

Karen Refugees After Five Years in Canada - Ready Communities for Refugee Resettlement

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	
Acknowledgements	3
Acronyms	4
Executive Summary	5
Background	7
The Evolution of Services for Karen Refugees in Langley	8
Research Methodology and Sample	11
Protracted Exile among Karen Newcomers	12
The Impact of Pre-Departure Orientation	13
Housing Issues and Neighbourhood Safety	18
Employment and Income Security	22
Previous Work Experience	22
Employed Profile	23
English Language	24
Other Training	27
Health	27
Community Participation	27
Church and Sport	29
School	30
Volunteering	31
Information and Assistance	33
Citizenship and Belonging or not.....	35
Reflecting on Life in Canada	37
Best things about life in Canada	38
Worst things about life in Canada	39
Youth – Biggest Fears and Hopes for the Future	41
Perceptions of belonging	42
Self-perceptions of success	45
Future resettlement	46
Conclusion	49
Recommendations	50
Works Cited	53

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Acronyms

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	CMHC
Citizenship and Immigration Canada	CIC
Community Activities and Recreation Liaison	CARL
Early Childhood Development	ECD
English as a Second Language	ESL
English Language Services for Adults	ELSA
Government Assisted Refugee	GAR
Government Transportation Loans	GTL
Immigrant Services Society of BC	ISSofBC
International Organization for Migration	IOM
Langley Health Authority	LHA
Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada	LINC
Non-Governmental Organization	NGO
Permanent Resident	PR
Promoting Community through Kids in Sport	PuCKS
Protracted Refugee Situation	PRS
Refugee Advisory Committee	RAC
Service Providing Organizations	SPO
Settlement Worker in Schools	SWIS
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR

Executive Summary

Between 2005 and 2009, the Government of Canada selected and resettled close to 800 Karen government assisted refugees (GARs) to British Columbia or 20% of all GARs for that period. Karen refugees were part of a humanitarian resettlement movement - durable solution to the plight of various ethnic communities fleeing Burma's military regime (officially known as Myanmar). Karen refugees were a relatively new refugee resettlement movement to Canada. Many Karen refugees have spent considerable time, up to 20 years, in remote jungle refugee camp situations in Thailand along the Thai-Burma border. Although most Karen were eager to work in Canada and become self-sufficient, many Karen had no English language skills and lacked local employability skills and work experience often asked by employers for the Canadian labour market.

While the majority of Karens that came to BC settled in the City of Surrey, 257 Karens were destined to the City of Langley, a non-traditional destination for GARs within the Metro Vancouver region. This represented the second time in recent history a large group of GARs were resettled outside the traditional GAR resettlement cities, and the first large movement of resettled refugees to be settled in Langley.

The combination of a relatively new refugee resettlement movement and a non-traditional destining city provided an opportunity to not only gain insights into the settlement outcomes of the Karen refugees five (5) years after arrival in Canada but also reflect on the successes and challenges of destining GARs outside traditional destining cities.

Not surprising given the humanitarian objectives of the National Resettlement Assistance Program, the research findings indicate that the Karen refugees are progressing in their settlement and integration process. The vast majority of community members are grateful for the opportunity to rebuild their lives as future citizens of Canada. Peace, prosperity, opportunities, adherence to human rights, and democratic principles were some of the things that they favoured most about Canada. However, while many settlement challenges remain, including significant housing affordability challenges and widespread income insecurity, they remain largely hopeful and optimistic for the future and particularly, the future of their children.

The City and community of Langley has learnt a lot through the resettlement of Karen refugees. By far the biggest learning was that inadequate pre-arrival community preparedness planning inhibited a smoother transition in ensuring the necessary services eg English language classes, first language settlement services and other infrastructure including adequately trained volunteers were in place, prior to Karen resettlement movement to Canada. Despite the challenges faced by various local churches, community agencies, public institutions, local school board and health authority, they are more prepared now and welcome an opportunity to take the learnings from their experiences working with Karen refugees to benefit other refugee communities, if another opportunity arises.

Lastly, the research presents twelve (12) recommendations for consideration taking the views of Karen refugees and local community members. These recommendations address current settlement practices but also provide input into ongoing settlement policy reform discussions presently underway.

Background

Between 2005 and 2009, the Canadian federal government destined 4,026 government assisted refugees (GARs) from 46 different countries to British Columbia (ISSofBC, 2010). Of those GARs, approximately 20% – or 786 individuals – were from Burma (officially known as Myanmar), composing the largest group of GARs based on country of origin during that period. The majority of BC GARs from Burma belong to a minority ethnic group known as Karen. They are a relatively new group to settle in BC, arriving after the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognized Karen refugees as a distinct group with particular protection needs and called upon the international community to assist in their resettlement. Although other Burmese refugees had been previously settled in the Greater Vancouver in the mid-1990s they were Karenni (Hyndman & Walton-Roberts, 2000) so the Karen GARs were a new population for resettlement.

For over three (3) decades, the Government of Myanmar adopted a policy of forced relocation and assimilation so that the Karen and territories dominated by insurgent groups could be monitored and controlled by the central government. As a result of the subsequent human rights abuses, many Karen fled to the borders of Thailand and were confined to remote jungle refugee camps by the Thai authorities (for more details of the various waves of conflict see Hyndman & Walton-Roberts, 2000). The majority of Karen displacement occurred after 1995 (CIC, 2007) and approximately 140,000 Karen refugees have lived in the camps for almost 20 years. This is relevant as Nawyn et al (citing Barron et al, 2005) note that: "... Burmese refugees ... resettled directly from urban areas instead of spending protracted time in refugee camps have had an easier time adjusting to life in the United States" (2012:264).

Literacy among both adults and children is relatively low due to years spent evading the army to reach the Thai border and the lack of educational opportunities in the camps. Most Karen speak S'gaw or Pwo while a few speak Burmese as an additional language. The vast majority in BC are Baptist Christian, while a minority are Seventh Day Adventists or Buddhists (ISSofBC, 2010).

Karen resettlement to Canada began in 2006, but a coup in Thailand in 2008 disrupted the process. Those selected for resettlement in 2007 and 2008 only arrived in 2009. GARs from Myanmar settled mainly in the cities of Surrey (387), Langley (257), and Vancouver (127). They tend to live in a few concentrated areas to support each other and depend heavily on the extended family structures developed previously in the camps. Gaining employment and access to health care needs are two of the many challenges they face due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with the Canadian system. Because of their limited income and the high cost of housing in Metro Vancouver, many of the Karen live in crowded apartment suites. It is common for 6 people to live in a 2 bedroom apartment or 4 people to live in a 1 bedroom apartment; teenagers and children often have to share a bedroom with their parents (ISSofBC, 2010). This is not unusual given the "... precarious housing situation" (Fielder, Schuurman & Hyndman, 2006: 215) of immigrants and refugees in Greater Vancouver.

ISSofBC settled approximately 33% of all refugees from Burma – approximately 257 individuals – in the City of Langley (ISSofBC, 2010). This marked only the second time a significant number of GARs were settled outside of the traditional receiving municipalities of

Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey (see Sherrell, Hyndman & Preniqi, 2005 on the settlement of Kosovars). Most of these GARs were Christians of the Karen ethnicity and came between 2007 and 2008. They mostly settled in four apartment buildings in Langley City near the intersection of Fraser Highway and 206 Street.



The Karen settlement initiative was an example of ‘group processing’ whereby the Canadian Government designated specific refugee groups in protracted situations and/or high protection needs (see also Brunner, Hyndman & Friesen (2010) on group processing among refugees to BC from Indonesia). Somali and Sudanese refugees from Kenyan camps were the focus of early group processing, followed by the Karen and Bhutanese (specifically Lhotsampas) who had been living in Nepal for almost two decades. All of these contexts are defined by extended exile whereby access to health care, education, and employment were all restricted. This presents specific challenges for third country settlement in countries like Canada (Sherrell, Friesen, Hyndman, Shrestha, 2011).

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), “after living for many years in a remote jungle refugee camp, adjusting to life in Canada is challenging for the Karen refugees” (CIC, 2007). The present study was undertaken to examine how the Karen had met the challenges of resettlement in Langley, BC, and how the City of Langley had risen to the challenge of welcoming these newcomers.

The Evolution of Services for Karen Refugees in Langley

The Karen represent the first group of government assisted refugees settled in the City of Langley, a city of approximately 100,000 people about 37km from Vancouver, and a non-traditional resettlement location.

The early 2000s were marked by increasing housing prices and the outward movement of initial settlement locations in search for more affordable housing. In some cases the influx of refugees into new settlement areas was quite rapid. The City of Surrey, for example, settled one in five GARs to BC in 2005; this rose to almost one in

two by 2009.¹ The arrival of higher needs refugees, often concentrated within a small number of neighbourhoods containing affordable rental housing created a challenging situation. Understandably the emergence of these new settlement locations, and increase in new, often high needs, refugees has implications for service resources and local infrastructure.

The time period in which the Karen arrived was marked by concerns being voiced by local service providing organizations and municipal governments about the ability of existing infrastructure and services to meet these new demands, as well as internal pressures to identify other potential resettlement areas in Metro Vancouver, including Langley, containing more affordable housing. Following discussions with key ISSofBC staff, the decision was made by ISSofBC to begin destining Karen refugees to Langley. With an inadequate timeframe between being informed of the impending resettlement of the Karen and their arrival (as compared to over a year for the Bhutanese refugees), there was no chance for advance planning as ISSofBC was faced with high numbers of arrivals in a short time. ISSofBC did inform some key service providing organizations (SPOs) of their imminent arrival, such as Langley Community Services Society, School District #35, and the provincial ministry responsible for social assistance, but recognizes this was insufficient planning.² Out of necessity, a number of local SPOs and public institutions developed expertise and enhanced programming to meet the diverse needs of this group but process was not without challenges and setbacks (see Figure 1 on page 10).

¹ Changing Faces, Changing Neighborhoods (ISSofBC, 2010) presents a visual depiction GAR settlement patterns in Metro Vancouver during this period.

² The lessons learned from the resettlement of Karen refugees to Langley have been substantial. Recognition of the need for advance community planning informed the resettlement of Bhutanese refugees to Coquitlam beginning in 2009. See Sherrell et al. (2011) for a detailed account of the pre-arrival community planning that was undertaken.

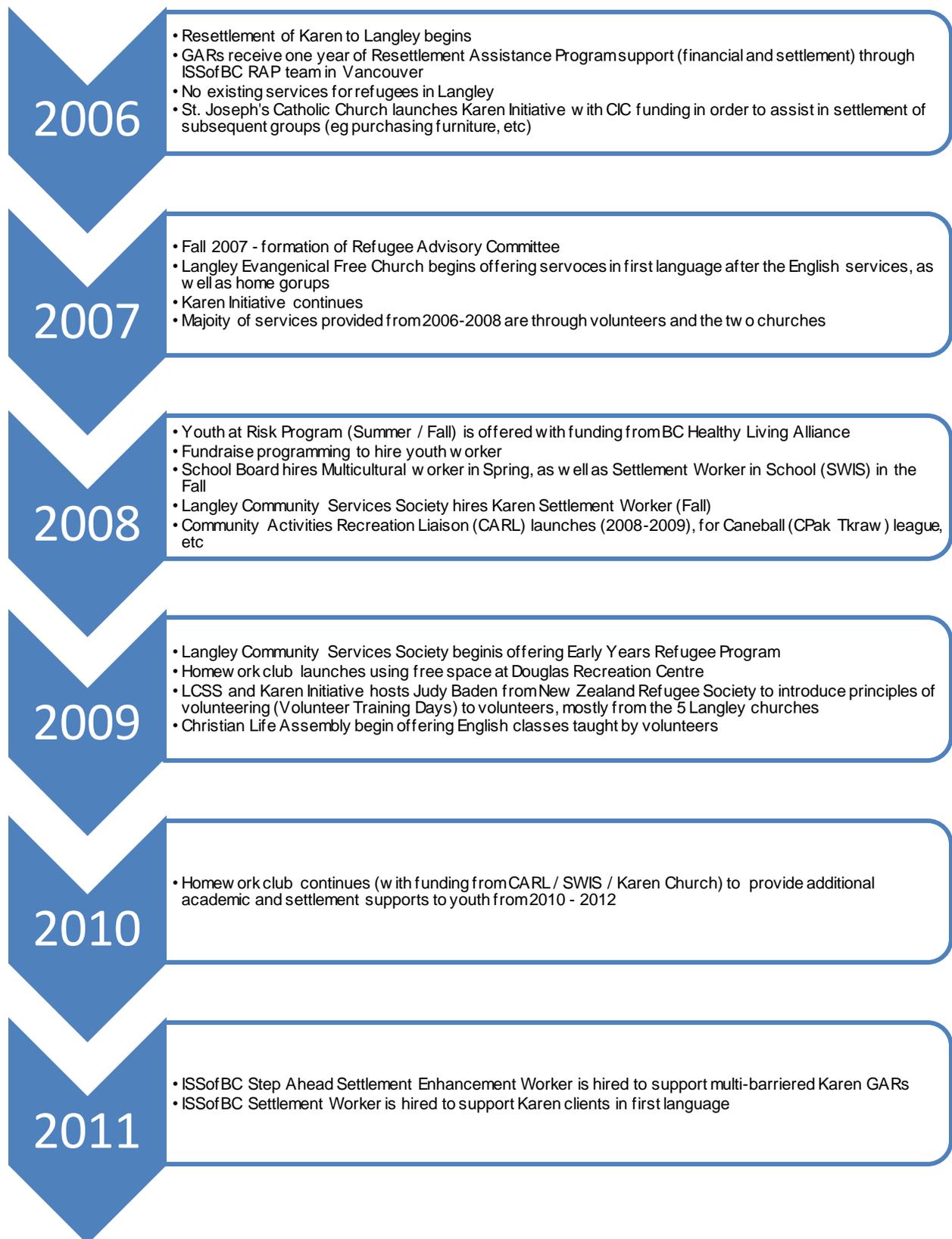


Figure 1: Services for Karen GARs in Langley

The protracted nature of the refugee experience contributed to low literacy levels, limited or no formal experience with education, and health issues (e.g., physical, dental). In the Thai refugee camps, few services existed to meet their needs. In a previous study by Sherrell (2009), for example, one key informant from a government ministry in Langley indicated that the Karen 'stood out' in the community owing to their needs.

