

# From ‘One Nation, One People’ to ‘Operation Swaagatem’: Bhutanese Refugees in Coquitlam, BC

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since IRPA, CIC has implemented several new directions in the selection of resettled refugees from abroad (Presse and Thompson, 2007). The increased use of group processing, the resettlement of refugees from protracted refugee camp situations, increase special need cases and the selection of refugees with no pre-existing presence in Canada (e.g. Achenese, Rohigayas) are all current trends (Yu et al., 2007). The research presented here examines the pre-arrival planning process and outcomes of settling Bhutanese refugees in Coquitlam, BC. The settlement of Bhutanese is exceptional in the context of BC in that it represents the first time in the history of refugee resettlement in BC, that representatives from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments as well as school board, local health authorities were brought together by ISS<sub>of</sub>BC to undertake advance pre-arrival planning for a new refugee population. In addition to presenting a pre-arrival checklist, this paper draws upon sixteen individual interviews with adult Bhutanese resettled in Coquitlam in order to assess early settlement outcomes. Early consideration of the settlement outcomes of Bhutanese GARs in Coquitlam offer both positive indicators and cause for concern. Although unemployment is high, early attachments to the labour market through paid or volunteer work are promising. While there is a long way to go before success can be claimed the lower affordability challenges and higher employment being experienced are in stark contrast to earlier groups. Another positive development is the extent to which Bhutanese newcomers are utilizing formal services and programs. The planning process and partnerships established in the months preceding the GARs' arrival have facilitated increased flexibility in responding to the new problems and challenges that arise for the Bhutanese.

## **INTRODUCTION**

On June 10, 1985 Druk Gyalpo King Wangchuck, the King of Bhutan, introduced the Bhutanese Citizenship Act. The Act, which is sometimes referred to as the 'One Nation, One People Act', modified the definition of a Bhutanese citizen. Over the next five years over 100,000 individuals of ethnic Nepali origin – or approximately one-sixth of Bhutanese population – were stripped of their citizenship rights and expelled from the country. They have been living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal since this time with little hope for a durable solution and are among the estimated 6 million refugees worldwide who are living in “protracted situations of displacement, living in refugee camps for decades with little hope of a durable solution” (CIC 2007a, IRIN 2008).

In an effort to address this long standing situation, the Government of Canada and six other countries have committed to offering permanent settlement to up to 70,000 Bhutanese refugees (global target). In 2008 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) indicated that 800-900 of the 5,000 Bhutanese government-assisted refugees (GARs) being admitted to Canada would settle in BC over a four year period. The Bhutanese are a new refugee group in the Canadian context (CIC 2007b, Banki 2008) and are consistent

with Canada's broader commitment to settle refugees from protracted refugee camp conditions. The life experience of Bhutanese refugees arriving in Canada is very diverse: while some are highly educated and have travelled and worked outside the camps, others have never left the camps or been exposed to 'westernized' conditions (IOM 2008). Once in Canada, the lack of a pre-existing Bhutanese community in BC creates additional settlement challenges.

The imminent arrival of a large group of refugees from a protracted refugee camp situation was met with an unprecedented response in Vancouver. For the first time, a proactive planning process was implemented to create the best possible conditions for settlement among this new refugee group coming from a protracted situation. The major aim of this paper is to outline this process and the collaborations forged as a possible way forward in other contexts for other agencies. Moreover, we conducted original research with Bhutanese refugees themselves that has allowed us to learn how the settlement process can be improved for future arrivals.

Partnerships were established between the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS<sub>of</sub>BC), School District #43, and all three levels of government to facilitate the establishment of a welcoming community for this previously unrepresented ethnic group. In February 2009, ISS<sub>of</sub>BC organized a Pre-Arrival Planning Forum to educate the public and mainstream service agencies on the background and needs of the Bhutanese refugees, as well as existing and planned programs and services for the newcomers. A summer program was launched in partnership with School District (SD) #43 to help immigrant and refugee youth, including the Bhutanese, to integrate to the school system through assistance with academic, social and recreational skills. A volunteer recruitment campaign through the ISS<sub>of</sub>BC Host program was initiated with great success in order to provide Bhutanese newcomers with additional local social support. Increasing public awareness was also achieved through a series of newspaper articles in *The Globe and Mail*, *Vancouver Sun* as well as local newspaper outlets – *Coquitlam Now* and *Tri-Cities News*.

The first group of Bhutanese arrived in March 2009. The numbers of Bhutanese government assisted refugees (GARs) who have settled in BC is not as high as initially forecast. To date less than 100 Bhutanese people have settled in BC and are building a new life in Coquitlam. The Bhutanese interviewed in this study represent the pioneers of a new ethno-national community in BC. After a long journey to Canada they are building the foundations for those who will follow. Yet they come having endured extended periods in refugee camps, some with significant physical and mental health issues. The information and supports provided will influence their settlement outcomes.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: Part 1 documents the pre-arrival process undertaken to prepare for this new refugee group and puts forward a Pre-Arrival Local Community Preparedness checklist for consideration in future settlement planning; Part 2

draws upon interviews conducted with Bhutanese refugees destined to BC to explore their initial settlement outcomes.

## **PART 1: PRE-ARRIVAL COMMUNITY READINESS PROCESS**

Operation “Swaagatem” or welcome in Nepalese refers to the formal planning framework undertaken by the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS<sub>of</sub>BC) to welcome and support the recent arrival of Bhutanese government assisted refugees, a new refugee resettlement movement to British Columbia. The arrival of resettled refugees from Bhutan, without any pre-existing community in BC, poised unique challenges and opportunities to test new approaches in the area of refugee resettlement. With funding from Metropolis BC, ISS<sub>of</sub>BC documents the practical considerations, specifically the pre-arrival planning process, undertaken to prepare for the arrival of this new refugee movement. Based on this experience, we also put forward a Pre-Arrival Local Community Preparedness Checklist as a starting point to better prepare local community stakeholders with the influx of new resettled refugee movements. The overarching intent is to enhance the coordination and supports to resettled refugees. Canada’s current refugee resettlement policy focused on refugee protection has necessitated both new ways of preparing host communities as well as supporting the complex adaptation and settlement needs presented by current government assisted refugees.

In June 2002 the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act passed in 2001 became law. This Act was the first major overhaul to Canada’s immigration system in over three decades. For the first time in Canadian history refugees were separated from immigrants and enshrined in a distinct refugee protection policy framework. Separating refugees from immigrants acknowledged the fundamental difference between these two groups of newcomers to Canada. Whereas in the past Canada was often criticized by the international community for selecting the “cream of the crop” for refugee resettlement, choosing those that could be “successfully settled “ within a 1-2 year time period after arrival in Canada, the current protection policy framework has significantly changed the selection and subsequent characteristics of resettled refugees. In fact, IRPA generates more space for refugee protection than under the previous legislation. With these changes, however, come new settlement challenges.

Canada currently accepts approximately 7,300-7,500 government assisted refugees (GARs) annually through the Government Assisted Refugee Program, a national humanitarian program. As part of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act which received Royal Assent in June, 2010, the number of GARs will increase annually until 2013 by which time, up to 8,000 refugees will be resettled annually. Government assisted refugees are provided with a repayable interest bearing transportation loan to travel to Canada and to cover their overseas medical health screening. GARs arrive in Canada as permanent

residence and are destined to 36 communities across Canada including 13 communities within the Province of Quebec. British Columbia receives between 10-12% of the national target or 800-900 individuals annually. All government assisted refugees destined to BC are provided temporary accommodation through the Welcome House facility operated by the ISSofBC within the City of Vancouver. The City of Vancouver receives the largest concentrated number of government assisted refugees in Canada. Once in Canada government assisted refugees are provided income support by the federal government for up to 12 months. Income support rates currently reflect provincial welfare rates for food and shelter.

Since 2002 the characteristics of government assisted refugees has changed significantly. Although government assisted refugees have tremendous life experiences and resilience, the past 8 years have witnessed a marked and steady increase in the number of refugees arriving in Canada who are medically compromised, illiterate in their first language, having lower employable skills, and coming from protracted refugee camp situations from source countries where there may be no pre-existing ethno-cultural communities in Canada. In recent years the number of resettled refugees requiring medical escort has increased threefold. Furthermore, family composition has tended to be larger than the Canadian norm, 4-6 children, with many children having been born and raised in refugee camps with no or very limited access to formal schooling. Mental illness, particularly depression and post traumatic stress syndrome is also very evident among this population. In a recent national RAP Working Group initiative to classify the January to June 2009 arrivals as high/medium/low settlement needs, over 38% of all government assisted refugees who arrived in BC between January 1, 2009 and June 30, 2009 were classified as having either high or medium settlement needs.

Besides the changing characteristics of resettled refugee populations noted earlier, the Government of Canada both alone and in conjunction with other countries has introduced several new practices in response to UNHCR special appeals, especially its *Agenda for Protection*. These practices include refugee group processing as well as the selection of refugees from protracted refugee camp situations. Over the past 5 years Canada has begun to resettle new refugee population where there were no pre-existing ethno-cultural communities in Canada. Such populations include Acehnese, Montanyards, Karens, Rohingas, Loatians, and most recently Bhutanese. This situation has poised significant challenges with local service providers, schools and health authorities.

How does one begin to develop culturally responsive social support structures, interpretation and translation services, etc in the absence of a pre-existing ethno-cultural population?

The impact of new refugee populations on local communities and neighbourhoods can be significant. Without adequate advance planning, it becomes more difficult to build

welcoming and inclusive host communities and coordinate necessary service interventions. This situation can have a tremendous impact on the success of the refugees' adjustment and settlement process as well as on local residents. Given the importance of community based pre-arrival planning processes for refugee resettlement, which civil society actor should lead such initiatives? There are numerous actors that intersect during the refugee resettlement process in BC including three levels of government, Board of Education, local health authorities, Immigrant Serving Agencies and other community based specialized agencies.

### **THE BHUTANESE REFUGEE MOVEMENT TO CANADA - CONTEXT**

In 2007 at the request of the UNHCR, the then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Honourable Diane Finley announced that Canada would welcome 5,000 Bhutanese refugees from 2008-2012 (Government of Canada, 2010).<sup>1</sup> Up until now most Canadians knew nothing of the 108,000 Bhutanese refugees living in exile in Nepal for close to 20 years. Except for a few families living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, there were no pre-existing Bhutanese communities in any of the remaining 35 destining sites in Canada. Not since the arrival of Vietnamese refugees of the late 1970's had the Government of Canada accepted such a large number of refugees from an area where there was virtually no pre-existing communities.

In 2009 CIC announced that 150 Bhutanese refugees would be destined to British Columbia. As the sole CIC contracted service provider in BC, staff at Immigrant Services Society of BC immediately began to plan for their arrival. Besides our role in providing temporary accommodation through our Welcome House refugee reception facility, ISSofBC also provides first language settlement support, orientation and family case management services during their first year in Canada. As part of providing first language services, ISSofBC is also contracted to assist government assisted refugees into permanent rental accommodation throughout Metro Vancouver. This role means that we play a pivotal role as to where resettled refugees will eventually settle in BC.

