OUR COMMUNITY, OUR VOICE: THE SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION NEEDS OF REFUGEES IN SURREY, BC
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This project has been deeply collaborative and would not have been possible without the efforts and support of many people and organizations.

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And last, but certainly not least, on behalf of the research team, I would like to thank the new and recently settled refugees, service providers, agencies and community stakeholders that participated in this study. Without their insights and contributions, the depth, perspective and creation of this report would not be possible.

Stephen Dooley
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I hope that our thoughts, ideas, comments, solutions will be taken seriously. I would love to see them on the ground, not only written on walls.”

Refugee Participant (Community consultation – SFU Surrey campus, May 7th, 2015)

This research project is grounded to the perspective of refugees, service providers, and concerned citizens who bring divergent sources of expertise to the understanding of refugee settlement and integration in Surrey. In keeping with this quote, we are privileged to be able to contribute to the development of a plan that will support the needs of refugees settling in the city of Surrey.

Introduction

The OCOV project examined the needs and challenges refugees face settling and integrating in Surrey, and explored potential solutions, actions and promising practices to remediate these issues. In order to gain relevant and effective insight, the study drew on the local and experiential knowledge of new and recently settled refugees, community stakeholders (i.e., local and provincial organizations that offer settlement services to refugees and their families), as well as civic, business and community leaders in the city.
Key Research Questions:

1. What are settlement barriers faced by refugees and how are they being addressed in Surrey? Are there Surrey-specific settlement barriers that can be addressed?

2. How do existing settlement practices support refugee integration into Surrey and are there gaps in services that need to be addressed?

3. As the largest recipient of refugees in the province, what level of understanding and awareness do civic stakeholders have of refugees?

4. What constitutes community settlement planning for refugees and how does it impact or support refugees? How does it impact or support the community?

5. Are refugee settlement supports adequate and coordinated in Surrey to the maximum benefit of the community and the refugees themselves? What needs to be done?

This project was grounded to the Active Community Engagement Model (ACEM) developed by Dooley, Gagnon, Bhatt and Tweed (2012). The ACEM builds community capacity throughout the course of the research project by directly engaged community stakeholders, city leadership, and refugees themselves throughout all stages of research development and implementation, so that the research became a template of inclusion, relevance, and integration.

Method

The OCOV Advisory committee comprised of 22 community stakeholders guided the development and implementation of the project. A total of 12 Research Assistants (RAs) - 4 SFU students, 1 KPU student and 7 Community RAs – were hired for the project. The 7 community RAs were themselves refugees and came from Myanmar, Somalia, Iraq and El Salvador.

A literature review was completed and shared during a community consultation day held on May 7th, 2015. A total of 65 participants from refugee and immigrant agencies, local government, healthcare, academia and new and recently settled refugees came together to review the literature, discuss current practices, and explore strategies for enhancing services.

Figure 1. on the right provides an outline of the focus groups conducted during this study. 16 focus groups (a total of 104 participants) were held during in the Fall of 2015. The focus groups were conducted with refugees – both youth and adult – across 5 distinct cultural groups (Karen, Arabic, Spanish, Swahili and Spanish (South America)), as well as diverse classifications of service providers (i.e., frontline staff who work directly and indirectly with refugees, City of Surrey leaders and sectorial leaders).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sectorial Focus Groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 City of Surrey Planning Leaders</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Frontline Refugee-Direct Services</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Frontline Mainstream Non-Direct Services</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sectorial Leaders</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Focus Groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Refugee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Arabic speaking</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Karen speaking</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Somali speaking</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Spanish speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Swahili speaking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refugee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Arabic speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Karen speaking</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Somali speaking</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Spanish speaking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Swahili speaking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privately Sponsored Refugees</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ Refugees</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Results

In conversations with both service providers and refugees, and in keeping with lessons from the literature review, it was decided to organize the results according to the following settlement stages: Pre-Arrival, Arrival, Settling In and Long-term. These stages are by no means perfectly demarcated. Indeed while issues like housing, employment and language training can and do span all stages, the categorization is useful for identifying critical pathways in the settlement process and thereby to understand how best to coordinate service delivery.

In relation to each of these stages, below is a summary of the findings reflecting the lived experiences of refugees in this study, and those involved in supporting their settlement in Surrey.

PRE-ARRIVAL

Over dreaming but under prepared:
Refugees described leaving their countries of first asylum with high hopes, yet underprepared. The study revealed that pre-departure communications, both formal and informal, created an overly optimistic picture of resettlement in Canada.

All focus group participants felt they could have been given more detailed information about what to expect when they got to Canada (i.e., they wanted to learn more about specific services and how to access them).

When probed about what they were told about Canada prior to arrival they mentioned they had been advised to expect frustrations when they got to Canada. “Don’t expect there won’t be challenges in Canada” was a title of a video they all saw before traveling to Canada. One participant mentioned she saw the video on a bus travelling to Lebanon from where she would be flying to Canada. The video depicts a woman from Africa who tells the viewers that it took her 5 years before she felt settled in Canada. The participants recalled that many of the passengers began to cry when they saw the video and wanted to go back home.

