



MONTGOMERY COUNTY

*Charles W. Gilchrist*

**Center for Cultural Diversity**



**Annual Report FY 2013**

**July 1, 2012—June 30, 2013**

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## Welcome Letter from the County Executive:

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OFFICES OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Isiah Leggett  
*County Executive*



Gilchrist Center Family:

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity for Fiscal Year 2013. We are working hard to make Montgomery County America's most welcoming community. Every day, the energetic and committed staff, volunteers, and partners of the Gilchrist Center help move us closer to this important goal.

The Gilchrist Center provides necessary services to all of the residents of our County with special emphasis on serving our immigrant population. Through programs and events, and by coordinating the efforts of immigrant-serving organizations and County Government, the Center is an invaluable resource for area residents. With more than 31 percent of our residents born in another country, a welcoming environment is of great importance so that all of our residents may be equipped to achieve their best and to support the economic and social development of Montgomery County. I recognize that our rich diversity is Montgomery County's edge in the global marketplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Gilchrist Center represents our commitment to creating an environment in which our newest neighbors are able to participate fully in building a better future for all of us.

The Annual Report for 2013 provides an excellent overview of the Gilchrist Center's valuable work. It gives us a clear perspective of the successful efforts made to strengthen and support the network of immigrant services in the 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: (cover)** Information and Referral Specialist, Natalie Chhuan, ready to provide information to clients at the Wheaton Library site. **(left):** Staff, Veronica Tejada, providing information and referral services during an outreach event at the Tess Center, in Long Branch, Silver Spring.

## History and Mission:

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Since 2001, the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity has been 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.

### **Vision:**

The vision of the Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity is to help make Montgomery County a thriving multicultural community where every resident feels welcomed, 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.

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## Biography of Charles W. Gilchrist:

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

In 1978, Mr. Gilchrist began the first of two consecutive terms as Montgomery County Executive. During that time, Mr. Gilchrist appointed the County's first African American and Latino 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:

- Continue to be the County's **Immigrant Welcome Center** by providing the most needed services to immigrants through partnerships with other organizations and by utilizing skilled volunteers.
- Provide **new resident orientations** by combining Montgomery County focused materials and other real life examples for the registration based and ongoing classes.
- Continue to build and maintain the immigrant integration **network of providers** through coordinated efforts, quarterly meetings and supporting the network through community events and immigrant media outlets.
- Value diversity through welcoming neighborhoods by promoting **cross cultural understanding and awareness** with efforts such as language classes to enable communication, volunteering, multicultural events, and working on community issues.

**Testimonial:** *"I have to say you are a special place where we can [come] to learn[ to ] live better and learn about what I need..."*

*-Student, ESOL Level 2 at the Mid-County RSC site, Spring 2013*



**Photo:** Staffers Jedidiah Carmichael and Dolores Ustrell, with volunteers at the Taste of Wheaton, June 2013

### Our Programs and Services:

- \*Information & Referral to Services
- \*Citizenship preparation classes
- \*English for Speakers of Other Languages classes
- \*Spanish Language classes
- \*English & Spanish conversation clubs
- \*Computer for Beginners classes
- \*Spanish literacy classes
- \*Pro bono legal clinic
- \*Job Search Workshop
- \*Volunteer opportunities

## Highlights:

### New Program: Job Search Workshop



**Photo:** Volunteer instructor Judith Johnson with her Job Search Workshop students, at the Mid-County RSC site, Fall 2012.

During Fiscal Year 2013 the Center added the Job Search Workshop to its list of offerings in order to meet the needs of the community. This workshop is a unique program designed for high intermediate or advanced English students to receive personalized assistance in their job search. In a small class environment, students learn how to write a resume and cover letter, practice interview skills, search for jobs, identify and apply for job opportunities.

In addition to strong English skills, the students that participate in this workshop must be familiar with Microsoft Word and the Internet/Email, and have access to a computer.

**Eighteen** students successfully completed the Workshop which was offered in the summer, winter and spring sessions.

### Success Story: Job Search Program Graduate Gabriela Zavala



**Photo:** Volunteer and Job Search Program Graduate, Gabriela Zavala

Gabriela Zavala, originally from Mexico City, came to the U.S. in 1998 with her husband who had accepted a job as an interpreter in Denver.

