

Enjoy dancing and delicacies

The Multicultural Association of Fredericton is holding Dance and Delicacies on May 11 in support of the newcomer scholarship fund

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Financing higher education can be a daunting experience in its own right without adding the challenge of being in a new country with few resources.

It's a situation newcomer youth regularly face and one the Multicultural Association of Fredericton is determined to do something about.

"We want to have a scholarship fund for newcomers going on to post-secondary education," says Lisa Bamford De Gante, executive director of the MCAF, so in 2011 the organization established a charitable education fund.

"We have 108 newcomers in our youth programming and there is so much potential in the newcomer community," she says. "Sometimes, when newcomer families first arrive and parents are still working on their second language or working to integrate, newcomer youth don't necessarily have that support system financially to go into post-secondary education. In some cases, there aren't parents here."

As well, some loans and scholarships include stipulations, such as having a family member who attended the institution or residency requirements, that the newcomer isn't able to meet.

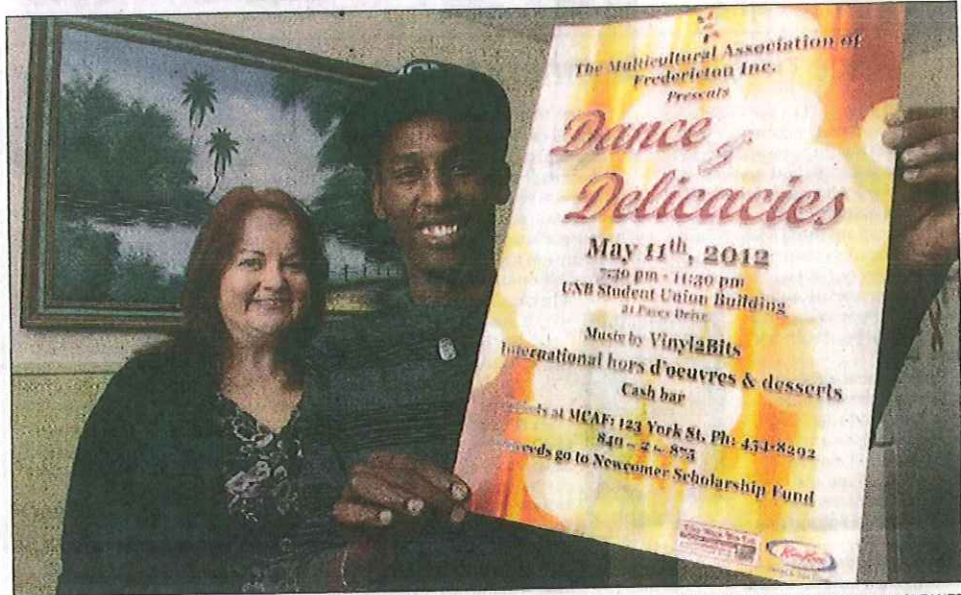
"We want to support newcomer youth who want to contribute in our community, who want to go on to post-secondary education and help them make that dream come true," says Bamford De Gante.

To do this, they need to build the scholarship fund to a large enough amount so it's sustainable year after year.

"We've done a few little things to start," she says, noting that some people have made donations and others have given memorial donations.

That got the ball rolling, but they decided they needed to have a big event to launch the scholarship fund and help build it up. That's where Dance and Delicacies comes in.

The fundraising event is taking place on Friday, May 11, from 7:30-11:30 p.m. at the Student Union Building on the University of New Brunswick campus. It will feature music by Vinyl2Bits, international delicacies and a cash bar.



STEPHEN MACGILLIVRAY/THE DAILY GLEANER

Come dance with us: The Multicultural Association of Fredericton (MCAF) will host its newcomer scholarship fundraiser, Dance and Delicacies, on May 11, from 7:30-11:30 p.m., at University of New Brunswick Student Union Building. Promoting the event are Lisa Bamford De Gante, executive director of MCAF, left, and newcomer Hassan Yussuf. Yussuf came to Canada from Kenya three years ago.

"We will have desserts and hors d'oeuvres from around the world. People will be able to come and try samplings of many different foods throughout the evening," says Bamford De Gante.

"The band Vinyl2Bits is just an amazing band. They play all sorts of very dance-able music — they have their own following."

Organizers chose this type of fundraising event because they thought it would be fun and appeal to a range of people.

"We love to dance, we love to eat and we get such positive feedback about the food made by the Immigrant Women's Catering Group," she says.

Everyone is welcome to attend. "We hope that people turn out in a big way to support newcomer youth hoping to go on to post-secondary education in our community," she says. "We will also have art there in a silent auction. Some of the art will be created by newcomer youth, and a few other artists in our community."

Hassan Yussuf knows firsthand what it means to be a newcomer to Canada. The 19-year-old came here from Kenya.

"I'm here with my other two brothers, my older one and my younger one. I'm in my first year of university at St. Thomas."

He would like to work in human rights some day, as it's something he strongly believes in and wants to help others achieve.

"I came here as a refugee, the same way every refugee comes here from Kenya," says Yussuf. "I've been here for three years now. I went to FHS and graduated from there."

He's the first member of his family to graduate from high school, and the first one to go to university.

His parents, as well as other family members, are still in Kenya.

"I talk to them often and they would be interested to come (to Canada)."

Yussuf first arrived in this country at 16.

"It was terrifying. Of course, I was in Winnipeg and it was winter. I stayed there for 10 months and then said, 'OK, I can't take it.'"

His brother was in Fredericton and asked him to come here. Yussuf was happy to make the move and is enjoying being here.

He hopes people come to Dance and Delicacies, to help support the newcomer scholarship fund.

"For me it's important because this will help families with low incomes, those who can't afford the money for university. Right now, for example, me I'm taking a student loan."

The scholarship fund would be really good for newcomers because it would help them avoid that financial burden, he says.

Having experienced the education systems in both Kenya and Canada, he believes there are more opportunities here.

"We had a really, really difficult time of studies there. Here we have equipment, you can go to the library, you can use computers, you can just go Google and search whatever you want," he says. "In Kenya, it's hard. You can go to the library and only use books. There are no such things as laptops. To live here is a good opportunity for anyone to actually get an education."

Newcomer youth have really given a lot to the Fredericton community, points out Bamford De Gante.

"We have the newcomer youth who perform, and Hassan is one of

the dancers. Many people have seen the African dancers and the African drummers. We also have the India music group," she says. "Newcomer youth volunteer at events, they work hard to try and share their culture with the community in Fredericton."

Yussuf has proven how motivated he is to succeed, she says. Though his parents are still in Kenya, he has managed to get through high school and to go on to university.

"Hassan worked last summer in the Rainbow Cultures summer camp for children aged six to 12. Some of those children are learning English or French as a second language, they're learning about the culture and they're also going through the experience of being new to Canada," says Bamford De Gante.

"Hassan has already gone through that and is a good mentor and is really encouraging for youth starting that process. He shares music and dancing and brings so much to his work with the children in the summer camp."

He's also been working with some of the youth programming at MCAF.

"Hassan has really, in three years, done a lot of things and shared a lot of things in our community. And we're really impressed that he's supporting himself to get through university," she says. "Really, he's an example and we want to support people like Hassan."

Tickets for Dance and Delicacies are \$40 each or two for \$75. They are available at the Multicultural Association of Fredericton office, located at 123 York St. in suite 201, or through volunteers, board members or staff.

To make a donation to the charitable education fund, contact MCAF at 454-8292.