

---

***Regional Consultations on Services to Newcomer & Ethno-cultural Minority Children, Youth and Families***

**Consultation Summary**

**Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC**

---

**Acknowledgements**

AMSSA thanks the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) for supporting the consultation process and report. AMSSA gratefully acknowledges the United Way of the Lower Mainland for its financial support.



## Introduction

The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) supports community services providers who work with ethno-cultural minority and newcomer children, youth and families throughout the province. In the fall of 2009, AMSSA and the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth began a dialogue on the issues facing newcomer and ethno-cultural minority children and youth. This initial discussion led to a collaboration, with RCY facilitating AMSSA's ability to conduct regional consultations with newcomer children and youth service providers across British Columbia.

In February and March 2010, four regional consultations were held in Vancouver (Metro Vancouver -February 2<sup>nd</sup>), Abbotsford (Fraser Valley -February 16<sup>th</sup>), Nanaimo (Vancouver Island-March 2<sup>nd</sup>) and Kelowna (Interior/North-March 16<sup>th</sup>) respectively. At each consultation, based on a set agenda with guiding questions (Appendix A), service providers brought forward issues and barriers affecting newcomer and ethno-cultural minority children, youth and families. They also discussed the current services available and possible ways to better meet the needs of this population. This consultation summary report documents the observations of consultation participants.

**The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)** is a provincial not-for-profit, non-partisan umbrella organization representing and serving more than 75 immigrant settlement and multicultural service agencies across British Columbia. AMSSA members are mandated to address a broad spectrum of multicultural and immigrant settlement and integration issues in their communities. AMSSA acts as a central resource for member agencies working in large urban centres and smaller communities. AMSSA's services and engagement extend to all levels of government, as well as to relevant public institutions, the private sector, community groups and the general public.

In 2009, the **AMSSA Newcomer Children's Advocate Program** was launched to build capacity in the area of early and middle childhood of newcomer children. AMSSA is currently working with its member agencies and other stakeholders to improve the outcomes for newcomer children – their cultural transitions, their social integration, their schooling outcomes, and their physical and mental well-being. AMSSA gratefully acknowledges the financial support provided by the United Way of the Lower Mainland for this program.

**The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth** supports children, youth and families receiving or seeking to access designated services or programs provided or funded by government. Designated services include services under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, early childhood development or child care, addiction services for children, mental health services for children, services under the *Adoption Act*, services under the *Youth Justice Act* and services under the *Community Living Authority Act*. It also includes additional services or programs prescribed by regulation under the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

Responsibilities of the Representative include advocating for children and youth under the age of 19, ensuring that their views are heard, their interests are considered and their rights are upheld. The Representative is particularly concerned that young people in government care – such as those in foster homes, group homes or youth custody – do well. These children and youth face greater challenges than those in the general population, especially related to health and education, incarceration and dependence on income assistance. The Representative also advocates for systemic improvements to the child serving system in British Columbia.

The Representative's work is based on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The Representative does not work for the government; rather, the Representative for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Legislature and does not report through a provincial ministry.

## Definitions

### **Children and Youth:**

Definitions of “children” and “youth” vary dependent on the programs, policies or legislation being referenced. The *Representative for Children and Youth Act* defines a child as being any individual under the age of 19 and a youth as being a person between 16 to 18 years of age.

For the purposes of this report, “children” is defined as between the ages of 0-12; more specifically, early childhood is from age 0-6 and middle years from 7-12. “Youth” is defined as a person between the ages of 13-19 years old.

### **Ethno-cultural Minority:**

According to The Employment Equity Act, “visible minorities” are: Persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Glossary, Statistics Canada, retrieved April 6, 2010).

“Ethno-cultural” refers to ethnic or cultural groups to which an individual belongs to by race, language, or religion at birth and is tied to ancestral roots that is more than a distant grandparent (Canada's Ethnocultural Mosaic, 2006 Census: Definitions, Statistics Canada <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-562/note-eng.cfm>).

This report uses the term “ethno-cultural minority” to describe individuals who belong to minority ethnic communities in Canada. Individuals belonging to ethno-cultural minority groups may also be visible minorities (e.g. Asian, Black) or they belong to an invisible minority group e.g. (Caucasian German) but still experience challenges to settlement due to language and cultural differences.

### **Newcomer Children:**

Our definition for “newcomer children” are children aged 0-12 years, born outside of Canada or born in Canada but one or both parents have immigrated, or have refugee or temporary resident status. The term “newcomer” is used rather than “immigrant”, as it is a more inclusive category encompassing immigrants, temporary foreign workers, live-in caregivers, and international students.

### **Regions:**

This report defines the regions of British Columbia according to AMSSA’s representational structure. The boundaries of Vancouver Island and the Interior/North are self-explanatory. Metro Vancouver includes the cities of Vancouver, Burnaby, Coquitlam, Tri-Cities, New Westminster, Richmond, North Vancouver and West Vancouver. Fraser Valley includes the cities of Surrey, Delta, Langley, Abbotsford, Mission, Chilliwack, Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows and their surrounding areas.

The regional consultations included participation from a variety of sectors, including settlement, early childhood development, education, and counselling. Appendix B provides a list of agencies represented at the consultations.

## **Acknowledgement**

AMSSA extends our sincere appreciation to the consultation participants who gave of their valuable time to share their knowledge and experience with us.

## **Participants’ Observations**

Participants’ observations have been organized into categories based on a number of consistent themes that arose in the consultation meetings. These categories are:

- Adaptation/Integration
- Language
- Family Structure
- Mental Health Concerns
- School
- Support Services
- Service Gaps
- Recommendations

### **Adaption/Integration**

Participants stated that the priority need of newcomers (immigrants and refugees) is settlement – adapting to a new culture. For some newcomers there is an initial stage of culture shock. They may be moving from a more rural to a more urban environment. They may have lived in a refugee camp for many years before being relocated to a Canadian city. Their racial and/or religious identity may be in the minority in their new community. Or perhaps they have yet to acquire English as an additional language. It was noted by consultation participants that in the settlement process so much of the emphasis is on the newcomer looking forward – moving and settling – that they are not

given permission to engage in another important aspect of settlement – looking back. Not enough time is given to the exploration of newcomers' origins. In order for a healthy identity to emerge, newcomers must be provided the opportunity to integrate their identity of origin with the evolving identity of their adopted country.

#### ***Refugee specific issues***

*While we have defined newcomers as being inclusive of immigrant and refugee populations, participants stressed the need to clearly acknowledge a distinction between the experiences and needs of refugees and other immigrant categories. For example, individuals who are in Canada as refugee claimants do not have the access to services that sponsored refugees and other immigrants have. They remain virtually in a state of limbo until their claim is reviewed and a decision rendered. Some refugees spent many years in a refugee camp, including children born and raised in camps, or have lived in two or three countries before settling in Canada.*

*When settling in Canada, refugees often need more time than other newcomers to decompress and share their stories before they can focus on integration activities. Service providers recognize that refugee status clients need to be in a state of "readiness" before they are able to successfully participate in services being offered such as ESL classes or child care. At first they are more likely to look within the sub-community of their own ethnic enclave for friendship and support. They may need to feel familiar and safe with their own circle before they are comfortable enough to explore further into the broader community. It was also noted that building social components into integration support programming assist in integration as friendships are formed while clients engage in activities they enjoy. Youth soccer was used as an example of a social program element.*

Linkages need to be established between newcomers and host communities in order to support newcomer families' adaptation and integration. Newcomer families need to know that it's okay to ask for assistance and they need to know how to access the supports that they need. They need help in navigating the various systems they are now coming in contact with. Community support workers link newcomer families to schools, health care, and other important government and community services. For example, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS workers), will inform immigrant and refugee children, youth and families about Canadian norms, explain to them how to access services at school and in the community, and will sometimes accompany youth to support agencies to ensure that they connect with appropriate resources. The aim is to create greater confidence for children, youth and families to eventually know how to access the services needed and how they can contribute to community health.

Another challenge for newcomer families is that the adaptation and integration process can take place over many years, sometimes generations. For example, new issues may arise as children move through the various developmental stages. A family may face integration related issues when their child reaches adolescence, even though the family has been in the country for 10 years. Technically a newcomer family that seeks settlement support after being in the country for five or 10 years is not eligible for settlement supports and cannot be a priority for settlement service agencies, however agencies do try to support to the degree they are able.