After relocating to the D.C. area in 2004, Gabriela was introduced to the Gilchrist Center through its Germantown English Conversation Club. She has since then been involved with the Center in many capacities as a student and volunteer staff assistant. During that time, she was able to improve her English, learn valuable workplace skills and, most importantly, build her self-confidence.

Gabriela successfully graduated from the Fall 2012 Job Search Workshop. As a career goal she hoped to find a position in the school system. Her dream came true in the Summer of 2013. Gabriela works currently as a Paraeducator for Special Education for Montgomery County Public Schools.

All we can say to Gabriela is: Congratulations! We are very happy for you!

## Services for Immigrants and Newcomers:

### Information & Referral Services:

The Center resolved 5,757 requests through direct walk-in or phone call. The most common requests were: English classes (ESOL), immigration and citizenship, pro bono legal consultation, computer classes, general center information, Spanish language classes, and employment and volunteering.



Staff and volunteers are bilingual or multilingual and are trained to serve clients with limited or no English proficiency. Clients receive in-depth information and referral services and get connected to appropriate services and agencies.

The loss of 2 AmeriCorp members and subsequent reduction of operating hours led to a decline in requests resolved.

**Photo:** Staffer Jedidiah Carmichael assisting an interested student at the Winter 2013 registration at the Mid-County RSC site.

### English (ESOL) classes and English Conversation Clubs:

Drop-in classes are offered at all sites (Mid-County RSC, Wheaton Library and Upcounty RSC) for students who have changing work schedules or who want to practice their English skills. These classes received a total of 4,719 visits.

Real life materials related to life in Montgomery County were introduced in all these classes to provide students with new resident orientations.



**Photo:** Volunteer instructor Vicky Wood teaching an English Conversation class. The topic for the class revolved around Montgomery County's multicultural character through food from different countries. Real life materials are presented to students to engage them in the class.— Mid-County RSC site, Fall 2012

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

666 students enrolled for registration-based ESOL classes offered by the Gilchrist Center, through its volunteer base, and partnerships with Montgomery College (WD&CE) at its Wheaton locations, and the Literacy Council of Montgomery County and the Spanish Catholic Center at its Upcounty RSC site.



**Photo:** Volunteer Instructor Cindy Newland and students in Level 4 English class at Mid-County RSC, Spring 2013

In Fall 2012 a great emphasis was given to improving the quality of the instruction for ESOL classes. Volunteer instructors met monthly during the Fall of 2012 for workshops on student-centered learning and focused on incorporating Montgomery County specifics into their instruction with the guidance of the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL).

*Testimonial: "I think everything, the themes were very useful. The topic U.S.A. and [learning] about the states and the county.....The extra material that the teacher brought for us was great too."*

- Student, Winter 2013 ESOL Level 4 class - Mid-County RSC.

**Citizenship Classes and Interview Preparation:**

The Gilchrist Center provides Citizenship preparation classes through its partnership with Baltimore City Community College and volunteer-run classes. Clients eligible for becoming American citizens also received individual coaching to prepare for their citizenship interview.

4,957 visits were received in the context of drop-in sessions. This number represents an 8% increase to FY'12's 4,576 contacts. Citizenship classes continue being offered at all 3 sites.



**Photo:** New Citizens! Former participants visiting the Wheaton Library's Citizenship classes, with volunteer instructor, Michael Benefiel.—Wheaton Library, Winter 2013

*Testimonial: "It was very useful and helpful. The way you explained was for me very understandable."*  
- Student, Fall 2012 Citizenship Class - Upcounty

### Legal Counseling:

The Center provided **1,170** pro bono legal consultations at the Wheaton Library and Upcounty RSC sites through its partnership with the Bar Foundation of Montgomery County. The Foundation provides assistance with civil cases, including divorce, separation and custody agreements as well as adoption, name changes, bankruptcy, security deposit disputes, will and power of attorney, and also limited immigration, debt collection defense and employment cases.

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Photo: Spring 2013 Computer Class—Mid-County RSC site

### Computer Classes:

The Gilchrist Center served **269** students through basic computer literacy instruction introducing them to Windows, Microsoft software, Internet and social media in English and Spanish. Classes are offered in two basic levels. Basic Level 1 assists students who are completely illiterate with computers. Basic Level 2 targets students who have a limited experience using word processing, the internet and email.

