



MONTGOMERY COUNTY

*Charles W. Gilchrist*

**Center for Cultural Diversity**



**Annual Report FY 2012**

**July 1, 2011—June 30, 2012**

## Welcome Letter from the County Executive:



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

Isiah Leggett  
*County Executive*



Gilchrist Center Family:

I am pleased to present the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity's Fiscal Year 2012 annual report. As you will see, the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity continues to serve thousands of our immigrant neighbors through a variety of critical services and by connecting immigrant-serving organizations to each other and to County Government. Our commitment to our newest neighbors is stronger than ever before. With more than 31 percent of our residents born in another country, it is critical that we create a welcoming environment so that all of our residents may be equipped to give their best to our economy and our social fabric. By creating a welcoming environment now for our newest neighbors, Montgomery County will ensure a positive future for all of our residents for decades to come.

This annual report is an excellent overview of the Gilchrist Center's work, and it gives us a strong foundation from which to continue to strengthen the network of immigrant services in our County. Thank you to all of our staff, volunteers, clients, supporters, and partner organizations for helping us make Montgomery County a thriving multicultural community.

Sincerely,

Isiah Leggett  
County Executive

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Photo: Center staff and volunteers during the World of Montgomery Festival—Fall 2011 (left) and traditional Peruvian folk musicians during the 10th Anniversary Celebration—Winter 2011 (bottom right)



## History and Mission:

Since 2001, the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity has been Montgomery County Government's immigrant welcome center where the County's diverse population can be connected to public and private services, volunteering, civic engagement, cross cultural activities, and economic empowerment.

### **Vision:**

The vision of the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity is to help make Montgomery County a thriving multicultural community where every resident feels welcome, participates civically, and contributes positively to the economy.

### **Mission:**

The mission of the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity is to be Montgomery County Government's welcome center where the County's diverse population can be connected to public and private services, volunteering, civic engagement, cross cultural activities, and economic empowerment.



Photo: Mr. Charles Gilchrist (top right) and opening ceremony (above)



Charles W. Gilchrist was a native Washingtonian, living in the District and Montgomery County throughout his childhood. He attended Williams College and Harvard Law School. In 1975, he was elected to the Maryland State Senate where he served until 1978.

Starting in 1978, Mr. Gilchrist served two consecutive terms as Montgomery County Executive. During that time, Mr. Gilchrist appointed the County's first African-American and Hispanic staff advisors, created the County's Minority Business Procurement Program and established the Commission on Ethnic Affairs.

Mr. Gilchrist sought to open doors of participation in community life to everyone. He envisioned the changing demographics of the County and encouraged everyone to welcome the new faces and cultures that were beginning to redefine our community.

## Our Goals:

- Provide the most needed services to immigrants in the County through partnerships with other organizations or by utilizing skilled volunteers. Services include information and referral to services; English as a second language; workforce development; civic engagement; computer literacy; citizenship; and pro-bono legal assistance.
- Provide Civic Engagement academies to help residents get oriented to life in the County, understand their rights and responsibilities, and become engaged in the community.
- Assist Regional Service Centers to staff (via AmeriCorps) and create programs for Gilchrist Welcome Centers—set up classes, find partners and volunteers, materials, etc.
- Serve as a resource for organizations seeking to set up new programs or find partners.
- Increase coordination and build the network of immigrant service providers.
- Promote diversity, cross cultural understanding and awareness throughout the County.



Photo: Upcounty Citizenship students listen intently to an immigration official's presentation on citizenship and naturalization process.—Summer 2012

### Our programs and services:

- \*Information & referral to services
- \*Citizenship preparation & application assistance
- \*English for speakers of other languages
- \*English, Spanish & French conversation clubs
- \*Computers for beginners
- \*Workforce development
- \*Spanish literacy
- \*Free legal advice
- \*Civics for English learners
- \*Volunteer opportunities
- \*Spanish language classes

## Highlights:

The Center celebrated its 10th Anniversary, joined by Councilmember Nancy Navarro and County Executive Isiah Leggett, who presented awards to the Center's volunteers for their commitment and long time service.