This role leads to several questions: where should resettled refugees be settled once they leave temporary housing? Within the Bhutanese context, how do service providers support the community when there is no pre-existing population? What is the relationship between the Nepalese community (Nepal being their country of asylum and closed refugee camps) and the Bhutanese refugee population? How many school aged children would be part of the initial group and what sort of education had they received in the camps? Were there any unusual medical concerns within the population that health authorities should be aware of?

### **PRE-ARRIVAL - FACTORS IN SELECTING FINAL DESTINATION -HOST COMMUNITY**

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<sup>1</sup> Although 2008 was mostly a planning year, the first 24 Bhutanese arrivals landed in December 2008.

After undertaking some initial information gathering on the situation of the Bhutanese refugee population in Nepal, discussions were initiated with members of the Nepalese community in Metro Vancouver. The purpose of these initial meetings was to ascertain what sort of support and capacity might be provided by the Nepalese community as well as to assess the general relationship between the two communities. One cannot assume that the relationship between refugees and citizens of asylum countries are necessarily harmonious. This situation can influence the settlement and adaptation process within local host communities in Canada. Within Metro Vancouver there was an estimate of 700-800 Nepalese living primarily within the City of Surrey, a suburb within Metro Vancouver. Early indications suggested that the local Nepalese community was supportive of the Bhutanese resettlement movement to Canada and were willing to mobilize themselves to assist in the adaptation and settlement process. Nepalese community members remarked that although the Bhutanese community had lived in exile in Nepal for upwards of two decades and that they in fact shared many traditions, linguistic and religious practices; we were advised that the Bhutanese newcomers should be seen and treated as a distinct population.

From research findings and firsthand experience in supporting other refugee populations over the past 40 years it was important to build a critical mass of Bhutanese refugees in one area so as to create additional social and other supports within the community itself as well as ease in delivering targeted support with limited resources. This was particularly important considering that there was no pre-existing Bhutanese community in Metro Vancouver. After assessing various factors such as

- availability of affordable housing;
- pre-existing immigrant settlement and language supports and infrastructure;
- bus transportation routes;
- pre-existing specialized ESL resources within the local school board e.g. Settlement Workers In School, targeted ESL classes;
- perceived local absorption capacity and receptivity; and, lastly
- geographical landscape similarities with the country of asylum and Bhutan

a decision was made to settle Bhutanese in the Tri-Cities near the Nepalese living in the City of Surrey.

After reviewing some additional factors including the experience of settling other refugee populations in the Tri-Cities a decision was made to specifically settle the Bhutanese within the City of Coquitlam. The City of Coquitlam is located 25 kilometres east of Vancouver and has a population of 120,000 people based on 2006 census data. The city has pre-existing immigrant and language support infrastructure including first language settlement and employment support services and several adult ESL providers. The area also had a pre-existing and well functioning collaborative local planning table consisting



of senior representative of community based agencies, school board, city staff, public institutions, local health authority and provincial government representatives, all of which could be leveraged to support future service needs of the Bhutanese community.

Once the decision on the Bhutanese final destination in BC was reached, key community leaders were approached and briefed on the initial settlement plan. Providing key local community leaders e.g. health, school board and city government representatives with advance notice was not systematically undertaken previously. The provision of advanced notice allowed them to immediately undertake an assessment of their own capacities and make necessary adjustments. The destining decision can have significant ramifications and impact on local neighbourhoods especially when it can result in unanticipated mass movements involving several hundred new residents with special needs. From these initial discussions within the City of Coquitlam and to enhance service coordination and address information gaps among stakeholders and local residents ISSofBC decided to organize a broad based pre-arrival planning forum.

#### **PRE-ARRIVAL PLANNING FORUM**

After securing space for the forum from the Coquitlam School Board, ISSofBC sent out invitations to a wide range of stakeholders who would inevitably interface with the Bhutanese and/or could assist in preparing local residents to this new refugee movement. ISSofBC was deliberate in targeting senior decision makers. This included federal, provincial and local municipal officials including the Mayor, school board representatives both senior management, teachers, support staff and trustees, health authorities, faith groups, local community agencies, local media, business association, members of the community planning table, social workers and representatives of other immigrant serving agencies. Each representative had certain sphere of influence that



**Welcoming Participants: Coquitlam Mayor Richard Stewart at Operation Swaagatem Community Planning Forum (February 2009)**

would be critical in building a broad based support in assisting the settlement and integration process of the Bhutanese.

For the first time in the history of refugee resettlement in BC, representatives from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments as well as school board, local health authorities were brought together by ISSofBC to undertake advance pre-arrival planning for a new refugee population. These representatives were asked to present certain information that would assist various stakeholders in the City of Coquitlam to undertake pre-

arrival planning for the Bhutanese.

After ISSofBC and the Mayor of Coquitlam officially welcomed forum participants, six speakers shared key information to over 90 forum participants. The federal government, represented through the Department of Citizenship and Immigration (CIC) highlighted possible arrival patterns, refugee camp conditions, and Bhutanese refugee characteristics. Excerpts from a film documentary on the Bhutanese refugee experience, entitled Killing Time, by Canadian film maker Annika Gustafson, was shown to highlight camp conditions and give participants a sense of the challenges that the Bhutanese might face once in Canada. The BC Provincial government, represented by the Immigrant Integration and Multiculturalism Branch, shared local programming available to support the Bhutanese settlement process and their English language acquisition process including an analysis of current wait-list for adult ESL classes. Depending on Bhutanese refugee arrival flows and numbers, the provincial government stated that it was prepared to allocate



Participants at Operation Swaagatem Community Planning Forum (February 2009)

additional resources to respond to any additional unanticipated needs. An ISSofBC representative provided an overview of the immediate settlement process, specifically during the first month in Canada. Thereafter two community health nurses from the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority in particular from the Bridge Community Health Clinic for refugees spoke about the possible primary health care needs, screening process and protocols in place while highlighting the need to identify local family physicians. The Bridge Community Health Clinic is a specialized primary health care and trauma centre established in 1994 and located in Vancouver to support refugees, with or without legal status. Since the year 2000 all government assisted refugees destined to BC have been seen by clinic staff as part of an integrated support team to address any specific primary health care issues including mental health needs within the first month in Canada. The Superintendent of the Coquitlam School Board #43 spoke next, sharing planning underway within the school board to prepare for refugee school aged students. At the time of the planning forum 40-60 school aged students were projected to arrive in year one. Lastly, ISSofBC shared some practical ways to engage civic society in building a more welcoming and inclusive community specifically targeting the municipal government, faith groups, schools and local residents in general.

Following the presentations, forum participants were divided into groups and asked to discuss the following questions prepared in advance (See Appendix A). By having forum participants discuss certain questions it helped to identify additional informational needs and pre-existing resources that could be leveraged for children and youth as well as provide valuable input into affordable housing possibilities. The following questions were used to guide small group discussions.

- With your knowledge of Tri-Cities (local community resources / assets / school supports, etc) and the fact that the Bhutanese will be on income support (similar to provincial welfare rates) what specific Tri-City neighbourhoods should we consider settling families? Please list specific neighbourhoods, blocks, if possible.
- In addition to what you have already heard, what other civic engagement ideas / ways do you have to get residents involved in supporting the settlement of Bhutanese newcomers?



Breakout Sessions: Participants at Operation Swagatam Community Planning Forum (February 2009)

- Up to 50-60 children and youth under 18 years old may arrive as part of the first Bhutanese group. What local programs/services e.g. recreation, etc are you aware of that could be used to establish linkages to support these kids? Please be as specific as possible – program name and contact?

Lastly, participants were asked to complete a brief evaluation of the forum for future planning purposes. As

a follow-up to the forum, a summary of the evaluation feedback and participant suggestions from the small group discussions were later electronically circulated to all participants. An electronic information sharing system was created to keep forum participants up to date with future information and developments.

#### **PRE ARRIVAL PLANNING FORUM - OUTCOMES**

Following the feedback received on suggested permanent rental housing options, the ISS<sub>of</sub>BC Housing Search Worker immediately began contacting property managers and landlords in specific neighbourhoods. Suggestions on ways to support Bhutanese children and youth during their first summer in Canada led to a School Board funded summer orientation pilot program. This pilot program implemented by ISS<sub>of</sub>BC became an 8 week structured orientation program that included multi-level educational-academic, social and

recreational modules targeting newcomer children between the ages of 10-17 years old residing in Canada, primarily less than one year of residency.

Subsequently, ISS<sub>of</sub>BC also organized two additional community events in the Tri-Cities to undertake further public awareness to the Bhutanese community and to solicit local residents as future volunteers to be matched with Bhutanese families and individuals to provide an additional local support network. Over 50 local volunteers were identified and trained for future matching purposes once families began arriving. This effort to recruit future local community volunteers was assisted by local faith groups and the media.

Local university students of Nepalese origin organized welcome teams that assisted Bhutanese families while staying in ISS<sub>of</sub>BC's Welcome House temporary housing facility especially during the evening and weekends to help families begin orientating themselves to local food shopping, transit system and engaging with other members of the Nepalese community through organized sport and other social events in the City of Surrey.

### **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

The impact of the media in influencing public opinion cannot be under estimated. As seen in the summer of 1999 during the Kosova refugee movement to Canada, public opinion quickly shifted from largely positive support to less than favourable support with the spontaneous arrival of Chinese refugee claimants by boat off the coast of Vancouver Island. However, media outlets can greatly influence the success of the settlement process of resettled refugees in numerous ways. It is important to develop key messages, identify a media spokesperson and take the time to properly brief reporters on key messages and background context.

Local newspapers became a key communication tool in the months leading up to the first arrivals as well as during the first months in Canada (Appendix B includes a list of some Bhutanese-related articles, as well as examples of articles published). Not only was the media used to provide background information to local residents it was also used to engage local residents in practical ways to assist the Bhutanese through their settlement and adaptation process. In addition, during the pre-arrival phase ISS<sub>of</sub>BC was successful in promoting the arrival of Bhutanese resettled refugees through stories printed in the Vancouver Sun. In addition, ISS<sub>of</sub>BC was successful in persuading a Globe and Mail reporter and photographer to travel to Nepal to visit the Bhutanese refugee camps, interview a family destined to BC and follow a pre-selected family through their first year in Canada. Additionally ISS<sub>of</sub>BC was able to access air time through CBC afternoon show, Shaw Community TV and the local Nepalese co-op radio program in Metro Vancouver to promote the situation of the Bhutanese coming to Canada while providing the public with practical ways to help.