### Testimonial:

*“I am very happy with the attention that the teachers were able to give us and how the class was conducted.”*

-Student in Basic Computers I, Winter 2013, Mid-County RSC site, translated from Spanish

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### Other Educational and Cultural Programs:

The Center’s offerings also include Spanish Literacy and other cultural programs such as “Go”, an Asian strategy game. The Spanish Literacy recorded **516** visits, providing basic instruction in the areas of reading, writing and basic math skills. The Go Club program included **70** participants and has since moved to a new location, at the Mid-County Community Center, with the Recreation Department.

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## Immigrant Service Provider Network:

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### Immigrant Service Provider Network:

The Center has focused on building a network of service providers for immigrants by coordinating meetings where information can be shared. This year there were four meetings held quarterly that were topic focused: “Interpretation and Translation: Best Practices” in September; the new GED Test and Provider Agencies in December; serving the African Community in March; and agencies that support small businesses in June.

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### Outreach:

The Center was able to access 1,645 participants through a wide range of activities and outreach events. By participating in these community events, community members learned about the Center and about valuable information regarding many services and programs available. The Center made its presence known at events such as: the Back to School Fair, Neighbor to Neighbor Exchange with Impact Silver Spring, the Community Resource Fair at Eastern Middle School, Long Branch Neighborhood Exchange, Montgomery County Housing Fair and Financial Fitness Day and the School Community United in Partnership, among others.



Photo: Center staffers, Veronica Tejada and Dolores Ustrell with volunteer Gabriela Zavala at Montgomery County Housing Fair and Financial Fitness Day, Gaithersburg, April 2013.

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## Fostering Multi-Cultural Awareness:

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### Spanish Language Classes:

The Center offered four basic Spanish classes at the Mid-County RSC site. This year a total of 37 students registered . Students could also participate in a Spanish Conversation Club at the Wheaton Library. This Conversation club was offered weekly and recorded 275 drop-in visits.

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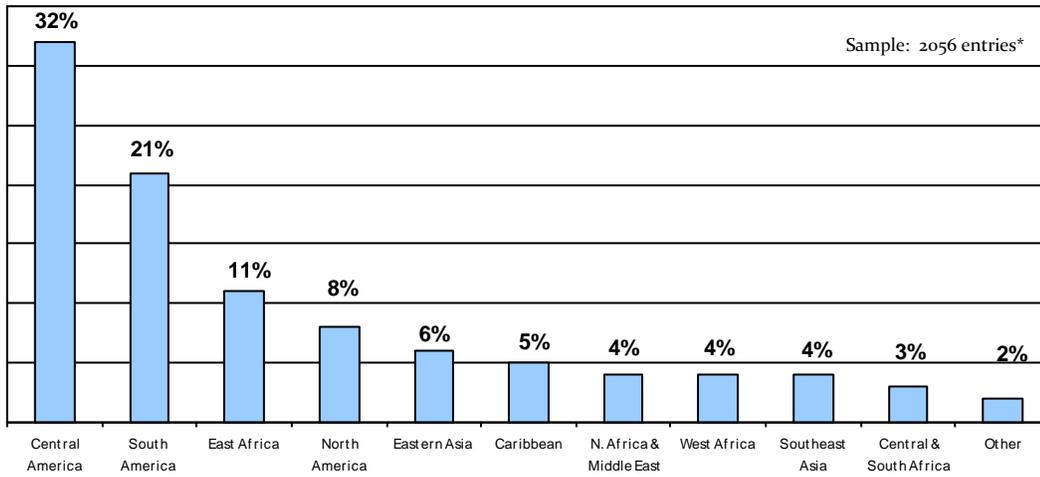


**Photo:** Center staffer, Natalie Chhuan, photographed with County Executive, Isiah Leggett and two more participants at a multicultural event, April 15, 2013

