beautiful tapestries hanging from the ceiling and covering the walls. Homework came out, and we all worked together to make sure everyone was finished before we started playing with Jenga and puzzles. The whole situation which had seemed to foreign to me felt completely normal by the time we left, again in the wake of more hugs than I could count.

In the car on the way back from my first visit, I asked Brett to tell me more about where the Bamiras came from. Their story amazed me, and throughout the rest of the semester I

learned more and more about their past and the conflict in Somalia through research and from talking to Brett, the Bimira's wonderful mother, Helema, and my kids.

By the end of my first semester, I felt like a part of their family. The club became about so much more to me than just tutoring; it was my second home. Between Real Saturdays and special occasions like baby Helema's first birthday and the Halloween Party, I was able to experience and appreciate the Somali culture on a much deeper level than I could have ever imagined. Going with Brett to see our family has become the best part of my week, and every time we go they always have a new piece of artwork or an A on a test to show us. I am so proud of them and the more time I spend with Keep It Real, the more I see how proud every tutor is of the their families and of being a part of this community.

After tutoring with Brett for two semesters and seeing how respected and loved he and all the board members are in the community, I knew that I wanted to apply for a position next year. I was lucky enough to be given the Arsenal Liaison position, and I can't wait. I hope to be a teacher one day, and I couldn't be more excited to gain some

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experience with the kids I've become so close with this year. This summer I plan on attending Siraji's wedding and graduation, and I'm already looking forward to seeing my family again in September!

-Morgan Buck

Having tutored for the last four years and eight semesters with the same family, I have so many emotions going through my head as I write this short piece about my experiences with Keep It Real. I have grown closer with my family than I had ever dreamed possible. When I first began tutoring, the allure was to have more volunteer experience, to gain teaching experience, and to learn about a new culture; however, when I first met the kids I knew right away that Keep It Real and the families that we tutor would provide so much more. The first day tutoring almost four years ago is still sharp in my head: I showed up to the address in the GPS with their previous tutor, but it was an abandoned road – they had moved during the summer, and we were lost. But according to the kids, we were close enough to walk, so we walked through North View Heights for over fifteen minutes before finally getting to the house. My first reaction was concern about my safety, and when we knocked on the door, I was nervous about what to expect. What if the kids didn't like me? What if I wasn't able to help them? When we opened the door I was bull rushed by five kids who all wanted to

give their old tutor a hug. I was received with the same warm welcome and from then on, have been greeted the same way each time that I go to visit my family.

To say that I have been welcomed into their home is an understatement. Keep It Real tutors are welcomed into the entire community. I often tell people that I have two families: my Selinsgrove family – my biological parents that I lived with up to college, and my Pittsburgh family – Salim, Halima, Big-Abdi, Muna, Siraji, Luley, Little-Abdi, Hassan, Amina, Shafie, Husseini, Ahmed, Ikra, Little-Halima, and Ibrihim. be today and the reason for my desire to continue teaching after college.

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Morgan and Brett with some of the Bamira family



Throughout the last four years, these people have influenced my life in more ways than are possible to list here. From helping with homework, to celebratory pizza parties after great report cards, and from listening to raps being spit and watching dance performances by the older kids, to dancing with Ahmed as he paraded around in his diaper, size 12 boots (borrowed from another tutor), and sunglasses that were way too big for him, each moment with the family has shaped me into the person that I want to be today and the reason for my desire to continue teaching after college.

And it is not only the Bamira family that has impacted my life. I was fortunate to be able to tutor not only one other family, but also a total of four other families and have been warmly

welcomed by each one. I was also fortunate to be involved early on in leadership through Real Saturdays and then as Co-President, where each role allowed me to become even more involved with the entire community and through every step and everyday, I had the same welcoming feeling working with the Somali-Bantu community. In all, the experience over the last four years has changed my life completely. I tell prospective tutors at tabling events that Keep It Real has been the most rewarding experience of my life, not only my four years at Pitt. I tell people that after a week (sometimes less) the families see you as one of their own children because they are that welcoming. And I tell people that through Keep It Real – helping the families in anyway possible, watching the kids grow and change over the years, and seeing the improvement in grades, behavior, manners, and post-high-school decisions – the bond you make with the families will not only be life-long, but also allows you to experience first-hand the difference that you are making in the community. I can say full-heartedly that these are completely true to me today, and they sum up my last four years with Keep It Real.