Gilchrist family and friends, former staff, alumni and County government officials and supporters (over a 100 people) helped us commemorate this milestone. It was an opportunity for them to visit the new facility, meet the staff, and celebrate the diversity of Montgomery County.



Photo: members of the Chinese American Senior Services Association performed a traditional dance.

## Services for Immigrants and Newcomers:

### Information & Referral Services:

The Center responded to **6,717** requests from walk-in clients and phone calls, which represents a 15% increase from FY'11.

The most common requests were related to: English classes (ESOL), immigration and citizenship services, computer classes, free legal advice, general center information, Spanish language programs, employment and volunteering.

Photo: Free and comprehensive Information & Referral Services



**English (ESOL), English Grammar and English Conversation classes:**

All of our sites offer drop-in classes year-around to help students who have changing work schedules or who want to practice their English to improve their language skills. These classes received a total of **6,034** visits.

During the summer of FY'12 there was also an English Conversation class offered at the Silver Spring Civic Building.



Photo: English Conversation class—Spring 2012

**English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL):**

Eight hundred and five students enrolled in registration-based ESOL classes. These classes were offered directly by the Gilchrist Center with volunteer teachers or through partnerships, such as Montgomery College (WD&CE) at its Wheaton locations, the Literacy Council of Montgomery County at its Wheaton and Upcounty locations and the Spanish Catholic Center at its Upcounty site.

This year's student enrollment represents a significant (34%) increase from last year's enrollment rate mainly due to additional offerings in Upcounty and the Mid-County Regional Services Center.



Photo: English class—Spring 2012

### Citizenship Classes and Application Assistance:

We provide a robust Citizenship preparation program thanks to partnerships with Baltimore City Community College, Montgomery College and through volunteer-run classes. Clients eligible to become American citizens received individual technical and legal assistance to complete their applications for citizenship through a partnership with the New Americans Citizenship Project of Maryland. **4,576** clients were assisted in all of our sites. This represents a remarkable 97% increase from the 2,321 people assisted last year.



Photo: Jorge Caicedo, an Upcounty citizenship student with his recently awarded Naturalization Certificate.

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### Application for Visa Renewal Event:



Photo: Consulate staff helping fill out applications

This past March, **80** Salvadorian eligible residents received free assistance to complete their visa renewal applications for Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Free legal consultation was also available on site. This event was made possible through a partnership with the Consulate of El Salvador.

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### Free Legal Counseling:

The Center provided **1,137 clients with invaluable** pro bono legal consultations on civil matters at the Wheaton Library and Upcounty sites in partnership with the Bar Association of Montgomery County.

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### Small Business Development Seminar:

The Upcounty site offered a workshop on small business development in partnership with the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) where **12** students and the public learned about LEDC's small business loan program and associated training and advice.



**Workforce Development:**

We re-launched our workforce development program to help job seeking residents through a new open computer lab where we provide assistance with resume writing, online job search and employment application submission. The program registered **28** clients.

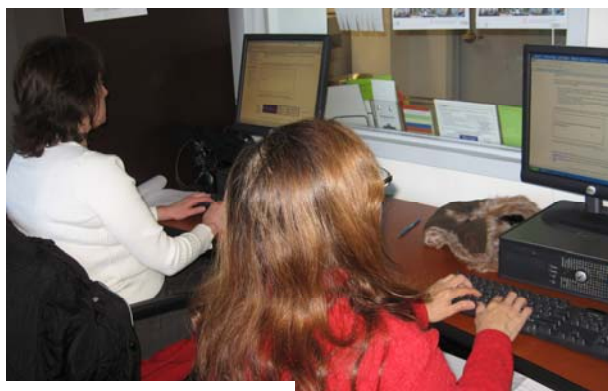


Photo: Computer class students

**Computer Classes:**

The Gilchrist Center served **434** students through basic computer literacy instruction, introducing students to Windows, Microsoft software, Internet and social media in English, Spanish and French.

