



# **What Next? Developing a Lifeline for Refugee Immigrant Teenagers in BC**

**Consultation Report**

**April 2009**

**Prepared by**



**and**

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## I. Acknowledgments

We are grateful for funding from the United Way of the Lower Mainland which made it possible for us to take a closer look at the unique challenges facing refugee immigrant teenagers in BC. We would also like to thank all of the people who took the time to address the complex and important questions affecting refugee youth. Your experience and thoughtful responses ensure the usefulness of the material gathered and created for this report.

We appreciate the genuine interest shown by everyone: learners, parents, schools, ministry representatives, service agencies, unions/ employers and other stake-holders. In addition, several resource people from universities, colleges, and special programs across Canada took time to speak to us about their experience with this learner group, and also, where appropriate, discuss materials.

We are especially pleased for the opportunity to thank the learners themselves, and parents, each of whom faced special challenges in order to participate in this consultation. What each offered adds greatly to the veracity of this document.

Special thanks go to Catherine Eddy. Catherine was an integral part of the consultation throughout the year. Catherine's assistance, expertise, knowledge of refugee learners, and active participation as a contributing writer during the compilation and preparation of this report has been invaluable.

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## **II. About the Author**

Naomi Staddon, Project Consultant, has been working on refugee issues since 1986. Her emphasis is on community and capacity building. During the course of this work she has been able to work within the Cambodian, Kurdish, and most recently Afghan community. For the past several years, a substantial part of her work has been focused in schools and on creating conditions and programs that reduce barriers, assist newcomer children and teens to “catch-up”, maximize success in school, and adapt positively within the new culture.

Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC) is the oldest multicultural immigrant-serving agency in BC. ISSofBC pioneered what is now commonly referred to as “settlement services” in BC. ISSofBC provides a range of programs and services to help build futures for immigrants in Canada. Since 1968 ISSofBC has been at the forefront in supporting government assisted refugees destined to BC including the provision of temporary housing and first language support services.

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## **IV. Executive Summary**

Since the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) was introduced in June 2002, the selection process for government-assisted refugees has shifted from the ability of an individual to successfully settle to one based on refugee protection. Recent government assisted refugees to Canada have more complex and challenging migration experiences. This situation has created a disconnect between the refugee protection policy framework and the national humanitarian program (Resettlement Assistance Program) goals and current available funding resources.

From January 1, 2003 to December 31, 2008, 350 government assisted refugee (GAR) youth between the ages of 16-18 years old arrived in British Columbia. These young people represented 19 different source countries and slightly more than half (51%) were girls. The majority of these youth settled in Surrey (30%), Burnaby (26%), Vancouver (15%) and Coquitlam (13%). These demographic patterns are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

School officials and staff, settlement services and community leaders are becoming acutely aware of a growing crisis among these older refugee school-age learners who enter secondary schools in BC as teenagers and leave before achieving basic literacy and numeracy. There is also a specific concern for some refugee youth who start school in their teens for the first time in their lives, quickly become very discouraged and choose to drop out of school. This leaves them entering adulthood with very limited information for understanding and accessing opportunities for work, and no tools to support themselves economically.

This report documents findings from a one-year consultation process and presents several recommendations including a learning framework/model for future consideration to enhance the settlement outcomes of refugee immigrant teenagers. One of the main areas to emerge from the consultation is the recommendation of a proposed three (3) year learning framework/demonstration program that starts with an underlying foundation that refugee immigrants require a literacy platform not an ESL/EAL foundation platform. There is currently no pre-existing literacy curriculum in Canada that meets all areas of need for many refugee immigrant teenage learners. The proposed demonstration program would involve two intake cycles totalling 35-40 refugee youth. The program would address learning needs, in depth trauma counselling support, and work/volunteer placements along with a monthly stipend/wage subsidy allowance to enable program attendance. Six (6) essential program components were identified. Partnerships with government, employers and unions were also identified as being critical to the success of the proposed program.

The consultation process involved key-informant interviews and focus groups conducted throughout Metro Vancouver. Focus groups were conducted with

learners and parents from Africa and Afghanistan, school district staff, government ministries (both Provincial and Federal), immigrant and refugee serving agencies, social service agencies, and unions/ employers. In addition, feedback was received and incorporated from a cross-country e-mail/ telephone survey.

The consultation focused primarily on refugee immigrants from the continent of Africa<sup>1</sup> and the country of Afghanistan because up until 2007 these were the two main source regions of government assisted refugees arriving in BC. Within these two source regions the majority of these new refugee immigrant youth were settling in the Metro Vancouver cities of Burnaby and Coquitlam, thus the consultation primarily targeted these two geographical areas.

Refugee immigrant youth arriving in BC are extremely resilient and have tremendous assets that, if adequately supported and given “a life line”, will make a valuable contribution to Canadian society.

## **V. Introduction**

For the past 10 years, and more noticeably since the introduction of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in June 2002, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has shifted the focus of Canada’s national humanitarian refugee resettlement program towards refugee protection. This policy shift has meant a significant change in the characteristics of refugee immigrants coming to Canada as permanent residents. This situation is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Of the 7,300-7,500 government-assisted refugees (GARs) that are resettled to Canada annually, approximately 11% or 800 individuals arrive annually in BC and settle within Metro Vancouver. Approximately 40% are refugee children and youth under 18 years old.

Presently most refugee immigrant families arrive from refugee camp situations where they have resided for up to two or more decades. A significant number of refugee immigrant families are now coming from multi-generational first language pre-literate and pre-numerate backgrounds. This is because of war and/or internal conflict, the unavailability of schools, low socio-economic status and/or protracted refugee camp experience. A few refugee camps have basic schools, but the vast majority do not.

The story of Gholan Nabi Nouri, a refugee youth from Afghanistan and a focus group participant illustrates the hopes and challenges of many refugee immigrant learners. Nabi came to Canada in 2006 at the presumed age of 16. Exact age is unknown due to the lack of precise birth records. Arriving in Canada gave Nabi his first opportunity to attend school. During one of the consultations Nabi told of