Research Methodology and Sample

Primary research was conducted between January and May 2012, including 60 semi-structured household interviews (74 adults total) and two focus groups with youth (20 individual youths total). To obtain additional information a group interview was conducted with three individuals who had been actively involved in the resettlement of the Karen community in Langley. All are non-Karen, long-term Langley residents who have volunteered and/or worked with the Karen on a part-time or full-time basis in multiple capacities since 2007, including participation through formal employment, volunteering with the church and/or Refugee Advisory Committee, writing funding proposals, etc. As such, each has helped to facilitate Karen resettlement both through individual participation with the community, as well as in helping to shape the programs available for the Karen community in Langley. The group interview was held in May 2012, referred to here as Community Representatives.

The need to utilize trusted informants is well understood within the Canadian refugee literature (c.f., Hyndman and Walton-Roberts, 2000; Sherrell, Hyndman and Preniqi, 2005). Potential participants were first contacted by a S'Gaw/Pwo-speaking Community Research Assistant from Surrey who is well known and respected within the Karen community. The Community Research Assistant provided information on the research project and asked if individuals were willing to participate; interview times were then set for interested individuals. To facilitate participation and enable people to respond in the language with which they are most comfortable, the interviews were conducted by the Research Assistant with the assistance of the Community Research Assistant.

Participants were provided honorariums and bus tickets in recognition of their time and to offset any inconvenience. Focus Group participants received \$15, while those participating in individual interviews received \$20.

Although the interviews and focus groups were conducted by a research assistant with the help of an interpreter, the data analysis has been informed by the insider status of one or two members of the research team.

The Research Assistant stopped asking a question on family reunification as the responses were too painful for participants. All have family they would like to sponsor, but none are financially able to do so.

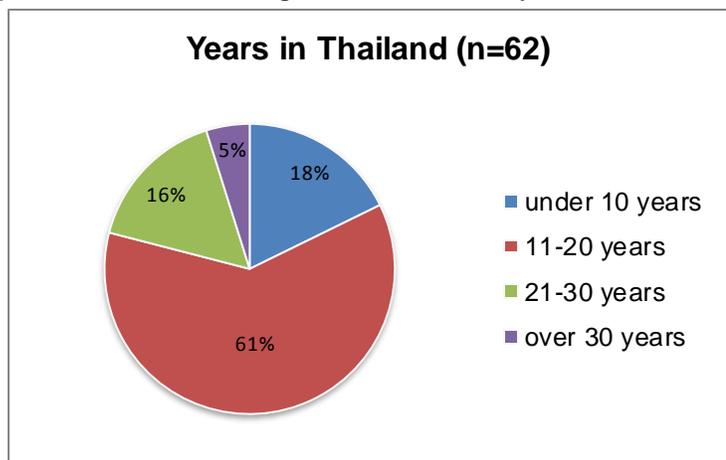
All quotes are translations/reports by the interpreter at the time of the interview.

Protracted Exile among Karen Newcomers

Respondents were given the choice of having the interview conducted either at their home or another location of their choosing (e.g., ISSofBC office). In recognition that other household members are frequently present – and participate – during interviews done in the respondent’s homes, the research assistant was asked to collect demographic information on all adults (i.e., ages 19 and older) providing responses during the course of the interview. In total, 74 respondents participated in the household interviews.³

Of the 74 respondents, 46 are female and 28 are male. At the time of the interview the age of respondents ranged from 23 to 76, with an average age of 44 (n=70). Although most respondents had been born in Myanmar (68), a small number (5) were born in the refugee camps in Thailand (total respondents n=73); all but one reported Thailand as being their country of last ‘permanent’ residence (one person did not provide a response). The time spent in Thailand ranged from 6 to 45 years, with the median years being 14 (n=69, average = 16.6 years).⁴ UNHCR

defines a protracted refugee situation (PRS) as one in which refugees spend five year or more in exile, with no prospect of return (UNHCR, 2012). The Government of Canada, and CIC in particular, has been an advocate for solutions to address the problem of PRS: “[t]he consequences of having so many human beings in a static state include wasted lives,



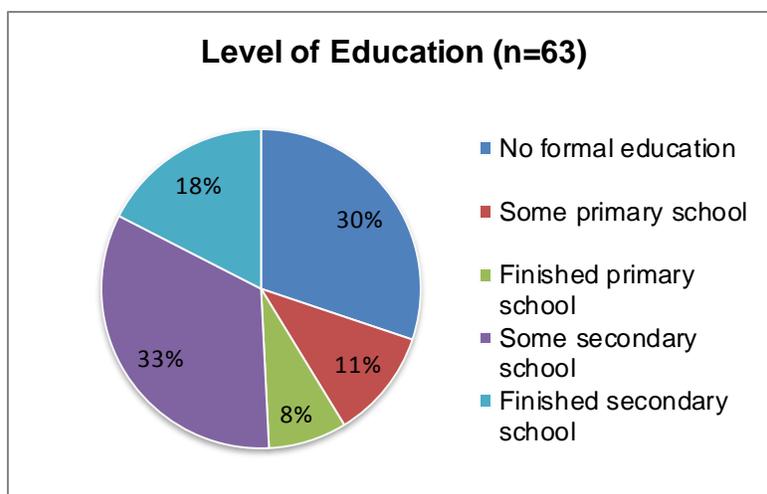
squandered resources and increased threats to security” (CIC 2013:24). Some respondents spent years in Thailand before coming to the refugee camps. As such, the time shown represents time in Thailand, not necessarily in the camps. One respondent, for example, had lived 10 years in the camp but more than 20 years in Thailand. All of the respondents who were born in the camps had spent upwards of 18 years there (range 18-22 years) before being resettled to Canada.

At the time of the interview, forty-three (43) households had children under the age of 19 living with them. Of the 122 children, youth and young adults identified, 38 were ages 0 to 6 years, 48 ages 6-12 and 36 ages 13-18.

³ Where information was not collected on all respondents the number of respondents has been indicated (e.g., n=70).

⁴ Although n=69 for the question relating to years spent in Thailand, 7 respondents provided responses in a way that was not easily represented (e.g., more than 10 years).

Educational attainment amongst Karen respondents is not high, with over 30% reporting no formal education (n=63). Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents have completed secondary school. In comparison with the general population of Langley (Langley Local Health Area) this is well below the norm. In the Langley LHA only 16% of the population (from Census 2006) did not graduate High



School and do not hold any further trades certificate or college diploma (Fraser Health Authority, 2010), meaning that 84 percent hold qualifications of high school graduation or equivalent, as such the Karen stand out for their lack of formal education.

Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents arrived in Canada between 2007 and 2008 (n=71), with the earliest arrivals in 2006 and the last arrivals in 2010.

Two focus groups were conducted with Karen youth living in Langley, held at a recreation centre near their homes. Both discussions were facilitated by an ISSofBC Youth Worker and a Karen youth interpreter. Another member of the research team was available on site (though not in the room) to provide assistance should the discussions provoke any emotional issues for participants. At the suggestion of the Youth Workers and Youth Community Interpreters, two groups were held – one for young women and one for young men.

Of the 20 respondents, 13 are female and 7 are male; all were between the ages of 13 and 18 at the time of the focus groups. Four participants were born in Myanmar, the remainder in Thailand. The majority (88%, n=16) arrived in 2007 and 2008.

Consideration of the demographic information provided by respondents in both the adult interviews and youth focus groups reveals a portrait of protracted exile in which participants have spent decades – and in some cases their entire (adult) lives – in the Thai refugee camps or on the run, as well as a generation of youth born into these conditions. Certainly this has influenced participants' educational attainment, and, as we will see, their settlement experiences in Canada.

The Impact of Pre-Departure Orientation

Fifty (50) adult respondents reported having participated in pre-departure orientation. Thirty-one provided information on what they remembered from the Pre-Departure Orientation, much of this was very basic information, including:

- How to cross the road;
- How to find housing;
- That one has to work in Canada; and

- That one cannot leave kids alone.

One person, for example, characterized the pre-departure orientation as ‘very short – can’t remember. Just clue about toilet, transport. Short and basic’.

Other excerpts from responses relate to suggestions for everyday life in Canada:

- ‘City in Canada is different from home; takes time – life is not easy;’
- ‘Learn English ASAP; you must try to go to school and learn;’
- ‘Remembers only that if you go to Canada, you have to look for work and you have to say you are good - encourage yourself in the interview;’
- ‘If you come to Canada, no weapons. Law and responsibility and rights.’

Other individuals remembered information on multiculturalism:

- ‘In Canada, big city, multicultural. Can still hold culture but need to make friends with other groups;’
- ‘You can keep your culture here in Canada – multicultural.’

One respondent acknowledged that while it is difficult to do so, she ‘tries to connect herself outside of the Karen community’.

It is not always clear where the information (e.g. around parenting in Canada, job search and interview skills) was obtained. Although respondents reported having learned it in the pre-departure orientation, it may have been learned in Canada (e.g., Refugee Early Childhood Development (ECD) program, settlement services).

When asked what three things would have been helpful to know before arrival (n=57), there was an overarching sense of trepidation and anxiety in the responses (see the word cloud below).⁵ Education, language and employment were the three most frequent responses, though others centred upon financial support, safety and the absence of war, ability to access specialized services and education for seniors or those with special needs, age and weather. With respect to education, responses were differentiated by age. Adults were seen to require information on life skills, including life skills for employment, while responses around children, youth, and young adults centred upon the importance of education.

⁵ A word cloud is a visual representation generated from text; the size of a word corresponds to the frequency with which it was mentioned by respondents.

- 'Son - Not successful, cannot find school for son; age is teenager; government project - not for his going to school; only to bring him and support him;'
- 'Can kids get educated due to their age? Can they integrate?'

A 63 year-old respondent expressed frustration about having been separated from her surviving adult children, reflecting a need for information about the eligibility criteria for family reunification.

- 'If she comes to Canada, she worries about her children. She's suffered losing children as teenagers, even those still alive they will depart. Government of Canada doesn't want family living together ... God took away [her] kids, [the] government separates kids – [it] makes her angry. She already came to Canada ... [but she] does not want to [be] separated from son ... [The] other two would come together...but [one] will have a baby so they can't come together.'

Issues around parenting in Canada were brought up by a number of respondents. For example, one asserted that you cannot leave children alone because the 'government puts kids first at top, you can't hit or neglect kids,' while another questioned 'how to guide the children due to [the] language barrier?'

Other responses underscore the importance of language in the settlement process, particularly with respect to the ability to access work:

- 'Learn English before you come;'
- 'He doesn't speak any English, doesn't know how to contact with people, can she still live in Canada?;'
- 'Education – need more education to know more about language and communication.'

For many, the journey to Canada was their first experience with being in a city, something which evoked feelings of concern in some.

- 'Can they look for work, settle in Canada? Never been to a city before;'
- 'Karen haven't been in a big city.'

Many of the responses of older adults and seniors, reflect anxiety over their ability to integrate given their age, as well as their unfamiliarity with cities, inability to speak English, and lack of previous work experience.

- 'In Canada, can he still go to school? Can he communicate with people because of his age? Can he still get good, get help from government without work?'
- 'Is his age already too old?'
- 'It's really hard to learn English. Will it work or not;'
- 'We have to work in Canada. How can we do it? Do they have programs to assist [her]? ...Government still accept [and] assist her at her age. [If] no one can hire her, is it possible to come and live?'

Some responses underscore the challenges faced by the individuals during the settlement process. One respondent, for example, juxtaposed his/her understanding of equality in Canada learned in the pre-departure orientation, with his/her experience of structural barriers experienced in Canada. For example, a 23 year old female with

Grade 8 education received in the camps recalls from her orientation that you 'have to work hard in Canada, to go to college/university, you need to work hard' but finds 'it's really hard to look for work in her experience'.

For youth, the pre-departure orientation was seen to be helpful because it provided information about the schools in Canada, as well as broader information (e.g., weather, clothing, how to keep important documents from the UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM), how to put on seat belts).

Ten of the thirteen young women in the focus group, and a number of the young men (number not specified) had participated in some type of pre-departure orientation in the Thai refugee camps.

Participants in the young womens' youth focus group felt it would have been helpful to have received more realistic information about life in Canada, as well as more practical information. While the young women suggested information be provided on using the bathroom (e.g., sit, use water) and food in Canada (e.g., as being different, though Karen food is available as well), the young mens' responses centred on the need for more information on Canadian culture, transportation (e.g. how to ride skytrain) and traffic rules.