Consultation participants noted that unrealistic and artificial deadlines for newcomer settlement services are currently in place. In terms of how the success of government funded settlement programs is measured, the expectation is for settlement to occur in one to two years. In addition, the measures of success used tend to focus on the labour market readiness of the parents. The adaptation and integration process for children and youth has not historically been an area of focus in government settlement programs.

In reality, one or two years is not typically enough time for newcomers to develop the language skills, labour market readiness, and community connections to successfully integrate. A specific example provided in the consultation was the expectation by program funders that newcomers are labour market ready after completing a six month job readiness program, while in reality it takes approximately three years for many newcomers to find success in the labour market. Participants further noted that because of the pressure on newcomers to get into the labour market immediately, coupled with obligations to sponsors, they often are not in a position to pursue the educational opportunities that could ultimately contribute to better long term economic outcomes for their families.

Participants identified a number of other factors that contribute to the challenges to the adaptation and integration of newcomers and to the social cohesion of the community as a whole. Because it is often low wage and/or part time jobs that are available to newcomer parents, they must work multiple jobs in order to meet the needs of their families. This, in addition to the pressures of caring for their families, results in these parents having very little, if any, time to seek and access the community support that could assist the families' adaptation and integration process. As a consequence some newcomer families are either extremely isolated or connect and socialize almost entirely within their own ethnic enclave and do not interact much in the broader community.

Newcomers are viewed as being "a problem" by some members of host communities because the dialogue around newcomer issues tends to focus only on the challenges of adaptation and integration for newcomers and host communities, and does not highlight the assets they bring to the community. In order to foster a sense of belonging for newcomers and a greater sense of social cohesion in communities, there needs to be not only an understanding of the challenges that newcomers face but also an appreciation of the strengths they bring that will contribute to the overall social capital of communities. Another factor in the development and maintenance of social cohesion is mutual trust. Some newcomers are fleeing countries in which they experienced flawed systems and corrupt authorities. Once in Canada, they are once again being encouraged to trust government systems and authorities and support services funded by government. Understandably, it will take time and experience for that trust to be built, as trust is established through relationships.

## **Language**

The topic of challenges faced by newcomers who were not proficient in English was the most prevalent theme in all of the consultation sessions. English language proficiency was noted as being contributory to any other challenge that newcomer families face. In

addition, newcomers are not challenged just by English language and literacy proficiency; some newcomers also have low literacy levels in their first languages.

In newcomer families adults and children tend to have different rates of English language acquisition. Children typically are able to acquire the new language more quickly than their parents. Out of necessity, children sometimes become the language and cultural interpreters for the family, which can have a harmful effect on family dynamics, leading to role confusion and adult responsibilities being inappropriately placed on children. For example, sometimes children are used to translate their parents' legal documents or accompany parents to medical appointments.

While translation services are a necessity when working with many newcomer families, in smaller communities, professional translators may be members of the same communities as the families that require the translation services. The families may be reluctant to use the service for fear that the translator may breach confidentiality or harshly judge the family for the challenge with which they are dealing.

## Family Structure

During the settlement process the family structure and dynamics of newcomer families are impacted in numerous ways. Often the process itself creates change to the family structure. For example, in some situations one parent emigrates first, living and working abroad perhaps as a temporary foreign worker or live-in caregiver. Many years can go by before the family is reunited, which can lead to a loss of attachment between children

*A single mother of a 7 year old works 6 days a week. Mother did not quit her job when she lost her parent and a month later her husband. Her priority was to report to work and she would not even consider taking sick benefits through employment insurance when her doctor suggested it. She was reluctant to apply for benefits under Employment and Income Assistance Program, Rental Assistance Program, Child Care Subsidy and so on. She is aware of the impacts of her working condition on her, her son and the relationship between her and her son. She knows that her son was really close to his father and any amount of time she can spend with him is very helpful for both. While there is strong willpower at play, one of the contributing factors for such action is family sponsorship application. She wants her parent and a sibling to join them in Canada. She needs \$41,198\* per year until two family members are issued Canadian Immigrant Visas. She certainly does not make the \$19.81/h needed to allow her to work only 40 hours each week. While there are many studies done on immigrants, their priorities, work to meet basic needs, and lack of awareness of programs and services, what isn't mentioned is that there are times when child neglect is due to the family sponsorship policy of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.*

**Settlement Worker, Lower Mainland**

and parents. In the intervening years, children can grow from being toddlers to being



*A Filipino woman came into our office in tears. She came to Canada as a Caregiver. She had not seen her son for 5 years, and he was now turning 13 and attending the local high school. She was having a very difficult time, trying to discover the nature of their relationship. The roles were very mixed. Sometimes she would try to be his friend, sometimes an authoritative mother figure. Neither seemed to work well. He had just been suspended from school. He had dyed his hair blond, wore earrings and had now disclosed to her that he was gay. Obviously he was also trying to "fit in" and was also having great difficulty.*

**Settlement Director, Interior**

teenagers. They are no longer used to the formerly absentee parent in the role of authority figure, decision-maker, nurturer and disciplinarian. As the parent seeks to resume these roles it may cause a great deal of pressure and confusion for the children, the caretaker parent, and the parent attempting to re-establish his or her roles. Therefore for some families the integration process is twofold: they are integrating into Canadian society at the same time that they are reintegrating as a family. They are relearning how to be a family together in the Canadian context, which, out of necessity and a desire to adapt, may not fully reflect how they functioned as a family in their country of origin.

Typically individuals decide to immigrate with their family to a new country to improve life circumstances for themselves and their children. Once they relocate the reality of their situation in their new country and community may not be the positive picture they had envisioned. Their economic and social status may change dramatically. They

may have been highly regarded professionals in their home country, but find that once in Canada their foreign credentials are not recognized. They may find themselves isolated due to language barriers and lack of transportation, while at the same time being suddenly faced with many mounting pressures: the pressure to learn a new language quickly; the pressure to find employment to sustain the family, even if they are not yet proficient in the language; the pressure to find affordable housing for the family; the pressure to enrol their children in school; and, the pressure to find a sense of belonging for the family in their community.

Poverty is a reality for many newcomer families. Their basic needs for food and shelter are not being sufficiently met. It is not unusual for newcomer families to have larger family units than the majority of Canadian families. It is a challenge to find affordable appropriate living accommodations for the family. Participants noted that unscrupulous landlords exploit these families due to the desperate situation they find themselves in. Poverty is also manifested in a poor diet, increased health issues and underperformance in school.

Participants identified domestic and family violence, drug and alcohol abuse and other mental health concerns in newcomer families as issues of concern for which the various stressors and the issue of role confusion mentioned previously may be factors. The link between isolation and depression was specifically stressed. In one consultation session participants observed that they are becoming increasingly aware of domestic violence issues in situations where Canadian men have sponsored foreign brides and their isolated situation has prevented the women from accessing support services.

Community-based support services for newcomer families assist families in dealing with isolation and the accompanying cycle of depression by facilitating the creation of social connections. Participants stated that, unfortunately for some individuals, the social connections made while engaged in community programs are not maintained once the

*Last May I received a phone call late at night from my Mandarin speaking Board member, in distress. An acquaintance had been arrested and my board member did not know what to do. Her friend had only been in Canada a few short months, married to a Canadian man she met in China. She has a daughter who was 14 at the time of this incident. The man was abusive in the home, yelled and shouted at her and her daughter constantly. Would not allow them to speak mandarin together, would not let them cook Chinese food. He was very demanding in every way imaginable. She was tired of his abuse and announced that she was going to leave him. An argument ensued and he had pushed her down the stairs even though the daughter was still in the house. His wife then left the home, in order not to be late for work. However he was quick thinking and called the police and reported HIS WIFE for assault. The RCMP arrived at her workplace and arrested her. The daughter was still in the house with her husband. The RCMP did not seem to notice that there was a minor in the home. I was called to help the newcomer remove her belongings from the home the following day, and at that time I suggested to the RCMP that the daughter should not be left with this man alone. We made arrangements for them to stay in a local hotel, until we could get them into the Transition house. This whole incident was a nightmare, apart from the fact that the RCMP never thought to question the motives of the husband, and simply took his complaint at face value. The wife and daughter spoke only limited English and did not know the community well at all. Thankfully she was attending our ELSA classes and had met our Board member. So she did have some support from our staff and volunteers.*

*I wish I could say this was an isolated incident, however we have many "foreign brides" married to Canadian men, who are experiencing significant challenges, especially when they bring children into the home. Often the Canadian partner has more knowledge of systems, legal issues, etc.. and often the women are being forced to negate the needs of their children in order to please the man who is supporting them both.*

**Settlement Services Director, Interior**

services end and they return to a fairly isolated situation. It was also noted that in some cultural communities it is the norm for women to seek permission from their husbands before they or their children can participate in community life. Women and children who

do not receive this permission have limited interaction beyond the home, extended family, and their own cultural group.

