

The National Medal for Museum and Library services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exciting ways. Erie Art Museum director John L. Vanco and community member Victoria Angelo traveled to Washington to receive the national medal and spoke to IMLS about how the museum impacts the community.

John L Vanco: Old Songs New Opportunities is a program that was initiated by the art museum based in our folk arts program. And the idea -- our folklorist's idea initially was to be able to collect songs and dances from the new-comer population. There are a lot of refugees in Erie proportionately 10% of the cities population now; over 10% are refugees have come in the past decade. It seemed a wise thing to focus our folk art program on that group and in the process of conceiving how to go about that, Kelly Armors our folklorist and education director quickly discerned that there was a real need for employment opportunities for the refugee women.

Victoria Angelo: No I didn't have skills and I didn't know how I was going to live with my kids but because of them, they helped us a lot.

John L Vanco: So we teamed up with a -- the better kid care program at Penn State, so the women went through a training program that basically certified them to work in an American daycare.

Victoria Angelo: I met Kelly Armor and she introduced me to the program of old song opportunity and then now I am working in a childcare center as a childcare provider.

John L Vanco: At St. Martins they assign a teacher to a group of children when they are babies and then she stays with them as they grow up until they get to be four or five.

Victoria Angelo: We move, we move with them from class to class until they are five.

John L Vanco: And then they, she starts over again so she is starting again with a new group of baby. Our part of it then was to get them to come up with songs and in some cases dances. All these women would bring a song to the group, the whole group learns the song and then they figure out an English translation for it, and so they all sing each other's songs.

Victoria Angelo: In Africa we teach our kids discipline through our tradition, we teach them songs, we teach them dance.

John L Vanco: And we have also done a lot of trainings for existing daycare workers teaching them to use song and dance. It's a best way for children of that age to learn.

Victoria Angelo: Through the cultural institutes they supported us with some money. Then we train our kids, we teach them songs, we teach them the language, we teach them dances and now they are doing good. They like to know about where they are from, about what is our tradition, so we keep our tradition alive.