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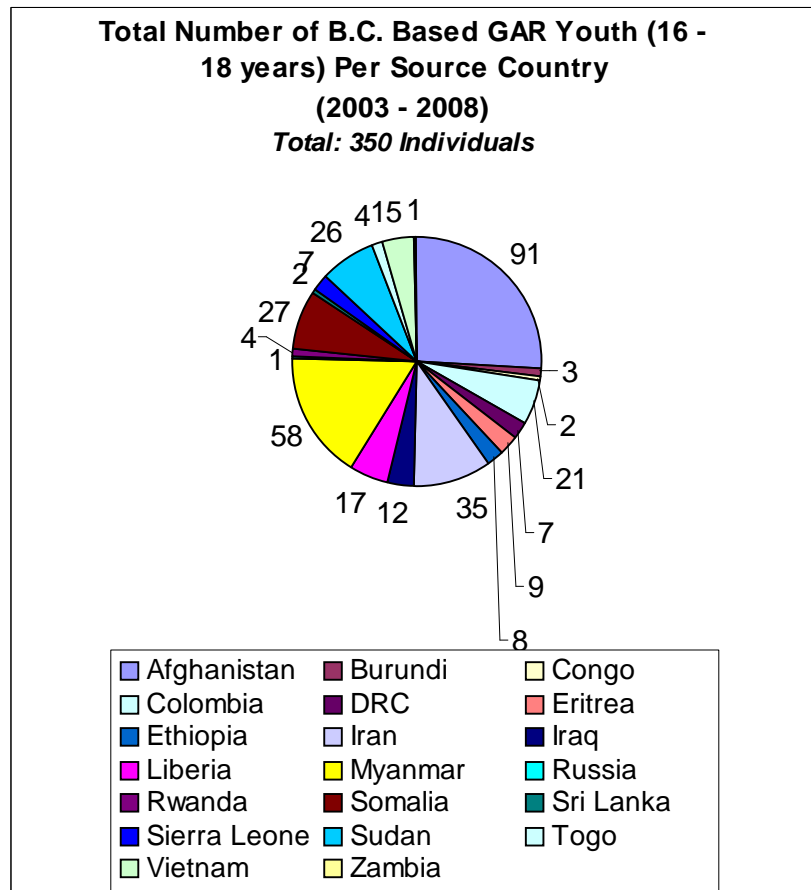
<sup>1</sup> In this context, the term “African” reflects numerous source countries, but in particular Sudan, Somalia, Congo, etc.

his experience of having to begin work at the age of 5 making carpets in Afghanistan. Because of war, Afghanistan became increasingly dangerous so by the age of 10, he and some of his brothers fled to Iran. In Iran, they worked in a number of different places, but the employment was often illegal, so their employment was frequently shut down unexpectedly or their work was left unpaid. Nabi would like to work in the trades for a few years to assist his family, but all of his experiences have been in a society that was not print based, and his skills do not directly transfer to the Canadian work setting.

“My brothers and I have so much work experience from Iran, but it is still difficult to find jobs in Canada because we can’t provide documentation of experience”.

Now in Canada, he goes to school up to 18 hours a day combining his high school classes, with additional English classes at a local community college. His goal is to achieve literacy, graduation, and eventually enter college.

Many 16-18 year olds now arriving in British Columbia have had no formal schooling. The chart below highlights the number of 16-18 year old government assisted refugees that settled in BC from 2003-2008 as well as the source countries they represented.





Print has little or no meaning and numeracy is an abstract concept to them. Many of these refugee immigrant youth learners will reach school leaving age (19) without having had the opportunity to learn more than rudimentary English and mathematics, and only a few will have developed basic work related skill sets. This is a growing concern to school officials, immigrant serving agencies, and other community service agencies.

Ms. Amran Toyo as a parent of three children, former refugee and concerned African community member, summarized the experiences and feelings of many parents when she formally addressed a multidisciplinary consultation forum in February 2009. The following are excerpts from her presentation.

Ms. Toyo's full speech can be found in Appendix E.

“Many (refugee young people) were exposed to the brutal killings of innocent people and the suffering of many people. They have struggled all their lives just to survive the horror that surrounded their young lives. Then, a miracle happens, they get the opportunity to travel to Canada.

As wonderful as coming to Canada may be, there are underlying issues that these young people cannot simply overcome. These kids need our assistance. Let me give you an example what is going wrong now, when a sixteen year old child is sitting in a classroom while their peers are preparing themselves for Colleges and Universities and still this poor African kid is struggling with how to write his or her name. Of course, it is not surprising why some of them leave school. Although, they may not realize this, they do not have yet the skills needed to work with Canadian standards. Here is the place we are losing many of them to depression, homelessness, and sometimes streets, and criminal activities.

The circumstances in these youth's lives are sometimes overwhelming. For example, boys in African families are encouraged to enter the work force before they are ready and prepared for, due to the needs of the family here and to help the relatives they left behind. In the case of the girls, more often they are asked to help raise the younger ones while the mother works at low paying jobs, or they marry early. What they are lacking is to realize that literacy is necessary to get reliable jobs in the future.”

A focussed literature review across Canada revealed that there is very little research on refugee immigrant learners in Canada. This premise was reinforced by a report released by CERIS in 2000 entitled *The Needs of Newcomer Youth and Emerging “Best Practices” to Meet Those Needs*. The authors, Paul Anisef and Kenise M. Killbride, state that an intensive review of the literature proved there is no real attention and subsequently needs are not being met for refugee and immigrant youth between the ages of 16-20.

The purpose of this consultation report was to gain further insights into the hopes, aspirations and challenges of refugee immigrant youth, document current trends, and identify the necessary components of a program framework/model to enhance learning and labour market attachment.

## **VI. Methodology**

There were several streams of methodology employed within the consultation process. The first involved outreach to stakeholders' groups and services to learn about each other's knowledge of and experience working with this target group.

This was done through cross-Canada emails and telephone calls. Current literature and reports on this topic were reviewed, and aspects drawn into the text of this report.

Locally, representatives of each stakeholder group<sup>2</sup> were invited to key informant interviews or focus groups. Outreach was accomplished through translated summaries, phone calls and emails which could be followed up by appointment. Bilingual, bicultural settlement workers assisted with community meetings held in both the Afghan and African communities.

Key informant questionnaires were tested and adapted prior to the first interviews and focus groups. Questions for the key informant interviews appear in *Appendix A*. Each key informant was given an assurance of confidentiality. Some excerpts from interviews are used in this report (unattributed).

Specific questions as found in *Appendix B* were prepared for the focus groups. Each focus group had up to 15 members, and each group took approximately one and one half hours to complete. Each stakeholder group sent participants to one dedicated focus group and one multidisciplinary focus group. Participating youth and parents were all paid a stipend and provided transit tickets to cover travel expenses. Child minding was provided for the younger children of parents participating in that focus group.

Focus group participants were asked to identify specific issues and challenges they saw and identify possible resources that could be used to address them. Each focus group completed a post-focus group evaluation (*Appendix C*). The data was compiled and summarized. Finally, translated summaries of the consultation findings were prepared and distributed to refugee immigrant youth and their parents.

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<sup>2</sup> Stakeholders were defined as: youth targeted in this particular research; parents from the same target group, teachers and school administrators, ministry representatives e.g .,education, advanced education, Immigrant Integration Branch, health, social services, and unions/ employers.

## VII. Results

The following outlines the findings from nine (9) focus groups and thirty-three (33) key informant interviews. (See *Appendix D* for details).

### A. Key Informants

Some of the issues/themes that arose through key informant interviews were as follows:

- Learners are often coming from a desert, rural, or mountainous refugee camp environment, into a highly complex urban environment;
- Learners are coming from oral societies, with a focus on verbal communication skills, into a predominantly education-based, print-focused society;
- Within the groups, there are issues of multi-generational pre-literacy and pre-numeracy;
- On arrival, the idea of print as a meaningful communication system is not predominant;
- The kind of concept development essential for schooling is not well developed;
- Most of these learners are at the pre-readiness stage of learning and accommodations will have to be made;
- Several respondents noted that significant amounts of new curriculum will need to be developed for these learners;
- Learners, parents, school staff members and health personnel all identified trauma as a constant reality in any setting in which this profile of learner is involved;
- Youth who suffer from post-traumatic stress have difficulty adjusting to a learning and/or work place environment and will require additional supports;

There was consensus that refugee immigrant youth, and their families, need a more extensive pre-departure orientation than they are currently getting on schooling, education, culture and life in BC. This orientation can be augmented with additional orientation programming following the youths' arrival in BC.