Many parents are unable to provide the full attention that their children require while they are also trying to deal with the multiple pressures facing them. The parents are either at school (e.g. ESL classes, career preparation courses, accreditation upgrades and exams), working, or sometimes a combination of the two. Often newcomer families are living in poverty and/or parents are working multiple low wage jobs in order to support the family. An example was provided of a young child about ready to enter the school system. This child had speech difficulties that seemed to go unrecognized because they were a family living in poverty and her mother, a single parent, was working three part-time jobs to try to make ends meet. Older siblings were the caregivers. Consequently the mother had very little time to interact with her young child. Was she able to spend more time with her child, she may have picked up more quickly on the speech delay. Participants reported that, consequently, newcomer children sometimes feel a lack of love and affection from their parents.

Another factor that can impact the relationship between newcomer parents and children is that as some children become increasingly proficient in English, their proficiency with their language of origin may start to diminish, while at the same time their parents remain much more comfortable in communicating in their first language rather than in English. This negatively impacts the ability of children and parents to effectively communicate. Some participants noted that they were also alarmed to find that some children speak “broken” English and language of origin. They are proficient in neither.

It was further noted by participants that some newcomer children are gaining a greater level of sophistication in learning to deal with various social systems than their parents, so the danger is that in some instances children have been known to use or misuse the information they have about “how things work in Canada” to manipulate their parents into decisions or a course of action they might not otherwise take. An example provided was that of a child telling their parents that the child tax credit money sent to the parents was to be given directly to the child. The child told the parents that they would call the Ministry of Children and Family Development to make a complaint if the parents did not give them the money. That being said, it is not always possible to shield or isolate children from the impacts of settlement being faced by their parents. The settlement process affects every member of the family and the issues are often interrelated. Therefore, support services must also reflect this reality.

### ***Integration and Adaptation Challenges for Newcomer Children and Youth***

Participants also touched on themes specific to the unique settlement experiences of children and youth. Most children and youth experience culture shock upon moving to Canada similar to their parents. However, unlike their parents, newcomer children and youth did not decide to immigrate to a new country. The decision was imposed on them. While it can be argued that adults who come to Canada as refugees also did not necessarily have a choice in their relocation, even in this situation adults tend to have a

more sophisticated understanding of why the relocation is required. Children and youth are in the position of being impacted by a life-altering decision over which they have limited understanding and little to no control.

As stated in a previous section, in the settlement process, out of necessity, suddenly there may be new expectations in terms of roles and responsibilities children have within the family unit. They may become the primary caregiver for younger children as the parents work or attend settlement classes. They may also be working themselves to contribute to the family income. At the same time they may face expectations of educational excellence from their family while adapting to a foreign education system and school culture.

In their role as language interpreters for the family, children of newcomer families are often called upon to support their parents in discussions with outside agencies, to read letters and documents for their parents, to assist the parents in writing letters, completing forms, and so on. Therefore, these children are exposed to information and stressors that children in most families are shielded from. This role diffusion is also difficult for parents as it can serve to undermine their sense of authority in the home and their sense of confidence in interacting with outside agencies, schools in particular, as the primary advocates for their children. Participants noted that some parents are unable to read the school notices or report cards sent home to them so they may not be aware of, and are unable to address, challenges or problems their child may be experiencing at school. Additionally, some newcomer parents cannot effectively participate in parent/teacher conferences due to linguistic challenges and cultural differences.

An additional feature unique to the immigration experience of newcomer children and youth is that children and youth are immigrating while they are also in the identity formation process. Connection to cultural community is an important aspect of identity formation. This connection is challenged, disrupted and needs to be re-formed when the child or youth relocates. Their vulnerability is heightened if they are moving to a community where for the first time in their experience they are a member of a racialized group or visible minority, and become targets of racial discrimination. Racism impacts an individual's sense of identity, positive self regard and internal locus of control.

Children and youth experience racism at school and elsewhere in the community in the form of bullying and exclusion from activities. They may be teased and judged because of the sound of their name or because they are not proficient in English. One participant provided the tragic example of a 15 year old youth from an immigrant family who was incessantly bullied and eventually committed suicide. Other participants noted that some communities are quite closed and non-accepting of differences including race and culture. They also spoke of the dynamics in small communities where the racial makeup is fairly homogeneous. In describing one such community in the interior, a participant stated that visible minority children and youth do not feel welcome amongst the larger white population. Newcomer children face discrimination, racism and violence. This service provider observed that the newcomer children internalize this racism and will do

anything to be accepted by their white peer group, including acts of violence. She further stated that for these children, it is more important to be accepted by their peers than by their family. Others noted that students (youth) coming to these communities from refugee camps are routinely labelled as violent solely based on that history.

Participants point out that many parents are eager to immigrate to Canada with their families, however once here some parents resist the influence of Canadian culture on their children. They believe that Canadian norms are much more permissive than their traditional cultural values and/or their religious values, particularly around issues of gender relations and sexuality. Service providers are often in the position of having to convince newcomer parents that their perceptions of Canadian norms are inaccurate. For example, some newcomer parents mistakenly believe that Canadians believe it's appropriate for children as young as 12 or 13 years old to smoke or engage in sexual activity.

At the same time, newcomer children and youth struggle with understanding where they belong. They are reminded of their responsibility to maintain cultural traditions by the family while they are also worrying about how they are being viewed by peers in their new community. In order to facilitate their sense of belonging and be accepted by their new peer group, newcomer children and youth seek to adopt the language, dress, and activities of other children and youth in their school and community. They may want to develop friendships with peers of both genders, while their parents frown upon interactions with members of the opposite sex. Bicultural conflict, which involves the dynamic of parents holding firmly to traditional values while children seek to adopt the culture of the new community, is a common experience for newcomer families that may continue into the second generation.

Participants mentioned a number of issues that can impede newcomer children's and youth's success at integrating into their new peer group, school and community. The paramount barrier identified in this regard was limited English language proficiency. Another concern noted was that newcomer children and youth are often excluded from the very activities and social systems that could facilitate their integration and sense of belonging such as sports, and recreation and art programs. In addition to language barriers, access to these activities is limited due to their need to work to help support the family, taking care of younger siblings while their parents work or go to school, lack of transportation to attend activities and/or the expense connected to program participation. Participation in these activities provides children and youth the opportunity to connect with and be mentored by new friends. Observing and interacting with their new peer group in a variety of settings, provides them with "cultural translation", that is, they learn both the formal etiquette and cultural norms of the society and are exposed to the informal social norms such as colloquialisms, slang, and general exposure to youth culture that is not directly taught.

While participants clearly understand the need for newcomer children and youth to "hang out" with other children and youth, they also acknowledge that there are limited avenues and opportunities for this to take place. Participants recognized that even for

those agencies that do have youth buddy programs, the programs are not resourced to effectively meet the needs. Most programs take place once a week over a two to three month period. Most of these programs also do not address a fundamental need of newcomer youth – life skills training for the Canadian context. This has been pointed out as being particularly important for refugee youth, whose exposure to some of the day to day conveniences that we take for granted, such as transportation systems, grocery shopping, and navigating the school environment, may be extremely limited.