When the young women were asked what would have helped them settle in Langley, three main themes emerged – the need for more education and orientation in the camps, the need for more information on resettlement, and the challenges of making friends outside of the Karen community.

Participants in the young women focus group felt youth should study and learn more about English before coming here (e.g., in the camps) in order to be prepared for the education system. The provision of more detailed information about schools in Canada would be helpful, as would the use of visuals and/or videos in the orientation.

Beyond practical information on the transportation system (e.g., buses, traffic lights, etc), youth expressed a need for more realistic information about life in Canada in order to be better prepared for the challenges faced during resettlement.

- 'They should know that life here is very hard;'
- 'Be prepared emotionally and physically because of the pressure and struggles you have to go through as a newcomer. Be ready to work and go to school at the same time;'
- 'In camp most youth are not working. In Canada they have to work and go to school. They don't feel like they belong;'
- 'Have to be self-confident and really want to come here - but for themselves if they are not prepared to come here. If just because of their family and friends but not for themselves they will be homesick.'

Making friends outside the Karen community was the third theme that arose, though the differences between experiences at public school and private school emerged. The three young women who attend private school and stated people are nice to you. Four young women stated it is easy to make friends, others did not agree.

- '[It's] very hard to make friends in school because of the language;'

- 'Worried they will say something wrong and people will laugh at them;'
- 'Canadian students / youth should come to us first and make us comfortable to be friends;'
- 'We still find it hard to make friends in school. Except for the few in private school.'

By contrast, responses from participants in the young mens' focus group centred upon non-verbal communication (e.g. 'learning what the middle finger means' or 'how to shake hands'), practical information (e.g. how to use toilets, how to wear seatbelts, the need to wear shoes and socks outside), and English.

- '[We can] get help from other students, university students, community volunteers and tutors at homework club'
- 'ESL class was helpful; the ESL teacher helped with homework from other classes'

For many, the pre-departure orientation is the first opportunity to learn about Canada, as well as to be introduced to the information and skills necessary for living in Western society. Consideration of responses, albeit provided five years after arrival, underscore ongoing concerns and give insight to the information and advice people wish they had received prior to arrival. Participants – regardless of their age at arrival – spoke of the need for more detailed practical information, as well as information that was more motivational in nature. Key within many of the adult and youth responses was the sense that future refugee populations need to be told that although life in Canada will be difficult at first, it will get better over time.

Housing Issues and Neighbourhood Safety

The Karen settled into Langley were initially housed in a couple of apartment complexes (4 buildings) in close proximity to each other and there appears to have been limited secondary migration. Of the 52 households surveyed 16 remained in the original housing; 23 had moved once with only 13 households moving more than once. Seven households have moved from Surrey to Langley; two have moved from Langley to Surrey.

Reasons cited for moving to or within Langley related to desire to find more affordable housing (though this was sometimes through finding smaller, less suitable units), changes in family composition (e.g., marriage, death, births), and obtaining BC Housing, as well as the close proximity of housing in Langley to both the church and other services. One respondent spoke of a volunteer having 'found a place for them that was better. They moved out because it wasn't a safe place – people were using drugs and neighbours complained about them. [Their] neighbour gave them a notice that said they had to move out'. Both respondents who moved from Langley to Surrey related to the presence of family and friends in Surrey. 'When [she] arrived in Langley, [she] doesn't have many friends. Her husband knew more friends in Surrey, so after one year they moved to Surrey. Husband speaks Burmese, not Karen. [There are] more Burmese speakers in Surrey'. Fifty (50) households reported that they were living in proximity to other Karen.

The majority (46 of 52 respondents) report that their housing is appropriate and comfortable for their families though by Canadian terms they can be considered as overcrowded with the vast majority of families living in two bedroom homes.⁶

Approximately two-thirds of those living in two-bedroom apartments are families of 5 or more. Fiedler et al. (2006) identify the same phenomenon among refugee newcomers, and call it “hidden homelessness”, though such a term appears ethnocentric in this context, given that Karen respondents overwhelmingly thought housing conditions were appropriate.

Several respondents reported problems with their living conditions with 5 expressing that the rent was too expensive, 4 that they needed more space now that children are growing up and 6 commenting on problems with the neighbours:

- ‘Tenants below complain about his kids being loud, but it’s hard to calm them down. He gets scared easily due to loud noises and bangs on the wall. [He] wants a house, better than an apartment. Tenants drink and sometimes come knocking on the door to complain to them’
- ‘Good but tenants upstairs threw pet poo into tree and comes inside window’
- ‘... Loud music / shaking from people below late at night. Never complained - scared. Neighbour works nightshift’
- ‘... Other [people] use illegal drugs and they can smell them’

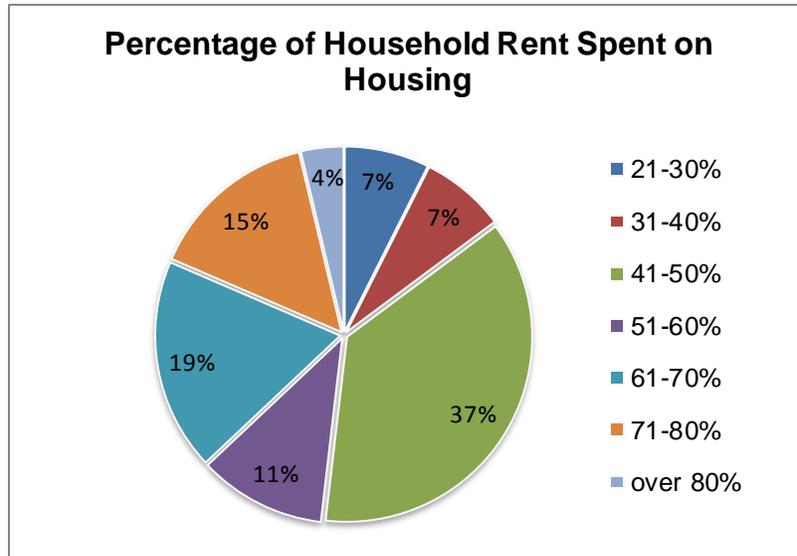
Others reported other reasons why their accommodations do not suit them such as the building being old and in disrepair; stairs being too hard for the elderly to climb and for one respondent painful memories in the home due to the death of a child. The bonus of this location is that it is close to the school and the building manager seems to respond well.

# Bedrooms	Household Size
1	1 family of 2 4 families of 3 3 families of 4 1 family of 5 N= 9
2	2 families of 3 11 families of 4 8 families of 5 4 families of 6 8 families of 7 1 family of 8 N= 33
3	1 family of 4 4 families of 5 2 families of 6 1 family of 8 N= 8
4	1 family of 8 1 family of 10 1 family of 15 N=3
N/A or blank	N=3

⁶ According to the National Occupancy Standards, housing in Canada is considered to be suitable if it has sufficient bedrooms for the “size and make-up of resident households” (CMHC Beyond 2020). These guidelines regulate the number and age of persons sharing a bedroom.

Information on rent and income per household was obtained for 27 households. Rates of income insecurity are high, and are exacerbated by the high percentage of income spent on rent. In Canada, housing is considered affordable if it accounts for no more than 30% of monthly household income (CMHC, 2001). Of the 27 Karen households interviewed, only 2 spend less than 30% of their monthly incomes on rent.

The percentage of Karen households spending 30% or more of their total income on shelter (93%) is significantly higher than the general population; in 2010 the percentage of renter households reporting spending upwards of 30% of total income on shelter in the City of Langley was 48.7% (Statistics Canada, National Housing Survey, 2011). Thirty-seven per cent (37%) spend 41-50% of household income on housing and



almost half spend upwards of 50% of income on rent. Approximately one in five households interviewed spends upwards of 70% of income on rent, placing them at significant risk of absolute homelessness. Despite this it was reported that they all manage to pay rent on time (Community Representative).

The size of households varies significantly across the community. Eighty-four percent (84%) of respondents live in households of 3-7 persons. Forty-seven percent (47%) report living in households of 4-5 persons, well above the 14% of similar sized households reported in the City of Langley in the 2011 Census. The average household size of respondents was 5.6, well above the 2.2 persons per household in the City of Langley (Census, 2011).

Sample Household Composition among Karen respondents:

- Couple with older teen in a two bedroom house, paying 80.2% income on rent.
- Young couple with 3 small children in a one bedroom apartment paying 61-70% of income on rent.
- Senior couple with adult child in 2 bedroom apartment, paying rent out of old age pension.
- Couple in their 30s with 5 children from infants to school age, living in 2 bedroom apartment, finding it very hard to move.

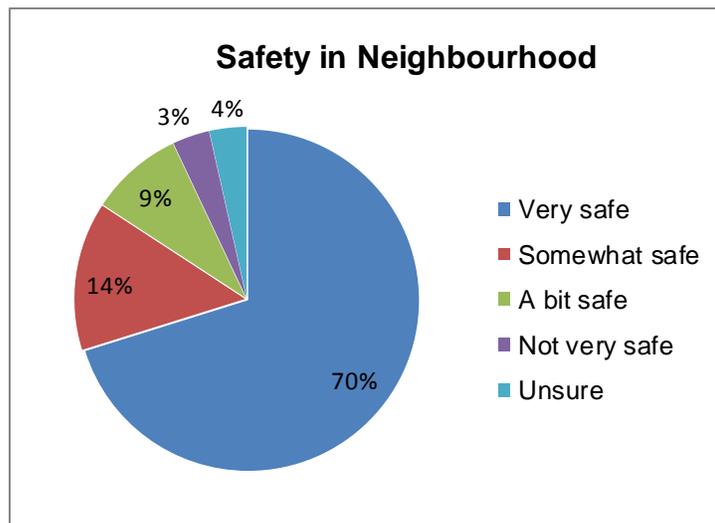
There are some Karen who are looking to move, likely out of Province to communities with existing Karen communities and work, such as Edmonton.

When asked if living near other Karen was a good thing or not, the results were mixed. While some adult respondents felt that there were benefits – especially in the ability to give and receive help to meet every day needs (e.g., reading the mail, accompanying people to doctor’s visits, childminding) and easily communicate with each other, others felt the proximity increased negative behaviours in their children. One person who does not live in close proximity to other Karen, for example, felt that youth go out too much and get involved in negative behaviours when living in close proximity, while ‘in this farther away apartment kids stay home, follow rules’. A few saw living in close proximity as having both positive and negative implications:

- ‘Better to live near...but can honestly say it's better to separate from Karen families because Canada is multicultural and sometimes he feels good, sometimes he feels bad. It's better to be together because Karen families are good, but his kids/family could improve quicker and learn more if they were separated’
- ‘Depends on [the] family. Those without education need more help. His family can survive on their own. He applied for BC housing and decided to go even though it was far away because it’s good. His job is unstable and he might have to move to be close to job, but the place you live is important - more important than being near other Karen people’

Interestingly, living close together provides necessary supports for adults, yet concentration of youth in the nearby school was perceived differently by youth. Community Representatives, for example, spoke of those who had visited other high schools as saying it would be good because there would not be the refugee stigma found in their high school.

Perceptions of safety in the neighbourhood differed between adults and youth. While 84% of adults (n=57 respondents) felt very safe or somewhat safe’ in their neighbourhood, youth responses focused upon When asked about feelings of safety, 57 interviewees responded. There were three references to the police, two of these were positive but one interviewee stated that in his new home the police attend his building every night which scares him. Another reported that the reason they feel safe is ‘because of other Karen families’.



Young women in the focus group brought up multiple examples of having felt unsafe in the neighbourhood and at school (e.g., bullying, being asked for money, being isolated).

- 'Sometime [when I] wait for [the] bus people ask for money; they don't feel safe'
- 'Went to work, came home, people try to catch me, it was dark in night, ran away'
- 'In apartment building, [other people] smoke weed, murder. [I] come home [and] don't go outside'

Like the young women, young men in the focus group expressed safety concerns, citing fear of strangers, gangsters, drugs, and a lack of awareness of homeless people. One female respondent asserted a need for 'training to teach Karen people how to deal with people- when people ask for money, fight back, fight people, tell community leader.'

The findings of high levels of housing insecurity and overcrowding owing to the need to find affordable housing within limited income means is consistent with the existing literature (c.f., Francis and Hiebert, 2011; Sherrell, 2011; Sherrell and ISSofBC, 2009; Fiedler et al., 2006; Sherrell et al., 2005). For some, the feelings of safety brought about by the nearness of other Karen is offset by feelings of insecurity arising from interactions with other people in the community (e.g. homeless, panhandlers).

Employment and Income Security

The employment profile of the Karen GARs in Langley is not very positive, not surprising given the lack of local employability skills, protracted refugee camp experiences and lack of English language. Of the 54 who responded to this section only 14 reported full time employment. The forms of employment reported are predominately manual, seasonal, marginalized and precarious. Most seem to be employed in the local agricultural sector around Langley. Some were reported to have received employment from business owners who are members of the same church congregation (Community Representative). One young adult female with good English skills and better connected than most with the community has found employment in retail and catering. Lack of proficiency in English is most definitely related to the precarious nature of employment as even those in employment reported having 'a bit' English as the highest level of proficiency. At the time of the interview only 16 people said they spoke more than a 'bit' of English. The lack of other employment opportunities in Langley is also reported as an issue as travelling to work was difficult owing to the limited transit available (Community Representative).