It was repeatedly made clear to the consultants that Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS) is the source of much "inattention" and school absences, greatly affecting information retention, and class completion rates. For this reason, as well as for humanitarian reasons, on-site counselling and weekly staff-supported peer-group sessions, which would also debrief "current stresses", are an essential element in maintaining these learners in school or any program of significant length.

- Several key informants noted that because these particular learners had never learned to read or write in any language, the concept development assumed by ESL curriculum would not be in place. Experience and research indicate that a literacy platform, rather than an ESL platform, provides the most effective basis for this particular group of students;
- Key informants also specifically noted that secondary school programming for these refugee youth needed to include a life skills and workplace language component;
- Some key informants and the researchers noted that these learners were not yet, or in some cases just beginning to be, on the “radar” of many whose mandate would otherwise make them part of the solution (e.g. some alternative programs, some union training programs, etc). This means that an intermediate aim should be to further publicize information about the realities faced by these new groups of learners. This would include the information we have compiled on the environments that will support their learning, and allow them and us (Canadian society) to benefit from the skills they do have waiting to be developed;
- There was much discussion about the placement of these learners when they register for classes. Some respondents felt that these students needed to be with their age appropriate group for social adaptation reasons. Others felt that sitting in an age appropriate classroom put the student at a severe learning disadvantage since their needs were so different from same-age-peers. In some cases that generated discussion about solutions that took account of both of these realities; and,

“We add a second level of trauma when we place these learners in age appropriate classrooms, where they are continually compared to and are comparing themselves to the accomplishments of their age-peers. Their age-peers may be preparing to go to college and/or graduate, when they (the refugee learners) are learning the alphabet and/or to write their own name.”

- Key Informant

It follows that any program developed be offered in a ‘work-learning environment’ rather than a school environment, and that age-appropriate social interactions/ learning experiences be appropriately safeguarded/included.

## B. Youth Focus Groups

The youth consultation and focus groups focussed on four main questions: What are the benefits and challenges of (1) staying in school, (2) leaving school and getting a job, (3) participating in a new program, and (4) learning part-time and working part-time. The youths' combined responses are presented below:

### 1. Staying in School

Benefits	Afghan	African
• Will become better educated	X	x
• Can get credits for graduation	X	
• Can get to know system and society	X	x
• Can give better service to society	X	x

Challenges	Afghan	African
• Making yourself understood when you have little English	X	x
• Being teased	X	x
• Not being respected because of language or background	x	
• Dealing with the bullying	X	x
• Delayed income earning	X	x
• Becoming a burden on your family	X	x
• Becoming depressed	X	x
• Not having family support for this	X	x

The youth also commented that learning English is hard, and that they didn't always understand homework assignments.

It was also clear from a variety of responses that neither the students nor the parents have an accurate understanding of the employment/ income limitations these students will face in both the near and the long-term without a targeted intervention such as that which this consultation explores.

“All youth and parent focus groups made clear that the family survival needs would necessarily result in ongoing pressure for the youth to leave any training program and keep on searching for some kind of work. A monthly stipend [and a transportation allowance/ bus pass] to each participant throughout the length of the training is clearly critical to program completion<sup>3</sup>.”

## 2. Leaving School and Getting a Job

The youth identified benefits and challenges of leaving school and obtaining a job as follows:

Benefits	Afghan	African
• Financial improvement	X	x
• Can meet & learn from other people	X	x
• Can use English in a practical way	X	x
• Can gain good experience	X	x

Challenges	Afghan	African
• Jobs are low-paying or dead-end	x	x
• Harder to learn how to make good decisions	x	x
• Can end up with 'bad' friends	x	x
• Forget how to study and coming back is hard	x	
• You're left behind because you're not achieving		x

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<sup>3</sup> Our tracking of youth in this target group to date shows clearly that any employment found is temporary, usually unstable, and often exploitive.

The youth recognized the difficulty in finding and keeping a job. They identified the negative consequences of this as staying home, potentially leading to an increase in family fights, seeing poverty grow, and developing a lower level of self-respect.

### 3. Participating in a New Program

Youth focus group participants identified the following benefits and challenges with participating in a new program.

Benefits	Afghan	African
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can match/foster development of skills</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could lead to a better job</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can't get lazy if you're busy</li> </ul>	x	

Challenges	Afghan	African
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More education doesn't always lead to a job</li> </ul>	x	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of time it might take</li> </ul>		x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibility of a program being temporary</li> </ul>		x

These findings reinforce a growing view that any new program developed should take place in a work-oriented rather than a school environment. Given this view, it was also recognized that youth need to have opportunities to socialize so that they do not feel 'ghettoized'. Program planning needs to specifically incorporate social opportunities.

#### 4. Learning Part-Time and Working Part-Time

The notion of studying and working part-time elicited the following responses among youth participants.

Benefits	Afghan	African
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can get education for a better life while contributing to family finances</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can practice English</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can make money for future education</li> </ul>	x	

The challenges highlight a belief that they would not have enough time to do both functions well. These youth believe that if they can concentrate on either 'schooling' or 'work' their learning will be significantly increased. They were unfamiliar with the notion of learning and working being mutually supportive.

When Afghan and African youth were asked what components would be important for a new program, they highlighted seven (7) key elements.

Components	Afghan	African
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English language learning</li> </ul>	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academics</li> </ul>	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills/vocational training</li> </ul>	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child care program</li> </ul>	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earn money while in program</li> </ul>	X	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money management</li> </ul>	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job outreach mechanism</li> </ul>	X	X



### C. Parent Focus Groups

From the list of focus group questions (See Appendix B.ii.)<sup>4</sup>, the facilitators were able to ascertain the following major concerns that parents had for their children and youth:

Concerns	Afghan	African
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to help youth learn English faster</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need specialized English intensive classes for older arriving youth</li> </ul>	x	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want advice on how to enable teens to stay in school but still make some money</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need free vocational/skills training</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need support to deal with trauma</li> </ul>	x	x
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of graduation too often means that teens make bad choices about friends &amp; money making opportunities</li> </ul>	x	x

A continuing concern of parents was their lack of money to support their children in general as well as enabling their teens to complete school. This situation becomes exacerbated when a family must begin to repay their 'transportation loan' (a year after their arrival).

Many parents also want literacy and/or skills based training programs so they can be better prepared to enter the workforce, thus reducing their 'cycle of poverty'. Parents also stated that as part of increasing their family income

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<sup>4</sup> For reasons of clarity, these questions are listed in the Appendix rather than in the text as was the case in the Youth Focus Group section.

security, changes are needed to be made to the current Ministry of Housing and Social Development policy regarding dollar-for-dollar deductions on monies earned by government assisted refugees through employment similar to what currently exists through CIC's Resettlement Assistance Program.