In summary, many newcomer children and youth struggle with balancing their family's traditional preference for interdependence between family members and the more prevalent value placed on independence and individualism in Canadian society. One of the biggest challenges newcomer children and youth face in their adaptation process is multiple, and often conflicting, expectations from family, peers, and the school community. These children attempt to navigate two worlds and multiple sets of expectations, with varying degrees of success. They have two faces, one at home and one in school and community. In each of those settings they have learned to conceal the aspects of their identities that they have learned are inappropriate or unacceptable. Many newcomer children do not have an environment in which they are confident that expression of their whole identity is acceptable. Parents have reported that while they want to assist their children, support them through the challenges and protect them from negative experiences, they often feel incapable of doing so as they have no point of reference from their own childhood to relate to their child's experience. Participants acknowledged that there are very limited resources available to parents and children to explore this issue. Service providers agree that bicultural parenting is extremely challenging.

### **Mental Health Concerns**

A certain percentage of the newcomer population have pre-existing mental health concerns, as do all populations. Some newcomers, particularly refugees, are also coming from situations in which they experienced and/or witnessed horrendous atrocities. These realities, and/or the overwhelming stress that many newcomer families face when adapting and integrating into a new society, can result in mental health concerns including anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder.

Newcomer families tend to experience a higher level of isolation and more limited peer and community supports than most other populations. Depending on the family's cultural norms, mental illness in the family could be viewed as an embarrassment or stigmatizing, and they may view a request for mental health supports as negatively impacting the status of the family in their community. An additional barrier for some newcomer families is their lack of information about mental health issues and a lack of trust in the mental health system and services available. They may be reluctant to expose their family's vulnerabilities if experiences with the political climate or dynamics in their country of origin taught them that it is dangerous for those in authority to know of areas of "weakness" in their family.

Participants pointed out that there is a lack of services, particularly counselling services, to support the mental health needs of newcomer children and youth. Newcomer children and youth have similar mental health needs to newcomer adults. Unfortunately the trauma and stress experienced by children and youth sometimes go unnoticed. They may have experienced trauma in their home country, such as witnessing the violence of war. They may be worrying about friends and family left behind in situations where there may still be unrest. In addition, they may be experiencing separation and attachment issues if they have been separated from parents or parental figures during the immigration process. They could also be exposed to violence in the form of domestic violence in the home or bullying or racism in their new school and community. Parents may not be aware that their children may be in need of mental health interventions. They are often focused on the daily survival needs of the family and coping with their own adjustment issues. Children and youth are often left to deal with their mental health concerns on their own.

When working to connect newcomer children, youth and families to mental health supports, service providers report that supports through the provincial health authorities and child welfare system are unable to effectively meet the needs for a number of reasons including: the lack of necessary language capacity, limiting their ability to communicate with parents and children; limited understanding of the trauma experienced by newcomers, particularly refugees, and how the trauma impacts individuals at different developmental stages and phases of life; and, insufficient training on how to work with families holistically.

Service providers have been told by mental health practitioners and educators that it is difficult to provide accurate psychological and psycho-educational assessments of children if they are not proficient in English because the assessment tools are in English only. If English only assessment tools are used, the resulting assessments will not be reliable or culturally relevant and may in fact be detrimental to the children. On the other hand, lack of assessment often leads to children going for years without appropriate mental health supports and intervention. Mental illness, trauma, or other special needs may not be caught early and appropriately treated or addressed. When assessments do take place there are sometimes misunderstandings or misdiagnoses of concerning behaviours, particularly in very young children. For example, children's misbehaviour in school may not be recognized as the response to stress or trauma that it may be, but may instead be labelled as a misdemeanour deserving punishment.

A further point of frustration expressed by participants is their experience in seeking assistance from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) when newcomer families need support in dealing with the acting out behaviours of their adolescent family member(s). Participants report being told by MCFD staff members that they don't have the assessment tools and/or skills to appropriately diagnose the youth's issues. A few participants also noted difficulty in connecting newcomer families with children with special needs, such as autism, with support services through MCFD. Oftentimes no immediate support services are offered to the family by the ministry, however as the youth's behaviour continues to escalate, the youth may subsequently be



removed from the family. Participants pointed out that this is woefully inadequate practice in terms of cultural competency. They suggest that in these circumstances the ministry should: be in dialogue with community; seek to understand the cultural context and norms of the family; ensure that their actions don't "criminalize" the youth; keep the best interest of the child as a priority; and, seek alternate approaches to removal when possible.

## **School**

### ***Education Funding***

The Ministry of Education provides block funding to school districts to support the educational needs of newcomer students. The districts submit funding requests to the ministry, based on new enrolment data identifying the numbers of newcomer children enrolled in the districts in September of each year. Additional enrolment data identifying newly arrived refugee children is submitted to the ministry in February so that the districts can receive supplementary funding to meet their needs. Other new immigrant children are excluded from the February count.

Newcomer children arriving and enrolling in school districts outside of September and February are not funded as they were not identified in the enrolment data submitted. While there are issues with this funding cycle, participants noted that in the past the count only happened one time per year, in September.

February has now been added to identify more of the refugee children entering the school system which is an improvement, but children are still missed.

### ***English Language Proficiency***

Once again language barriers were raised by participants as a principle concern in regards to newcomer children's success in school and the establishment of positive working relationships between school personnel and newcomer parents. In British Columbia, the languages of our school system are English and French. In the majority of schools the language of instruction is English, with the exception of the French Immersion Program and a separate French school

*Many teachers have argued that we are not really helping by encouraging use of the home language as it will only serve to put the children 'behind' when they begin school. This is very short-sighted in my view but I do understand the challenges and it will likely take another generation to work out how to be truly bi/multi-lingual and bi/multi-cultural so that these individuals - our future Canadians - move with ease from one language and culture to the other without anyone seeing it as a negative. How can we afford to continue this waste of intellectual and linguistic and cultural capital by devaluing it? I think we will come up with 'better' ways to see this challenging opportunity.*

*We need to think outside the box or we simply perpetuate the not always so wonderful status quo. How to go about this sort of creating multilingual education programs is the big question.*

***Elementary School Teacher, Vancouver***



district. Though invited to participate, the French school district was not represented at the consultations, therefore, the issues presented here will focus on English-based programs.

Limited English language proficiency inhibits parents' and students' understanding of how the school system works and how to work with the schools to resolve issues that arise. When children cannot speak English or their English language proficiency is limited, they are unlikely to be able to function effectively in a classroom setting. Participants believe that the importance of English language acquisition is underemphasized in the school system. There are insufficient English as a Second Language (ESL) trained teachers, resources and curriculum.

While the value of English language proficiency for the successful integration of newcomer children is important, sometimes the language issue overshadows the settlement service needs of newcomer children and youth who are English speaking. The erroneous assumption is often made that ESL services and immigrant settlement services are one in the same. There must be an increased recognition amongst educators and other professionals of newcomers' settlement issues beyond that of language acquisition, accompanied by an increased ability to identify those children and youth needing non-language based immigrant settlement services. Settlement issues for newcomer students identified by participants include: social isolation; lack of understanding of social etiquette of peers and community; low self-esteem; and, lack of

confidence to speak out and participate in classroom and school activities.

***Experience of newcomer child in school (Translated by child's mother from Korean to English)***

*At first time, I don't like to go school, hard to know understanding of English. So I don't want to go school. I am getting to know, I have a fun. I like a PE class and an art class. I have a close friend now, I am happy with her.*

*It is different in Korea we have lunch first then we will have a play time, but Canada, we do outside play first then we eat a lunch.*

*It is very strange to me; even it is a rainy day still in recess hour we play outside. But I have found that many Canadian friends are having fun outside when it is a rainy day too. In school I am happy with a teacher and a helper teacher (EA).*

*I like the Friday because it is a popcorn day and Slush day too.*

*Sometimes in the recess hour I could do extra activities like sewing, Lego, Walking etc. But my younger sister, \_\_\_ she is in grade 1, they all have to go outside for the recess time.*

***Newcomer Child, Grade 5, Vancouver Island, emigrated from South Korea in September 2009***

***Cultural Differences in Educational Systems***

Participants further stated that the reality of "cultural differences" of educational systems in different countries are not usually discussed or acknowledged. In adjusting to the culture of a new school system, newcomer families must respond to new gender role expectations, differing expectations in terms of parental involvement in school activities, advocacy on behalf of

their children, parent-teacher relationships, teaching style/teacher expectations (e.g. quiet listening-speak when specifically asked by teacher vs. active interaction and questioning by students). Some newcomer parents feel that Canadian schools do not expect very much from students in terms of homework and studying outside of school hours. Others feel that schools don't focus enough on "moral teachings" in addition to academic subjects.