Previous Work Experience

Previous work experience was reported by 62 individuals, the majority of whom stated that they had worked at subsistence farming in Burma and/or Thailand, a finding consistent with known information about the Karen (ISSofBC, 2006). Twelve respondents had held professional positions in the past, varying from nurse/medical assistant to teacher. Four had worked in wood processing, two as boat drivers and three were students. It also appears that at least three had NGO related jobs in the camps. Of the 62 five reported no work experience. As such, with this profile, the majority of Karen do not have the skills sets necessary for employment in the

mainstream Canadian economy, not unusual given the fact that the Karens were part of a humanitarian refugee resettlement program-movement.

Employed Profile

In addition to the 14 in full time work five have part time jobs, though four of these are less than 10 hours per week and have been employed less than 6 months. Four of the 14 in employment have another family/household member also working. In addition, one person has two jobs whilst another used to have two jobs. Not surprisingly those in work were predominately young adults in their 20s and 30s and more young women than men were in employment (data is not clear whether this is an over representation or not). The majority of jobs were manual labour ranging from kitchen helper to cleaning to warehousing and working in greenhouses.

The precarious nature of the employment found by the Karen in Langley is illustrated by the length of tenure in their positions, both full and part time. Considering the 18 responses to this question only 2 had the same employment for over 4 years and both of these individuals have experiences which increase their personal employability (such as age and volunteer experience). Seven reported being in the same job for 1-2 years. Fully half of the responses reported employment of less than 6 months.⁷

My husband: struggled hard to get job - has had 5 jobs and had training - none are permanent jobs - could not find job using skills - even though he goes to community centre he still cannot get help. He needs personalized, intense help with employment. He found jobs only through friends, not through community centre. He suggests people should apply in person. Even newcomers without education can work hard!"

Five of the youth focus group participants reported being employed at the time of the focus groups for 0-10 hours per week; the remainder was not employed. No information was collected on other employment within their households.

Main Source of Family Income	Number of Households
Paid work	28
Social assistance	18
Combination of both above	10

We gathered information from 56 households regarding the main source of family income which revealed that 50% of these households remain dependent on social assistance to some extent.

In spite of housing affordability challenges and widespread income insecurity, the Karen interviewed in this study demonstrate high rates of loan repayment, with most respondents having repaid the Government Transportation Loan (GTL) within 3 years (minimum 1 year, maximum

⁷ Thirty five respondents reported that they were not in work and gave reasons from ill health (male late 40s), old age and childcare. However, 23 of this group live in a household with someone in employment, albeit it precarious or seasonal work.

3 years and 3 months). As with other groups, the pressure to pay off loans quickly in order to avoid incurring interest influenced the amount of repayments. One respondent, for example, paid the loan within one year, while another reported having paid the minimum for one year before realizing he needed to pay more. A few individuals benefited from loan forgiveness. Clearly, loan repayment is an onerous obligation when the Karen receive only a modest stipend as part of their federal income assistance in the first year.

Thirty-one respondents indicated sending infrequent and limited remittances to close family when they are in need (n=53).

The high housing affordability challenges experienced by the Karen in Langley are not surprising given limited employment and low social assistance rates in BC. Unless the employment situation improves, something made more difficult by the combination of low levels of formal education, a lack of previous related employment experience, and limited English language proficiency, the Karen will continue to experience income insecurity and ongoing housing challenges. In spite of the ongoing income insecurity, rates of loan repayment remain high suggesting the Karen have had to divert scarce resources from housing and other basic necessities towards the loan repayment.

English Language

... a very large proportion (90%) of Karen refugees reported no knowledge of English or French on arrival. Of the 10% with any knowledge of English, a slightly smaller proportion of females than males reported knowing any English. None reported any knowledge of French. In terms of formal education, the majority (71%) of adults 18 and over reported having between 0 and 9 years of schooling prior to arrival in Canada. Another 28% reported obtaining 10 to 12 years of schooling. A very small number (less than 1% of all adults) reported having any post-secondary education (CIC, 2009:8)

Respondents were asked to self-report their levels of English language prior to departure and at the time of interview (2012) using the following scale: Very comfortable, Somewhat, A bit, Not very, Not at all.

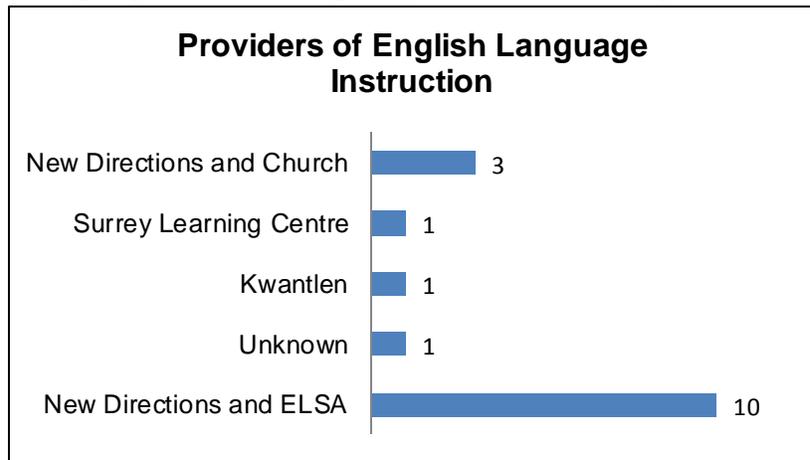
Nine of the 60 respondents reported having 'a bit' of English language proficiency upon arrival (this is the best result); 46 report being 'not at all' comfortable. One of the respondents who reported having 'a bit' of English upon arrival and 'somewhat comfortable' now had been an English teacher in the camps.

At the time of the interview (2012) 24 people report being 'a bit' comfortable and a further 16 report being 'somewhat' comfortable in English. For example:

- 'At first the wife needed someone to assist her at all times; the husband could understand teacher but not outside the classroom interactions. Now they still need someone to assist them - they understand but not clearly. Also they cannot understand letters'

While there has been a substantial improvement in self-reported language proficiency, it is concerning to note that 18 still report ‘very limited’ English language proficiency.

English language classes were predominately provided by New Directions – a service providing organization funded by the government to provide free English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) classes (as of April 1, 2014 called LINC under CIC funding regime) and church language classes taught by volunteers, though one respondent reported having attended classes at a local university (Kwantlen Polytechnic University). Of the 58 responses to the question on English classes 27 reported currently studying with 31 replying that they were not studying due to the pressures of responsibility for children (explicitly mentioned by 15), the cost (17) and work (8).



Not surprisingly the majority reporting childcare as a barrier were women, though this was also the case for a middle aged man with five children and for one couple.

Compared with the Achenese study (Brunner, Hyndman & Friesen, 2010), our study found that Karen were less likely to be in paid employment in their first year of arrival. The Achenese study found that due to their observant Islamic practices, their priority was to take manual jobs to earn money to more quickly repay their Government Transportation Loans (GTL) rather than to be in English language classes.⁸ For the Acehnese, paying interest on a loan is prohibited in their interpretation of Islam. By the time many of the Achenese were ready to take English classes their period in which to take ELSA classes for free had expired as they had become Canadian citizens and hence were ineligible for government-funded services. Although anecdotal evidence suggests many of the Karen did pay off their loans early – a finding consistent with earlier research on the Karen resettled in Surrey (Sherrell and ISSofBC, 2010) – this was not listed by any as a reason for non-attendance at classes, though the desire not to pay interest may have been a factor. The Karen experience is more akin to that of the

⁸ GARs selected for resettlement in Canada are asked to sign two financial promissory documents: a transportation loan overseas and an assistance loan upon arrival in Canada. Collectively, these loans cover costs associated with transportation, health care, and a service fee. GARs are expected to begin repaying their loan within 12 months of landing in Canada; interest begins accruing after 3 years. Failure to repay loans precludes a GAR from sponsoring family members. Stress associated with being in debt and owing interest, something that is forbidden in some cultures, has precipitated a number of strategies to eliminate the debts quickly, a finding consistent with other research (cf, Brunner et al., 2010; Sherrell and ISSofBC, 2009). This is an important conundrum for policy makers who may not see the lived tension in their policies.

Kosovars (Sherrell et al., 2009) in that a number of the older Karen reported that they believe that they are not capable of learning English.

Given the low levels of English language it is not surprising that only one respondent reported speaking English at home and then only with his five children, from early elementary age to late teenage. All others who answered this question spoke either or both S'Gaw or Burmese at home.

Respondents reported similar experiences to those researched by Nawyn et al (2012) in the USA, especially a frustration that they were being instructed in English only and not their own language.⁹ This was compounded by the fact that not all were literate even in their own language and so faced an additional linguistic and cultural hurdle. The ability to converse in English is vital for not only do language skills open up employment options it is just as important for non-economic reasons as speaking English '... would allow them to access information that is important for their survival ...' (Nawyn et al, 2012:275) such as medical services or simply reading street signs to make using public transit less stressful.

The lack of English language was commented on by the Community Representatives as creating '...so much pressure on translators', yet they also noted that a lack of translators has had some positives as people have had to manage and this has 'forced successes' in some instances. The lack of English has had serious implications especially in relation to health with it being reported that some medical receptionists displayed impatience with Karen patients; that they found it difficult to explain complex medical issues to practitioners and in some severe issues of miscommunication regarding medication for children resulting in further health emergencies (Community Representatives, 2012). It was also noted, similar to other immigrant populations, that family relations have been affected by the fact that children have language skills that parents do not making some parents report a lack of authority in the home (Community Representatives). The 'parentification' of children and resultant power shift brought about by early English language acquisition by children may have long-term implications on youth. Community Respondents noted parents with the most English literacy and education have done the best (e.g., first to drive, better jobs); conversely the kids who struggle the most are those whose parents had the most challenges (e.g., illiteracy, alcoholism).

The findings here mirror those of Nawyn et al. regarding the settlement of Burmese refugees in the USA, who conclude:

The detrimental effects of household linguistic isolation are compounded within immigrant communities with a high concentration of linguistic isolation, and when the receiving community has few linguistic resources to assist non-English speakers. (Nawyn et al, 2012:275)

⁹ For some parents, there is a tension between the desire to practice English at home versus the desire to maintain their language and culture.

Other Training

English language skills are important to future employment but not the only skills necessary. The lack of work-related skills training may be explained by the Langley settlement experience involving some ad hoc services. A number of respondents (18) reported having attended a variety of courses to assist with life and money skills (provided by VanCity and Christian Life) and eight had received training in early childhood care (e.g., through the Early Years Refugee ECD project), but for their own children not for employment in the childcare industry. Training focussed on healthy living, community engagement, food and personal safety. None of the training was employment related pointing to a gap in services that can be addressed in the future for this population.

Health

We have qualitative information on the health of this group. Not only did the lack of English make it difficult to explain complex illnesses and to navigate the health care system but there were also a number of individuals suffering from blood disorders common in Southeast Asian populations and other chronic conditions such as hepatitis (Community Representative). Dietary change is also a concern. The lack of availability of meat in the camps and the relative affordability of meat in BC as compared to the vegetables they like resulted in a prevalence of eating more meat causing constipation and headaches (Community Representative). Like other marginalised populations their diet is not good as healthy options and produce are expensive and one respondent commented on the ‘... crap that they’re eating’ (Community Representative) affecting health. Another concern is dental health, not just among those who spent time in the camps but also among the children born in Canada.

Medical concerns continue to be one of the main issues facing the Karen. Community Representatives report that after working with the Karen to build confidence in accessing medical services on their own, that individuals have been told by the receptionist that ‘I need to speak to someone who can talk English’. This undermines progress made and may contribute to continued reliance on others to provide interpretation and accompaniment. Although individuals can access Provincial Language Services interpreters through the hospital the interpreters may not have the cultural understanding necessary to be of great use.

Community Participation

While integration is often a stated policy goal of government, it is rarely defined (see Brunner et al., 2012 Metropolis WP series). We concur with others that ‘integration’ is a “two-way interchange of culture and understanding,” (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008: 309) implying adaptation by both the “host” community and its institutions and newcomers. Integration overall remains scarce, though some have better connections outside the Karen community than do others. The vast majority of Karen (49/58) reported that ‘most’ or ‘all’ of their friends are from within the Karen community, something which may be influenced by low English language ability as well as the

activities they report participating in (e.g., organized by church, immigrant service provider, community centre).

When asked about community participation, 11 cited holidays (e.g., Karen New Year, Christmas), 25 mentioned church activities and 32 reported visiting / gathering / being together (e.g., shopping, eating) with the assumption of this being with other Karen. A few mention that they don't go out or do anything because they are 'too old'.

The majority of activities are undertaken with other Karen, possibly reflecting the difficulty of integrating when interactions with the wider community are limited by language.

- 'No special activity because of language barrier; wants, but it is hard;'
- 'No. Scared to go out with non-Karen person because of language;'
- 'Hope and wish he will have social activities but due to language barrier don't do any.'

When asked about participation in community and/or social activities organized by non-Karen people and/or organizations responses centred upon activities undertaken with volunteers and/or service providers. In some cases services were perceived by respondents as social events (e.g., ECD program, swimming lessons, field trips, ISSofBC meetings).