The number of students served increased by a significant 73%, to the **251** students served in FY'11.

**Spanish Literacy for Spanish Speakers:**

This drop-in class recorded **1,131** visits, providing basic Spanish Literacy instruction in the areas of reading and writing as well as teaching basic math skills.

**Outreach:**

We conducted a broad range of outreach activities to inform the public about the services and programs that we offer. Door knocking with Impact Silver Spring in the Glenmont area, Impact Silver Spring's Neighborhood Exchange meetings in Gaithersburg and Wheaton, the Muslim Community Center's Job Fair in East County, the Spanish Catholic Center's Christmas Fair in Wheaton, a Citizenship Information session Upcounty, and a Health Fair in Upcounty are some of the events we were involved in.



Photo: Neighborhood Exchange outreach event—Spring 2012

## Civic Engagement:

### Civic Engagement through English Conversation:

The civic engagement program, that fosters communication between new county residents and representatives from Montgomery County Government and non-profits through English Conversation, was offered in Upcounty, Mid-County and East County/Silver Spring regions. The total number of students registered was 38.



Photo: Civic Engagement student (second from left) receiving completion award from this edition's facilitators Mid-County Regional Center Director, Ana Lopez van Balen (second from right), Community Engagement Specialist, Asaati Ahmad (left) and volunteer instructor, Diane Hibino (right).—Winter 2012

*"Thank you for helping us to see how to solve our neighborhood concerns. Before I would only call the police, but now I know there are other ways to find solutions."*

Extracted from student evaluation survey,  
Mid-County Civic Engagement Academy: April 2012.

## Immigrant Service Providers Network:

### Building a Service Providers Network:

The Center has focused on building a network of service providers for immigrants through meetings and events where service providers can share information: the Upcounty and Downcounty Network meetings; a workshop in Spanish on Social Security benefits; a presentation at the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL) for ESOL providers; and meetings with the public schools Linkages to Learning staff, and the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) staff, among others.

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## Fostering Multi-Cultural Awareness:

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### Spanish Language Classes:



Photo: Spanish Conversation class students, Upcounty—Summer 2012

We offered basic Spanish language classes on a quarterly basis. This year a total of 72 students registered. Students could also participate in Spanish Conversation Clubs, both at the Wheaton Library or Germantown site. These Conversation Clubs were offered weekly and recorded 272 drop-in visits.

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### Educational and Cultural Programs:

Our offerings also include Health & Nutrition Seminars, a French Conversation Club in our Upcounty site, and other cultural programs such as “Go”, an Asian strategy game.

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### Multi-Cultural Events:

The Center aims to foster understanding and multi-cultural awareness through its participation in different events such as: Taste of Wheaton, the World of Montgomery Festival, the Fiesta de las Madres event in Silver Spring, and the Asian Lunar New Year event in Silver Spring.

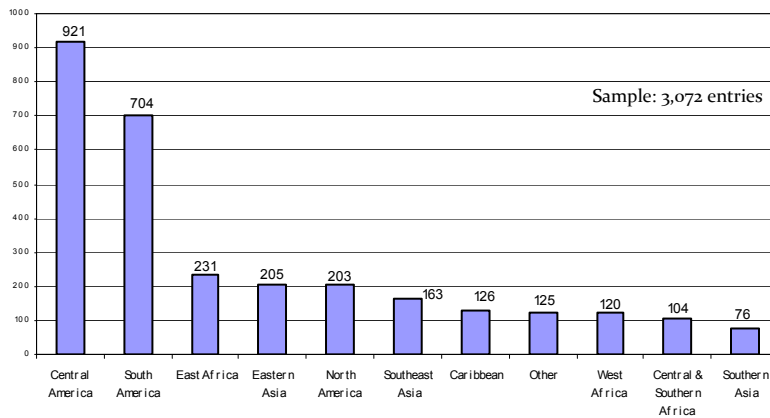
Photo: Multi-cultural arts project during the World of Montgomery Festival in Wheaton —Fall 2011



