

**NOT JUST CLOWNING AROUND:
Refugee Children Learn About Teamwork and Friendship Under the Big Top**

BURLINGTON, VT. – The Sara Holbrook Community Center announces a special collaboration this summer with Circus Smirkus. Children attending the Center’s *New Arrivals* program will sample a weeklong “circus buffet” at the Circus Smirkus Academy in Essex Junction from July 25th to July 29th. With its combination of athletics, performance arts, and recreational fun, Circus Smirkus is an ideal venue for the children to build new social skills. This added enrichment activity to the *New Arrivals* program is made possible by a three-year grant awarded by the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust.

Since 1989, the Sara Holbrook Community Center has offered *New Arrivals*, an educational program for immigrant and refugee children with limited English proficiency. The program provides English language instruction to children while public schools are closed, alleviating the summer slip. Currently, 60 children are enrolled in *New Arrivals*, representing 14 countries and 16 different languages. Nearly 50 percent of the children speak Maay-Maay, the most predominant language this year.

Circus Smirkus provides a unique environment for the children to practice English and expand vocabulary, while reinforcing important skills such as cooperation, self-discipline, and teamwork. Leisa Pollander, Executive Director of the Sara Holbrook Community Center adds, “Cooperation and teamwork are qualities all kids need for healthy development, but for many of the children this year, these concepts are alien. From living in the camps, their lives have been challenged in unfathomable ways. It is our hope that their time at the circus will help each child develop these life-skills”.

The Sara Holbrook Community Center was established nearly 70 years ago by Sara Holbrook, a clinical psychologist at the University of Vermont. Since its inception, the Center has been providing support and programs for low-income children and their families. Annually, 5,000 individuals, including refugees and immigrants, take part in the Center’s programs: preschool, after-school care, teen activities, English classes for adults and children, summer camps, and basic needs assistance. The Center is located at 66 North Avenue in the Old North End of Burlington.

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