- 'Visit the friends (to go their house); families are volunteer – teach them, visit them, go to their house'
- 'Teacher takes them to the zoo' and 'Korean New Year [and] Chinese New Year ... [the] ESL teacher ... tell them about events;'
- 'Host volunteers come to [my] house to try to solve things – look for work, build up friendship;'
- 'No, except for nurse who comes to visit.'

The Karen do not appear to be organizing events as a community for themselves, rather they are participating in community events and/or activities being organized for them.

Other responses provide a glimmer of hope:

- 'Husband wants to make friends but there is a language barrier. Wife is friends with other refugees from Afghanistan and also some Bangladeshi friends in the building;'
- 'Meet with other parents when dropping off kids at school – building friendship;'
- 'Best Babies – not all Karen parents. Strong Start. Tries to practice English.'

Five years after arrival in Canada the awareness of community resources and ability to access services independently remains low. Five (5) of the 7 individuals who report being very aware of services, for example, do not participate themselves (e.g., because of health problems) though their children do (e.g., in sports, library). Another reported that while they are very aware they do not have a library card or participate in events except when the teacher takes the class (e.g., field trip, leisure activity). There does not appear to be any culture of adult recreation within the community; they themselves participate if it is externally organized (e.g., field trips). Six explicitly state

they would need help in order to access any leisure activity. Two of the three individuals who stated they do not know where the recreation centre is live across the street from it; the other did not provide an address.

For the most part children are doing activities that are being organized by others, often without parental participation. The 'car pulls up, kids get in, they go play soccer and then are returned' (Community Representative). Community Representatives indicated it took a long time for the parents to get out and stand on the sideline, perhaps owing to a lack of familiarity with the sport (e.g., are their children doing well?), as well as fear of having to engage in English. There is a 'huge gap that may never disappear. Canadian parents cheer and yell; Karen parents standing way back' (Community Representative).

Church and Sport

Information provided by the Youth Focus groups and the Community Representatives' interview as well as from the surveys indicates that Christian churches, in particular two in Langley, and sports projects have had a positive effect on the settlement of the Karen in Langley. One church (St Joseph's Roman Catholic) organised a Karen Initiative in 2006, whilst a second (Langley Evangelical Free Church, LEFC) had a Refugee Advisory Committee (RAC) from 2007. This latter church '... became the Karen church' (Community Representative) and offers religious services in Karen languages. LEFC also organised home clusters of around 20 people to assist with settlement as there were then (Fall 2007) no services in Langley (Community Representative). The RAC, recognising that the Karen youth were struggling; with language, health and generally being 'at risk', organised sports programs and in the Fall 2008 provided \$6500 to hire a youth worker. In 2010 the RAC received funding via BC Healthy Living Alliance to hire another youth worker and interpreter (\$42,000) (Community Representative).

This money funded the Community Activities Recreation Liaison (CARL) which was described as '... a turning point for many youth' (Community Representative) who were struggling in school as 'the school district was not prepared [for the Karen] and the youth felt isolated in the classroom' (Community Representative). This project had success in providing a positive space and experience through hockey, a point confirmed by the male Focus Group as many of them reported hockey as one of their few activities. This was '... a whole year of first experiences' (Community Representative) some very successful and others rather sad. Successes included providing girls with swimming lessons (boys had learned to swim in the river in the camp) but this was tempered by the experiences of soccer where the boys did not understand that not all in training would make the team. Very positive experiences were reported for Caneball, a Karen sport, in which the youth did demonstrations and '... had ownership' (Community Representative).

Information obtained from Community Representatives was confirmed by participants in the youth focus groups. With respect to settlement and life in Canada, all activities youth participated in were organized by the churches in Langley, in programs such as Community Activities and Recreation Liaison (CARL) and Promoting

Community through Kids in Sport (PuCKS).¹⁰ This outcome is not unexpected, given that the majority of services provided in Langley have been geared towards children and youth, owing to the ad hoc nature of funding availability (e.g., Healthy Living Alliance, etc.).

School

Understandably given the inadequate advance planning time, the Langley school system was not prepared for the arrival of the Karen. It was reported that the Karen youth suffer a stigma as refugees in school (Community Representative) with boys in particular experiencing negative events and being portrayed as negative (Community Representative). In the male Focus Group the young men reported being mistaken as Chinese and facing racist comments and bullies, especially in middle school. This was attributed to the Karen being the first settlement of refugees in Langley (Community representative). Youth reported dealing with this by telling their ESL teacher, talking to the Principal but more importantly with the support of other Karen youth, a fact not lost on those working with them, one of whom commented that ‘...boys especially stick together at school’ (Community Representative).

Young women participating in the focus group spoke about physical bullying (e.g., dust being thrown on one person’s face, multiple examples of being pushed and/or bullied in gym class), as well as being made to feel like an outsider (e.g., through gossip, stares). Some spoke of having been asked for money by other students, as well as people waiting for the bus, something which made them feel unsafe.

- ‘[One] girl through dust on her face in park, did she do it on purpose or not??’
- ‘Some other people look down on them because [they are] refugees’
- ‘[A] classmate asked her for money, [she] told teacher because she was crying ... Another girl ask her money [and she gave] 50 cents’

The lack of linguistic ability and previous education led to the observation that those who arrived in Canada after their twelfth birthday are less likely to graduate (Community Representative), perhaps due to the fact that some at high school remain in ESL classes. Yet several of the male youth stated their plans to include graduating high school; gaining more education; going to university and getting a good job. Girls were reported to drop out due to teenage pregnancy and early marriage (Community Representative).

The male youth focus group discussed the homework club (Lit Fit) established in September 2009 in the local recreation centre (who donated the space), and the help they received via CARL and the involvement of student tutors from a local university (Trinity Western).

Although participants in both the male and female focus groups reported having made friends with others outside of the Karen community, the young women indicated

¹⁰ PuCKS is an empowerment-based charity launched in Langley focused on Promoting Community through Kids in Sport program (for more information see <http://www.pucksprogram.ca/>).

they were not really close friends (e.g., 'just say hi in school'). Further, female youth articulated some of the challenges experienced at school both upon arrival and on an on-going basis:

- 'Found things easy and okay in ESL class until [I] was moved to regular class;'
- '[I go to] ESL every day; [but] don't get credit to graduate?;'
- 'Teachers were helpful with showing me around the school when I was new there, however my friend felt uncomfortable in the class and felt she was being talked about;'
- 'The students make us feel uncomfortable, make us feel different and lonely;'
- 'In school a lot of people looking, hair, way they look, people stare, make them feel uncomfortable;'
- 'In terms of group projects in class, we get no partners.'

Concerns about homework are exacerbated by lack of familiarity with education in Canada, as well as language barriers.

- 'Still find it hard doing homework and very worried about our grades. Homework club is only open twice a week;'
- 'if don't know how to do homework feel upset, want to cry;'
- 'Some teachers are very nice, others very hard to talk to because they look very serious.'

The majority of parents (29/37) with child(ren) in schools reported their children were doing Very Good (3) or Good (26). Thirty-two (32) report their children have made friendships outside of the Karen community, though many are with other minority/newcomer communities.

Although a number of parents mentioned being in contact with schools, it appears as if the contact is most often initiated by the teacher (e.g., parent-teacher meetings); two respondents indicated they (have) volunteered in the school.

Volunteering

Volunteering is one way for new arrivals to integrate into the wider community, develop networks and acquire skills that can enhance employability and employment opportunities. However, although thirteen (13) of the 57 responses to a question on volunteering answered yes we need to consider how 'volunteering' was interpreted by respondents. For the most part the volunteering reported was not unpaid labour for an organization rather what was reported were activities than can be classified as 'helping neighbours': working in the Karen community garden; escorting people to medical appointments; childcare; and helping friends move house.

The importance of volunteers in the resettlement of the Karen in Langley cannot be understated. In the absence of funded settlement services and programming to meet the high needs of the Karen, individuals from local churches and the broader community played a pivotal role in facilitating settlement and establishing refugee specific programming and services. Groups came together to arrange furniture, offer free English classes, seek funding to provide supports and recreational opportunities to

engage Karen youth, and provide accompaniment to medical and other appointments, as well as establishing friendships with the Karen. Certainly the benefits of volunteers' efforts are evident in participants' responses. People spoke of having received help from volunteers both in the past and at present with a variety of tasks.

However, the effects of widespread volunteer assistance have not all been positive. Community Representatives, for example, spoke of well-meaning individuals who had registered Karen children for sports teams, and in one instance a week-long sleep away camp, without parents' informed consent. In trying to provide assistance and opportunities for children and youth, some volunteers did not consider parent's wishes, nor obtain their informed consent. In one instance a number of Karen youth were registered in hockey, without consideration given to how to get the kids to games. Nor were some of the youth aware they were on the team. The resulting frustration for coaches almost resulted in the kids not being allowed to register in subsequent years because of the negative experiences. In part, this may relate to the lack of training about establishing and maintaining boundaries when volunteering. It must be noted, however, that the churches arranged for volunteer training in 2009, two years after the Karen began settling in Langley.

Besides some well-meaning but unstructured and untrained volunteers' some participant's responses suggest the abundance of help received may have contributed to higher levels of dependency. Five years after arrival a number of Karen spoke of still needing their volunteer to do everything, from taking them shopping or to appointments, to filling out government forms. Responses suggest some volunteers have done everything for the newcomers, as opposed to working with them to build individual capacity over time. Consequently some respondents were not able to imagine a time when they would not require substantial support with everyday activities. This is particularly true for those who are illiterate, as well as seniors. When working with illiterate seniors, for example, community representatives reported 'we celebrate when they can go to the bank and sign their name'. According to one Community Respondent the 'more illiterate they are, the harder it is', they will 'always need a settlement worker'. Community Representatives, for example, spoke of people still getting panicked calls do to things 'with or for me', as well as consequences of some volunteers being very helpful whilst others contributed to a learned helplessness. When information or assistance is not provided individuals frequently go to another worker, potentially undermining any capacity building efforts.

This orientation is particularly troubling in light of recent changes to program eligibility effective April 1, 2014 under CIC in which naturalized Canadian citizens are no longer eligible for settlement services and language classes.¹¹ While many of the participants are eligible for citizenship, very few have obtained it, in large part owing to language requirements. The ability to transition to citizenship without language testing at age 55 (raised to 64 as of June 20, 2014) poses potential challenges, as individuals

¹¹ The province of BC has provided one year of transitional settlement funding for Naturalized Canadian Citizens, though they are not eligible for language training in Metro Vancouver.

may not yet have the language capacity or ability to access mainstream services independently, yet cannot access services owing to their status as a naturalized citizen.

Information and Assistance

All but one of the respondents report being able to obtain information and assistance from people and/or organizations in the community, including a settlement worker, Step Ahead counsellor(s), SWIS (Settlement Worker in Schools) worker, and Early Childhood settlement worker. Although ISSofBC is the most frequently cited organization (37 explicitly mention ISS), it is not clear if this is related to ISSofBC's involvement in the research. Over half of respondents report receiving information and assistance from multiple individuals and/or organizations. For some, obtaining information and assistance involves scaling up – eg 'First ask friend - if friend can't help, ask ISS'.

When asked if they are able to access services and systems (e.g., medical, social, educational) the majority of individuals indicated they need help in some way or at some time. While some require help all the time (most often with interpretation), others are gaining confidence in their ability to access some basic services and systems independently.

- 'Just simple things – grocery, stores. But office, clinic – still need assistance;'
- 'Yes, can go to clinic by herself for example, but if she needs to talk to a specialist she needs an interpreter;'
- 'Can shop in a familiar place, but other than that she still needs help;'
- 'Even though she can go alone, she feels like she wants a friend to go with her. Doesn't feel comfortable. Not language barrier - just no confident alone.'

One response stood out owing to its forward looking and complex need:

- 'Satisfied with Step Ahead, but worried if kids graduate Gr 12 - need college, university; needs loan - how to get loan from government'

Respondents were asked to consider what services and/or information would help them to settle better (n=48). Forty (40) of the responses provided indicated the need for continued and/or expanded services in the future; seven responses indicated the services provided are already good. Of the seven, three are in their 70s and may be facing different stresses (e.g. not looking for work, worrying about citizenship) and two are professionals. One individual believes 'it's up to herself - if she needs to do more activities like go to school to help her settle better. Plans to go to school (ESL), no plans to go for other school'.

Responses provided highlighted the need for services that are individualized, and can be provided either in their homes or through accompaniment.

- 'Karen who is expert can provide information for Karen families who cannot communicate; different from settlement worker - someone who can hold her hand, talk to employer, do interview, etc. - more intensive'
- 'More group programs to work with families who cannot go to difficult places - give a ride, translate, guide'

Nine respondents expressed a need for further English language training, including one who articulated the need for 'ESL classes without limited hours because they use up all their hours. Even after five years they can't learn'. Of particular note, four of the respondents request English language classes, as well as other assistance that can be provided in their homes as opposed to in a classroom or office:

- 'More program like people came to his place and do volunteer work, teaching English skills, life skills, visit family, ESL classes, two times a week. Home visits;'
- 'English skill program, government can get people to come over and help, teach ESL out of class, could be faster, then if she gets lost she can ask;'
- 'Someone special should come to her house, also teach English skills and reading for kids;'
- 'Volunteers could come to home to teach English at home and help him look for work.'

