

African Native Brings World of Experience to Charlottesville Families

Charlottesville, Virginia is a world away from the civil war-torn African country of Congo, from which AmeriCorps member Mondo Mulemaza and his family fled 9 years ago. But it is in his newly adopted country that Mulemaza feels he can affect the greatest change by helping others, especially fellow refugees who have had similar experiences to his own.

Mulemaza, his wife, and 3 children were able to come to America in 2005 after being approved by the federal government's resettlement program. He worked in a Charlottesville bakery until learning of the opportunity to work at CHP's Blue Ridge Commons (BRC) community through a former AmeriCorps member.

"I love working with kids and connecting with people in the community. It is gratifying to be able to give advice to children and help them better understand their families," said Mulemaza. "Being at BRC is an excellent opportunity for me to learn more about the United States, while sharing with residents here the things I have learned abroad."

Before coming to America, the multi-lingual former psychology student lived in several different refugee camps, where he worked with the refugees to help resolve conflicts and bring rival ethnic and national groups together through peace and reconciliation.

Mulemaza admits he had some initial doubts about being an effective mentor to the BRC community, which is made up of both American citizens and several African refugee families.

"It wasn't easy to work here at first since only the African residents came to me for help," Mulemaza said. "But, slowly, more people are beginning to know and understand me. "I hope I can help them see it's not about where we come from, but where we are going. All anyone wants is a chance at a better life." Mulemaza added.



Above: Mulemaza is happy to be in America where, "anyone can succeed if they work hard."