



Mamie Spillane

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- ❖ *“I teach the whole child when I go beyond my classroom doors to ensure each child’s success. This means communicating with parents, social workers, homeroom teachers, and support staff members to meet the students’ needs as a team. I invite the staff to come to me with questions and concerns and provide them with any materials they need to assist their English Language Learners. Although the staff looks to me to help solve my students’ behavioral issues, we more often seek out one another to share endearing anecdotes and to celebrate the newcomers’ achievements. I also go beyond the classroom by calling parents, scheduling meetings, and making home visits. By communicating with the refugee families and the community members who work with them, I serve as the bridge between two very different worlds. On the one hand I help the Tucson community to understand the norms of the African cultures, and on the other, I help the African refugees to understand and navigate the complexities of our American society.”*
- ❖ *“Recently, I met with several Somali refugees who told me they were dropping out of high school, because they realized they were never going to pass the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) exam. It took everything I had to convince them that the most important aspect of school was the education itself not a test they might never pass. I pleaded with them to stay in school for the sake of their families who so desperately depended on them to be the one person in their family who could read the mail, handle finances, and serve as their voice to the outside world. After that conversation they realized school was not just a diploma; it was their path to survival here in America. They have all now re-registered, and we are working as a team to keep them in school.”*
- ❖ *“It is my mission to inspire teachers who work with students of different cultures and races to open their eyes and see the fascinating children they have been blessed with in their classrooms. It is my expectation that these teachers will take the time to address the issues of racism and more importantly, the idea of cultural acceptance. It is my outrage to hear that my students feel unwanted in their homeroom classes. Although I try to console them, I know that I alone cannot open the eyes of their peers. It is up to all of us to take a stand against discrimination and to promote the acceptance of others. It is my dream that all teachers will realize what treasures lay before their eyes. It is my hope that they embrace these treasures despite the many challenges they often bring. It is my wish that teachers realize the role they play in preventing generational poverty, and it is my ultimate mission that teachers celebrate each child that graces their classrooms.”*
- ❖ *Dr. Barbara Eiswerth, who works with refugees and teachers throughout Tucson says, “Out of the hundreds of African refugees in Tucson, I do not know of any group who has had as much academic success and parental involvement in their children’s education as the ones under the care of Ms. Spillane. The Somali Bantu community is capable of many things in our strange, modern urban environment, but only if they find mentors and dedicated teachers like Ms. Spillane. She has been reaching out to the Tucson community effortlessly to generate money and resources through raising awareness and providing inspirational education to churches, volunteers, and civic groups. She motivates teachers, their aides, and staff while providing valuable information about the culture and plight of African refugees in the United States. Remaining focused on her compassionate teaching, she still manages to act as refugee liaison for the many social service agencies serving refugees. I find her to be innovative and ever shifting with the demands to find creative solutions for this unique group of students and parents.”*

Ms. Spillane began her career as an aspiring actress, but her love for students lured her into the teaching profession. Mamie has her Bachelor of Science in Education with an emphasis on Theater from Northern Arizona University. She earned her Masters degree in Bilingual and Multicultural Education from Northern Arizona University. Mamie has taught for eight years.