The support of the Host Program (called Community Connections since 2011) and the assistance of volunteers more broadly is valued by the Karen, as evidenced by their inclusion in future service provision (e.g. at home English classes, teaching life skills, etc). One respondent suggested it would be helpful to have 'community services and host volunteer. More programs like social coming over, sharing, and doing activities with them', echoing earlier responses about the importance of hosts and other volunteers in social networks.

The need for employment related services emerged in a number of responses with respect to both obtaining employment, as well as job maintenance (e.g., communication with employers, discrimination in the workplace).

- '... employment counselling; look for work, find a job, talk to employer; language barrier - cannot talk to employer. Doesn't know how to get help.'
- 'More people involved newcomer looking for job; guide; <Husband> ISS, Step ahead counsellor, more than that – [a] person who help look for job, talk to employer on behalf of him in case problems with boss [arise]. Even if work together in group multicultural ... [people] want to push Karen more than other groups (Indian). Look down on Karens more cannot speak to employer. <Wife> Something happened with husband at work ... misunderstanding? Discrimination at work because of Karen; Discrimination not only in workplace; has been learning about Canadian workplace (e.g., payment of worker, role of worker), he works more than 10, 12 hour feels tired, but when someone talk to him not nicely, [in a] loud voice, [he] feels upset. If someone helping through employment services, it would be better because of language barrier, cannot call in to not go work, then employer says you are not coming to work on time, get sick did not call in'

The need for ongoing guidance and support is evident, even five years after arrival. Multiple respondents noted the need for assistance with paperwork, as well as preparing for the citizenship test, going to the doctors and parenting and other life skills.

- 'Programs should continue. Needs more help for paperwork, can't read English at all;'

- 'If he applies for citizenship he needs someone to guide him to explain test, to help him study;'
- 'Satisfied with program (host) but could provide more parenting classes for youth ... [and] teenagers. [It is] different from home – parenting for teenagers. Guide kids in a good way. Worry about future of kids – are they doing good? Has sympathy for other parents – if you don't know how to teach your kids, if you hurt them against the law ... [Need] classes how to guide kids in right way.'

One individual expressed concern for his deaf son's future – 'program of sign language; one day when parents pass away he needs to sign to support himself. Another expressed concern about family and friends who are not yet in Canada, suggesting 'fund for people in need - can government help people back home? Villages don't have enough food/housing - emergency needs - being them here? Family can settle and get job, help government'.

At the time of the research the future of a number of programs (e.g. Refugee ECD program, Step Ahead) was uncertain due to government funding changes. Six respondents explicitly mentioned funding changes and uncertainty, while a number of others indicated that programming should continue. Respondents provided suggestions on what services would help:

- 'ISS/early childhood program contract with government might end in July. She said she needs help to go places [and] still need programs to keep going. Instead of early childhood program [Government could] provide program for families that still need help [including] people to go with them;'
- 'Early childhood program contract is ending in July, [it] should continue. She still needs help, community services, more programs. [She] needs someone to assist her with doctor.'

Responses underscore both the importance of continued services in meeting existing needs, as well as the need to revisit current programming and service gaps in order to ensure emerging needs are met.

Citizenship and Belonging or not....

To become a Canadian citizen, eligible individuals must demonstrate an adequate knowledge of Canada and the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship, as well as an "adequate knowledge of English or French" (CIC 2012a, online). In addition to a written test demonstrating knowledge of Canada, applicants are required to participate in an interview with a citizenship judge in which s/he is expected to demonstrate the ability to communicate in English or French (e.g., through answering simple questions on familiar topics, telling a simple story about everyday activities, giving simple instructions or directions, etc). A citizenship judge has the final ability to adjudicate all citizenship applications, including whether or not an individual has demonstrated sufficient knowledge of an official language.

The 2009 release of a revised and expanded Discover Canada citizenship guide which is "more comprehensive in scope and ... [contains a] strong focus on Canadian

values, history, symbols and institutions captured in the attention and the imagination of many in Canada” (CIC 2009, online), followed by a new citizenship test in March 2010 resulted in historically high failure rates. Brunner et al., 2010 found that Achenese allophone newcomers also had trouble passing the citizenship test with the new standards. Only applicants ages 19-54 are required to take the test. In addition to the inclusion of far more detailed information in the guide, the benchmark to pass was raised from 60% to 75%. Subsequent revisions to the exam in October 2010 were intended to ease pressures on the system, including providing failed applicants the ability to rewrite the exam, revised questions and elimination of a policy requiring that a few mandatory questions be answered correctly (Beeby 2010, online).

In September 2012, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) announced new language rules for citizenship applicants. The change, which came into effect for all applications received as of November 1, 2012, requires applicants to “provide up-front objective evidence of their language ability at the time they apply” (CIC 2012b, online). Applicants must now demonstrate they meet Canadian Language Benchmark 4 in speaking and listening at the time the application is submitted through inclusion of “acceptable evidence, such as

- the results of a CIC-approved third-party test; or
- the evidence of completion of secondary or post-secondary education in English or French; or
- the evidence of achieving the appropriate language level in certain government-funded language training programs” (CIC 2012b, online).

Those individuals whose applications do not contain sufficient proof of language ability up-front will have their applications returned. Additional requirements proposed on February 6th, 2014 and passed June 20, 2014 will now require all applicants aged 14 to 64 to take the Citizenship test.

The vast majority of adult respondents have not yet achieved Canadian Citizenship, with 71 of the 74 reporting their current status as Permanent Resident and 3 reporting Naturalized Canadian Citizen. This is consistent with other groups of newcomers to Canada who experienced protracted displacement before coming to Canada (Brunner et al., 2010). Three others are waiting to take the Citizenship Oath. Sixteen have applied for Citizenship and are waiting either to take the test or for the result. Reasons provided for not having obtained Citizenship included the intention to apply for citizenship when their English is better, the desire for citizenship test preparation classes, and concern about the expense associated with applying for Citizenship.

Some have tried the new test and failed, others say they will get a new Permanent Resident (PR) card instead of applying for citizenship. One individual who is eligible for citizenship, is ‘scared of citizenship test / language’ so is not planning to seek

Canadian Citizenship, while four others said they will wait until 55 when they do not need to take the test.¹²

- 'Wait until 55 so no need to take test. Wish he could ... but seen his friends and language barrier is hard. Cannot pass (he thinks). [He would take the test] if government prepare test for non-speakers to make it quick and easy (yes/no), otherwise too difficult.'

Continued involvement of service providers in the preparation of the Citizenship forms, and in one instance an individual who indicates they 'will apply, Ra Htoo will do it for them'.

To date, very few have passed the citizenship test, something Community Representatives saw as contributing to a sense of failure and continued sense of being in limbo.

- 'Is citizenship a benefit? He is a new immigrant so he is not at the same level as citizen...more benefit than PR, refugee...when he shows card he feels bad;'
- 'Wish he could become a citizen because he hopes he could settle forever, but still have problem with citizenship.'

Youth, for example, do not know how to identify (Community Representatives). Some say Thai because it is easier to explain than having been born in a refugee camp, while others do not acknowledge they were a refugee. For adults, recently passed changes to Citizenship, including the potential to be returned to their home country if the situation stabilizes, is concerning to those without Citizenship (Community Representatives). One respondent, however, saw things differently:

- 'Wife wants to because ISS suggested it - so they don't have to renew PR card - husband doesn't want to get citizenship - says he will wait until someone asks him to - he says he will live here forever so why worry about citizenship'

When individuals do obtain Citizenship it is a cause for celebration within the community; it's 'huge because it's the first day they belong to a country' (Community Representative).

Reflecting on Life in Canada

Respondents were asked to think about the best and the worst thing(s) about living in Canada (n=58 and 54 respectively). Better living conditions, the availability of support (e.g. from government), their children's future, and the lack of civil war were among the best things about living in Canada, while language barriers, un/employment difficulties, the use of illegal drugs and alcohol in others and their children's future were among the worst.

¹² As of June 20, 2014 the age limit has been raised to 64 years.

Best things about life in Canada

When asked about the best thing about life in Canada respondents spoke of the better living conditions found in Canada (e.g. having enough food, housing), something that was frequently linked to stability of place (e.g., not having to move).

- 'Housing; education for kids; free, no war, no worry about food / moving out;'
- 'Place is stable; food is enough ... enough everything;'
- 'Got good jobs – don't worry about food/housing anymore - don't worry about tomorrow or moving to another place;'
- 'Have enough food; have good house to live; whatever they want to eat, they eat;'
- '(1) good for his kids, (2) having good place (3) enough food. Family life = free from fear. Worry about everything but here he has his own place;'
- 'Safe place – no worries about food or other things.'

Eleven respondents spoke of the assistance provided by government (e.g. financial, services) as contributing to their better living conditions.

- 'She came here and government assists her and she can learn English. In camp [it was] not like this;'
- 'Receives help from the government, his life is free, he never worries about food or housing – many things;'
- 'Government tries to help and support them very well (food, housing, etc.);'
- 'Kids already have enough education, services are good – the best thing is that the government provides for her;'
- 'Government looked after her very well – so much support and services.'

Not surprisingly, education – both for children and themselves – was a frequent response (22). For some, the potential benefits for their children's future was the best thing about life in Canada.

- 'For kids – they have good education and hope for their future, if they are doing good and get a good job their life will be better;'
- 'For his kids' future life – wanted to send kids to Canada to improve their future and get education;'
- 'For kids – education – best thing to bring kids;'
- 'Good opportunities for the kids to have a high level of education;'
- 'Good opportunity to do whatever he wants to do – education – back home can't continue school without money – here he can learn more and he can still work despite language barriers.'

Fifteen respondents provided responses related to freedom, lack of civil war and peace found in Canada. For some, the best things in Canada were explicitly compared to life in the camp and/or at home.

- 'Prosperous - doesn't worry about fear, war, [or] suffering. Kids are progressing in education;'

- 'Back home war [and] fighting; in Canada no war. Everything is settled out of war. Feel warm [and at] peace;'
- 'All situations are good compared to back home. Feels really happy. Best [thing is] settle, live forever here;'
- 'Feels free – can go anywhere – compared to back home where she is afraid of police and fear of war. Could not go to other countries;'
- 'So much better than refugee camp. No fear or worry about anything. Camp is like a bundle, here in Canada the bundle is untied. Don't have to worry about those things.'

Of particular note, is the positive outlook expressed by many respondents. Interestingly a number of the respondents spoke of feeling warm in Canada.

- 'Wife: her life has totally changed; back home she worried about tomorrow but now she feels freedom and feels warm;'
- 'Make Canada a home;'
- '... integrate herself, educated. Got a good job;'
- 'Already settled in Canada. Everything is going well. Likes Canada;'
- 'Feels free. Life is good because kids are getting enough education, they will improve in the future;'
- 'Good to be in Canada; education for her and kids. Feel warm, no fear. Can have enough food, housing.'

Worst things about life in Canada

Concerns relating to language barriers, un/employment difficulties, the use of illegal drugs and alcohol in others, and their children's future were the most frequent responses to the question of what is the worst thing about life in Canada, though in many cases the challenges are interconnected. Two respondents said 'doesn't have' or 'none'.

The significance of language was underscored by the frequency of responses, with over half of all concerns explicitly mentioning language (n=37). Low English language proficiency was seen by respondents to impact their ability to pursue further education and communicate with others, as well as to obtain and maintain employment.

- 'Hard to understand English. If someone asks [him something or] talks to him, he can't respond [or] understand. Can't communicate;'
- 'Language – hard to communicate outside of Karen community;'
- 'For him and wife – education limited – language [is the] worst;'
- 'Husband: unable to communicate and hard to get a job. Wife: language. If something bad happens, she panics;'
- 'Language barrier, lack of education/skills to communicate;'
- 'Language barrier – specifically workplace communication.'

Un/employment Difficulties, including discrimination in the workplace were cited by thirteen respondents:

- 'Husband – earning and looking for work, transportation, he has a job but no car. Public transit sometimes not on time ... Got cold waiting for bus;'
- 'If jobs are not regular, they worry about rent;'
- 'ISS / Step Ahead tried to help but they work in office and cannot go to employer – husband says he needs more help;'
- 'Government should tell employers not to discriminate. He is a hard worker but they don't hire him because of his education;'
- 'Discrimination in workplace – can't stand up for rights – language barriers – looking for work especially – if someone says bad things, you don't know how to respond or can't respond.'

Several others made suggestions that more support is needed in assisting Karen access jobs, understand the Canadian job market and communicate with employers.

Six respondents expressed concern about the use of illegal drugs and/or alcohol, particularly in relation to their children's future.

- 'Worry that in Canada, bad people are using illegal drugs. It's a bad thing happening in the city; worry about kids and people who deal drugs;'
- 'People use drugs, feel scared when picking up kids, almost dark, scared of users;'
- 'Worry about future – youth. If they grow up with bad people? Use drugs, bad things, etc.;'
- 'Worried about future (using drugs? Bad influence on kids?).'

For some, health concerns and loneliness/isolation are worst things about life in Canada

- 'Language barrier and homesick. Mom and dad are home, feels lonely;'
- 'When he came to Canada he doesn't have friends; place is not familiar; lonely, stay at home all the time and not go out;'
- 'Health condition – not good; wants to look for work so health is holding her back.'

Not surprisingly two respondents noted the weather: 'weather is cold although he now feels more comfortable – he learned how to use layers of clothes'.