#### **D. Educators**

Educators from the Coquitlam and Burnaby School Boards were invited to share their thoughts and concerns about refugee immigrant teenagers under the following headings<sup>5</sup>:

- Issues and Barriers
- Potential Solutions
- Gaps in Service
- Resources to Deal with Gaps and Potential Solutions
- Potential Partnerships

Respondents identified nineteen (19) issues and barriers affecting refugee immigrant teenagers including:

- Literacy – reading and math
- Mental health issues
- Students getting frustrated and becoming more involved in drugs and gangs
- Students needing to 'work' to help out family – sometimes too many hours per day
- Sexism against females
- Strong adherence to gender roles as understood in countries of origin
- Lack of helpers' understanding about cultures and religions, and their importance to these youth and their families
- Can't go into career training because of lack of basic skills (English, math)
- Inadequate number and availability of interpreters to help teachers work more effectively with these youth
- Lack of resources/curriculum for program development
- Concern that programs for these youth won't be funded over the long term
- Lack of time
- Unresolved trauma issues, which negatively impact on learning because of learner difficulty with focus and concentration
- Learners' lack of English language skills
- Lack of social and cultural knowledge about how this society works
- Some students don't see school as relevant to them
- Lack of youth and parental understanding about schooling and requirements for getting and keeping a sustainable job

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<sup>5</sup> See *Appendix B* for specific questions asked.

Educators also commented on the length of time it took to identify the refugee learners in their schools, and the limitations of existing assessment instruments to assess these students' needs.

Potential solutions offered by these educators included:

- Additional ESL time/blocks
- Creation/inclusion of a life skills component
- Creation/inclusion of workplace language modules
- Integration of main dimensions of academics, health, skills, acculturation and language training into a time limited curriculum. This requires a coordinator to assist students with on-the-job training placements
- More extensive access to resource people who speak specific languages
- Time to collaborate with colleagues from other districts to share best practices and materials.

Eight (8) notable gaps in service were reported by educators:

1. shortfalls in interpreter and translation services;
2. inadequate access to specialized trauma counsellors trained in Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS);
3. counselling (including various expressive therapies –e.g. art and music);
4. time to build and sustain connections between community based settlement services and schools;
5. inadequate access to professional development opportunities about refugees;
6. career training opportunities in schools;
7. students being placed in higher level groups/classes because of 'numbers'; and,
8. the absence of a functional language program that facilitates friendships and social communication and workplace preparation/entry.

Educators recognized that a variety of organizations/institutions need to work cooperatively to foster long term learning opportunities for later-to-literacy youth. They specifically mentioned Boards of Education, immigrant serving agencies and other community organizations/outreach programs, and government programs (English language acquisition and job skills). They were interested in the potential role/responsibility of unions, and suggested that a case management approach for refugee later-to-literacy students should be utilized.

When asked to think about potential partners, educators responded with a wide array of possibilities. These included:

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- Federal Government departments (e.g. CIC, Heritage Canada)
- Provincial Government departments (e.g. Ministry for Children and Family Development, Health, Advanced Education)
- Police
- Unions
- Business and trades communities
- Immigrant serving agencies
- Other funding/support groups (e.g. Canucks Family Education Centre, Kids Out Front).

### **E. Union/Employer Focus Group**

The consultants met with representatives of more than a dozen union program streams, all of which have apprenticeship programs<sup>6</sup>. The major points they made were:

- The most important aspects of a youth preparation program are the development of a good work ethic, reliability and responsibility.
- A youth preparation program needs to focus on essential job skill English as well as literacy and numeracy, and instilling in the youth a 'long-term' mentality.
- It is critical for these youth to have driver's licences and cars. This is because they will be moving from one job site to another, many in places where there is no public transportation.
- Unions want to create nuclear groups, i.e. to hire several good workers who can then become recruiters for more workers because their friends see the benefits of having these jobs.
- Unions are prepared to help their workers with training for specific skills, and development of additional skills.
- Part of a preparation program is an orientation to a variety of trades as well as providing an opportunity to work in different areas.

Given the fact that many youth will go directly to the work force, at least in the short term, there will be a need to maintain on-going linkages with union/employer groups to ensure that program development continues to meet the needs of these groups for further skills training development.

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<sup>6</sup> See *Appendix B*. for specific questions asked.

## F. Multidisciplinary Meeting

The last component of the consultation process was to bring together thirteen (13) representatives of the focus groups with representatives from Federal and Provincial Governments and Literacy BC. The purpose of this meeting was (a) to provide preliminary results of the consultations, (b) to mutually share information, and (c) to elicit additional factors for future consideration<sup>7</sup>.

Questions were raised, and comments made, about the need for an appropriate alternate learning environment for a program.

Several made comments about ensuring that communities were involved so as to support families, to increase 'ownership' of and commitment to a program, and to help build community capacity.

Examples of strong existing programs<sup>8</sup> were identified and, as one participant wrote of one:

*“While you couldn’t take [another] model and expect it to work for this client group, there are some strong parallels to draw from.”*

Participants' last area of concern, as potential partners, was the sustainability of a program. Further comments regarding this concern are made later in this report. The meeting ended with a robust understanding that this initiative would be moved forward and that we would continue to share information with the participants.

## VIII. Potential Solutions

Our consultation findings reinforced growing consensus on key components critical for assisting newcomer youth to settle and integrate into Canada. Our findings strongly matched the “best practices” identified for supporting the integration of newcomer youth as identified in the study by Anisef and Killbride.

- Education - Youth need education programs genuinely tailored to their levels, and which include counselling and support services, mentoring and tutoring programs and appropriate assessment services.
- Access to Employment and Economic Mobility – Besides English language acquisition, there is a need for youth to be educated about labour market standards in Canada and programs to provide job-related language assistance.
- Access to Appropriate (Targeted) Social Services – There is a need for services that address an array of issues including, for example, issues

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<sup>7</sup> See *Appendix B* for specific questions asked.

<sup>8</sup> “BLADERUNNERS” was particularly mentioned as a program with strong parallels. See also *Appendix G*.

arising from family violence, and providing appropriate and accessible recreational programs. Currently available social services need to be reviewed in order to begin to meet the needs of unserved or underserved groups.

- Health – Youth require better health information on a wide range of issues (from smoking to AIDS) and good, genuinely accessible referral services.
- Mental Health- In addition to dealing with trauma, youth need “assistance in coping with adjustment as a newcomer, resolving personal identity issues, and balancing pressure from family to maintain old values as well as pressure from peers to adopt new ones” (p.31).

Programs and practices described as best meeting the needs of all newcomer youth, and especially necessary to our target group, include:

- Practical aids to assist integration into the institutional life of Canadian society,
- Aids to social and psychological integration,
- Providing referrals, and
- Programs specifically targeting newly arrived refugee immigrant youth.

Programs specifically tailored to youth included:

- Language instruction
- Health care, including support to help overcome trauma
- A drop-in centre
- Goal-oriented language and employment services, and
- The provision of practical job training

### **A. Importance of Employing a Literacy Platform**

The findings highlight an important issue in moving forward in the development of an age and culturally responsive intervention. The critical question that underlies any program foundation for refugee immigrant learners is whether a Literacy or an English as an Additional/ Second Language platform should be used.