There are unspoken values imbedded in the Canadian education system, as there are in the systems which newcomer families are more familiar with. Because these values are not explicitly stated, judgements are made about newcomer students and their parents by educators, and about the school system, by newcomer families, without full understanding. For example, our education system places a great deal of value on school readiness for preschool children, while in some cultures the emphasis for that age group is attachment to family. Newcomer families may feel pressured into school readiness activities such as sending their children to preschool, whereas from their cultural perspective the primary purpose of the early years is for the children to bond with family and extended family. From their perspective attachment may be the more critical element. Newcomer families who do not engage in school readiness activities in their children's early years may be viewed as damaging the future of their children or not assisting their children to reach full potential. At the same time, newcomer families who place a high priority on attachment may view sending their children into structured environments, away from family, for hours at a time each day as being damaging to their children's development.

Participants also acknowledged that early intervention services that can assist parents and educators to identify the adaptation and learning needs of young children before they enter the formal school system (e.g. pre-kindergarten) can be extremely beneficial to a child's school success. The challenge for newcomer parents is learning about and understanding the educational values of the new society which are presented to them as being normative standards, and then determining if/how to integrate these new values into their cultural perspective on child rearing and education. The challenge for some educators is first of all to acknowledge that what they recognize as normative standards are actually a values perspective and other equally valid perspectives exist. Underlying values in child-rearing and education are not normative everywhere and no one perspective is always "right". While all should be done to ease the transition for newcomer children into the North American way of life including schooling, it's also important to ensure that the families' norms of child-raising and education are

*Re: school readiness - as an early childhood educator I think schools should be way more ready for children than children ready for school, and there is the challenge for us as ECE parents and teachers to find out how to figure this out.*

***Elementary School Teacher, Vancouver***

acknowledged, valued and respected.

Insufficient communication between educators, other professionals, families and children may also result from some educational professionals' inability to identify with newcomer issues. For example, a teacher may label a newcomer child's acting out behaviour as behaviour misconduct when in fact the behaviour is the result of trauma prior to settling or from the stress of the settlement process itself. On the other hand, the behaviours of a child who has come to Canada as a refugee may be assumed to be a manifestation of Post Traumatic Stress disorder, when in fact they have other underlying mental health or special needs issues that have not been identified. All of this can lead to newcomer children's learning, emotional and other special needs not being identified or sufficiently supported within the system, as noted in the previous section on mental health issues.

Newcomer children also have a heightened vulnerability to experiencing violence at school in the form of physical bullying, racism and social exclusion, impacting their emotional health and sense of safety in their new environment. These children and their parents may not be aware of who they can turn to in the system for support.

### ***Academic Progress***

While there are some specific challenges related to the integration and adaptation of newcomer children in the early years, participants also pointed out other key points of vulnerability for older newcomer children and youth in the school system. Participants noted integration challenges for children in and around grade four. They believe that this may be because it is at about the time that curriculum starts to be more academically focused and children are given more homework. Sometimes newcomer children's understanding of the lessons, or their ability to complete the assignments, are affected by language barriers, different educational background, or other challenges, and some teachers do not know how best to support the children.

Most districts are not resourced to provide additional assistance to these children after school. Tutors may be helpful, but their services are expensive and many newcomer families cannot afford these services. This is a point at which educators observe a gap building between newcomer children and classmates in terms of their academic progress and sense of belonging to the school community. This gap also spreads as many newcomer children are unable to take part in after school academic and recreational activities in school and community due to responsibilities in the home, in particular the care of younger siblings while parents are at work.

*Mom and dad moved from Japan to Canada twelve years ago. Their children were born in Canada. Their two boys are in school (grade 4 & 2). Both boys are taking ESL support within the school system. The family speaks Japanese at home. The boys communicate effectively in English, but mom and dad have not taken to the English language easily even when they are very active parents by taking ESLA classes and other sources of ESL classes for adults.*

*The parents have mentioned to their SWIS worker that they feel they, as parents, cannot help their oldest child in school. The child's teacher has noticed that the gap of the child's educational development is increasing now that the child is in grade 4, in comparison with the child's classmates.*

*The parents are concerned that they cannot help their child with math homework as they do not understand the child's homework and homework instructions.*

*Their SWIS worker found private tutors and after school programs in the community; however, the parents cannot spend \$20-40 an hour for a tutor when money is tight. Some schools have homework clubs that administrators run; however, this help might be intimidating for an ESL family. A Homework Club that helps immigrant children or second generation Canadians would be a great resource to have; however, many small communities do not have that luxury.*

**SWIS Worker, Fraser Valley**

### ***Demographic Isolation***

Another issue impacting the education of some newcomer children from specific cultural communities was categorized as “demographic isolation”. This term was used to identify a situation in which groups of families from a particular cultural community live and work together as a part of a farming community. They generally do not mix with the broader community. These families leave their farms and communities for the winter months, taking their children with them and returning to their home countries. The children miss two months of school and need to catch up on what was missed when they return. According to participants, other people in the school community start to resent these families and their children, as they feel that this pattern of removing the children regularly holds entire classrooms behind, as these students require more attention from teachers in order to catch up with their peers. As an example, one participant noted that 250 families based in an interior community leave the community each winter to return to the Punjab in India. The school district has been in discussion with community leaders about this issue. From this participant's perspective, temple leaders place a greater emphasis on maintaining culture of origin than on building relationship to the local community. This observation demonstrates an ongoing philosophical debate in settlement circles as to what is the appropriate balance between maintaining culture of origin and adapting to a new cultural context.

### ***Educational Needs of Newcomer Children and Youth***

There was a very strongly held sentiment amongst participants that our education system is also failing to meet the needs of newcomer youth. Participants cited two main themes in this regard with a number of sub categories. The first theme is that newcomer children and youth often enter the system with assets that go unrecognized or that are viewed as deficiencies. While some newcomer children may not be at par with their same age peers in terms of academics, they are often skilled beyond their peers in other areas, for example language proficiency (some newcomer students are multilingual) and resiliency based on life experience (e.g. survival skills). Acknowledgement of these assets are not incorporated into the mainstream curriculum or teaching. Thus an important point of engagement with this student population is missed.

The second theme centres on the lack of resources, or inappropriate resources, to meet the needs of newcomer students. Participants mentioned inappropriate assessments and lack of suitable curriculum materials designed for the distinct educational needs of newcomer students as examples of resource limitations. They also discussed the inequitable distribution of resources throughout the province. Resources are mostly centred in urban areas. Sometimes newcomer children's needs are missed or they get "passed around" because no school personnel has been specifically assigned responsibility for these students. Some districts have the services of Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS workers). Others do not. There is general agreement amongst participants that access to SWIS workers is hugely beneficial to the successful integration of newcomer children and families into the school system. However, some community based SWIS workers express experiencing resistance from educators when they seek to become involved with newcomer students in the schools, perhaps due to a lack of understanding of the services SWIS workers provide to newcomer children and families.

Some districts have reception services and specific reception classes that newcomer children attend before integrating into the general student population. Reception services provide pull out programs to help newcomer children with introductory English, make connections with the local community, and specifically designed lessons. Other districts are not resourced to provide reception services. Representatives of one lower mainland school district stated that in their district newcomer youth are scattered between schools. There are not enough newcomer student populations in any school for the district to be able to implement a reception class model, as funding is based on the number of newcomer student they have per school. While this district's SWIS workers represent 22 different language groups, they do not have workers that speak all of the languages of the newcomer student population.

The lack of reception classes makes it particularly difficult to appropriately support refugee youth. Many refugee youth come to Canada with little to no formal education while residing in the refugee camp, many for most of their lives. It is not uncommon for a school district to be challenged with placing a 15 year old youth who has a grade one or two education, and limited English language skills, in an appropriate classroom setting.

These children do often find themselves in grade 10 classes with same age peers but without the academic foundation they need to succeed. On the other hand, to place these children with much younger children who are at an equivalent educational level would also be inappropriate.