One respondent noted 'Karen community asks him for donations/funding and collects money for committees – he doesn't like when they ask him'.

In spite of the challenges faced by respondents, including ongoing language barriers and employment difficulties, life in Canada offers the promise of better living conditions, the ability to access assistance (including financial), peace and a promising future for their children.

Youth – Biggest Fears and Hopes for the Future

Participants in the two youth focus groups were asked to reflect upon life in Canada with respect to their biggest fears, and their hopes for the future. While many of the overarching issues echo those of adult respondent (eg language, crime) and other youth their age (eg, fears about growing up), some of the responses illuminate challenges specific to refugee youth.

Language and safety concerns emerged in both the male and female youth focus groups. In addition to fears about language and interacting with others, youth participants in both groups noted safety concerns relating to crime in Canada and homelessness (e.g. how to interact with homeless people). Other fears that emerged in the male focus group included being injured working with machines and electricity, the large amount of traffic (e.g. cars passing at high speeds).

Notably, participants in the female focus group expressed fears predominantly related to the future. While some expressed concern about what to do after high school (e.g., 'hard time finding job after high school', 'clueless about what to do after high school'), others focused on concerns most frequently associated with adults, as opposed to youth.

- 'money for rent for parents;'
- 'not afford to pay rent for her parents;'
- 'parents relying on them for the future, so we are worry about fulfilling their needs since in the camp such responsibilities weren't expected;'
- One respondent spoke of the incomplete information received from relatives who 'told [us] it's good but they didn't say negative things' ...they 'did not tell about difficulties ahead.'

When asked about their hopes for the future, Karen youth provided a number of responses typical of others their age.


Girls

- have a good life
- be a police officer, nurse, teacher, flight attendant
- go to college or university
- graduate from high school and get a better job
- be a mother
- marry
- be a McDonalds owner
- help others as a missionary (eg helping people from other cultures or countries)


Boys

- pass all courses and graduate
- get a good job
- going to university
- learn more education
- become a fire fighter, policeman, soldier
- help others in the city
- be a soccer player
- play soccer well

Other responses illuminate the challenges faced by the refugee youth in Canada and their parents, as well as the pressures for the future.

- 'I visited my dad's work place one day and I felt very bad. He has to act like he doesn't speak because of the language. Both my parents work in labour jobs and it's very hard;'

- 'Our parents work in hard labour jobs, so we are pressure to have a good education, get better jobs and help our families;'
- 'Parents – no education hard to support family – people treat parents bad – don't want to do like their parents' – pressure of disappointing their parents if they do not get a good job;'
- 'Help my parent as I can with interpretations;'
- 'Proud to help parents but are still learning English so sometimes difficult;'
- 'The Karen Settlement worker in Langley help our parents to communicate with others;'
- 'In camp never experienced hard work – no opportunity to work – go to school, go home study. Here [in Canada] parents have to work very hard, very different experiences;'
- 'My parents always complain and talk about going back (home), but because of my need for education they've stopped complaining.'

Finally, when considering their hopes for the future, some of the girls provided advice to others who may come after them:

- 'If they can't deal with something trust in yourself; believe in yourself;'
- 'Don't be afraid to make a mistake. You can learn from your mistakes to improve yourself. Concentrate, pay attention. if you want to do something, do it with passion, not just for money;'
- 'Don't give up easily;'
- 'Don't forget who you are and never give up;'
- 'If you know two words, say three words;'
- 'Have a goal;'
- 'Find out what courses you need early on to make a plan.'

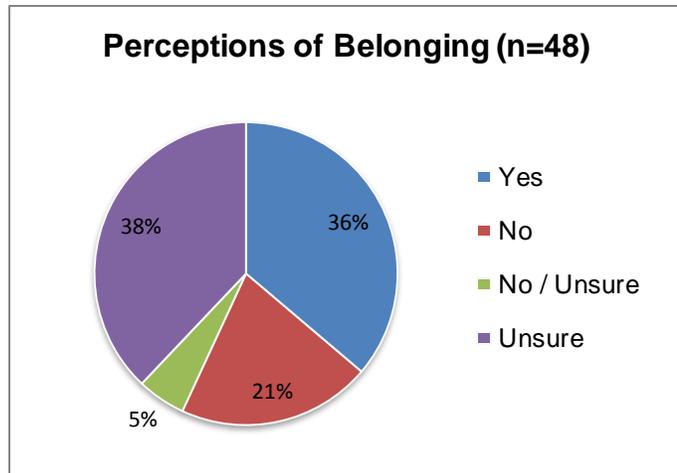
The needs and experiences of youth differ from those of their parents. Youth are simultaneously navigating the challenges of both adolescence and resettlement. As such, their information needs and concerns may differ from those of their parents, as well as other youth. Notably, concerns around their parents' well-being and the pressure to take care of their parents both now and in the future weighed heavy on youth respondents, emerging in both questions about their biggest fears and hopes for the future. Most promising is the advice provided by the young women to those who will arrive after them as it speaks to the positive outlook for the future.

Perceptions of belonging

We asked adult respondents to self-report on how they perceived if they belonged in Canadian society, the possible responses were Yes, No, or Unsure. Forty-eight (48) respondents provided information on this question. A number of respondents answered No / Unsure in recognition that their feelings were somewhere between the two responses. Perceptions of belonging varied between respondents. However, even those who answered no or unsure had positive things to say about Canada.

Ten of the fifteen respondents who answered either 'no' or 'no/unsure', for example, qualified their responses with 'not yet'. All four who mention freedom report a positive sense of belonging.

- 'She has opportunities in every single part. Go out. Travel, everything, feels free, warm, no worries, good place;'
- '... I kind of feel as if I am settled, but not. A lot of that is due to language, things being different from home.'



For a number of respondents, their sense of belonging was connected to homeownership and the land.

- 'Not yet – cannot contact with other people. If its belonging to him should have own house, pet. Back home [he] has house, buffalo, pets, go hunting, but here nothing belonging to him;'
- 'She can feel that it belongs ... depends on situation. We live here, stay here, eat going out ... almost belonging. But pay rent, a little bit different, belonging;'
- 'Doesn't own a house, only renting. Back home we owned our land. But happy he is a permanent resident so he can stay forever;'
- 'Planning to move from Surrey to Langley, someday because parents live there. Feels belonging in both Surrey and Langley but does not own land or own home.'

Three of the individuals who replied yes had a more spiritual understanding of belonging, though one worried about costs associated with her funeral.

- '[It] belongs to him. Life end here', rather than I belong here
- 'Never want to go back. Bible says wherever you settle is for you so already settled;'
- 'Blessed by God. She is already old, this is a good place for her. Government tries to help and assist her, she can suffer many things but still living happy. She is just worried about the rest of her family being responsible for the cost of her death/funeral.'

One quarter of respondents identify issues associated with language and communication (e.g. getting around, access resources, and reading signs) as holding back their sense of belonging, while others relate it to employment.

- 'Not yet, need more education, English skills, not familiar with places but likes Canada! Even though they are old they get money from the government. Don't worry about earning and living for tomorrow;'

- 'Not settled not connect with other people not have ability like back home. Same language. Here is still hard – you need English for everything need more information that help him and settle;'
- 'Not yet, it's 'different' here. She needs to know more English so she can travel by herself. At home she could travel wherever she wanted but here she needs to know the bus and know English;'
- 'Can't access anything by herself, doctor, going to park, shopping, dare not go out by herself. [The] weather is too cold;'
- 'Almost but not completely. Still need some help from others, still needs some help. Difficult to express;'
- 'Half...not completely. Something holding her back. Cannot connect / communicate because of language / multicultural;'
- 'More likely belonging to her but not 100% ... because the language is barrier – cannot communicate.'
- 'But not well. Doesn't know the location everywhere and when someone cannot go, give them map cannot read map, cannot read street sign / building number;'
- 'Already settled, knows where to get help and food, his life future will end here, he likes it but is worried about rent – wants to work but there is no work – it does not continue.'

Others linked their sense of belonging to the length of time spent in Canada, both now and in the future.

- '<laugh> Not yet – but grandkids maybe;'
- 'Here only two years so cannot answer;'
- 'Close but still misses homeland and family. For her kids it's 100% complete here. If more English will feel better but will take 5-6 more years at least.'

For some, belonging was tied to their ability to stay in Canada permanently, as well as obtaining Canadian citizenship.

- 'Not yet – but if becomes a citizen, will feel more belonging;'
- 'Not yet – not citizen yet, hard to communicate;'
- 'Before, in home not feeling free. Here, feels free and can continue living here forever;'
- 'But not citizen yet. Everything is almost but not Canadian yet;'
- 'More than first year. It's improving ... not 100% yet, but it's better.'

When asked about their sense of belonging, some adult respondents were very positive:

- 'Wherever she settles she feels good, knows neighbors are good;'
- 'Everything is perfect; doesn't need anything.'

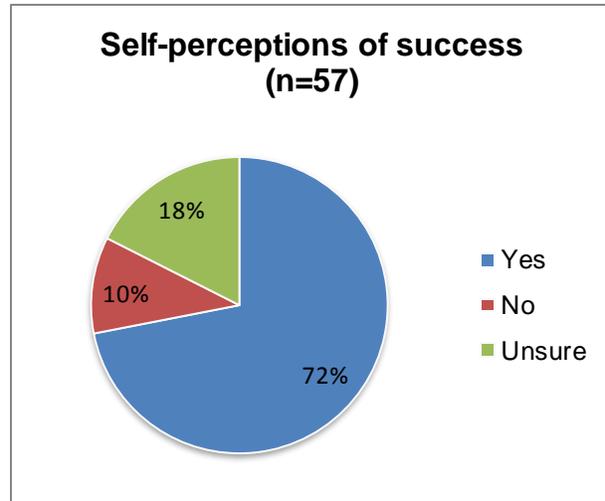
Self-reported sense of belonging varied among participants, though overall responses were positive. Although 36% of respondents reported feeling like they belong in Canada, only two were unconditional in their comments. Others demonstrated a range of belonging (from a little to almost) dependent on a multitude of factors (eg home ownership, time, language, employment).

Self-perceptions of success

In spite of the challenges faced during settlement, respondents were overwhelmingly positive, with 72% of respondents saying yes they see their life in Canada as successful (respondents n=57).

Respondents had a lot to say about food and having enough of it, their ability to access healthcare, learning how to use the ATM by themselves, and having enough English to use the Internet and computer by herself.

- ‘The first time his wife went to the ATM she didn’t even know how to press the buttons but now she can withdraw money by herself. Husband held her hand and showed her how to press buttons;’
- ‘Before he only knows a few English words but it was not comfortable to speak. Now he can speak up; it’s a big improvement. He has the internet and computer.’



Language was a key theme in many of the responses, both with respect to themselves and their children. For some, their children’s successes in learning English have contributed to their own sense of success (e.g. in their ability to access services semi-independently).

- ‘Many successes in her life. 1) kids are doing very well ... compare after 4 years English. 2) sometimes after hours if she need emergency is much better. She can use kids to go interpret for her. Very helpful.’
- One has measured success by being able to go to the clinic on her own: ‘Compare before: hard, whatever she needs because of English. After: ELSA 10 months - then go to clinic by herself, make appointment by herself – successful;’
- ‘[There is a] difference between educated and uneducated; need to help some people more. ‘We are too old to think.’ Needs more programs. If he knew English he could plan but not right now,’
- ‘During 4 years it's been successful. Been through so many different experiences ... He knows more than 10 English words, knows about city, life not very successful but small steps compared to camp,’
- ‘Has [a] job. Not rich but has enough. Life is improving through knowing more English skills;’
- ‘I can go to school, work have freedom, to visit friends, province, can talk to friends in another country even when far away know each other different cultures.’

Some individual responses reveal a sense of empowerment:

- ‘Teacher shows them new places like the US/Canada border. Before he heard, but now he sees face to face. Never thought he'd see Canada. He gets to see new places through ESL classes. He couldn't go out before, now he can see different trees;’
- ‘Didn't know about food before, here it's different – what to buy, what to eat, tries to help others and build her life. She volunteers to learn more English.’

Others consider their life in Canada to be a qualified success:

- ‘No success yet. In future his kids – if he is doing well, if you struggle hard they will succeed. Already late – age / memory ... kids doing well / success;’
- ‘Doesn't need to carry water on her head anymore, doesn't worry about finding a post for building her house;’
- ‘No worries about life. Back home have to hide [and] escape’
- ‘Not high, but not too proud, just starting. Got a job and did not get laid off. Worked 2 full years. Makes a lot of friends and is very careful to select good friends who will not be a bad influence’
- ‘Not high but building up – kids going to school; he is improving himself, hopes life in future will be more successful when he has his own house. A person needs to have their own house so he's working towards those goals.’

Sadly, a few have given up. One respondent, for example, ‘already feels like it's too late for her. She likes Canada though. She wants her kids to succeed but for her it's already too late’, while another responded ‘not yet, not sure if he will because of language barrier.’

Future resettlement

Respondents were asked what, if anything, they would change if they were to plan the resettlement of other Karen. Responses provided include both suggestions relating to pre-arrival (e.g., the need to focus on English and life skills in the camps), as well as revised and/ or expanded services in Canada.