## **PRE-ARRIVAL COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS CHECK-LIST**

Besides documenting the pre arrival planning process the other purpose of this report is to summarize successful practices arising from the Bhutanese experiences into a pre-arrival community preparedness check-list. The purpose of a Pre-Arrival Local Community Preparedness Check-List is to act as a starting point in helping local stakeholders prepare and support resettled refugee movements into their community. The opportunity to undertake advance planning greatly ensures that key stakeholders are adequately prepared and where necessary resources can be adjusted to meet anticipated new needs. The items in the check-list are not meant to be exhaustive but should be used to stimulate further discussion at a local level.

**PRE-ARRIVAL LOCAL COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS CHECK-LIST**

	✓	
Information gathering phase – what is the larger context of the specific refugee movement?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Contact and consult Ethnic Community Leaders / members from the Country of Origin and/or from the Country of Asylum</li> <li>– Determine receptivity to assist new refugee movement</li> <li>– Analyse pre-existing first language communication tools e.g. radio program, community newspaper</li> <li>- Gather information on community’s cultural and religious activities, practices and any community gathering sites – possible focal points</li> <li>- Consider what are the religious practices? How important is it that the community be located near their spiritual centre?</li> <li>– Determine population size of pre-existing community and available first language resources</li> <li>– Seek input into where (geographical area) to settle new refugee population</li> <li>– Ascertain any other culturally specific information that would assist the settlement process</li> </ul>
		– Compile list of possible interpreters and translators
		– If available, obtain a Cultural Profile of Refugee Population
		– Conduct research through various sources UNHCR, IOM, etc to obtain refugee movement background
		– Check to see if there are any audio-visual materials on the refugee community that can be used to educate staff and local residents
Final Destining Decision – Local Community Assessment / Capacity:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What is the general receptivity within the local community? Very subjective but is there a pre-existing newcomer population including refugees? Are local residents involved in the refugee private sponsorship program? What has been the local community success in attracting and retaining newcomers?</li> </ul>
Conduct inventory of local community resources		– How will health needs including mental health

		be addressed? e.g. are there specialized health services nearby
		– Local School Board capacity-e.g. does the local school(s) have specialized ESL class resources, a SWIS program, an assessment centre?
		– Is there existing mechanisms to engage local residents? e.g. Host program
		– Are there religious facilities nearby for the community to practice e.g. temple, mosque, church?
		– Does the local community have Adult ESL classes, preferably with day care services? If yes, what is the capacity e.g. levels and wait-list
		– Assuming refugees do not speak English or French, what resources are in place to provide first language supports?
		– How will refugees access services? e.g. proximity and existence of public transportation
		– What is the state of the local economy? What is the possibility of finding employment?
Communication including use of media		– Develop a basic communication strategy – what are your key messages? Who will be the main spokesperson? What is your intended audience? How will you communicate information within your local community/ main stakeholders e.g. e-bulletins
		– Contact local media – community newspaper – develop rapport with local reporter(s), engage media on possible story ideas along with specific requests/needs e.g. practical mechanisms to engage local residents – volunteer hosts
		– Identify and translate key information into first language for refugee population – local map, orientation materials, welcome to city, basic local city resource guide
Pre-arrival Local Community Planning Forum		– Organize broad based pre-arrival community planning forum
		– Who should participate? include health, school, faith groups, local businesses, local fire department and police force, sport and library facilities, social service agencies and

		three levels of government
		– Develop and deliver key information messages – target involvement –presenters from local school board, health authority, three levels of government, immigrant serving agency(ies)
		– Engage participants in providing input into 2-3 areas e.g. identification of affordable housing options
		– Compile and circulate findings from forum
		– Develop on-going communication mechanism
		– Evaluate Planning Forum for future use



## **PART 2: INITIAL SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES OF BHUTANESE REFUGEES**

The planning process that occurred prior to the arrival of the Bhutanese was unprecedented in many respects. Partnerships with all levels of government, the school board, and religious organizations (among others) were formed; new programs were developed (e.g. the summer school program); and attempts to build community support (e.g. through media coverage, volunteer recruitment, etc) were undertaken. Yet, these newcomers arrived facing many challenges. While it is too early to know the full implications of the pre-planning process this research explores the initial settlement outcomes of Bhutanese refugees in the Tri-Cities. In so doing, it seeks to ascertain how well are refugees from protracted situations like those in Nepal integrating into Canadian society.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE**

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen Bhutanese adults aged 19 years old and older, who arrived in BC between March and October 2009.<sup>2</sup> While the number of participants is small they represent the vast majority of adult Bhutanese GARs arriving during this period.<sup>3</sup> Further, they provide insight at the mid-point of the arrivals as to how we are doing in resettling Bhutanese refugees, as well as provide ability to make changes as necessary for future ongoing arrivals scheduled to the end of 2012. In November 2010 the semi-structured interviews were augmented by a community meeting and three focus group sessions that provided additional insights into more recent trends and issues impacting the new and emerging Bhutanese community in Coquitlam. As larger numbers of Bhutanese continue to arrive in BC and across Canada, this project may act as a pilot for a larger study.

The need to utilize trusted informants is well understood within the refugee literature (*cf.* Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 2000; Sherrell, Hyndman and Preniqi 2005). To facilitate participation and enable people to respond in the language with which they are most comfortable the interviews were conducted by a Nepali-speaking settlement counsellor with whom respondents had already established a degree of trust. Although all interviews were conducted in first language three Bhutanese respondents had the ability to participate solely in English if the need arose. The interview schedule was created with input from key stakeholders, including Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the BC

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<sup>2</sup> Although we sought to interview all adult Bhutanese who had arrived during this time, two were unable to participate owing to inability to provide informed consent. One other man refused our invitation to participate in the research.

<sup>3</sup> Although this research is focused upon adults only, we recognize the experiences of refugee youth may differ from that of adult refugees. For refugee teenagers, the normal challenges of adolescence are compounded by the stresses of settlement and integration. Many resettled refugee youth, for example, arrive in Canada having spent the majority (or all) of their life in refugee camps, with little or no access to formal education. As such, the experiences of youth have been captured in a separate project.

Government, Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) Working Group, and RAP NGOs; it was initially tested and revised based upon the first three interviews (see Appendix C).

Ten male and six female respondents between the ages of 20 and 78 were interviewed. Although over half of respondents were of working age (25-55), our sample included four young adults (ages 20-24) and two individuals who were over age 70. At the time of the interview respondents had been in Canada 8-15 months, with over half (11) having arrived 8 months previously in October 2009.

Education levels vary significantly among the sixteen respondents; half of the respondents reported having no formal education (5) or completed primary school (3), the remainder have finished secondary school (4) or attended some post-secondary training (4). Men were slightly more likely to have completed secondary and/or some post-secondary education than were women.

Although the Bhutanese have been in refugee camps for over 17 years the majority of respondents have some work experience, ranging from a low of 4 months to 2 years, to a high of 15-30 years.<sup>4</sup> Previous work experience includes farming and agriculture (7), construction and carpentry (3), security (1) and teaching (1), a finding consistent with the culture profile established by the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2008). Five respondents did not report any previous work experience.<sup>5</sup>

Three households have children under the age of 18 living with them at the time of the research.<sup>6</sup> Of those with children, two families have three children each and one has one child. All but one of the children are of school age (4 in elementary school, 2 in high school). Children in the camps have access to free education until the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, after which time refugees must pay part of the tuition (IOM 2008). According to the IOM many refugee children attend boarding schools in India and Nepal for grades 10-12; some continue on to university. All of the school-aged children (ages 5 and older) have received some education in the camps, including English language instruction. Anecdotal evidence from key informants suggests although education was available schooling was sporadic for many of the youth. Although three parents reported their children speak English comfortably, others felt their children could speak little (2) or no (2) English. .

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<sup>4</sup> Eight respondents did not provide information on number of years worked.

<sup>5</sup> One respondent reported having worked in both construction and security. As such, the number of previous work experience responses is 17.

<sup>6</sup> This represents a total of five respondents. Where conflicting information was presented (e.g. regarding children's ages) the information provided by the mother was used. Two respondents did not answer this question.

## PRE-ARRIVAL

All respondents participated in a pre-departure orientation program before leaving Nepal.

### Pre-Departure Orientation – What was helpful?

- **Transportation** – e.g. traffic rules, crossing the road, and/or using public transportation
- **Living in Canada** – e.g., laws and regulations, housing, climate, culture, people
- **Nutrition and food preparation** – e.g., grocery shopping, cooking and using the bathroom
- **Finances** – e.g., RAP, social assistance

The three- to five-day orientation, which is provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is intended to familiarize GARs and other newcomers with day-to-day life in Canada, including information about Canada

and Canadian society, as well as the resettlement assistance programs and basic life skills (e.g. how to travel on a bus or use a western bathroom).<sup>7</sup>

When asked to identify the most helpful aspect(s) of the pre-departure orientation program, participants provided a variety of responses, including transportation and road safety (8), living in Canada (7), nutrition and food preparation (5) and finances (4). While some aspects related specifically to Canadian society (e.g., laws and regulations, Resettlement Assistance Program, social assistance and Canadian society), the majority of issues related to living in Western society. Information about using public transportation, grocery shopping, using the kitchen and bathroom, and using a calling card to make long-distance calls were among the things the Bhutanese felt were most helpful in the orientation.

Information obtained – or understood – however, was not always correct. One respondent, for example, reported that the most helpful information provided in the pre-departure orientation is that ‘one family member will get a government job.’ In part this may result from confusion about the financial assistance provided during the first year through the RAP program. Given the Bhutanese’s long term dependence on outside agencies for basic necessities during the time spent in camps, the provision of financial assistance may appear to be a form of employment, particularly given the ability to allocate how and where the money is spent.

Information contained within the orientation was criticized by some respondents as being too vague. In part, respondents expressed a desire for provincially specific information that would better prepare them for life in BC. One area which caused concern, for example, was around inter-provincial differences in eligibility and provision of services and programs. Young adults who arrived in their late teens and early 20s, for example, expressed significant frustration at not being able to access public high schools owing to their age. For some, the frustration is heightened by information from Bhutanese in other

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<sup>7</sup> Most of the Bhutanese arriving in BC participated in the five-day COA at Damak, Nepal.

provinces that individuals of a similar age have been able to attend high school. Further, although RAP is federally funded it varies from provinces to province (e.g. one year case management in BC, six weeks in other provinces).

Reflecting back on the information presented in the pre-departure orientation in light of their experiences since arriving in Canada, respondents were asked to identify three things they would like to have known before arriving in Canada. While few participants provided three responses, their answers give an interesting insight into things learned during the first year in Canada.