Older newcomer youth are especially challenged as they have a very limited time period to adapt, integrate, learn the language and catch up with peers academically before graduation. Sometimes these youth are pressured by unrealistic expectations. Their family may expect them to not only graduate with their peers but to also be able to move immediately on to university after graduation. Participants suggested that for many of these youth what is really needed in order for them to succeed is a curriculum focused on career preparation.

When newcomer youth are not academically and/or socially successful in the school setting they are sometimes placed in alternate school programs. However, participants state that they are finding that these alternative settings are also inappropriate and the youth continue to face difficulties. The current alternate school programs are geared towards meeting the needs of youth with addiction issues, mental health issues such as suicidal ideation, and youth involved in high risk activities such as gang activities. They are not resourced to contend with the settlement and adaptation issues of newcomers. Oftentimes these youth, facing minimal success and social isolation in the school system, seek other avenues to find that sense of belonging and community. Unfortunately this sometimes leads to the youth disengaging from school entirely and becoming involved in anti-social actions including recruitment in youth gangs.

### ***International Students***

And finally, in relation to the education system, participants noted that school districts also host international students. Individual school districts manage their own fee based international programs. International students are not eligible for government sponsored support services to newcomers. While they share many of the challenges faced by newcomer students and their families, they are often in more isolated situations as they do not have their families with them and may be more susceptible to depression and abuse. Some participants expressed concern that this could be a particularly vulnerable group as they are very young, some at the middle school level, and live with host families. There was concern that without close monitoring these students' rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child may be violated and they would not be able to access recourse mechanisms.

### **Support Services**

Immigrant settlement and support services play a vital role in the adaptation and integration of newcomers to B.C. communities and supports communities in welcoming newcomers. A large portion of the consultation participants were representatives of community support agencies. They were very clear about the importance of the work they do to support families and communities but they also acknowledged a number of challenges and areas where improvement is needed.



Participants stated that first and foremost we need to better recognize the strengths and assets that families bring with them. Programs need to be able to adapt to support what families are already doing for themselves, rather than making families adapt to ready-made programs that may not fit their needs. It was also noted that at times programs have too many eligibility requirements. Many families do not meet these requirements and fall through the cracks.

A key insight brought forward in the consultation sessions is the fact that services tend to stress individualism or independence and develop programs to meet individual needs. However, many immigrant families operate from the perspective of collectivism or interdependence, so the programs often do not effectively meet the needs of the family as a whole. In fact, participants have observed that while well intended, this service system that works with family members independently rather than as a whole unit, can actually intensify conflicts in the home. It is important to empower everyone in the home through access to services. It is particularly helpful when the services are integrated and family members are engaged in programs together.

Families often lack awareness and understanding of the services available to help them, where these services are located in the community and the roles of the various helping professionals. The service delivery system in B.C. may be very different than what they experienced in their country of origin. They may be fearful of approaching those they view as being in authority or may not trust service providers. Some families believe that outsiders should not be made aware of or become involved in the family's challenges, conflicts or internal disputes, or they may be feeling shameful for the situation they are in and don't want to access services for fear of exposure and possible negative consequences. There appears to be a particular misunderstanding in newcomer populations about child welfare services and a fear that if parents contact child welfare services for help, or if children contact child welfare services, the children will almost certainly be "apprehended" or removed.

*This is a contribution by one of our clients who is a refugee protection claimant. She was raped in her home country and soon found that she was pregnant. She made the journey of an illegal immigrant through the United States and into Canada, where she claimed protection as a refugee in early 2009. That same year, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. She would like to say that her experience in Canada while she was pregnant and now as a new mother has been a very good one. She has felt welcomed and supported by the members of the community where she lives, especially when she developed post-partum depression. She is very pleased that agencies such as \_\_\_\_\_ exist to help people like her learn English and get connected with the services that they need such as counselling for her depression and moms and tots programs for she and her son. She says that if it had not been for the help of \_\_\_\_\_ and the people in her community she would have felt very lost and discouraged.*

***Refugee Claimant (as told to Settlement Worker), Interior***

Sometimes children become more aware of the services available to help the family than the adult member of the family. Participants report that some children will not contact government or community service agencies for support, even though they have the contact information because they are respecting their parents' wishes for family privacy. On the other hand some children use the information they have as a threat to their parents, for example, threatening that they will call various help lines if they are unhappy with their parents' decisions or actions.

Service providers recognized that they have to find a balance between competing needs to best support newcomers' integration. Newcomers need time to adjust to their new environment, particularly if they are coming from traumatic situations or very culturally and linguistically different environments. On the other hand, settlement service programs are only accessible to immigrants for the first few years in the country, so they may be in danger of losing valuable support services. If we wait for them to be "ready" for services, they may miss the window of opportunity to access services. Participants identified a number of lessons learned in terms of how to effectively connect with newcomer families. Sometimes it's difficult for service providers to "find the way in" to work with newcomer families and/or for a number of reasons newcomer families will not come out of their homes to access services. There can be a very low trust factor at play; parents may be isolated and don't socialize in the community; and, sometimes women are not permitted to mingle or communicate outside of the home unless the family approves. As one participant put it, service providers need to do "deep support work" with families. Part of that work is to walk alongside the newcomer families, orienting them to the services available in the communities, for example, helping them to enrol their children in school or find a family doctor. They have found that children and extended family (e.g. aunts and uncles) can sometimes be the gateway to the family. Service providers have also found success in reaching out to families by doing home visits rather than expecting the families to come to them. They also report that trust develops much more quickly when working with families one-to-one rather than with groups of families at a time. Sometimes families do not return after participating in an initial group session due to issues such as cultural relevance, cultural misunderstandings or lack of English language proficiency. However, the one-to-one and home outreach approaches are labour intensive and can involve safety risks that must be assessed and mitigated.

Services are most effective when they recognize the unique circumstances of families. This can only happen through working with families in a culturally competent manner. The service provider needs to both understand the cultural framework of the family and assist the family in understanding the laws and cultural norms of this society. Though not always possible, it is particularly helpful when the service provider shares the cultural heritage and speaks the language of the families with whom they work. Participants do not feel that our current services are sufficiently culturally competent.



## Service Gaps

While participants acknowledged the increased funding transferred from the federal government to the B.C. provincial government for services to newcomer families and many areas of improvements to services in recent years (e.g. SWIS workers in schools program), they also pointed out the service gaps that continue to exist. Services gaps are not only the result of a lack of resources. In fact some participants stated that for the most part sufficient resources exist to provide the basic services needed. The pressing issues are decision-making regarding the distribution of services and service access.

Most newcomer families don't know where and how to access all the services they are eligible to receive. Services provided to newcomer families by service agencies play an important role in decreasing a family's sense of isolation. However, once a program is completed, there are not a lot of other programs for the family to become involved in. The family is often cut off from community and the connections are lost. Other access barriers include families' financial challenges, lack of transportation, and in some cases lack of child care to enable parents to attend programs such as ESL classes. Child care subsidy is difficult to obtain and there are lengthy waitlists for service. Even service providers in the field have limited knowledge of the range of government and community service available to newcomer families. In particular, they have limited information on which areas of government are responsible for funding specific programs or for providing specific services. For example, many participants stated that they were unaware of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth and the Office's advocacy support function. Participants stressed that resources are lacking in the areas of language and cultural translation and interpretation, advocacy supports for newcomer families, preventative services such as anti-racism and anti-bullying programs and cultural competency training and development for staff.

One of the main challenges to this service sector is the recruitment and retention of frontline workers who both speak the language(s) and understand the culture(s) of the newcomer families served and have the necessary skills to effectively support the families' integration into their new environment. Service providers need ongoing training on working with various cultural communities, particularly as source countries of

*We do what we can. I believe we do much better than most. At least we have a culturally sensitive perspective, we understand the trials of coming to Canada that many newcomers face. We see the issues on a daily basis and navigate them with care and consideration. This is not to be discounted when working with issues of this nature. It is not simply a question of offering counselling or knowing whether one is supposed to look a person in the eye or not. That is not "cultural sensitivity". The question really is what kind of supports the newcomers need and who is best prepared and immersed in the Immigrant serving sector, in order to provide an approach that best suits the clients.*

**Settlement Director, Interior**

newcomers to B.C. change over time.