As I embark on a new adventure, I think I can safely speak for all out-going seniors in

saying that Keep It Real was an extremely influential experience that will stick with us all as we go on to the next stages of life. In our future endeavors, no matter what they are, there will be plenty of times to put the lessons that we learned during Keep It Real – from the kids, tutors, families, and community – into practice in the real world. I know that for me, and the many others who have had the privilege of becoming involved with this organization, the relationships that have been built will not simply end with graduation. The lessons and relationships built will continue because of the impact that both have had on all of our lives and molded us into the people we will be. The Bamiras, the Somali-Bantu community, and Keep It Real have changed my life in more ways than I could have ever dreamed possible, and I will be like the entire senior class of tutors in continuing to always Keep It Real.

Noteworthy Accomplishments!

Alyssa Klopfer, tutor

In the recent months we've had a couple major accomplishments in the Haji and Sekondo families. As tutors, we understand the value of a quality education and it is something we strive to provide for our kids. Our goal is to help them succeed and watching it happen is one of the best rewards.

In early March, Hussein Haji got accepted in Sewickley Academy after many weeks of rigorous studying. Sewickley Academy is a prestigious private school in Edgeworth, Pennsylvania that contains only around 700 kids from prekindergarten to 12th grade. There, Hussein will be enrolled in high-level courses and will be well prepared for college or whatever he chooses to pursue.

Similarly, Farhiya Sekondo spent countless hours preparing for her future, studying for the SAT and applying for colleges. She has even been taking multiple AP classes, and her hard work has paid off! Farhiya has been accepted into Chatham University, Carlow University, and even La Roche College, which had a selective acceptance rate of only 55 percent this year! Though financial situations are still being arranged, she is leaning towards attending Chatham in the fall.

Congratulations to both Hussein and Farhiya for their resilience and consistent dedication. We are so proud and we can't wait to see all that you accomplish in the next chapters of your lives!

Alumni Spotlight(s)

Julie Radomski and Greg Jones

Volunteering and organizing with Keep It Real completely shaped my college experience, and continues to affect how I see the world today. I started tutoring with the Abdalla family as a sophomore at Pitt nearly four years ago, and it's been privileged to stay close with the family ever since - as well as get to know other families and tutors in the KIR community.

Keep It Real quickly became a huge part of my life while at Pitt, as I began to realize how important tutoring and mentorship is for both families and tutors. I had a great time on KIR's board over the next few years, getting to know all of the kids (and meeting new babies), convincing/conning friends/strangers into tutoring, trick or treating, dancing at weddings, and seeing truly touching relationships form through KIR.

Currently, I'm studying for my Masters degree in international development at the University of Cambridge. I owe a huge amount to Keep It Real for sparking my interest in issues I now study full time, including international refugee policy, but also questions of humanitarian aid, global governance, reproductive health, and

early childhood development. I think of my experiences with KIR and the Abdalla family every day.

After graduating I hope to find work as gratifying and meaningful as my time with Keep It Real, fingers crossed. I'm so proud to have been able to be a part of such a great community, and can't wait to see how the organization continues to grow and progress in years to come.

-Julie Radomski, '14



Julie (right) pictured with members of the Abdalla family at Allderdice High School's graduation in June 2014

Participating in KIR during my time as an undergrad definitely shaped me personally, like I'm sure it has shaped all those who have been and are a part of the organization. But the experience has also shaped me professionally, and has driven me to continue working with immigrant and international populations as a career.

Since leaving Pitt, I shortly began interning with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, which houses the city's Immigrants and Internationals Advisory Council. Having had some interaction with the council before, the opportunity allowed me to continue to work with the Somali-Bantu community in addition to other immigrant communities throughout Pittsburgh.

Shortly after, I moved to Tanzania to continue my studies in East African affairs, essentially becoming an immigrant myself while continuing to learn about a culture I fell in love with. When I

moved back to the US, I knew I wanted to continue working with immigrant populations. I held positions with the International Rescue Committee and the Refugee and Immigrant Fund, both located in New York, and continued my pursuit towards what facet of immigrant affairs I wanted to be involved in. I plan to continue working with immigrants and advocate on their behalf, and it is because of KIR that I have chosen this career path.

-Greg Jones, '13

Check Out Our Brand New Website!
<http://keepitrealpitt.wix.com/keepitrealm>

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/>