<b>Three things respondents would like to have known before they arrived in Canada</b>		
<i>1<sup>st</sup> response</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> response</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> response</i>
Climate and Liveability (10/16)	Climate and Liveability (2)	Settlement Services (1)
Finances (3/16)	Transportation (1)	Health Care (1)
Language (1/16)	Society (3)	Societal expectations (1)
Gender relations (1/16)	Geography (2)	

The most frequently cited responses related to climate (e.g. “Canada is a cold place with heavy snowfall”) and liveability (e.g. “Canada is the best place”). One participant went so far as to link Canada’s cold climate with our low birthrate (e.g. “Canada is a cold place due to which less children are born”).<sup>8</sup> Income security and government assistance were cited by a number of respondents, though it is unclear how well respondents understand the financial assistance provided under the RAP and social assistance programs (e.g. “If one person is employed the family can sustain”, “We don’t have to work in Canada – welfare and disability support is good”, “Canadian government will give job to one member of each family and others can survive with the support from the job”).

### **POST-ARRIVAL**

The respondents represent five extended families (e.g. parents, adult children, grandparents) living in 6 apartments in the Gatensbury and Cottonwood areas of Coquitlam. Five families live in two bedroom units and one household in a 3 bedroom unit. The relatively small household size means all respondents are able to sleep in bedrooms, though some share (e.g. parents with a young child), a situation far different than that of Karen and Sudanese refugees living in Surrey (*cf.* Sherrell and ISSofBC

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<sup>8</sup> CIC addresses the rumour that Canada’s cold weather prevents people in Canada from having children in its 2010 handout to Bhutanese refugees in the camps, noting that “There are families of all sizes in Canada. It is up to individuals to decide how many children they will have” (CIC 2010).

2009) or the Acehnese in Vancouver (*cf.* Brunner, Hyndman and Friesen 2010; McLean, Hyndman and Friesen 2006) The apartment at Gatensbury is not in as good of condition (e.g. leaky) and is not as easily accessible by transit as is the other complex.

All households are comprised of family, either immediate or in-laws. Respondents who stated their housing in BC was not comfortable and/or appropriate for their family were asked to comment on why this was the case. High rents (7) were the primary reason cited, although one respondent noted their family of 8 has been forced to live in two different apartments owing to national occupancy standards which limit the size and composition of households living in rental accommodations, particularly within social housing stock. In Canada housing is considered affordable if it accounts for no more than 30% of monthly household income; those spending upwards of 30% are experiencing housing stress, while families spending upwards of 51% are experiencing critical housing stress.

All but three respondents reported experiencing housing stress, with 11 respondents reporting having to allocate upwards of 41% of household monthly household income to housing. Two individuals reported their households allocate upwards of 50% of monthly household income on housing, placing them at extreme risk of absolute homelessness. Eleven respondents report feeling very safe in their current neighbourhood; the remainder feel somewhat safe.

Upon arrival 14 respondents reported their English skills as Beginner and two as Intermediate. Participation in English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) classes has resulted in 8 additional respondents reporting their language skills at the time of the interview have improved to Intermediate. Twelve respondents continue to take English language classes at the time of the interview. Although previous research has indicated that waitlists to access English language classes can prevent newly arrived refugees from accessing classes for the first 6 months or more (*c.f.*, McLean et al 2006, Sherrell, Hyndman and Preniqi 2005), this was not the case for the Bhutanese. Significant investments in funding for ELSA classes over the last five years have provided increased capacity and significantly reduced - or even eliminated - many waitlists. As such, the majority of respondents (12) were able to begin ELSA classes within the first 3 months, including six who began studies in the first month after arrival. Although one respondent was forced to wait 5 months after arrival to begin taking classes no reason was given.<sup>9</sup> Of those attending ELSA classes at the time of the interview (12), two continue to do so on a full-time basis and the remainder on a part-time basis. Five respondents report having had difficulties in accessing English language classes. Reasons cited include, health problems (2), lack of transportation or time of day (2), location (1) and childcare (1). One

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<sup>9</sup> Three individuals did not provide a response.

respondent expressed great frustration that he was unable to access ELSA courses as he had been assessed at CLB Level 7.<sup>10</sup>

Seven of the respondents have participated in additional training and/or education programs (e.g., at ISSofBC, MOSAIC) since their arrival in Canada, including the ISSofBC's Youth Connexion and/or MY Circle programs for youth and young adults (4); resume writing and/or job readiness courses (2); life skills course (1); and vocational customer service training (1). For those who are not comfortable communicating in English the presence of a Nepali speaking intern at MOSAIC has facilitated access to additional supports and programs in first language.

Under the Resettlement Assistance Program, GARs receive one year financial assistance, roughly equivalent to provincial social assistance. Those who are not employed at the end

<b>Main Sources of Household Income</b>
Government assistance (10/16)
Paid work and government transfer (e.g. RAP) (4/16)
Paid work and Other (e.g., Canada Child Tax Benefit) (2/16)

of that year may be eligible to transfer to provincial social assistance. Given that the majority of respondents have been in Canada less than one year it is not surprising that all of

households receive at least part of their household income from government transfers (e.g., RAP, social assistance).

Four men, aged 20-39 were employed at the time of the interviews.<sup>11</sup> Of these, three work part-time and one full-time. Jobs obtained include sales person (2), construction helper (1) and restaurant helper (1). All have obtained employment within the three months preceding the interview. Since this time, the settlement counsellor reports that two more have obtained part-time employment in retail sales. Other families have transitioned to social assistance as their RAP funding ends. In some cases respondents report having volunteered for periods of 50 hours to 2 months since their arrival in Canada at a variety of places (e.g., retail store, construction site). Two have since obtained employment in the same field as their volunteer experience. Key informants suggest the pressure to support elderly or disabled family members places additional stress upon young adults. Some, for example, felt it was important to 'get a job' and worry about education and English language classes at a later time.

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<sup>10</sup> There are twelve Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) levels, each of which specifies reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. For more information see [www.language.ca](http://www.language.ca).

<sup>11</sup> No women had obtained employment at the time of the research; a few women become employed since this time.

All but one respondent who was not employed at the time of the interview reported wanting to obtain employment.<sup>12</sup> Lack of English language proficiency continues to be the primary barrier to employment, though lack of resume and/or job search skills and health concerns were also cited. Although some respondents expressed the need for work to be located near to their homes or relevant to previous work experience, others recognized improved language skills and additional training/vocational programs would facilitate employment.

In spite of the tight financial situations, eight of the sixteen respondents send money to family in Nepal on a semi-regular basis. Six send remittances 1-2 times per year, while another individual reports having sent money 3-4 times per year. Interestingly respondents from two households provided conflicting information – although both male spouses report sending remittances 1-2 times per year, their female partners respondent they were not sending remittances at all. Although only four respondents have obtained employment, 11 have already begun repaying transportation loans, a finding similar to that of Brunner et al. (2010) and Sherrell and ISS<sub>of</sub>BC (2009). Given the precarious financial situations of the respondents, given low incomes and high rents, the need to repay these loans further erodes the families' abilities to meet even the most basic of needs.

## **LIFE IN CANADA**

Obtaining housing, employment and improved English language proficiency represent important aspects of settlement and integration. Yet there is a need to reflect upon how well newcomers feel they are included within society. Are they able to obtain information or help when necessary? How do they spend their free time; and with whom? Are they satisfied with life in Canada? This section considers the connections Bhutanese newcomers are making within Canada, as well as their reflections on life in Canada so far.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of social networks in facilitating integration (*cf.* Hiebert et al. 2005). The majority of respondents (15) report being able to get information and/or assistance from both formal and informal sources. Agency programs (e.g., RAP, as well as ISS<sub>of</sub>BC's Employment Outreach Services, Life Skills, Community Service Counselling and Youth Connexion programs) was the most frequently cited source (11), a finding that is somewhat surprising. Within housing research, for example, immigrants and refugees are far more likely to cite friends and family than formal agencies as the most frequent sources of information (*cf.* Teixeira 2009; Sherrell et al. 2009). Two factors may account for this – first, the lack of pre-existing Bhutanese community in Metro Vancouver means newcomers are unable to

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<sup>12</sup> One individual reported being too old to work.

obtain information and guidance from those who have arrived before, necessitating increased reliance on formal information sources. Second, the extensive community planning which occurred before their arrival meant newly arrived Bhutanese GARs were well-connected to immigrant and refugee serving agencies and programs upon arrival. One program which has been particularly helpful to the Bhutanese newcomers is the ISSofBC Host program; volunteers were the second most frequently cited source of information (7), ahead of the Bhutanese community (5), neighbours and/or Canadian friends (3), the Nepalese community (2), family (1) and the internet (1). The supports and partnerships put into place prior to their arrival have facilitated linkages to both immigrant and refugee programs, as well as the small Nepalese community living in Surrey. While the Bhutanese community is still relatively new in Metro Vancouver, the linkages to the broader Canadian society through the host program are promising.

When asked where they normally socialize respondents provided a number of places and/or activities, including:

- Visiting the local area (e.g., parks) (7/16);
- Surfing the Internet (6);
- Spending time with Bhutanese/Nepalese and/or Canadian friends (6);
- Playing soccer (3);
- Practicing and/or reading English (3);
- Grocery shopping (2);
- Taking care of family (2); and
- Going to Temple (1).

Thirteen respondents reported over half of their friends in Canada are from Nepal or Bhutan. In spite of the positive portrait that emerges, however, key informants suggest it is necessary to consider if the newcomers have many friends. Some Bhutanese, for example, report feeling very isolated and expressed difficulty in integrating with other Canadians owing to language barriers and closed communities even within the apartment complex. Consequently many stay within the Bhutanese and Nepalese communities.

Since arriving in Canada the majority of respondents (12/16) report becoming very familiar with community resources in Coquitlam. Ten of the 16 respondents have obtained a library card, for example, and 8 use it on a semi-regular basis. The extent to which respondents report participating in recreational activities (e.g., swimming, skating, going to a community centre) varies widely. Although 14 respondents go to the park in their free time and 7 play sports (e.g., soccer, karate, badminton), only 3 go to community centres. Five interviewees listed going to temple and/or church as a regular recreational activity. For some, however, unfamiliarity with community and/or existing resources (3),



language barriers (2), health issues (2), and the lack of a leisure card (2) are the most frequently cited reasons why respondents and their immediate families are not taking part in recreational activities.

All but one of the respondents rate their general family well-being as being good (7) or very good (8). Similarly the majority of respondents with children believe they are doing good (2) or very good (3) in school. Parents report their children have begun making friends outside the Bhutanese and Nepalese community. Though the number of households with children is small, the children take part in a variety of sporting (12), arts and entertainment (4), and other activities (e.g., metalwork) (3).

Although all respondents live near other Bhutanese families, they expressed mixed feelings as to whether or not this was a positive thing. While some felt it was a very good thing, particularly in case of emergency (e.g., babysitting, translation, similar culture, support), others felt it was better to live in a more diverse environment (e.g., greater opportunity to learn and practice English). One respondent, for example, asserted:

*“It’s not good to live near other Bhutanese families as there could be unhealthy competition, conflict and exploitation.”*

At the time of arrival as decision was made to settle all newly arrived Bhutanese GARs in Coquitlam. Further, in the search for affordable housing families were settled in one of two complexes. As the Bhutanese become more settled some families may choose to engage in secondary migration in order to better meet their housing needs and desires.