The desire for expanded English language training in the camps, as well as new approaches to language classes in Canada was evident in multiple responses:

- ‘Learn more English before coming to Canada [then] continue going to school for English, other culture [will] follow ... Language [is the] priority;’
- ‘“No read [or] write How can he plan’ [There is a need] to provide people to give education in camp before they come to Canada. No previous training so it's hard to settle. Life skills in refugee camp. Learn more English;’
- ‘Better to focus on ESL classes. Government should provide more classes in the camps;’
- ‘Programs are already enough, but wants government to give people more English before they leave for Canada;’
- ‘Before coming – give more pre-departure orientation. Language [is] very important. Provide more training /skills, how to settle [and] communicate;’

- 'ESL is not successful. Find a different way to help people learn English fast. Been attending ESL for many years but still not speaking well. Some new idea needed;'
- 'Even though the government opens ESL classes, people are not learning – they need Karen interpreters in ESL classes. Teachers do teach but don't understand – they need improvement. When they are asked to 'fill in the blanks' they say yes, yes, but they cannot actually 'fill in the blanks';'
- 'Educate more, force them to go to school and provide teacher to come to homes to teach ESL;'
- '... never went to school back home, hard to learn. Pre-literate. Wants to learn English with Karen community, Karen teacher. English sentence [then] Karen sentence. Cannot learn from English teacher / class. He asked many help for school: ISS, groups, community, etc;'
- 'Fix difference between people with education vs. those without education. Should separate ... people because [individuals with] no education ... need to work harder and learn differently. In ELSA classes it is very frustrating to have people with different levels;'
- 'ELSA with childcare (not sure if it is available). More help with education. Wife wants to go to school but husband has to go to work. If programs assist more, families who have kids can go to ELSA.'

Other suggestions for improved services in Canada included the provision of interpreters, as well as education and life skills.

- 'Put more to open door for newcomer to welcome them and find a group ... different groups will need interpreter ... different services ... go to employment, school, clinic, interpreters that will be better. More interpreters in different places;'
- 'Plan to support more: (1) education – more ESL (special school for refugee – not only ELSA life skills in Canada, how to educate kids; how to improve social activities level; (2) health care (more interpreter, her mom passed away, had to go to doctor, settlement worker only works office hour; (3) work – find home;'
- 'Increase the interpreter in different places (every clinic). Settlement worker in school – provide more than 1, 2 in school.'

Key within a number of responses is the perceived need for ongoing, intensive support through either settlement services (e.g. similar to Step Ahead) or from volunteers, though there was not a sense of how long this type of programming would be needed.

- 'Working with families and helping them directly instead of visiting an office. Be patient, working with each family individually, go to their house and fix their problems;'
- 'Life skills to assist her and go out with her, settlement worker going OUT with her, not just paperwork. Hands on;'
- 'People are different. Even though same country [or] culture, some people catch on fast, some people slow ... Even if government provides life skills, it is not enough. Step Ahead helps individual families until they can move out by themselves;'

- 'Find one volunteer per family to look after them closely. Interpreter can come first few times, then no need for interpreter anymore. She didn't have a volunteer and it was very hard. Make sure they find a good apartment and one person to look after each family'
- 'Karen Settlement worker is OK but not for other groups ... he would plan more like a group/program ... people to look for work, how to contact? Where to go? People to go to look for work, people going with them, not just internet, showing them, assisting them'
- '...If he was in charge, improve how to coach job search ... government provide more organization for employment'
- 'Plan visiting new family and take them to the park and teach them how to cook, use different things. Had life skills trainings. She learned from life skills training and pass it on. She would teach.'

Others reflected on the need for increased financial assistance, noting

- 'Money from government is not enough; he received \$1200 per month but housing is expensive and that is not enough – he only has \$50 after heat and rent – his heat is \$250 – he doesn't drink either but he does chew betel nut'
- 'Need 3 years instead of 1 year of RAP. Also 3 years of ELSA'

Two respondents noted the need for specialized programming and services to meet the needs of people with disabilities:

- 'If government can provide a school for adult who have disability in Canada'
- 'To ask government [to] give advice to assist more people who are disability. They feel lonely at home. Group or organization to come help them. Home visiting program. Not really experience, but just wish.'

The debate around the benefits of concentration vs. dispersion emerged in some of the responses:

- 'Karen – put not in the same places. [Put] in other places in order to improve faster;'
- 'She knows too many together in one place is not good. If so many together, it has barrier, [it is] hard to improve English. Depends on family however. Some families really need help, they need to be together. Put 2-3 families together and spread them out;'
- In one interview the husband and wife expressed very different views – 'Husband: it's better to split people and spread families out so they can become more progressive and share ideas about different places. Wife: no, people should be in the same place for unity – keep the group united. But it's also good to split.'

Respondents were forthcoming when asked to consider what, if anything, they would change if they were to plan for the arrival of future groups. Drawing upon their own experiences during resettlement, the Karen made a number of recommendations including expanding English language classes in the camps, as well as re-evaluating and (where appropriate) revising existing programs and service delivery approaches. Central to the many of their responses was the need to look at specialized programming

to meet new and emerging needs, as well as those of diverse populations (eg those with disabilities). Flexibility and responsiveness are key aspects of the proposed resettlement needs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was two-fold - to seek an understanding of the settlement outcomes and integration process of Karen resettled refugees in Langley after five (5) years in Canada. Respondents noted that Canada has offered them better living conditions, income support (e.g. from government), a future for their children, and peace. Nonetheless, language barriers, joblessness, and the dangers of illegal drugs and alcohol among children were major challenges and concerns.

The other main objective was to document the outcomes and learnings from the decision to settle a refugee population in a host community with little or no prior experience (and infrastructure) in working with such newcomers. The City of Langley represented a non-traditional destination for refugees in BC.

As previously mentioned, one of the key lessons learned from the resettlement of the Karen is the importance of pre-arrival community planning. In the absence of time to plan for the resettlement of the Karen in Langley the community was left to scramble to fill the void in services in order to meet their needs, nor were local service providing organizations and government agencies adequately informed about the higher needs of the newcomers owing to their migration experience. Recognition of the need for advance community planning informed the resettlement of Bhutanese refugees to Coquitlam beginning in 2009.¹³

Although settlement services and supports provided to newcomers have to be appropriate to their level of need, it is integral that these supports seek to build individual capacity to meet their own needs (e.g., access mainstream services) independently. Failure to do so may leave individuals highly dependent on formal services or volunteer assistance indefinitely.

Shifting federal priorities for resettlement do not always coincide with program funding cycles, limiting the extent to which formal settlement and language services may be put in place to meet the needs of multi-barriered refugees (e.g., first language supports). Consequently, program funding obtained is reflective of funder priorities. At the time of the Karen resettlement movement and in the initial years significant funding was invested in healthy and active living among the youth population. This reflected in the initial supports that were established, in that few services were put in place to meet the needs of adults.

Settlement outcomes are mixed among Karen GARs, but many of these newcomers are progressing towards greater degree of integration and independence.

¹³ The lessons learned from the resettlement of Karen refugees to Langley has been substantial. Recognition of the need for advance community planning informed the resettlement of Bhutanese refugees to Coquitlam beginning in 2009. See Sherrell et al. (2011) for a detailed account of the pre-arrival community planning that was undertaken.

These findings are not surprising, given the stated objectives of refugee resettlement guided by humanitarian objectives rather than economic objectives. A common view expressed by Karen community members was their sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Government of Canada by giving them the opportunity to rebuild their lives in this country. Furthermore, community members stated their desire to give back to Canada and contribute as good citizens.

Through this study the authors would like to offer several recommendations for consideration. It is only through research like this that we can learn and enhance the settlement of future refugee populations while reflecting and ensuring that key elements and resources are in place when considering the destining of refugee newcomers to non-traditional destining communities.

Recommendations

1. If integration is a two-way street, pre-arrival community planning and development in Canadian towns and cities is required. Without some advance planning, the host community cannot properly respond in a timely fashion nor undertake an inventory of potential service demands. If health authorities have background information – eg health profiles, then local health care screening protocols can be adjusted, if necessary, to be culturally responsive and relevant to support the settlement process;
2. Along with pre-arrival community preparedness training, there is a need for more information on the cultural and health related information of the Karen population; Without a basic understanding of the intended refugee newcomer population background, needless confusion, misunderstanding and duplication and/or unnecessary primary health care test may be repeated. Furthermore, in recent years a family based needs assessment tool has been piloted with the Bhutanese refugee movement out of Nepal. This tool should be implemented as part of core resettlement programming for all refugee resettlement populations;
3. Karen GARs represent a refugee group from a protracted refugee situation, part of current resettlement selection policy. With the continued selection of refugees from protracted refugee situations, Karen GARs as well as other resettled refugee populations would benefit from more in depth first language case management as part of a new proposed national vulnerable population CIC funding stream. While there exists some in depth case management programs in some provinces, there is value in evaluating the existing models as part of introducing a new national program with common standards and a comparable basket of services;
4. Labour market attachment and subsequently, economic integration is weak among the Karen. While these outcomes may relate to a number of factors, including low official language capacity, a lack of formal education, or few transferable employment skills, refugee newcomers would benefit from some targeted employment assistance services not currently in place. Furthermore, the funding of employer relation specialist type positions to specifically target

potential employers where refugee skills and assets could be utilized should be considered;

5. The current pre-departure orientation program should be revamped beyond the current 3 to 5 day cultural orientation program to include specific age appropriate orientation targeting youth, as well as basic pre-settlement language training. With the move towards multi-year resettlement commitments from fewer source countries than in the past, there is an opportunity to re-allocate current funding to fewer regions in order to enhance some pre-departure programming for resettled refugees. This is important for the fact that Canada is selecting refugees from protracted situations. Some basic language training exposure to start the English and/or French language acquisition process for both adults and youth would help to better prepare them for resettlement to Canada. This follows current practise by several states, including US, Sweden, Germany and Denmark;
6. The Resettlement Assistance Program was introduced in 1998. Following on the previous recommendation for a more robust and completely revamped pre-departure orientation programming, post arrival RAP orientation should be reviewed and aligned with pre-arrival orientation programming. The use of common visuals, learning tools and messaging would be beneficial to newly arrived refugees by reinforcing key messages;
7. Accessible funding beyond the call for proposal cycles is needed to address new and emerging needs. Refugee selection and multi-year funding cycles are not always aligned. Clarification and/or funding mechanism is needed to address unexpected service needs by new and emerging refugee populations;
8. Psycho-social supports, including access to psychologists and other clinical counsellors, funded by CIC is needed to support the settlement of refugees from protracted situations. The trauma experienced by some members of the Karen community is characteristic of other refugee populations and research has shown that this can be extensive and long term (Liebling & Kiziri-Mayengo, 2002). We are observing a growing trend of significant trauma experienced by resettled refugees. Although health funding and services remains a provincial jurisdiction, CIC should review current program funding eligibility in this area. Ideally, services would also develop away from the purely medical to a more holistic model that includes social, religious and cultural factors (see Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012 for one model). An inability to address one's mental health issues as a result of violence, war, torture, rape and other forms of abuse impacts the refugees settlement and integration process. This may exhibit through poor attendance in language classes, inability to concentrate, depression, irregular sleep patterns, domestic violence, and challenges to properly parent. Psycho-social supports aim to foster resilience, heal psychological wounds, and facilitate better coping skills. With multi-year resettlement commitments from protracted refugee situation, it is time to review current program funding eligibility. Australia's federal settlement program, as an example, has funded psycho-social programming for refugees for several years although health is a state responsibility;

9. The Government Transportation Loan Program should be disbanded for resettled refugees. High income insecurity and low economic integration among Karen are similar to those experiences by other refugees from protracted refugee situations. While the research findings indicate a high repayment of the loan within three (3) years, families must allocate scarce resources that negatively affect their ability to meet basic necessities and growing housing costs. With refugee selection increasing from protracted situation, the interest bearing loan program should be terminated.
10. The issue of securing and maintaining affordable housing is a growing crisis that needs to be re-evaluated through new solutions such as a one year national CIC housing supplement. Even in Langley, a city with rental costs well below those in other Metro Vancouver cities, the Karen are experiencing significant housing affordability challenges. As was found within the Karen community, families are living in overcrowded units and are at risk of absolute homelessness, not just the “hidden homelessness” proffered by scholars.
11. Language acquisition is key to long-term settlement success, as such there is a need to re-evaluate existing models of language provision and explore new approaches. The ability to converse in English is vital for not only do language skills open up employment options it is just as important for non-economic reasons as speaking English. Learning methodology in English language classes should be reviewed for possible greater impacts and outcomes. Through focus groups and key informant interviews, several Karens mentioned that classes would benefit by having an interpreter in the class to assist in the language acquisition process. This is not part of current thinking in which full language immersion forces students to learn and use language (ie only English is spoken in the classroom). With the arrival of increasing numbers of refugees, including those who may be illiterate in first language, there is a need to consider alternative approaches to language classes;
12. Citizenship changes can adversely impact refugee newcomers. While Canada invites and assists resettled refugees to immigrate to this country as permanent residents, in the same stroke, this population is increasingly unable to obtain citizenship because of their language skills. Karen refugee newcomers may wait decades to obtain Canadian citizenship because of the higher official language standard required. There appears to be a disconnect, whereby we select refugees for resettlement on the basis of their need for protection and a durable solution to protracted situations but, after we have offered them an opportunity to rebuild their lives in this country, they are not able to fully participate in civil society because of an inability to seek citizenship.

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