The main foundational platform for refugee immigrant learners throughout Metro Vancouver Boards of Education is English as an Additional/ Second Language (EAL/ESL). Existing programs for ESL/EAL learners are geared and designed to support learners, who have already been in school and have studied their first language, with acquiring English. One of the current underlying principles is recognition that fundamental academic and social concepts had already been acquired in the learners' country of origin. In other words, EAL/ESL learners are first language literate. The reality is that this is not the case with a growing number of refugee immigrant youth and, therefore, to use an EAL/ESL 'platform' with them in future programming is not appropriate. Refugee immigrant youth need a combined 'literacy' and 'functional literacy' platform. For the purposes of this report, the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) definition of 'literacy' is intended.

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“‘Literacy’ is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society.”

“A functional literacy approach is a method used to teach people how to read well enough to function in a complex society. It incorporates reading materials that relate directly to community development and to teaching applicable or useful life skills.”

Throughout the consultation process it became clear that a functional literacy approach needs to be utilized to prepare refugee immigrant youth for labour market attachment.

## **B. Key Program Elements for Refugee Immigrant Learners**

On the basis of research, key informant interviews, and focus group participants, six (6) essential program elements have surfaced as critical support components for a successful model that targets refugee immigrant learners. The essential program elements that have been identified are literacy and numeracy, workplace essential skills and language, orientation to workplace experiences, academic development, social support and cultural information and trauma counselling. Each is discussed below:

- **Literacy and Numeracy**

Literacy and numeracy are two of the most crucial aspects of a program. A literacy premise or platform is more appropriate for these youth because it:

- improves employment prospects and income,
- reduces dependence on social assistance,
- promotes health and well-being, and
- promotes participation in a civil society.

A literacy approach can reach to the youths’ levels of pre-literacy performance, and can ensure that the building blocks of concepts and knowledge have a firm foundation on which to build. Numeracy is critical for everyday life as well as for work environments.

The consultation and research review revealed that very little applicable material currently exists in Canada for refugee immigrant learners described in this report. In consultation with key informants with specialized knowledge in this area, it has been estimated that given the cross-disciplinary nature of the proposed

program/model, approximately 70% of a new curriculum would have to be created, while the remaining 30% could be adapted from ready-made materials.

- Workplace Essential Skills and Language

Developing essential workplace skills is essential to any workplace program. This includes facets such as reading print (including environmental print), numeracy, oral communication, thinking skills (e.g. problem solving), working with others, and the idea of continuous learning. It also incorporates the development of a solid work ethic, fostering a longer-term view of employment and building understanding of the 2 “Rs” of the workplace – reliability and responsibility.

While every form of work has its own language, youth need to be introduced to common workplace language, expectations and acceptable behaviours.

- Orientation to Workplace Experiences

Refugee immigrant youth arriving in British Columbia (and throughout Canada), have no understanding of the range of work and trades opportunities that currently exist, or for that matter what each of them really means. Youth need opportunities to experience different workplace settings to help them determine an area of sufficient interest based on their aptitude that would prepare them for a long-term commitment.

- Academic Development

It is important that the doors to more academic development, including secondary school graduation, be kept open. These learners are bright, resilient and creative; but many of them did not have the opportunity to attend ‘formal’ schooling prior to coming to Canada.

It is expected that some youth will continue their formal schooling in the future, and they need opportunities to advance this aspect of their lives in preparation for that future.

- Social Supports and Cultural Information

Given the intensity and complexity of backgrounds that these learners and their families are bringing with them, they need a variety of strong and consistent social supports over a more extended time period than might usually be in place. Coming from a protracted refugee camp situation, or a “desert or mountainous background” to a print/knowledge-based society, demands explicit and on-going support. They also need explicit and on-going cultural information so they can better understand both the realities and the nuances of the culture in which they



are living, and to assist them in better understanding their roles in participating in a civil society.

- Trauma Counselling

Although Trauma Counselling is identified last, it is now commonly recognized that giving refugee immigrant youth opportunities to deal with their migration related trauma and feelings needs to precede many other areas, and still remain an on-going facet of any program. There has long been an understanding among mental health professionals that dealing with trauma must occur early and consistently in educational and training programs. Counselling could consist of such well-known areas as art and music therapy, and/or working with a trained Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome therapist with specialized training in refugee trauma. Other counselling options continue to be explored.

The proposed model sets out two intakes per year of 16 to 20 students each and of 18-month duration. Refugee immigrant learners would participate in a combination of literacy/numeracy class work, and workplace entry skills and vocabulary development prior to work placement. Before the program implementation, new curriculum would need to be created. The program would also include special supports, such as built-in counselling/social support that has also been identified as critical to participant retention and their completion of all steps in the program. It is anticipated that the proposed structure would provide the necessary time to incorporate the learning from cycle 1 so as to strengthen and enhance the work with cycle 2 participants.

While many educational models purport to be able to prepare previously non-schooled learners within a shorter time frame, our experience, consultation and the literature review support the notion that a longer training period maximizes the likelihood of extended and sustained employment opportunities.

All program deliberations had as a priority the retention of learners for the 18-month period. Program success was defined as learner's success in workplace settings including achieving employment; Employers able to gain potential long-term employees; Schools having an option to refer similar youth to the target population; and, Schools having access to a comprehensive pre-literacy curriculum, which would address the shortfalls of the current school curriculum.

The proposed model would also address:

- Trauma issues among young people that need to be dealt with prior to active learning taking place;
- The cultural and linguistic supports needed: in the community, at home and in all learning environments; and,

- Ways to maintain parents/sponsors' support for learners' participation through completion of the program.

A third party evaluator has been identified to conduct formative and summative evaluation of the model/ process.

### Program Sustainability

The youth, educators and participants who attended the multidisciplinary group and who were part of this consultation process raised the importance of program sustainability.

While the demonstration program identified in the recommendations is expected to provide valuable information on meeting the learning needs of refugee immigrant teenagers, it cannot meet the needs of all such refugee youth currently residing in BC. Further, as has been previously stated, more such refugee youth are expected to arrive annually for the foreseeable future.

One pro-active option would be to have a dedicated location where the recommended program can be repeated for additional learners over time. (This selected location should enable an adult education work-study environment.)

## IX. Possible Partners

The following are partners and potential partners who have indicated interest in participating in the proposed program as well as being crucial to the program's success. These partners will provide a variety of support and in-kind contributions including assistance with work placement sites, curriculum review, and the development of an evaluation framework.

### A. Services and Agencies

- Bill McRoberts – Manager of the Discovery to Apprenticeship Program
- Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, Vancouver, BC
- Carol Madsen, Executive Director, Pathways Program – Tradeworks, Vancouver, BC
- Catherine Eddy – until July 2007, Manager, Vancouver School Board, District Reception and Placement Centre. Currently, a researcher focusing on the needs of the target group of learners described in this report.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada –Consulting support –Vancouver, BC
- Dr. Erling Christensen – Chair, Department of Sociology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Richmond, BC
- Dr. Lee Gunderson – Professor, Faculty of Language and Literacy, UBC, Vancouver, BC

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- Dr. Ying Hoh – Registered Psychologist, Coquitlam School Board, Coquitlam, BC
- Nolan Eddy, Operations Manager, United Food & Commercial Workers Local 247, New Westminster, BC
- Steve Dunbar, ESL Educator, Curriculum Review, Vancouver School Board, Vancouver, BC
- Sylvia Helmer, Manager, District Reception and Placement Centre, Vancouver, BC
- The Burnaby Board of Education – Consulting support
- The Coquitlam Board of Education – Consulting support
- The Ministry of Advanced Education – Consulting support
- The Ministry of Housing and Social Development – Consulting support
- The Vancouver Board of Education – Consulting support
- UFCW - Local 247 Training Centre – will provide guidance and assistance in employment placement options within the trades sectors and retail sectors of the local labour market. UFCW has also agreed to act as a conduit/ liaison to other unions. – New Westminster, BC

## **B. Community Participants**

The program steering committee must consist of stakeholder representatives drawn from consultations (including community members), on-going research and specialized support resource people.