Respondents were asked to reflect on the best and worst things about living in Canada. Ongoing challenges with language barriers, finding employment, repaying Government Transportation Loans and the long wait times for medical appointments were cited, as was the weather. For young adults over the age of 19 in particular the challenges related to difficulties in enrolling in school. Four youth in their 20s, for example, expressed deep frustration about access to education. Although all have high school diplomas, and some have attended some post-secondary education, their diplomas are not recognized in British Columbia. As such, the young adults find themselves in a difficult position — although they are unable to attend high school owing to age limitations they cannot directly access colleges or other post-secondary training. As the young adults struggle to establish themselves in Canada they are encountering multiple challenges – in accessing education and obtaining employment – a situation aggravated by the need to financially support their families both in Canada and Nepal. Anecdotal evidence of an increase in problem behaviours suggests a need to build stronger linkages with this group.

In spite of the challenges faced upon arrival and in the first few months in Canada the Bhutanese were positive about living in Canada. The clean environment and lack of pollution (6/16), the helpful, nice or friendly people (5) and the police, law and security

(4) were among the best things about living in Canada. For others, the ability to access fresh foods, general liveability and education also made Canada a good place to live.

## CONCLUSION

Early consideration of the settlement outcomes of Bhutanese GARs in Coquitlam offer both positive indicators and cause for concern. Although dependence on government transfers (e.g., RAP, social assistance) remains widespread and families are experiencing housing stress, the relatively small household sizes mean crowding is less severe than other refugee groups in Metro Vancouver. At the time of the interview four of the sixteen respondents had obtained part-time or full-time employment; two others have obtained employment in the intervening period. While unemployment is still high, these early attachments to the labour market through paid or volunteer work are promising. As respondents continue to attend English language classes and employment-related programs (e.g., ISSofBC 's programs - Youth Connexion, Employment Outreach Services) the possibility exists for further employment success. While there is a long way to go before success can be claimed the lower affordability challenges and higher employment being experienced are in stark contrast to earlier groups, including the Acehnese and Karen GARs (*cf.* McLean et al. 2006; Brunner et al. 2010; Sherrell and ISSofBC 2009).

Another positive development is the extent to which Bhutanese newcomers are utilizing formal services and programs. After eight to fifteen months in Canada, the Bhutanese are showing strong connections to English language classes, employment programs and the host program. While it is not possible to assess the extent to which the Bhutanese newcomers' connections to formal services and programs relates to the lack of pre-existing social networks or the pre-arrival community planning program it bodes well for future settlement outcomes. Further, the planning process and partnerships established in the months preceding the GARs' arrival have facilitated increased flexibility in responding to the new problems and challenges that arise for the Bhutanese.

As one might expect, we recommend that such planning processes be undertaken for all GAR group processing and settlement in Canada, and the checklist provided above represents a step in this direction. Pre-departure training for government assisted refugees coming to Canada has proven important to positive settlement experiences, and more resource development and piloting on this front is underway by ISS of BC at the time of writing. In short, comprehensive pre-departure orientation, agency-based planning for GAR arrivals with all relevant stakeholders, and timely research with refugees soon after arrival represent an essential trio of tools that can enhance welcoming communities and effective settlement and participation upon arrival in Canada.

## ADDENDUM<sup>13</sup>

In November 2010, while undertaking research in support of a United Way of the Lower Mainland funding application, we convened a community meeting. Among those attending were representatives from all but two of the newcomer families from the Bhutanese/Nepali community who have been settled in Coquitlam to date.

Questions were put forward to both the newest arrivals and families that had come as early as July of 2009.

The meeting was designed in both a plenary format and three facilitated focus groups – one for women, one for men and one for youth.<sup>14</sup>

We split the group by gender and had each group work separately on priorities and challenges, thinking in terms of longer term solutions.

The following were issues raised by community members. These issues summarized into 16 points are in no specific order:<sup>15</sup>

1. Learning English with a non- Nepali (speaking) teacher is difficult
2. Can't find ESL classes and/or long waiting times (e.g. more than 3 months)
3. More frequent learning opportunities are needed, 3 days a week is not enough
4. There is a need for job readiness trainings, such as resume writing, computer training, interview preparation, job search, as well as vocational training
5. Participants require legal education, as well as support in times of emergency
6. Disabled people have no opportunities to learn, find employment and opportunities for their self development
7. Many cannot read letters, bills, bank statements etc. all of which come in English
8. There is a desperate need for printed information in Nepali (usually safety, employment or family issues focused). With respect to family issues the Bhutanese require information about new laws. 'Right now we are breaking them before we know they exist'.
9. Information on how to handle issues around domestic violence, child disciplining and elderly people are required, as well as the relevant laws and policies. 'How can we solve the problem without having to call police?'

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<sup>13</sup> This addendum was prepared by N. Staddon, Consultant to the ISS<sub>o</sub>/BC led children and youth programs in Coquitlam and leader of the November consultation; Carmel Hennessy on site coordinator of the ISS<sub>o</sub>/BC led "Schools Out" programs who is also assigned to the Bhutanese/ Nepali community consultation and Raj K Khadka, who did interpreter and outreach work for the November consultation.

<sup>14</sup> The Bhutanese/ Nepali facilitator interpreter advised us that adult men and women would only get into specific, detailed discussion on these issues if they were offered the opportunity to do so in gender specific groups.

<sup>15</sup> In some cases, where appropriate, the issues and recommendations have been written from the Bhutanese perspective through the use of 'we'.

10. What options exist for Bhutanese who can't learn the language even after trying for several years? 'How are we going to pay our loans and take care of our families?'
11. Severe worry about what to do about the transportation loan since so many neither speak English, nor have employment and in many cases have no prospect of employment as they understand the situation now.
12. Lack of opportunities to interact with other communities, visit places, and learn about various resources and opportunities
13. Bus passes are needed so people can get places and make / take opportunities
14. Education about available opportunities would be beneficial
15. 'How do we pay dental fees?' for children's dental bills
16. More information about low income housing and the subsequent application process is needed.

There was one additional key issue raised by the women's group. Many of the women raised the issue of a lack of child care facilities and the impact of that which essentially excludes them from attending English language classes.

Community members, from their own perspective and experiences of living in Canada to date, suggested 7 priority ideas as possible solutions and/or recommendations for addressing some of the issues they raised.

1. We should organize community meetings to be held twice a month
2. Have all basic information translated into Nepali; develop a manual on how to access different services (e.g., how to find a doctor, what our insurance covers etc)
3. Provide education about child rearing and disciplining, as well as other family issues
4. Skill building trainings, including vocational training, are needed
5. Inter-community visits and interactions would help increase belonging and may provide more opportunities to learn English
6. 'We should search job opportunities through Nepali network and others.'
7. 'We should explore opportunities where we all can find jobs together so that non- English speakers can work as well in a group.'

### **ISSUES RAISED BY BHUTANESE/ NEPALI YOUTH**

Youth in this community often have a clearer idea of how things “work” here than their parents. They are incredibly worried and stressed and carry the additional demand on themselves that they not let their parents know about all of their worries. They are doing without even small things that would ease their school experience and perhaps make it

more likely that they can form friendships beyond their cultural group. Further, friendships within the cultural groups are limited in number because there is already some divisions surfacing within the community. Most youth stated that they were desperate to find a job in order to assist their families and also put some ground underneath their own feet by providing such simple things for themselves such as a bus pass or like the example given below - a bar for their guitar for music class.

During this consultation and in particular in the youth focus group, the following issues were raised:

1. Money - The youth were so aware of the shortage of money
  - They seemed to be carrying the weight of the worries that their parents had – they mentioned that they worried about bills and about the price of rent.
  - They talked about the stresses of paying monthly for their bus pass
  - They spoke of how it felt in school when other children seemed to have everything with regards to technology. An example they gave from the school setting was –  
*“The music teacher asked everyone to bring in \$4 for a bar for our guitars. I felt bad because I am the only one who does not have that now”*
2. Improving their English
  - They found that the teachers were speaking very fast and it was hard to understand and as a result they get lost
  - Sometimes they don’t understand what people are saying – idioms, talking fast, pronunciation
  - They find pronunciation very hard and find they make mistakes with some words and others laugh at that and make fun (linked to the next point)
3. Experience of bullying
  - Some of their peers laugh at them because they make mistakes when they are pronouncing words, or not fully understanding questions and just agreeing with them, making them feel isolated and forming another barrier to them integrating and making friends
  - Some people say “Go home Nepalese”
  - There have been instances of pushing and name calling and using “not nice words”
4. Not knowing about Canadian Food:
  - The youth in this group felt that they did not know (and wanted to know more) about Canadian foods. They mentioned things like burgers etc. They wanted to know how to prepare these kinds of foods.

5. Not knowing how to use electronics

- The youth expressed that they had no clue how to use certain electronics e.g. – microwave, oven etc. One youth gave an example about the oven “we did not know how to turn it off and we were very worried that it was not properly turned off all night”. It was clear that this was distressing to the youth and worried him a lot.

The youth expressed great interest in setting up a group that will act as both a conversation circle and also provide some help with homework, with a particular emphasis on word problems in math etc. They felt that this would provide them with a “safe” place to have social conversations and work on pronunciation of certain words as they come up in “everyday” sentences. Also a chance to focus on what they describe as “easy math” that is made difficult by the way the question is asked (word problems).

It would also be helpful within this group to introduce topics like cultural food and how to cook them, as well as provide some tutorials on certain electronics.

Some of the change in perspective demonstrated in this consultation can be linked to expectable changes due to the passage of time, consistent with stages in settlement and adaptation. There is not so much optimism and more of a sense of barriers which is consistent also with daily frustrations as they try to find solutions to multiple problems at once while, for the most part, not having the tools at this time.

The sample size and the representativeness of the Bhutanese-Nepali community provides a current snapshot into their adjustment process. While challenges exist, community members remain very grateful for the opportunity to rebuild their life in Canada. Community members still have hope, aspirations and greet the possibility of working to address the issues raised in this consultation with energy and real enthusiasm.