## Who We Serve:

### By Country of Origin:

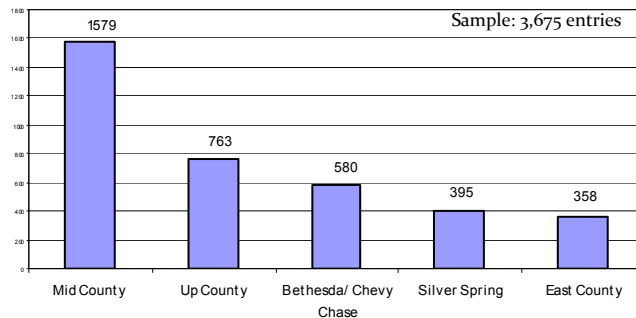
Center participants come from a wide range of countries.



The top 15 countries of origin of participants sampled are: El Salvador (591), Peru (309), USA (201), Ethiopia (195), Bolivia (107), Guatemala (106), Colombia (100), China (94), Ecuador (82), Vietnam (78), Honduras (72), Mexico (72), Nicaragua (67), South Korea (66), Cameroon (65), Dominican Republic (60), Iran (57), and Brazil (54).

### By Zip Codes:

The majority of the participants sampled came from the Mid-County area, followed by Upcounty and Bethesda-Chevy Chase (mainly from locations in Rockville) in third place.



## Volunteers:

The Center relies on volunteers to run its day-to-day operations and teach its programs. During FY'12 **132** volunteers supported the Center in many different capacities, contributing **5,319** hours (a 29% increased from last year). This is partly attributable to the expanded Upcounty program. Among the activities that our volunteers performed:

- teaching : **3,172** hours
- administrative aide: **891** hours
- reception/ information and referral: **416** hours
- teaching aide: **340** hours
- data entry: **326** hours
- event helper: **86** hours
- other: **62** hours
- program coordination: **13** hours
- interpretation & translation: **7** hours
- editing: **6** hours



Photo: Volunteer Devi Divakar receiving award from County Executive during the Center's 10th Anniversary Celebration

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## Meet our Staff:

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During FY'12 the Gilchrist Center's staff members were:

**Community Liaison & Manager of the Gilchrist Center:**

Karla Silvestre

**Program Specialists:**

Kaori Hirakawa

Dolores Ustrell Roig

**Program Coordinators (Americorps fellows):**

Asaati Ahmad

Jonathan Hershendorfer

Patricia Larson

**Information & Referral Specialists:**

Jedidiah Carmichael

Natalie Chhuan

Elizabeth Gonzalez

Martha Guzman

Gabriela Raudales

Veronica Tejada

Susan Ucanay



Photo: Center staff and volunteers joined by County Executive Ike Leggett during the World of Montgomery Festival—Fall 2011.

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## Locations, Hours of Operation and Contact Information:

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Main number: (240)777- 4940

Fax number: (240)777-4941



Headquarters: Mid-County Regional Services Center

2424 Reddie Drive, Suite 220

Wheaton, MD 20902

tel: 240.777.4940

Hours of operation:

Monday through Thursday: 9 am to 4 pm

Wheaton Library Site:

11701 Georgia Avenue

Wheaton, MD 20902

tel: 240.777.4950

Hours of operation:

Tuesday through Thursday:

4:30 to 8 pm

Saturday: 10 am to 4 pm

Upcounty Site:

12900 Middlebrook Road

Germantown, MD 20874

tel: 240.777.6950

Hours of operation:

Monday through Thursday:

4:30 to 8 pm



**Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural  
Diversity**

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Website: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/gilchrist](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/gilchrist)

Facebook: [charleswgilchristcenterforculturaldiversity](https://www.facebook.com/charleswgilchristcenterforculturaldiversity)