## **X. Summary and Recommendations**

Through the consultation process several recommendations emerged for future consideration.

### **Citizenship and Immigration Canada**

- That the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) Income Support rates include a monthly transportation allowance (bus pass) for all children and youth between the ages of 6-18 years old;
- That CIC develop a specific refugee youth orientation program for youth ages 14-18 years old as part of the Resettlement Assistance Program;
- That CIC eliminate the transportation loan for government-assisted refugees as this loan is negatively impacting the well-being of families.
- That the development and delivery of a specific pre-departure orientation program for refugee teenagers (14-18 years old) be implemented;

## Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development

- That the Ministry fund a specialized trauma support program for refugee children and youth who have been in Canada fewer than 5 years;
- That the Ministry partner with the Ministries of Housing and Social Development and Education to fund a three (3) year program for recently arrived refugee immigrant youth who have had limited or no schooling in their countries of origin and who are between 16 and 18 years of age upon arrival in BC;
- That this 3-year demonstration program be developed and implemented as follows:
  - a) That it focus on literacy and numeracy, workplace essential skills and language, orientation to workplace experiences, academic development, and include social supports, cultural information and trauma and other counseling;
  - b) That a Steering Committee, consisting of representatives from stake-holder groups, be created to meet regularly in order to contribute to the evolution of the project;
  - c) That a literacy 'platform' be used, rather than an English as a Second Language platform;
  - d) That a "fast track" working group be established to develop new curricula, including the revision and/or adaptation of existing materials whenever possible;
  - e) That the program be offered in a 'work-learning environment' rather than a school environment;
  - f) That monthly stipends be in place in order to enable youth to participate in and complete the program;
  - g) That monthly transportation allowances/bus passes be made available to all refugee youth in the demonstration program.
  - h) That youth be assessed on their learning needs and also the psychological support systems needed;
  - i) That both formative and summative evaluations be conducted on the program by an independent evaluator;
- That the Ministry fund two specialized refugee youth workers to develop an early intervention support and orientation program for refugee teenagers who reside in the Lower Mainland during their first month in Canada;
- That the Ministry provide a funding program to increase the capacity to keep refugee teenagers in school through funding for after school and summer programs including a first summer in Canada settlement and orientation program for refugee teenagers. This could include funding volunteer coordinator positions for after school homework clubs that use volunteer tutors;

- That the Ministry fund pre-employment skill based training programs for refugee parents (adults) in order to increase the income security within the family; and
- That the Ministry fund the development of workplace language modules for inclusion in secondary school programs for refugee youth.
- That the Ministry through Welcome BC and other initiatives enhance the promotion/education of unions and employers to the existence of underemployed high and low skilled refugee immigrant workers already in BC.

### **Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD)**

- That provincial income support rates (food and shelter) be increased including a monthly transportation allowance for children and youth in order to support school attendance (parents and key informants mentioned how beneficial this would be particularly for refugee youth and their families);
- That the Ministry rescind the policy of the dollar for dollar deduction in income support for GAR recipients that are employed part-time e.g. similar to the federal government CIC RAP policy that allows government assisted refugees on income support to work up to 50% of their total family income without deduction;
- That the Ministry partner with the Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and Labour Market Development to fund a three (3) year program for recently arrived refugee immigrant youth who have had limited or no schooling in their countries of origin and who are between 16 and 18 years of age upon arrival in BC
- That the Ministry co-fund, with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, literacy and pre-employment skill based training programs for refugee parents (adults) in order to increase the income security within the family

### **Ministry of Education**

- That the Ministry partner with the Ministries of Housing and Social Development and Advanced Education to fund a three (3) year program for recently arrived refugee immigrant youth who have had limited or no schooling in their countries of origin and who are between 16 and 18 years of age upon arrival in BC;
- That the Ministry of Education provide funding for the development/adaptation of a pre-literacy curriculum for the proposed 3 year demonstration program;
- That the Ministry develop a provincial resource guide for teachers in BC who work with refugee learners to enhance the support to these learners;

- That the Ministry specifically fund the creation of literacy classes for refugee youth, including a staffing allocation and time for their teachers to consult with others about these learners; and
- That the Ministry fund the development of a life skills component for inclusion in programming for refugee youth.

### **Local Boards of Education**

- That local Boards of Education put in place electronic tracking systems to better support and monitor high need refugee learners including the ability to conduct follow-up on those students that drop-out;
- That local Boards of Education with the financial assistance of the Ministry of Education, expand literacy classes as well as English as a second language/additional language classes for refugee youth;
- That local Boards of Education develop some translated orientation materials for refugee learners and their parents to better acquaint them with the public school system;
- That local Boards of Education develop centralized intake and assessment centres for ESL/EAL learners and their parents to better support and monitor non English speaking newcomer learners, particularly refugee youth;
- That local Boards of Education review/evaluate current assessment tools for refugee learners while moving towards the development of a common tool built on current research findings and promising practices in Canada that document both learner assets/strengths as well as current levels;
- That more emphasis be placed on enhancing the abilities of teachers to work more effectively with refugee learners within District Professional Development resources;
- That local Boards of Education/school administrators allow increased time in their programming schedules for literacy teachers to collaborate with colleagues from other districts to share best practices and materials;
- That local Boards of Education/school administrators fund additional ESL/ Literacy time/blocks;
- That local Boards of Education/school administrators facilitate the inclusion of a life skills component in the existing curriculum for refugee youth;
- That local Boards of Education/school administrators facilitate the inclusion of workplace language modules for refugee youth in the existing curriculum;

Each year 50-60 refugee immigrants between 16 and 18 years of age enter BC as permanent residents. Most of these young people have spent considerable time in refugee camps without having the opportunity to be part of any formal schooling. In the case of specific sub groups of young people, such as Afghan girls that lived under the Taliban regime, systematic barriers kept them from attending school. While the numbers of refugee immigrant youth arriving in BC is expected to be similar as in previous years, this particular population is growing into a critical mass that if left unsupported could have dire consequences in the future.

One of the general agreements that emerged from the year long consultation process was the fact that many refugee immigrant youth are facing considerable challenges integrating into the public school system. Key informants acknowledged that the drop-out rate among this group of learners is growing, fuelling increased underemployment, poverty, intergenerational conflict and exposure to criminal/illegal activities. Key informants underlined the fact that these learners are incredibly skilled, have valuable assets, are tremendously resilient but are not getting the support they need to become active and contributing members of their new home country. Youth and parents, and others, outlined a possible road map for future support that would give these specific learners a second chance to enhance their skills and succeed in the labour market. The proposed three (3) year demonstration program, as well as the other recommendations included in this report, are meant to be a step forward – a starting point in developing a lifeline for refugee immigrant teenagers in BC.