### Multicultural Events

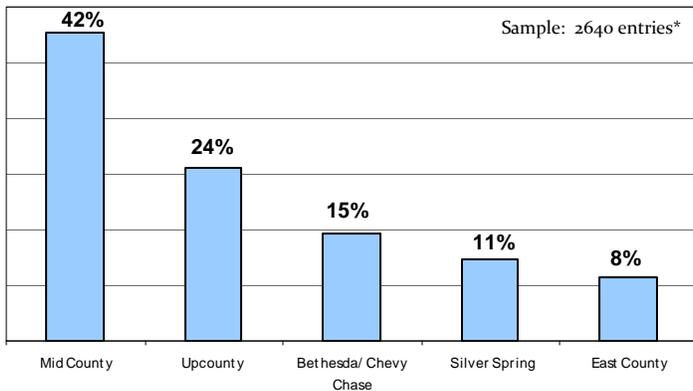
The Center strives to develop strong relationships with immigrant communities and promote multicultural awareness by participating in events such as the Caribbean Heritage Festival at Aspen Hill Library, the Club del Libro with CentroNia, the Salvadorian-American Festival, the TET Festival, the Taste of Wheaton, the World of Montgomery Festival, and the World Refugee Day event, among others.

## Who We Serve:



### By Geographic Origin:

Center clients come from a wide range of countries. The top 15 countries of origin of clients sampled are: El Salvador (460), Ethiopia (193), USA (166), Peru (148), Colombia (93), China (79), Bolivia (67), Guatemala (64), Honduras (58), Iran (54), Mexico (47), Ecuador (44), Dominican Republic (42), Haiti (37), and Cameroon (37).



### By Zip Codes:

The majority of the participants sampled were from the Mid-County area, followed by Upcounty and Bethesda/ Chevy Chase in third place.

\*This information has been collected from a random sample of program participants and information and referral clients from all our sites.

## Volunteers:

The Center relies on volunteers to run its day-to-day operations and teach its programs. During Fiscal Year 2013, **125** volunteers supported the Center in many different capacities, contributing **4,493** hours.

**Among the activities that our volunteers performed:** teaching: **2,689** hours ; administrative aide: **558** hours; program coordination: **305** hours; data entry: **281** hours; teaching aide: **253** hours; event aides: **150** hours; reception and information and referral: **153** hours; class preparation: **75** hours; others: **25** hours.

The Center provided training to **77** of its volunteers on topics such as: active listening, customer service and computer instruction. ESL training was also provided in through the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL).



**Photo:** Volunteer Devi Divakar providing information on class registration to a prospective ESL student—Mid County RSC site, Spring 2013

**Testimonial:** *....I want to let you know that William and I went for our citizenship interview on September 11 and we were both successful. Today, September 19, at around 9:45, we went through swearing in ceremony and we are American Citizens!*

*Daniel, this would not have been possible without your dedication and hard work on our behalf. We are sincerely indebted to you and deeply appreciate your hard work and your team. We could not have managed this journey on our own...*

*- email note to Daniel McCall, volunteer instructor for the Upcounty Citizenship class from Jane and William Owiti, students in the Citizen preparation class.*

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## Meet our Staff:

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During FY'13 the Gilchrist Center's full-time and part-time staff members were:

Community Liaison & Gilchrist Center Manager:  
Karla Silvestre

Program Specialists:  
Anna DeNicolo  
Kaori Hirakawa  
Dolores Ustrell

Information & Referral Specialists:  
Jedidiah Carmichael  
Natalie Chhuan  
Martha Guzman  
Gabriela Raudales  
Veronica Tejada  
Susan Ucanay



**Photo:** Anna DeNicolo joined the Gilchrist Center as a Program Specialist in November 2012.

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## Locations and Contact Information:

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Main number: (240)777- 4940  
Fax number: (240)777-4941



**Photo:** The welcoming staff and volunteers of Gilchrist Center, Rick Weaver, Natalie Chhuan, Gabriela Raudales.

Headquarters: Mid-County Regional Services Center  
2424 Reddie Drive, Suite 220  
Wheaton, MD 20902  
Phone: 240.777.4940

Wheaton Library Site:  
11701 Georgia Avenue  
Wheaton, MD 20902  
Phone: 240.777.4950

Upcounty Site:  
12900 Middlebrook Road  
Germantown, MD 20874  
Phone: 240.777.6950

New location for FY14:  
Gaithersburg Library Site  
18330 Montgomery Village  
Avenue  
Gaithersburg, MD 20879



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