Some participants expressed concern that, to their knowledge, there is no provincial government department specifically responsible for planning and delivery of support services to newcomer children and youth. They point to a lack of connection between the mainstream early childhood education programs taking place in schools and

#### **YouthCan Program**

*The YouthCan program was highlighted in a consultation session as an example of a success program for newcomer youth between 15 and 25 years old. The program targets youth who are out of school and are unemployed or underemployed. The program works to connect youth to school or employment, and also has recreational and ESL components. The program structure consists of six weeks in the classroom and of out of class experience.*

**Surrey**

communities and settlement services for newcomer children. They acknowledge the wonderful service SWIS workers provide to children and youth in the school districts that have established a SWIS program. However, SWIS workers are not mandated to assist newcomer children and youth with academic issues or who present mental health issues and challenging behaviours. So service gaps in these areas remain. The need for school-based and community-based mental health services to newcomer children was stressed.

Middle childhood (e.g. 6-12 years of age) was identified as a particularly vulnerable time in children's lives. The observation was made that there are very little settlement services that specifically target newcomer children in this age category. It was pointed out once again that children should be receiving settlement services ideally at the same time and in the same venue as their parents. Under this service model more

newcomer families could access services as parents would not have to secure child care in order to attend and their children would benefit from interacting with other children who are also newly arrived and settling into a new school and community. They may gain strength from sharing with each other aspects of their experience that they may not feel comfortable in sharing with their parents or other adults.

Lack of services and programs tailored to the needs of newcomer youth was also acknowledged as being a service gap. Participants conceded that the traditional means by which community agencies promote their settlement services to adult newcomers may not effectively engage newcomer youth. Service gaps to newcomer youth include opportunities for youth to connect positively with adult role models beyond the school environment, community based ESL and integration programs and programs to address mental health and emotional challenges. Service providers working with newcomer youth and their families are not sufficiently trained to understand and assist families to work through the complex issues that create conflict between newcomer youth and their parents/elders. Primary areas of distress for newcomer youth are the bicultural conflict they experience when they are pressured by differing expectations in home, school, community and peer group in regards to discipline and cultural norms. Newcomer

youth are challenged to maintain respectful observance of family norms while at the same time trying to find their place in their new environment. For visible minority newcomer youth, their racialized status in the community, and the racial discrimination they may face, adds another dimension to the emotional distress often experienced. A specific newcomer youth settlement service plan with accompanying youth-friendly engagement strategies and service options, and specific training and development programs for agency staff working with newcomer youth, is required.

Inequitable funding for youth services around the province was also mentioned in the service gap discussions. Participants noted that there are two funding streams for settlement and integration services for youth in the province. One funding stream is for the Lower Mainland and the other stream funds programs for the rest of the province. Concern was expressed that most of the funding is routed to the Metro Vancouver area. There was also concern about lack of clear criteria related to the funding of newcomer youth programs, resulting in scattered programming around the province. There was general agreement on the need for consistent funding criteria for youth programs throughout the province.

Overall, participants pointed to a continued lack of coordination of services and programs within communities and across the province. There appears to be little communication or collaboration between government agencies funding programs targeting newcomer and ethno-cultural minority populations. Within this sector many services are funded as pilot or demonstration projects. This creates service instability as the services sometimes end when the pilot funding runs out. Many difficulties ensue from this pattern of funding. Service agencies are not in a position to commit to long term employment for project staff as the staffing dollars are dependent on the renewal of project funding. Therefore the professional development of staff to build their skills and competencies in this area and staff turnover are constant challenges. Innovative, creative approaches to service delivery are abandoned as enough time is not provided to develop and solidify the program or service and determine the effectiveness of the approach. For example, it is generally recognized within the sector that an integrated, intergenerational approach may more effectively engage newcomer families in services. However, programs continue to be developed in silos. Different programs are developed separately for parents, elders and children. While some distinct services are necessary, it would also be beneficial to families, and respectful of how many extended families are naturally structured, to also offer more services and programs that families can take part in together. A positive step in this direction would be the development of concurrent programming for family members, offered in the same location at the same time. Greater movement in this direction requires a long term commitment from funders.

Participants believe that the provincial government has a key role to play in ensuring that information sharing, collaboration and coordination of services takes place. However, rather than cooperation and collaboration, current government funding processes often leads to an unhealthy competition for funding dollars at the community service delivery level. There is also inconsistency across the province in terms of how service providers work together to serve the newcomer population. For example, in

some communities SWIS workers from community agencies work within the school setting. In other communities there is resistance to having community-based SWIS workers in schools. In some communities newcomer services are provided to temporary foreign workers. In other communities these services are not provided. Participants state that this discrepancy exists because government has not applied consistent funding criteria across the province.

Government agencies must also ensure that the direct services they provide to newcomer and ethno-cultural minority populations are easily understood and accessible. A service provider gave the example of her attempt to contact the Income Assistance department within the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD) on behalf of a client. Rather than connecting to a local office, calls to Income Assistance are now directed to a central call centre. The participant felt that she spent an unreasonable amount of time waiting on the phone only to be disconnected before she was able to speak to anyone at MHSD. While she was extremely frustrated with the experience, she wondered how much more frustrating it would be for a newcomer, especially if their English language skills are limited. That experience, in and of itself, could discourage an individual from pursuing the assistance they need.

The relationship between service sector agencies, schools and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) was also raised as an issue of concern by participants. Newcomer parents have told service providers that they are fearful and feel powerless when interacting with MCFD. They have heard many stories about newcomer children being removed from parents and placed in ministry care. They sometimes have not been made aware, or do not accept, that certain discipline styles or cultural practices that they consider to be the norm are considered abusive within the Canadian context. Service agency staff and school personnel are often faced with the dilemma of working very hard to develop a relationship of trust with newcomer families while at the same time having a duty to report incidents of child abuse or neglect they witness to the MCFD. When concerns are reported to MCFD, the trust relationships that have been developed with newcomer families are damaged. In addition, participants identified a lack of resources to aid them in understanding the indicators of child abuse and neglect in newcomer homes. While they sometimes suspect that abuse or neglect is taking place, they are concerned that they may be mistaking an unfamiliar cultural practice with abuse. This apprehension is compounded by participants' perception that many MCFD protection workers are not sufficiently culturally competent to intervene in a way that ensures the safety of the children but also maintains the integrity of the family when possible.

The administrative process connected to accessing government services, in particular the complex application forms to be completed before services are rendered, were also noted as being huge challenge to service access for newcomers. Newcomers are faced with multiple forms requiring duplicate information even though many of the agencies requesting the information are a part of the same provincial government. Some forms use terminology newcomers are unfamiliar with or that have a different meaning in their country of origin. In addition, most forms aren't available in various languages and

limited translation services are available. This is particularly an issue for newcomers who don't belong to larger ethno-cultural minority communities in the province, whose languages are more likely to be acknowledged and accommodated by government. Participants stressed that it is of fundamental importance that government complaint processes should be accessible to newcomers in their first language.

And finally, participants noted as a service gap the complete lack of support services available to international students (including children, youth, adult students and their spouses) as they do not have an immigrant status. Particular concern was raised about the lack of monitoring of the safety and well-being of children and youth in British Columbia as international students.

## **Recommendations**

The four regional consultation sessions yielded a number of thoughtful suggestions from participants on how to improve supports to ethno-cultural minority and newcomer children, youth and families. Improvements to the integration and adaptation supports available to these target populations serve the broader goal of social cohesion throughout B.C.'s communities and Canadian society generally. The following is a summary of recommendations that were made by consultation participants.

### ***Government Funding Structure & Immigrant Settlement Services***

- As the adaptation and integration process can take place over many years as newcomer children and families move through developmental stages, funders should consider extending the eligibility for settlement supports beyond the two to three years that is the current criteria. It should also be recognized that there are second generation children, youth and families who have the same challenges as newcomers.
- Government should provide pre-departure orientations for children immigrating to Canada. Currently adults get pre-departure orientations but children and youth do not.
- There are very limited programs and/or services specific to newcomer and ethno-cultural minority populations in areas outside of urban centres. A government funding structure, based on a province-wide strategic plan, with transparent and consistent criteria, should be applied across the province to ensure a coordinated response and equitable access to support services.
- The current funding structure creates competition between agencies for limited funding dollars. Government funders should work closely with community based agencies to ensure that services are relevant, effective and coordinated.
- Community agencies are experiencing continuously changing funding requirements that leads to program instability, resulting in more families in need

left without service. Effective services require government's long term commitment to service development/delivery, not just project-based funding.