Based on the consultations and findings of this study, the authors put forward several recommendations for consideration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### PRE-ARRIVAL

1. CIC and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) should review the exiting pre-departure orientation program (COA) to ensure that information provided is realistic and more in line with some of the inevitable experiences faced by refugees during their first few years in Canada.
2. When considering destining a large group, especially one that is 'new and few' in BC, it is imperative that CIC provide RAP contracted agencies sufficient time to organize a pre-arrival community planning forum. This enables the local community to draw upon the expertise of multiple constituencies and resources in a coordinated manner, ensuring necessary supports are in place prior to the arrival. Additionally, as we have seen in the case of the Bhutanese, these networks prove invaluable in identifying appropriate supports when post-arrival challenges occur.
3. If handled sensitively and if properly prepared, media can be a tremendous asset in building public awareness, recruiting volunteers and in general build a more welcoming and inclusive community.
4. A mechanism should be put in place to review and provide strategic settlement funding to address the new and emerging needs of new refugee populations arriving between government procurement periods. After the initial and limited RAP type intervention the community will require some community development support beyond direct programming and case management assistance.
5. The BC Government should reinvest in tailored, project-based language training programs to support the retraining and greater labour market attachment opportunities for resettled refugees.
6. School boards and teaching programs (e.g. BCTF, universities) are encouraged to include opportunities for professional development related to working with the distinct needs of refugee children and youth (e.g. those with little or no previous experience with school, severe trauma, etc).
7. Ethno-specific official language training overseas should be considered for post-IRPA GARs, particularly those who are 'new and few' and/or come from protracted refugee situations. The pre-departure provision of these services (e.g. in first countries of asylum) would be efficient, both in terms of cost and facilitating settlement in Canada.

### INITIAL SETTLEMENT

8. CIC should explore the establishment of a national shelter rate for GARs under the Resettlement Assistance Program, in essence decoupling from provincial income support (shelter) rates. At present, provincial income support (shelter) rates in British Columbia are inadequate to meet local housing costs, a finding supported by earlier CIC research (*cf.* Goss Gilroy 2004). The inclusion of a monthly

transportation supplement for all family members (6-65+ years) would facilitate the ability for all members of the family to adequately navigate services and resources.

9. The increased use of group processing, and arrival of multi-barriered GARs from protracted refugee situations has dramatically changed the needs of GARs arriving in BC. As such, there is also a need for CIC to increase RAP funding for the provision of more home based life skills training-support.
10. Government assisted refugees, like the Bhutanese, would greatly benefit from enhanced early intervention support services during their first year in Canada. CIC should increase the funding to RAP so that it could be expanded to include additional services, particularly those required to address the changing needs and characteristics of post-IRPA refugees.
11. With the agreement of GARs a host-like volunteer match is an important resource during the adaptation and settlement process. The BC Government should implement an advertising campaign, such as that currently undertaken for ELSA, to increase knowledge of the programs and encourage volunteerism within the broader community.
12. GARs would benefit from access to space for community gatherings and network/support building, particularly during the first year after arrival for those who are 'new and few.'
13. The need to repay government transportation loans represents a significant burden to low income refugee families coming to Canada for a better life. The Government of Canada should consider eliminating the government transportation loans for refugees. If loans cannot be forgiven in full, CIC could consider either extending the period before the loans incur interest beyond the first three years, or not charge interest at all
14. Funding should be provided by CIC to ensure basic key information (e.g. health, safety, housing) is translated prior to the arrival of new refugee populations.
15. The BC Government should review the existing capacity of child care provisions connected to ELSA so that the increase investment in language acquisition process is matched with the ability of women to actively participate.

#### **YOUTH- AND YOUNG ADULT- SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

16. Case managing older children-youth in particular through their first summer in Canada has proven very effective. The BC Government, in partnership with local School Boards and immigrant-serving agencies, are encouraged to provide funding for an eight week structured free summer orientation program for immigrant and refugee newcomers to the school system.
17. Refugee children and youth may require additional supports once they enter schools. Schools are encouraged to develop or partner with existing homework clubs to aid new students in adapting to the Canadian school system. Additionally



these clubs could provide social spaces in which students may practice English and become more familiar with both the 'social' language and school culture.

18. Refugee youth and young adults are an underserved population. Many arrive in Canada with no formal education or English language abilities, yet as they pick up the language they are often called upon to assume traditionally adult responsibilities for parents who are unable to communicate in English (e.g. translating at medical appointments, contributing to family incomes, etc). The concurrent emotional and physical development occurring during this period creates additional challenges (e.g. hormones, peer pressure at schools), potentially leaving older youth at greater risk of anti-social behaviours. Youth would benefit from a specialized pre-departure orientation, as well as a youth-specific RAP orientation program to be delivered in the first few weeks of arrival in Canada.
19. Older youth and young adults arriving post-high school age, but with little or no formal education and no English language proficiency are at-risk for long-term disenfranchisement from the labour market. The BC Government is encouraged to extend existing pilot programs (e.g. Youth Connexion) targeting this group and provide increased funding to facilitate access to education (both English language and basic education) and training as well as wage incentive work internships.

#### **GENERAL**

20. Given the challenges that GARs often experience with information retention during the first several weeks in Canada, the RAP orientation should be repeated through targeted ethno-specific settlement orientation workshops, six months after arrival, funded by the provincial government.

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## **APPENDIX A: OPERATION SWAAGATEM PRE-ARRIVAL PLANNING FORUM MATERIALS**

### **Operation Swaagatem – Pre-Arrival Planning Forum**

#### **Agenda**

1. Welcome / Opening Remarks 10 minutes
2. Bhutanese background – Karen Catalin, Regional Program Advisor, BC-Yukon Region, Department of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism  
20 minutes
3. Killing Time - Excerpt from 2008 Montreal International Human Rights Award Documentary on Bhutanese refugees 10 minutes
4. First Month in Canada – Chris Friesen, Director, Settlement Services, Immigrant Services Society of BC 10 minutes
5. Health Care Approach – Nishat Janmohamed, Nurse, Bridge Clinic, Vancouver Coastal Health 10 minutes
6. Welcome BC - current settlement and language PROGRAM in Tri-Cities – Catherine Guzik, Program Manager, Stakeholder Relations & Partnership Development, Immigrant Integration Branch, Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development 15 minutes
7. Public Education – Tom Grant, Superintendent, Coquitlam School District #43 10 minutes
8. Civic Engagement Strategies/Considerations – Chris Friesen  
10 minutes
9. Small Group Discussion 20 minutes



## Operation Swaagatem

### Pre-Arrival Planning Form Participant Evaluation Form

1. How would you rate this pre-arrival planning forum?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not helpful                      useful                      very useful

2. What information did you find the most helpful?

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3. Is there any other information that would have been helpful to you?

Yes                       No

If yes, please list the information that would have been helpful

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4. Any other suggestions for future considerations?

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## Operation Swaagatem

### What does it take to build a welcoming and inclusive community?

#### Civic Engagement Strategies / Considerations

The following list are some practical, in most cases low cost, suggestions to engage Tri-City residents of all ages. This list is not exhaustive but is meant as a starting point for on-going discussions. Some of these suggestions may already be in place but simply need minor modification for Bhutanese newcomers.

#### General

- Volunteer in the Host / Community Bridging Program;
- Organize a special screening of the 90 minute award winning documentary – \**“Killing Time”*;
- Engage local business through volunteer recruitment, future work placement sites, etc;
- Help to identify and report back to ISS of BC possible low-cost housing options;
- Speak to your Family physician concerning the possibility of her/him accepting Bhutanese new patients; and,
- Learn a few Nepali words if you are likely to interface with Bhutanese newcomers.

#### School

- Initiate a peer buddy program / friendship club;
- Place bilingual (English and Nepali) “welcome to school sign(s)” in entrance of school;
- Conduct in-service training for staff using \**“Killing Time”* film and local speaker;
- Highlight (to be released in Spring 2009) BC Ministry of Education Teacher Resource on Working with Refugee Students;
- Organize a Bhutanese special event to acknowledge new students –invite new students (when ready) to share some of their experiences of life in the camp;
- Take opportunities in classes such as History and Geography to focus on Bhutan;
- Arrange and host an interpreter supported Bhutanese parent forum to provide orientation to the school system and answer any questions parents may have;
- If there are pre-existing orientation materials for new students, consider summarizing them into a one pager and translate it into Nepali. If no material

- exists, are there some key messages (in one page) that could be created and translated for parents?
- Develop a specialized orientation to school program especially for high school students;
  - Evaluate and pilot a new risk assessment tool to enhance tracking of refugee populations – case manage students through their first summer in Canada;
  - Develop an integrated and coordinated virtual (or preferably physical infrastructure e.g. Welcome Centre) intake and assessment centre; and,
  - Ensure mechanisms e.g. data base are in place to properly track refugee students.

### **Municipal Government**

- Initiate a city proclamation welcoming Bhutanese new residents;
- Facilitate field trip opportunities for Bhutanese adults to city hall;
- Have the Mayor sign a welcome to XX city letter, translate it and distribute it through ISS RAP Counsellor to Bhutanese adults perhaps along with a city label pin (if one already exists);
- Help raise the public awareness of new immigrant/refugee residents that require a helping hand; and,
- Put in place and/or modify a section on the City’s website focused on ways residents can help support new immigrants and refugees e.g. start a “help make Tri-Cities feel like home” campaign – promote volunteer opportunities, special events.

### **Faith Groups**

- Organize opportunity for cross cultural dialogue / social event;
- Show the \*‘‘Killing Time’’ film and have a post film discussion; and,
- Help recruit volunteers for the Host/Community Bridging Program.

\*For more information re: KILLING TIME an award winning film by Annika Gustafson-go to <http://killingtimethefilm.com/>

**Compiled by Immigrant Services Society of BC**

**February 2009**



## **APPENDIX B: MEDIA COVERAGE FOR BHUTANESE REFUGEES IN BC**

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### **THE BHUTANESE JOURNEY: FROM REFUGEES TO PIONEERS**



**The Kattel's in Nepal before leaving for Vancouver July 2009. Photo By John Lehmann**

When the days in the refugee camp seemed to last forever, Bhim Lal Kattel prayed to the gods to let his family return home to Bhutan.

Nearly two decades passed. His children grew and his mother aged. Mr. Kattel gave up his dream of reclaiming his family's farm in southern Bhutan. The grinding boredom at the Goldhap refugee camp in the nearby Himalayan country of Nepal sapped his spirit.

So, at age 37, with an anxious heart, he decided to take his family to a strange, cold land on the other side of the globe.

Mr. Kattel arrived at Vancouver International Airport on Thursday afternoon, his eyes shining with excitement and fatigue. Despite the warm July weather, his wife, Bishnu Maya, and three children, Prakash, 14, Menuka, 12, and Ganesh, 8, were clad in thick sweaters. His 73-year-old mother was pushed through the international gates in a wheelchair.

This week, as Ottawa issued strict visa requirements for Czech and Mexican visitors, citing a raft of bogus refugee claimants from the two countries, the Kattels were part of another unfolding Canadian refugee saga. Five thousand Bhutanese refugees will be arriving in Canada over the next five years – one of the largest government-sponsored resettlement efforts in recent years.

Earlier, as the plane began its descent over B.C.'s Lower Mainland, Mr. Kattel stared down at the Coast Mountains and thought the landscape reminded him a little of Bhutan's rugged countryside.

"I was thinking, 'This is going to be my family's home,'" Mr. Kattel said.



