**Working with English Language Learners**

**(taken from the book The Middle of Everywhere: Helping Refugees Enter the American Community by Mary Pipher)**

* There are two main rules: Don’t assume anything and Ask questions. For example, How do you greet people in your culture?
* Meetings can be stressful and the setting is important. Try to have the setting be informal, friendly and calm.
* Even knowing a few words of their native language makes newcomers feel more relaxed.
* Remember that without English, people can only show you the tip of the iceberg. Most of their personalities, intelligence, problem solving abilities and humor are hidden.

*Communication with Language*

* Use short, simple sentences and speak slowly.
* Pause frequently to check that you have been understood.
* If you are not understood, do not repeat exactly what you said before; rather paraphrase what you said in even simpler language.
* Many times newcomers pretend to understand when they don’t. Ask them to repeat any essential information or instructions to make sure they understand.
* When possible use pictures or gestures to go with your words.
* Write instructions down, even if the newcomer cannot read or write. Many newcomers have someone who can read the instructions to them.
* Good manners are always in order. You can’t overdo please, thank you, and statements of respect empathy and appreciation.
* Humor is appreciated and defuses tension. Laughter is calming for everyone.
* Remember that different cultures have different ideas about the way to express emotions and the value of emotional control.
* Silence means different things in different cultures. In many cultures silence is a sign of respect and it is considered impolite to interrupt or to speak right after another person finishes.

*Suggestions Concerning Nonverbal Behavior*

* Because language skills are limited, newcomers pay careful attention to nonverbal cues. Be aware of the message your posture, voice, facial expression, and eyes are sending. Use your body language to signal respect, attention and optimism.
* Be sensitive to cultural differences about touching. For example, many Muslim women are not comfortable shaking hands with men.
* Be aware that different cultures have different ideas about personal space. Americans tend to be farther apart when speaking. This distance can be interpreted as coldness.