## **XI. Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Key Informant Discussion Points**

1. Could you share with me your experience with this target group to date?
2. What are the major needs that you see needing to be met with respect to educational challenges?
3. What are the barriers to meeting these needs?
4. What resources are you aware of that can be brought to bear on these issues?
5. What are the gaps in services from your perspective?
6. Are there any other points you would like to raise?
7. Would you/ your organization be prepared to work with us further as we more forward to address these needs?

### **Appendix B: Focus Group Questions for:**

#### **1. Students**

- a. What are the pluses and minuses of you staying in school?
- b. What are the pluses and minuses of leaving school and getting a job?
- c. What if you can't find a job or lose your job? Then what?
- d. What are the pluses and minuses of participating in a new program?
- e. What are the pluses and minuses of learning part-time and working part-time?
- f. In your opinion, what does a new program need to include?

#### **2. Parents**

- a. What are the pluses and minuses of your sons and daughters staying in school?
- b. What are the pluses and minuses of them leaving school and getting a job?
- c. What if they can't find a job or lose their job? Then what?
- d. What are the pluses and minuses of participating in a new program?
- e. What are the pluses and minuses of learning part-time and working part-time?
- f. In your opinion, what does a new program need to include?



### **3. Educators**

- a. What are the issues?
- b. What are the barriers?
- c. What are the potential solutions?
  
- d. What are the gaps in services and resources to deal with the gaps and potential solutions?
- e. What are some potential partnerships?
- f. Who else should we talk with?
- g. Anything else?
- h. Given the above, what does the potential structure need to look like?

### **4. Unions/ Employers**

- a. Have you had any specific experiences with GARs\* to date?  
Describe it/them.
- b. Given recent demographics, why not?
- c. What are the greatest barriers to long-term employability?
- d. What needs to be done individuals and unions to turn the barriers into successes?
- e. What do you need to learn to increase your hiring practices of GAR youth?
- f. Efforts to work with school boards.

### **5. Multidisciplinary Meeting**

- a. Is there anything missing from this consultation that you can identify that further impacts immigrant refugee youth?
- b. If an opportunity arises to help design and implement a new program to address all of the issues raised in this consultation process, what information would be critical to you as a potential partner?

## **Appendix C: Evaluation Questions for:**

### **1. Students**

- a. For you, what was the most important thing talked about today?
- b. What things does the plan need to include that we haven't talked about today?
- c. Is there anything that would prevent you from participating in such a program?
- d. Are you willing to come again to help do some planning?
- e. Anything else?

### **2. Parents**

- a. For you, what was the most important thing talked about today?
- b. What things does the plan need to include that we haven't talked about today?
- c. Is there anything that would prevent your son or daughter from participating in such a program?
- d. Are you willing to come again to help do some planning?
- e. Anything else?

## Appendix D: Contact List

As noted in the body of our project proposal ISSo/BC, with funding from the United Way of the Lower Mainland, began a consultation process in January 2008 on older refugee young adults arriving in Canada with little or no previous education. The following provides an overview of some of the people / methodology that has helped to formulate the recommendations in this report including the proposed three (3) year demonstration program.

### 1. FOCUS GROUPS

#### Afghan Community Representatives

- Reza Afzali
- Shima Anvari
- Leila Akhtari
- Osman Akhtari
- Suruja Aima
- Nadoya Mohamdi
- Mr. Nabi
- Najiba Ahmadi
- Fariba Habibi
- Nozy Golestan
- Fatemah Qorban
- Fatima Rachmani
- M. Farid
- Shir A.M. Ashraf
- M.K. Geeta
- Fahima A. Samat
- Habiba Abduk Satar
- Tursongul Youqub
- Saih Shah Mohammed Yasin
- Nabi Heider
- Hamid Soltan

#### African Community Representatives

- Amran Toyo
- Farid Omar
- M. Joseph
- M. Mayram
- Kobra (Tara) Pedraz (*facilitator/participant*)

## **Parent Focus Group Evaluation**

In the focus group evaluations, the adults identified that they were pleased to be able to

*“ take decisions for our children to have better lives.”*

They stated that they were prepared to meet again to do more planning for any program development.

### **Afghan Learners**

- Abbas Sharar
- Gulnesa Qurban
- Gulsoom Qurban
- Hassan Rasooli
- Idress Taleb
- Masud Ahmadi
- Mohammad Ali
- Mohammad. Nabi
- Mohammad Moradi
- Nima Ghani-Zadeh
- Razieh Jafari
- Roya Moradi
- Samim Salam
- Shafiq-ullah Sharar
- Shahid-ullah Sharar
- Shahin Abdul Hamid
- Waheedullah Taleb
- Zahro Abdul-Saboor
- Zainab Askarzadeh
- Zeinab Mohebhi
- Nazila Mohammed Dashin
- Nazanin Abdul Qayoim
- Anita Mohammad Yasin

### **African learners**

- Tassew Herba
- Piter Bedawy
- Charles Thon
- Mosiftu Hamza

### Afro-Colombian learners

- John Palacio
- Carlos Palacio
- Frank Garces
- Luis Garcia
- Jose Ascona

### **Youth Focus Group Evaluation**

Major findings from the Afghan and African youth focus group evaluation include the following:

*“The most important part for me was to get an experience or profession that you like”.*

*“The most important for me was when we talked about study and work part-time”.*

They also reported that being involved in a focus group was beneficial, and that they appreciated learning that there could be options for them. Although they had previously expressed concern about not having parental support to continue learning, their evaluation results reflected a strong desire and willingness to continue their education somehow. One hundred percent (100%) of the participants indicated they would be prepared to meet again.

## School Districts

### Coquitlam

- Dr. Ying Hoh, Clinical Psychologist, Coquitlam School District
- Dale Shea, ESL Multiculturalism Coordinator
- Troy Cunningham
- Verna Panwar
- Cindi Seddon, Principal, Como Lake Middle School
- Tina D'Amelio
- Estuardo Toledo

### Burnaby

- Mirella Moscato, Learning Support Services, Byrne Creek Secondary School
- Maureen DeCamp
- Lynn Archer, Principal, Byrne Creek Secondary School

## Union/Employer Focus Group

- Bill McRoberts, Program Manager, Local 247 Training Centre
- Graham Young, Director of Training, BC 38
- Arne Johansen, Trade Improvement Coordinator, International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental & Reinforcing Ironworkers
- Brad Randall, Administrator, Operating Engineers Local 115

## **2. Key Informants**

- Doug Heselgrave, ESL instructor, Central School, Burnaby, British Columbia
- Bill Saunders, President, Vancouver and District Labour Council
- Clyde Duncan - Rail Chief Shop Steward - CAW Chair - City of Vancouver Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues
- Robert Wilmot, Director, Broadway Youth Resource Centre, Vancouver
- Emilie Hillier, Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia
- Maureen de Camp, Byrne Creek Secondary School, Burnaby, British Columbia
- Abdul Fatah Samim, Afghan Community Settlement Counsellor, ISSofBC
- Chaplain Duku, Resettlement Assistance Program Counsellor, ISSofBC
- Fatounata Niane, Host Worker, ISSofBC
- Bonfils Mada, Resettlement Assistance Program Counsellor, ISSofBC
- Peter Dorfman, Settlement Workers in Schools, Ontario
- Wendy Steeves, Counsellor, Burnaby South Secondary School, Burnaby, British Columbia

