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A new exhibit in Kendall: Your life as a refugee

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Quick -- pick five things to take on the road. There is no certainty of when you will be home, only that the soldiers will arrive soon, and staying is not an option.

This is the scenario that Suzy Brientner relays in *Torn From Home: My Life as a Refugee*, a new exhibit at the Lisa Ann Watson Children's Discovery Museum on life in a refugee camp.

"We have to flee, you can take 15 things, and we're traveling by car," Brientner, museum director, tells visitors as they embark on the tour of the exhibit.

She then has the visitors cross 10 of the items off their lists.

"It's to show them that material things can give you a sense of security, no matter who you are," she said.

The exhibit models the refugee camp found in places all over the world where people are fleeing war and persecution.

When visitors walk in, they check in at a station where they can learn about nutritional differences between American children and those living in refugee camps.

A makeshift tent, mini-school and hospital are interactive. Visitors can try on a wristband that will tell them if they're malnourished. Refugee children tell their stories through animated artwork.

"It's kind of sad. You hear about these things, but I didn't think it was this bad," said Victoria Encalada, 13, of Homestead. "I thought [refugee camps] were like a boot camp."

Victoria, an eighth-grader at Coral Reef Montessori Academy, saw the exhibit on a field trip with the school's peace committee.

The group was preparing for a trip to the United Nations in New York for a youth conference this week.

Lucy Golden, co-director of the academy, said she wanted her students to have a firsthand account of the global refugee problem.

"I think this is as close as any of them are ever going to get to a refugee camp," she said.

The United Nations High Council on Refugees counts 30 million refugees throughout the world; 10 million of them are children.

And 1 out of every 100 people in the United States are refugees or are the child of a refugee.

The traveling exhibit was created by the Lied Discovery Children's Museum in Nevada and funded by donations from eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife, Pam.

It is open for private tours at the museum, inside the Alper JCC at 11155 SW 112th St., until Oct. 25, when it opens to the public.

It will stay in town through Jan. 10.

“It's sad and we're just learning about the refugee camps,” said eighth-grader Indigo Golden, 14, of Country Walk.

The camp living conditions hit the students especially hard.

As 13-year-old Emily Rivero of Cutler Ridge and her friends assembled a tent, using only a few sticks, a tarp and string, they began to realize the severity of the situation.

“We have it really good here,” she said.

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