



For Immediate Release
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Textiles and Crafts from the Refugee Sewing Circle Project

Hartford — The Clare Gallery is pleased to present *Weaving a New Life: The Refugee Artists Sewing Circle*, a multi-media exhibition featuring textile arts created by recent refugees and more longstanding immigrants to the Greater Hartford area. The Sewing Circle Project began in 2007, initiated by the Institute for Community Research's (ICR) Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program (CHAP) based in Hartford, Connecticut. The exhibition is free and open to the public and extends from January 22 to February 22, 2009. A reception will be held on Tuesday, February 17, from 5 to 7 p.m., at which time participating artists will demonstrate their weaving and needlework techniques. Lynne Williamson, Director of CHAP at ICR, will speak on the history of the project, the diverse artwork and traditions of the artists, and the project's importance to the Hartford community. All are welcome.

Weaving a New Life: The Refugee Artists Sewing Circle highlights a collection of global crafts made by artists including Fatuma Ahmed, a Somali basket weaver; Fatima, a Bosnian rug weaver; Melka and Mevlija, Bosnian crochet and knit workers; Florence Betgeorge, an Assyrian lace maker; Mai Xiong and Choua Yang, Hmong embroiderers; Elena Cupceancu, a Romanian needleworker; Kannah Zealey, a Liberian tailor, and several other textile artists. Though most of the artists have experienced war, trauma, and dislocation, they continue to practice their cultural heritage and traditions, blending these with current experiences to create artwork that is both beautiful and functional.

Many immigrants and refugees have come to live in the Hartford area. CHAP, working with local refugee groups and service providers, identified the need for an initiative that would develop the remarkable skills of these newcomers. The Sewing Circle Project members meet regularly at ICR to work on their art forms and share coffee and conversation. This supportive environment provides social interaction among the artists, recognition of their cultural heritage and artistic traditions, stimulates literacy improvement, and helps develop marketplaces for their artwork. Over the past year, several Sewing Circle participants have sold their work in Hartford at the Hartford Library World Refugee Day; Open Studio Weekends; the International ICR Conference; and as regular vendors at the Billings Forge Farmers Market on summer Thursdays. Lynne Williamson describes the Sewing Circle Project: "This has become such an enjoyable and productive group of artists, who honor their roots while working hard to become good neighbors here in our area. We will be expanding the project to offer small business training to the artists, thanks to grants from the Aurora Foundation and the Avon Hello Tomorrow Fund."

The Clare Gallery primarily features exhibitions that emphasize world religions or interfaith themes, as well as social justice themes, on either a global or local level. The Gallery is housed in the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry at 285 Church Street. The Center is part of St. Patrick – St. Anthony Church, a vibrant and active downtown faith community.

The Clare Gallery's hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Fridays; Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Sundays from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The Gallery and all related events are free and open to the public. Free parking is available directly across from the church at Saints Lot, and the facility is handicapped accessible. More information may be found under "Community Life" on the Church's website: <http://www.spsact.org/>