For nearly 25 years the Multicultural Institute has been assisting immigrants transitioning into a new way of life away from their homeland—into an American life. “Our goal with every person who comes to us is for them to secure a job, to become financially independent, and to fully participate in society,” explained Fr. Rigoberto Calocarvias, PhD, Executive Director of the Institute. “We accompany immigrants in transition from poverty and isolation to prosperity and participation. This means we want them to completely feel a part of this society and for them to contribute.”

Through a variety of outreach programs in Contra Costa, Alameda and San Mateo counties, the Institute helps more than 2,500 individuals annually with everything from food and housing to job placement and computer skills. “We have several programs that aim to service two profiles of populations; one is immigrants and low income, and the other is employers,” said Calocarvias.

The Day Laborer Program is an example of how both population groups are benefiting at the same time, explained Calocarvias. “We have close to 1,500 day laborers during any year and those that hire day laborers rely on the Institute to provide them with the right people to do the right job,” he said.

In addition to screening laborers for basic information and skill sets, the Multicultural Institute sets the minimum wage at $15 per hour and does a follow up with the employer and the worker to make sure that both parties were satisfied with the job done. “We don’t collect money from either the employer or laborer, we are only a connecting link,” added Calocarvias.

Since many fulltime employers require at least a GED, the Institute does offer a five-week-long GED prep program so participants will be able to take the online GED test. “Many people who have done this program have gone onto college and are very happy with their own personally development,” he said proudly. “The GED program is what led us to start the Business Skills Development program for many of those adults who realize that they could begin a small or mid-size business.”

Would be business owners are able receive up to sixty hours of training on how to put together a small business. “We help them put together a business plan, marketing strategies, and figure out the finances,” he explained. “This program has paid off big time. Many of them have gone on to begin their own businesses. We have some incredible success stories.”

While the Multicultural Institute has many ways for adults to receive help, youth are certainly not forgotten. “We have Mentoring for Academic Success (MAS) with a summer component called the Youth Writing Festival,” Calocarvias shared.

Through MAS, students are able to receive afterschool tutoring and enrichment with the goal of becoming academically proficient and being able to compete for post-secondary education. During the summer, students are able to continue learning through the writing program.
only 23. I came here to be reunited with my family,” he shared.

During his first few months in America, he described feeling unbalanced and isolated. “I finished university and was teaching and had a good sense of who I was, yet moving here I really felt that I didn’t belong and I couldn’t communicate well—I felt like I sounded pretty stupid when I did try to communicate,” said Calocarvias. “But then there was a moment when I simply said I am me, regardless of how others perceive me. From then on I was assertive and assured of what I wanted to express.”

This experience is what led him to want to reach out to others who may be or will go through the same thing he did. “I decided I would start an organization that would help immigrants transition in such a way that was less painful than what I experienced and become an integral part of the larger society and the dominate culture without being damaged in the process.”

Calocarvias feels accomplished at the work the Institute does. “With the dedicated help of my amazing staff, I believe that what I set out to with this particular instrument has done a lot of good,” he expressed. “The Institute has promoted good relationships between people and has served as a stepping stone for many people including myself, to not only have a rightful place in society but to contribute in a very positive way.”

For more information go to Mionline.org or call one of their three offices; Richmond (510) 847-1479; Redwood City (650) 339-2794; Berkeley (510) 848-4075.

“We are not babysitting for the summer,” he stated. “Every single day the kids are writing. We chose different topics each week and they really get into it. Those that may have been afraid at the beginning to even write a sentence end up loving it.”

“These are skills the youth will benefit from, not only in school but also into their adulthood,” explained Calocarvias. For only $200, kids from third grade to ninth grade are engaged all summer long, as well as provided with snacks and weekly field trips.

With so much being offered, the Institute is always looking for funding. “Now, most of our funding comes from contracts that we have with the three counties and the cities of Richmond, Berkeley and San Pablo,” he said. “The rest comes from writing grants and we also have a circle of friends and host a few fund raisers each year.”

What the Multicultural Institute is able to achieve year after year just goes to show that when something is important a way will be found and that is exactly the mindset of Calocarvias—he is the original founder of the Institute.

“I was somebody who had the experience of emigrating from Mexico to the U.S in 1977 when I was