**The Kattel's in Vancouver July 2009 just after arriving from Nepal. Photo by John Lehmann**

“Bhutan didn’t want us. Nepal didn’t want us,” Mr. Kattel said, moments after his family arrived at a temporary immigrant shelter in downtown Vancouver. “There is no way to go back now. This is what’s best for my family.”

Seven Western countries agreed to accept the Bhutanese after years of talks between Bhutan and Nepal ended in stalemate. Most – about 60,000 – will go to the United States. Many of the Kattels’ friends and relatives have plane tickets to places like Dallas, Salt Lake City and Phoenix. Mr. Kattel wishes more of his friends were going to B.C.

In Canada, the Bhutanese are to be settled in nearly 30 communities from Newfoundland to B.C. Eventually, about 900 refugees – including the Kattels – will move to Coquitlam, just outside Vancouver.

It’s a daunting prospect for the suburban community, and for the country as a whole.

Unlike most immigrants and refugees, the government-sponsored Bhutanese will be landing in Canada without the safety net of already-established countrymen to greet them and ease the culture shock. The Nepalese and Bhutanese community in Canada is tiny.

Coquitlam Mayor Richard Stewart compared the Bhutanese refugees to Wild West pioneers, landing in a strange country with little English, few job skills and even fewer relatives and friends. Many of the younger refugees were born and raised in a camp.

Mr. Stewart said he was in awe of their courage. “I can’t imagine, having spent my entire life in a camp, to get on a plane and fly to a new country. I want them to feel welcomed.”

In fact, city officials, community groups and residents in Coquitlam have laid out the welcome mat for the refugees from a little-known land. The local school board and the Immigrant Services Society of B.C. have set up a summer camp for the kids to polish their English and learn basic computer skills. Host families have come forward to help the refugees with basic tasks such as shopping and learning transit routes. Community meetings held in the spring to discuss the refugees’ arrival were overflowing.

The Kattels are the third Bhutanese family to arrive in British Columbia.

Mr. Stewart said he is determined to ensure the Bhutanese – especially the elderly – don't drift into isolation. "We're going to do what it takes to give them every chance to succeed."

They face a raft of challenges. Most of the adults come from farming backgrounds and have only a high-school education. Some have spent their entire adult lives in a refugee camp and have no work experience. Mr. Kattel worked five years as a security guard in India, where he learned halting but understandable English.

But the biggest shock is sure to be cultural. The Bhutanese are moving from a near-primitive rural setting to a fast-paced modern city. Light switches, flush toilets, refrigerators – even chilled food and drinks – are as foreign as cellphones and computers.

The Kattels' plane trip to Vancouver took 19 hours, but the family's journey began 17 years ago when more than 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese were driven out of the small Himalayan kingdom. The refugees fled to Nepal and spent nearly two decades in camps in the country's humid, snake-infested lowlands, miles from the tourist-trammelled mountain trails.

When a worker from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees came to the camp, asking who was interested in moving to a new country for permanent resettlement, Mr. Kattel thought of his children's future and raised his hand.

Nearly two years after that encounter, the family boarded a plane in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, and began their long journey to Canada. As the plane's wheels lifted from the tarmac, Mr. Kattel felt thrilled and homesick at the same time. Menuka cried from London to Vancouver, telling her mother she already missed her friends.

On Thursday afternoon, as their jet-lagged children slumped onto beds and sofas, Mr. Kattel and his wife listened intently as a Nepali-speaking counsellor showed the couple how to flush a toilet and run a shower. In the kitchen, he pointed to the stove and explained how the electric elements worked. Ms. Kattel, who cooked meals at the camp over a fire stove in the family's hut, had never operated an oven.

Later that evening, the two other Bhutanese refugees paid the family a welcome visit. One, Saha Bahadur Diyali, took Mr. Kattel to a grocery store, where they bought rice, vegetables and fruit. Back at the shelter, Mr. Diyali, who arrived in May, filled Mr. Kattel's head with advice on life in the Canadian suburbs.

"We decided that we aren't many Bhutanese here, so we'll have to stick together," Mr. Kattel said.

## SUMMER CAMP NEW EXPERIENCE FOR NEW CANADIANS



Children from

A summer camp at Miller Park community school in Coquitlam is providing a group of young immigrants with their first experience of life in Canada.

So far, so good.

The Tri-City News met up with Prakesh Kattel, 14, and his sister Menuka, 11, two

recent arrivals from a refugee camp in eastern Nepal. The two moved to Coquitlam with their family a few weeks ago to start a new life.

On Friday, Prakesh and Menuka got a lesson in civic government when they visited Coquitlam city hall with 20 other young people who are participating in a summer camp run by the Immigrant Services Society of BC. in partnership with School District 43.

The camp runs all summer and gives students who are new to Canada a chance to improve their English and math skills, play sports, do art and try out Canadian pastimes such as swimming and skating. The youngsters also got to visit the Vancouver Aquarium, which was a big hit.

Prakesh and Menuka said they enjoyed skating, too, even though they both fell a couple of times.

Both speak some English and aren't too shy talk to the media. Their ability to converse should make it easier to go to school next month. Menuka said she has learned more English in the last few weeks at the Miller Park camp than all the years studying at school in Nepal. She's entering Grade 6 at Como Lake middle school while Prakesh will be a student at Centennial secondary.

They've found it easy to adjust, thanks to the summer camp. "In summer camp, I have made a lot of friends," said Prakesh, with Menuka

echoing the sentiment and naming several of her new friends.

The summer camp is for new Canadians, many of them refugees, who are between the ages of 10 and 17. As many as five different languages are spoken by children in the class and the kids come from all over the world, including Afghanistan, Columbia, Ecuador, Mexico, Korea, Russia, the Ukraine and the Philippines.

The Tri-Cities are home to increasing numbers of government assistant refugees (GAR) who are being settled here in low-cost housing. But the Kattels are pioneers of a sort, the first of about 900 Bhutanese refugees who are expected to settle in Coquitlam over the next three years.

Approximately 150 Bhutanese refugees are expected to move into the community by Christmas. The Nepalese-speaking Bhutanese have been living in refugee camps since the mid 1990s because of a policy of de-nationalization in southern Bhutan.

The Kattels — besides Prakesh and Menuka, there are brother, Ganesh, their parents and grandmother — are the third Bhutanese family to arrive in B.C. Many of their friends went to other cities, mostly in the U.S. They will be supported by the Canadian government for one year.

Prakesh said the family decided to accept an invitation from the Canadian government to move to Coquitlam so he and his siblings could get a good education. He wants to be an engineer in computer science and Menuka wants to be a nurse.

They like Coquitlam because it has less pollution than Birtmod, the city nearest the camp where their family has lived for the last 20 years, and because there are more traffic lights and rules for drivers.

"I was afraid to cross the street," Menuka said of Nepal.

Except for the cold, the two say they like their new country, especially the summer camp, which is providing them with a lot of new experiences.

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Only a few of the estimated 150 Bhutanese refugees who were expected to arrive in the Tri-Cities this year have shown up, according to the director of the agency that will help them settle.

Immigrant Services Society director Chris Friesen said in an email he doesn't know the reason for the delay but the agency is prepared to find homes for those who arrive and help them get settled.

An interpreter who speaks Nepalese has been hired to work with the newcomers and three Bhutanese refugee children are attending a summer camp to improve their English and upgrade their math.

School District 43 assistant superintendent Sylvia Russell said she's not concerned about the delay and the district will be able to cope with the Bhutanese students when they arrive, even if they all arrive in a bunch. Russell said refugees tend to arrive throughout the year and the province has been providing funding for those who enrol mid-year.

The district is also looking at ways to streamline the process of registering students in school and is looking at models used in other districts. "We're not rushing into this, it needs to be thoughtfully done," Russell said.

The district's international education department also helps receive students who are new to the country and will be training school secretaries this month so they can better assist the families.

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A summer camp for students new to Canada is helping ease the back-to-school jitters for 21 children.

Naomi Staddon, project co-ordinator for a summer camp run by the Immigrant Services Society of BC for School District 43, said the 10- to 17-year old students who come to the daily program at Miller Park community school are improving their English, honing their math skills and, most importantly, making friends.

On the day The Tri-City News visited, several students arrived half an hour early for the program, their backpacks slung over their

shoulders, and one boy was singing as he walked through the parking lot.

"We registered students on a Monday and Tuesday; by Wednesday morning, we saw friendships and, by Thursday, the group had formed," Staddon said. "The kids just climbed over the language differences."

Students attending the camp come from all over the world — South and Central America, Russia, the Ukraine, the Philippines and Nepal — and many are refugees. All have arrived in Canada within the last two months.

In addition to working on their academic skills, the students do art, play sports, work on the computer and go on field trips, visiting Coquitlam city hall, the Vancouver Aquarium, the Coquitlam's City Centre Aquatic Complex and the skating rink.

"We have the academic goal to try to help them a bit with English vocabulary and math because we know a lot of the refugee kids, if they've been held back in school, they may be several thousand words in vocabulary [behind], even though they are in in grade school."

But at the same time, the youth are making valuable connections with other kids, which will help them make the transition to school when it starts in less than three weeks. They're also working on a mural about their experiences moving to Canada, which will be presented as a gift to Coquitlam school district.

The program ends when school starts but participants will get together once more at the end of September so ISS can see if the program helped the transition to school — and so the leave-taking isn't so sad, said Staddon, noting, "We've gotten very fond of them."

If the program is successful, it may run again next year.

The Tri-Cities is increasingly home to refugee families. According to ISS statistics, 20% of government-assisted refugees are now coming to the region because of the availability of low-cost housing. As of April, 45 refugees had arrived. The top five source countries are Iran, Myanmar, Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan.

dstrandberg@tricitynews.com

Strandberg, D. (April 22, 2009) "Hosting immigrants: Putting out the welcome mat in the Tri-Cities" *The Tri-City News*. Coquitlam, BC: p.20.

## Hosting immigrants: Putting out the welcome mat in the Tri-Cities

Wanted: Friendly people with open hearts and open minds to welcome new Bhutanese families into the Tri-Cities.

You are a refugee. You arrived at YVR on a giant jet after a long, exhausting flight. Some members of your family are with you. Many are not.

You have an apartment, a small income and the basic necessities. Your English language classes are paid for and you have a rudimentary understanding of the local school system, the transit system, your rights and obligations.

But your apartment in Coquitlam -- a world away from the spartan refugee camp where you've lived for many years -- is not yet home.

What you need is a friend, someone to help you navigate this strange, new world.

This month, a settlement service agency is putting the call out for Tri-City residents to play host for six months or longer to new Bhutanese families expected to settle here in the coming months.

The first family has already arrived and up 150 more Bhutanese will move here by summer from refugee camps in Nepal, as part of a Canadian refugee re-settlement program. Officials would like to see as many hosts as possible step forward and befriend families who are coming here.