- Victoria Lee, Principal , Cariboo Hill Secondary School, Burnaby, British Columbia
- Mirella Moscato, ESL, Bryne Creek Secondary School, Burnaby, British Columbia
- Lynn Archer, Principal, Bryne Creek School, Burnaby, British Columbia
- Roberto Bombelli, Principal, Central School, Burnaby, British Columbia
- Lynne Davies, Vice-Principal - Central School, Burnaby, British Columbia
- Dr. Erling Christensen – Chair, Department of Sociology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, Vancouver, British Columbia
- Karen Catalan, Regional Program Advisor, Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- Chinu Das, Manager, Multicultural Services, SWIS Program New Westminster
- Dominic Fung, Program Design and Evaluation Analyst, Immigrant Integration Branch, Province of British Columbia
- Eve Gaudet, Director of Literacy, Ministry of Education
- Catherine Guzik, Program Manager, Immigrant Integration Branch, Province of British Columbia
- Dr. Ying Hoh, Clinical Psychologist, Coquitlam School Board
- David Osborne, Professor, Simon Fraser University
- Bill McRoberts, Program Manager, Local 247 Training Centre
- Nolan Eddy, Operations Manager, United Food & Commercial Workers Local 247
- Graham Young, Director of Training, BC Local 38
- Arne Johansen, Trade Improvement Coordinator, International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental & Reinforcing Ironworkers
- Brad Randall, Administrator, Operating Engineers Local 115

### **3. Additional Resource People Contacted**

- Emilie Hillier, Coordinator  
Diversity and Equity, BC Ministry of Education
- Hana Imai, ESL & Languages Department  
Bow Valley College, Calgary, Alberta
- Diane Hardy, ESL & Languages Department  
Bow Valley College, Calgary, Alberta
- Ian Sutherland, Canadian Manager ESL/EDU  
Cambridge University Press
- Dr. Lee Gunderson, Professor, Faculty of Language and Literacy,  
University of British Columbia
- Dr. Sylvia Helmer, Manager, District Reception and Placement Centre,  
Vancouver Board of Education, BC

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- Jim Jones, Director, Continuing Education Division, Mohawk College, Hamilton, Ontario
- Paula Markus, LEAP Program  
Toronto Board of Education, Toronto, Ontario
- Dr. A. R. MacKinnon (ret.), Office of International Education  
University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario
- Judith Robson, Gladstone Secondary, Vancouver, BC
- Yvonne Mitchell, Elementary, ESL special education
- Sydney Dean, ESL teacher, New Westminster, BC
- Sandra Marshall, ESL teacher, Vancouver, BC
- Sharon Fenton, ESL pre-employment programs, Vancouver, BC
- Steve Dunbar, Elementary & Secondary ESL
- Janet Dempsey, Elementary ESL
- Sally Ringdahl, ESL, Vancouver, BC
- Jim Marcia, Professor Emeritus, Clinical and Developmental Psychology,  
Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC



## **Appendix E: Community Representative**

### **Amran Toyo, African Community Representative**

The following is the text of the presentation made by Ms. Toyo to the Multidisciplinary group that met on February 10, 2009:

Hello Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here today. My name is Amran Toyo, Independent Advocate and Community volunteer, and parent of three beautiful children.

When teens come to Canada from war torn countries they face many new challenges in their lives. Many were exposed to see brutal killings of innocent and the suffering of so many people. They have struggled all their lives just to barely survive the horror that surrounded their young lives. Then, a miracle happens, they get the opportunity to travel all the way to Canada, where they will find peace and see people live who live in harmony, and they do not need to struggle for basic needs, such as shelter, food and more importantly they do not have to worry about their safety, whether they will live to see another day.

As wonderful as coming to Canada may be, there are underlying issues that these young people cannot simply overcome as things are now. In Canada, they are expected to interact with others, learn English, make money and attend public schools. For these teens who have never been in school, this is a tall task.

These kids need our assistance. Let me give you an example what is going wrong now, when a sixteen year old child is sitting in a classroom while their peers are preparing themselves for Colleges and Universities and still this poor African kid is struggling how to write his or her name. Of course, it is not surprising why some of them leave school. Although, they may not realize this, they do not have yet the skills needed to work with Canadian standards. Here is the place we are losing many of them to depression, homelessness, and sometimes streets, and criminal activities.

Younger children do need help, especially with health and trauma. After that they can more easily fit into the new society than older brothers and sisters because they have more time to learn and overcome their challenges. The teenagers - these are the hardest group to deal with, and they often have not been previously schooled. If they have given up on themselves, surely, we cannot give up on them. Many have great creativity and resilience.

The circumstances in these youth's lives are sometimes overwhelming, for example, boys in African families are encouraged to enter the work force before

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they are ready and prepared for due to the needs of the family here and to help the relatives they left behind. In the case of the girls, more often they are asked to help raise the younger ones while the mother works at low paying jobs, or they marry early. What they are lacking is to realize that literacy is necessary to get reliable jobs with a future.

What we need is to embark on is to understand what these teens have experienced in their young lives and help them cope through schooling structured to their need, appropriate counselling, social belonging to help them transform their lives and futures into productive, happy ones.

What these families need is for the teens to be in school with the help of special counselling, to be introduced to entry level jobs that are unionized, even along with their mothers to ensure that they are empowered to transform their lives for the life they anticipated before they came here.

I am very thankful to be here, and to share my views to the most esteemed members of our society. I appreciate the fact that we have common goals, and by uniting our efforts we can overcome the challenges these youth and their families face.

## **Appendix F: Cross Country Scan (by Email)**

Number of organizations contacted by province:

- British Columbia (60)
- Alberta (16)
- Saskatchewan (10)
- Manitoba (4)
- Ontario (34)
- Quebec (12)
- Nova Scotia (12)
- New Brunswick (12)
- Prince Edward Island (1)
- Newfoundland (2)

## **Appendix G: Bladerunners**

Created in 1994, BLADERUNNERS is an internationally recognized employment program assisting multi-barrier and disadvantaged youth aged 15 to 30 in gaining on the job construction training and apprenticeships. BLADERUNNERS' mandate is to provide skill training and support so that youth can overcome their barriers to employment and achieve long-term attachment to the workforce. It provides participants with local meaningful work experience through on the job training to enhance their employment prospects. The BLADERUNNERS model emphasises overall consistency, continuity, integrity and identity through a provincially standardized service delivery model that reflects the original intent and purpose of the program, yet at the same time offers regional flexibility. The BLADERUNNERS model is built on the foundation of cooperation, success and measurable results for all. Participants are referred by pre-employment programs, past and/or present BLADERUNNERS and community organizations. BLADERUNNERS is a non-partisan program that works in partnership with ACCESS, Employers, Trades Organizations, Unions, Community Organizations, Government and the Aboriginal Community to increase opportunities for youth in British Columbia.

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