- Provincial government multiculturalism and immigrant settlement services should be located within the same provincial ministry, as effective integration involves both settlement services for newcomers and education in anti-racism and diversity for the entire population. [*Recently provincial government and immigrant settlement services were assigned to the same ministry; however, the need for ongoing communication and cooperation between the sectors continues to be of concern.*]
- An information portal should be created to be shared by funders, service providers and consumers throughout the province. The information portal would have a service map identifying services available province wide, a section that responds to frequently asked questions, and a section that provides statistical information on the numbers of newcomer children, youth and families settling in B.C. communities each year and their source countries.

### ***Community-Based Settlement/Integration Programs***

- The full spectrum of services to newcomers (e.g. therapeutic, settlement, advocacy, and training) needs to be more fully developed to support their integration and adaptation.
- As many immigrant families operate from the perspective of collectivism or interdependence, programs that are reflective of this perspective, encompassing the whole family, are likely to be more effective for some families than programs geared only towards parents, children or elders, in isolation. Programs should be developed that focus on the family learning together. For example, a homework program could be developed where newcomer parents could learn how best to help their children with homework. In some cases, it may be preferable to have programs running concurrently for family members. They may not be involved in the same service but the services take place at the same location at the same time.
- In terms of supports to newcomer children, children between six and 12 years of age are particularly underserved. More support services are needed for newcomer children in the middle years.
- A newcomer youth settlement service plan including youth friendly engagement strategies and service options, and training and development programs for agency staff working with newcomer youth should be developed.
- Newcomer children and youth that are not proficient in English should receive intensive English language training before being placed in the school system.

This is especially important for youth between grades 10 -12. Many of these youth will not graduate on time without this additional assistance.

- In order to combat the isolation that many newcomer families experience, more programs are needed that not only provide information and skill development but that also provide social networking opportunities. This is especially important for families in which women are isolated in the home or where they may be one of a few visible minorities or language minorities in their school or community. Nobody's Perfect parenting program was identified as an example of a program that enables parents to form social connections.
- While recognizing that the same service model will not work for all communities, we should also be careful not to reinvent the wheel but should draw on effective service models already being used with other populations and in other communities such as Aboriginal communities.
- Part of the funding for immigrant settlement services should focus on building welcoming communities. It takes time to build rapport between various groups.
- In order to attract workers in the immigrant settlement sector with the education, skills and competencies required to develop and deliver effective programs, compensation must increase to reflect the level of expertise required.
- Resources should be invested in the recruitment and retention of frontline workers who speak the language(s) and understand the culture(s) of the newcomer families served and have the necessary skills to effectively support the families' integration into their new environment.

### ***Training***

- Training must be recognized as an ongoing need and funded as such, because the makeup of newcomer populations and community dynamics change over time and the skill set needed by service providers is constantly evolving.
- Increased training in the areas of diversity, cultural competency and anti-racism needs to be increased for those working with newcomers and ethno-cultural minorities specifically, and in the human services sector generally. Settlement workers, educators, and practitioners within the Ministry of Children and Children and Family Development were viewed as being priorities in terms of this training.
- Service providers also require more skills to work with newcomer families dealing with the various dynamics within the settlement process that challenge the integrity of the family such as role reversals, inappropriate discipline, parent-teen conflicts, isolation, discrimination, domestic violence, mental health and poverty.

- Service providers require training in effective advocacy in order to assist newcomer children, youth and families to navigate the various service systems and to break down the barrier to receiving the services they need. There is a particular need to advocate for the educational and mental health supports that newcomer children and youth require.
- MCFD staff and settlement service staff require training on how to effectively deal with disclosures of child abuse and neglect in newcomer homes.

### ***Information for Families***

- Newcomer parents need to be provided with information about Canadian norms and laws related to child rearing and discipline.
- Programs need to be developed to assist newcomer parents in learning child rearing and discipline techniques that are consistent with Canadian laws.
- Government agencies and community services agencies must consider the importance of extended family and cultural community when developing services and programs. Some newcomer and ethno-cultural minority families are more likely to seek assistance from their extended families and cultural communities than to turn to community service agencies for support.
- Many newcomer families have only heard about MCFD as being “child snatchers” from those in the community that may have had their children removed, or heard only about MCFD’s child protection role. Newcomer families need to be oriented to the full range of MCFD services as a part of their overall orientation to community supports. This orientation will help families to understand that MCFD’s primary goal is to support a healthy family environment for children, not to threaten the integrity of the family unit, and that the removal of children is only contemplated when there are no other options that will ensure children’s safety.

### ***Advocacy***

- A national children’s advocate office should be established to ensure that children across Canada are well supported by federal and provincial government funding. A national child advocate would also have a pivotal role in overseeing services to refugee children as refugees fall under federal rather than provincial jurisdiction.

### ***Recommendation to the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth***

- It is important that the connection the RCY is making to the immigrant settlement sector and ethno-cultural minority serving agencies be kept viable. Information



about the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth and its advocacy services should be distributed:

- in schools
- in newsletters for service providers
- in community newspapers
- through brochures written in plain English and translated into various languages;
- through B.C.'s Child Care Resource and Referral network; and,
- through information and links placed on the websites of child and family serving agencies.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC extends our sincere appreciation to the individuals who participated in our regional consultations and the agencies that they represent. You shared with us your successes, challenges, frustrations, and most importantly your recommendations for improving services to newcomer and ethno-cultural minority children, youth and families in order to better meet the settlement, adaptation and integration needs of these populations. We would also like to thank those participants who provided us with the case scenarios included in this report. It is our hope that this summary document will be used by all who participated in the consultations to further the dialogue at the local, provincial and federal levels, with service providers, policymakers and funding agencies.

# APPENDIX A

## AGENDA Regional Consultation The Representative for Children and Youth Office

- 9:30 Welcome and introductions
- Review objectives of the day
- 9:45 Roundtable discussion – identifying issues and barriers
- *What are the main issues or barriers for ethno-cultural minority and newcomer (immigrant and refugee) children and youth?*
- 10:30 Refreshment break
- 10:50 Discussion – service gaps and awareness
- *Do the current government services to children and youth meet the needs of ethno-cultural minority and newcomer children and youth?*
  - *What are the gaps in government services to children and youth?*
- 11:30 Recommendations
- *What could be done to better meet the needs of the ethno-cultural minority and newcomer children and youth?*
  - *What would be the best methods of raising awareness of the role and mandate of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth?*
- 12:00 Adjournment

## APPENDIX B

### Consultation Participant Agencies:

#### Metro Vancouver

BC Mental Health and Addictions Services  
Burnaby Family Life Institute  
CHIMO Crisis Services  
Collingwood Neighbourhood House  
Coquitlam School District  
ELSA Net  
First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Immigrant Services Society of BC  
Kiwassa Neighbourhood Services Association  
Language and Literacy Education, University of British Columbia  
Little Mountain Neighbourhood House Society  
Lower Mainland Purpose Society  
Mount Pleasant Family Centre  
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House  
Multicultural Helping House Society  
Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities (MOSAIC)  
North Shore Multicultural Society  
North Vancouver School District  
Pacific Immigrant Resources Society  
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.  
SHARE Family and Community Services  
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House  
Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society  
Vancouver Foundation  
Vancouver School District  
West Vancouver School District  
YMCA of Greater Vancouver

#### Fraser Valley

Abbotsford Community Services  
Abbotsford School District  
BC Healthy Living Alliance  
Chilliwack Community Services  
DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society  
ELSA Net  
Langley Community Services Society  
Mission School District  
OPTIONS: Surrey Community Services  
Progressive Inter-Cultural Community Services Society

#### Vancouver Island

Campbell River and Area Multicultural and Immigrant Services Association  
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society  
Cowichan Intercultural Society  
ELSA Net  
Greater Victoria School District  
Nanaimo Ladysmith School District

#### Interior and Northern BC

Community Connections of Southeast BC  
Kelowna Community Resources Society  
S.U.C.C.E.S.S. – Northern BC Newcomers  
Integration Service Centre  
South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services  
Vernon and District Immigrant Services Society