"The sooner we can give people a friendly face -- someone who can help them find out about the community and how to access services, and where to go shopping, someone who can be a friend, just for support -- the better," said Thea Fiddick, who works at Immigrant Services Society.

What hosts get out of the relationship is hard to quantify but Fiddick said the benefits go both ways, with hosts learning more about the rest of the world and feeling good about giving back, and refugees gaining confidence and knowledge necessary to adapt, get jobs and become productive citizens.

"The research shows the people who have more support, they know people, they get a job more quickly, they tend to settle faster," explained Fiddick, who manages volunteer and youth programs at ISS.

Approximately 40 Bhutanese families are expected to move here this year, adding to a growing number of refugees who are being settled in the Tri-Cities in pockets of affordable housing

Find out more

A public education event is being held April 28 for social workers and people interested in the re-settlement of Bhutanese refugees to the Tri-Cities. The workshop begins with the documentary *Killing Time* by Annika Gustafson, followed by a discussion and question period on Bhutanese culture and a review of systems and services in place to help newcomers in their settlement process.

The meeting will be from 10 a.m. to noon in the Henry Esson Young Building auditorium on the Riverview Hospital grounds in Coquitlam. To sign up for this event, call 604-684-7498 for Mette (Ext. 1635) or Mona (Ext. 1632), or Fatoumata at 778-861-8499.

### BECOMING A HOST

Prospective hosts will meet with an outreach worker for an interview and will be matched with a refugee or family based on shared interests, geographical proximity or other issues. There's also a screening process, a reference requirement and a criminal record check.

An individual can host but so can an entire family. The minimum requirement is six months, with hosts expected to spend between two and four hours a week with their individual or family.

Call 778-661-8499 to participate in the ISS host program. Other settlement agencies, such as SUCCESS, offer similar programs.

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Strandberg, D. (February 24, 2009) "Refugees coming here will need docs, homes and friends" *The Tri-City News*. Coquitlam, BC: p.4.

## **Refugees coming here will need docs, homes and friends.**

Officials preparing to settle Bhutanese refugees in the Tri-Cities have put out the call for low-cost housing, family physicians and people to befriend families who will begin moving into the area next month.

And it wouldn't hurt to learn a little Nepali, suggested Chris Friesen, a director of settlement services for the Immigrant Services Society.

According to Friesen, who spoke at a refugee planning forum for school, health and social service agencies Friday, the simple act of saying swaagatem -- "welcome" -- would have "a tremendous impact" on the 800 to 900 refugees from Bhutan who are expected to settle in the Tri-Cities over the next three to five years,

The purpose of Friday's meeting was to plan for the arrival of the first 40 families expected to move in between mid-March and August. Friesen said immediate needs are finding affordable housing and family doctors to care for people once they move here and registering the children in local schools and their families in English-language education.

Most of the children are expected to have a functional level of English, which they learned in camp schools, and the new refugees are expected to be a diverse group, some with high levels of education and vocational skills and others with no English and no job skills.

"This is a new ethno-cultural community that is coming here," Friesen told officials at the forum, noting that for a successful transition, the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese will need support and encouragement because they won't have a ready-made community to depend on.

The refugees expected to arrive in B.C. -- about 12% of 5,000 destined for Canada -- are expected to be healthy because the camps provide good medical services, including vaccinations. But they might suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder from upheaval in their lives when they had to leave their homes; as well, a social caste system may be a factor among members of the mostly Hindu group.

The refugees will face other challenges of settling in the Tri-Cities and will have to learn basic life skills, such as how to use transit and how to operate many

of the appliances in their home. ISS will provide orientation upon arrival and support for the first year, and the B.C. government provides other settlement services, including ESL training and a community bridging program that links refugees up with mentors from the community.

Furniture and household goods will also be provided for them, as will a year of federal income assistance and medical coverage. Those who don't find jobs are likely to transition to provincial income assistance after a year is up.

School District 43 superintendent Tom Grant said a number of procedures will be in place to support refugee students and their families. The school district is setting up a reception centre where families can be introduced to the local education system and children can be assessed, and is designing a tracking system to ensure students don't fall through the cracks.

Settlement workers will help families work with local schools and a grant is being sought to provide students with programs to help them get through their first summer in the Tri-Cities.

"We are building on this opportunity," Grant said, noting that the influx of Bhutanese refugees provides SD43 with an opportunity to improve its services to all students who came to Canada as refugees.

A number of suggestions were made as to how the community can welcome the Bhutanese refugees, including:

- \* holding community showings of the 90-minute film *Killing Time*;
- \* engaging local businesses in providing volunteer and work placement opportunities;
- \* encouraging teaching students about Bhutan in history and geography classes;
- \* hosting parent forums with Nepali-speaking interpreters;
- \* adding a how-to-help section to the city website;
- \* recruiting volunteers for the host/community bridging program.

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## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### Operation Swaagatem: Pre/Post Arrival Refugee Programming and Research Development

Gender:    Male    Female    Trans

#### Pre-Arrival (Within Nepal)

1. How helpful were the newsletter(s) distributed to you in Nepal before your interview and during the selection interview?

**Very Helpful    Helpful    A little helpful    Of little help    Unhelpful**

2. Did you participate in the Pre-departure orientation program?

**Yes    No    Unsure/No answer**

- a. If yes, what did you find the most helpful?

- b. If no, do you think that orientation assistance or information before departing to Canada would have been beneficial to you?

**Yes    No    Unsure/No answer**

3. What three things would you like to have known before you arrived in Canada that you were not told?

#### Post-Arrival (in Canada)

4. What education level best describes your experience before arriving in Canada (Check one):

- No formal education
- Some primary school
- Finished primary school
- Finished secondary school
- Some post-secondary training
- Finished training in trades or technical skills
- Finished university/college degree
- More than one university degree

5. What job, if any, did you have before you left Bhutan/Nepal, and how many years of experience did you have in that/those post(s)?

6. Do you have any children?

**Yes No Unsure/No answer**

7. If so, please provide the following information for each child:

- a) Age
- b) What level of education did each attain in the camps?
- c) How much English instruction (e.g. # of years or level) in the camps has each received?
- d) Do they speak English comfortably?

Child	Age	Level of Education received in camps	English instruction (# years or level) received in the camps	Speak English Comfortably?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

8. Household composition:

- a) How many people live with you in your household? \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Are they all family members? If not, who else lives with you? (e.g. friend)

9. Is your house here in BC comfortable/appropriate for your family?

**Yes No Unsure/No answer**

a. If not, why?

10. How many bedrooms are in your place here in BC? \_\_\_\_\_

a. Does everyone have a bedroom (e.g. are people sleeping in living room)

11. What percentage of your monthly income do you spend on rent here in BC?

0-10%      11-20%      21-30%      31-40%      41-50%  
51-60%      61-70%      71-80%      81-90%      91-100%

12. How would you rate your English skills when you first arrived in Canada?

**Beginner                      Intermediate                      Advanced**

13. What level is your English now?

**Beginner                      Intermediate                      Advanced**

14. Are you currently attending English language classes?      **Yes      No**

a. If yes, are these ELSA classes? If so, what level?

15. How long did you have to wait to start English classes?

16. What type of English classes do you attend?

\_\_\_\_\_ Full time  
\_\_\_\_\_ Part time  
\_\_\_\_\_ In the evening  
\_\_\_\_\_ On the weekend  
\_\_\_\_\_ During the Day

17. Have you had any difficulties in accessing English classes?      **Yes      No      N/A**

a. If yes, for what reason:

Childcare  
Transportation  
Location of classes  
Cost  
Time of day  
Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

18. Have you undertaken any training courses or educational programs other than English classes since you arrived in Canada?

**Yes No**

a. If yes, in what subjects and organized by whom?

19. Have you worked as a volunteer for any business or organization since you arrived in Canada? **Yes No**

a. If so, for what kind of business/organization?

b. For how long?

20. What are your main sources of **family** income?

\_\_\_\_\_ Paid work

\_\_\_\_\_ Government assistance

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (if other, please specify)

21. Are you currently employed? **Yes No**

a. If so, are you: **Self-employed Employee**

b. Do you work: **Full-time Part-time**

c. What kind of work do you do?

22. Do you hold more than one job? **Yes No N/A**

a. If yes, how many different jobs are you doing? \_\_\_\_\_

23. How many hours do you work a week?

**0-10 11-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 60+**

24. How long have you worked in total in Canada?

**1-3 months 4-6 months 7-9 months 10-12 months 1 year +**

25. If you are not currently employed, do you want a job?
26. If so, why do you think you do not have a job?
27. What would be of most useful to help you find a job?
28. Do you send money back to Nepal or Bhutan? **Yes No**
- a. If Yes, how often
- 1-2 times per year 3-4 times per year 4-6 times per year Monthly**
29. If you have a government transportation loan, have you started to pay it off?
- Yes No N/A**
30. Are there local people and/or organizations you can get information or help from?
- Yes No N/A**
- a. If so, from whom? (e.g. Other Bhutanese, Host volunteer, Printed materials, media, government, internet, agency)
31. Where do you normally socialize – e.g. with other Bhutanese/Nepalese community or elsewhere? What do you enjoy doing when you're not studying or working?
32. How many of your friends in Canada are from Nepal or Bhutan?
- All Most About half A few None Don't know/No answer**
33. How safe do you feel in your neighbourhood?
- Very safe Somewhat safe A bit safe Not very safe Not at all safe**
34. Are you familiar with community resources in Coquitlam (e.g. parks, libraries, stores, etc)?
- Very aware A little aware Not at all aware**

Do you or your immediate family members (i.e. dependent children, spouse):

a. Have a library card?      **Yes**      **No**

i.      If yes, how often do you go to your local library?

**Never**   **Sometimes**   **Often**   **Very often**

b. Participate in recreational activities, such as:

i. Swimming	Yes	No
ii. Skating	Yes	No
iii. Other sports	Yes	No
iv. Community Centres	Yes	No
v. Go to the park	Yes	No
vi. Other	Yes	No

If other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

c. Is there anything that prevents you or your immediate family from taking part in these activities?

**Yes**   **No**   **N/A**

i. If so, please elaborate.

35. If you came as a family, how do you rate your general family well-being?

**Excellent**   **Very Good**   **Good**   **Fair**   **Poor**

36. How well do you feel that your children are doing at school?

**Excellent**   **Very Good**   **Good**   **Fair**   **Poor**

37. Have your children made many friends outside of the Bhutanese/Nepalese communities? **Yes**   **No**

38. Do your children take part in out of school activities? (e.g. sports, music, clubs, religious groups, etc) **Yes**   **No**

a. If so, what sort of activities?

39. Do you live near other Bhutanese families? If so, do you think it is a good thing to live near other Bhutanese families? Please elaborate.
40. What is the worst thing about living in Canada?
41. What is the best thing about moving to Canada?