Refugees are remarkably resilient:
Along with histories of trauma and hardship, refugees are bringing resiliency, resourcefulness, courage and survival skills. The participants referenced the difficulties they had left, and hinted at ways these experiences may have longer term implications for settling in.

Fleeing difficult decisions:
Almost every Somali woman who participated had made the impossible, forced decision to leave children behind.

Alongside the guilt and grief of divided families, refugees are experiencing the on-going mental health consequences of trauma. The prolonged precarity, deprivation and repeated exposure of threat or violence that is fairly common among refugees are conditions that increase the risk of psychological impairment. (eg. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Refugees in this study reported experiences that fall far short of providing the security, connection, and meaning needed by trauma survivors.

ARRIVAL

Jet lagged but asked to focus:
Refugee participants described their early days as intensely emotional, a blur of confusion and excitement, uneasiness with the unfamiliar and uncertain, all compounded by extreme physical exhaustion.

Participants admitted that they were too weary and worried about finding housing to clearly focus during the initial housing orientations upon arrival. Those who had settlement workers (or community volunteers) who could do home visits, co-national friends experienced in Canadian living or were privately sponsors fared better.

With limited stays in the reception centre, orientation begins on day two and refugees are expected to be independently housed within two weeks. However, most participants reported being far too exhausted and confused to take in the information. Refugees are navigating the incredibly important and difficult transition to independent housing within the first few weeks of arrival.

Among Government assisted refugees (GARs), the early weeks in a reception centre were recounted with stories of close-knit living with ample social interaction. Relationships formed in the Welcome House reception centre became important sources of social support.
Surrey is the destination for the highest proportion of refugees in BC:

In recent years, Surrey has become the arrival city for 25–40% of BC’s refugee newcomers, 2015 marked a dramatic shift in refugee protection and settlement in Canada created by a change in federal government and a public awakening in Canada to the on-going humanitarian crisis and unprecedented displacement of Syrians after years of war.

On November 4th, 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau kept his election campaign commitment to settle 25,000 Syrian refugees in late 2015 and early 2016. The number of Syrian refugees who came to Canada between November 4th, 2015 and March 8th, 2016 was 26,176. British Columbia is set to receive approximately 3,500 Syrian refugees between November 4th, 2015 and December 31st, 2016, and 1,625 (including 1,541 GARs, 78 PSRs (privately-sponsored refugees) and 6 Blended Visa-Office Referred)) arrived between November 4th, 2015 and February 29th, 2016.

Around 50% of these refugees have settled in Surrey (ISS of BC).

Structural/systematic social barriers:

Social isolation became an issue for many once they left the reception centre—particularly those with limited English language capacity. Unemployment and limited access to classes frustrated participants’ efforts to re-establish meaning and purpose in their lives. Poverty undermined the security of most. Many of the refugees in this study are living in or close the poverty line - initially while on social assistance and even once employed. Most are working low wage jobs with long hours that leave them with little time or energy for upgrading language skills, education and training.

Refugees get support in Surrey:

Community organizations, settlement agencies, and schools play an enormous role in the settlement process and offer promising practices during the early arrival of refugees in the city.

Lack of Affordable Housing and Poverty:

Refugee families consistently reported their housing search as a bewildering and difficult process because of the lack of affordable homes for larger families.

Many Surrey-based refugees in this study reported living in substandard housing conditions. The social inequalities of the housing market are compounded by the difficulties of negotiating leases without knowledge of their rights as tenants. Families adjust to their small quarters as best they can, but overcrowding, intermittent utilities, and disrepair of their home environment have longer-term social, mental and physical health consequences.

If the first hurdle of housing for refugees is finding a place they can afford, the second is sustaining themselves in their homes. Electrical appliances, central heating and indoor plumbing were completely unknown to many new refugee arrivals. With a mix of humour and embarrassment, participants shared stories of mishaps during their first few months of living in Surrey.

With 50–80% of household income going to housing, money left for other essentials is inadequate. Single people on social assistance typically had $40–80 per month for food once rent and utilities were paid. In this study, a number of participants noted that they and their families are turning to food banks, not on an emergency basis, but as the only means for providing sustenance for families. Most refugees indicated that access to local food bank services was essential to their families.

Importance of translation services:

Early and on-going availability of interpretation and translation services was critical to refugees; helping them meet healthcare needs, communicate with potential landlords, enrol children in school, and decipher official documents.

Front line staff were well aware of the importance of interpretation services for refugees and expressed frustration with the lack of availability of those services, especially in some languages. The lack of interpretation in the provision of healthcare services was seen as particularly problematic.

The use of their children as interpreters (a strategy used by many out of absolute necessity) is particularly problematic in healthcare situations.

Focus on Transportation:

Refugees depend heavily on public transit to get to classes, appointments and other settlement tasks. Navigating a new city, in an unfamiliar language is anxiety-provoking, and many refugees were using public transit for the first times in their lives.

The Bridge Clinic was the first source of healthcare for refugee arrivals in Surrey. Bridge continued to provide service to refugee
claimants, GARs and PSRs despite cuts in federal funding to refugee health care in 2012 that impacted funds available for claimants and PSR. Some participants accessed healthcare at Bridge’s Surrey based clinic (The New Canadian Clinic), however, most reported taking public transit to their Vancouver location. Refugee participants were impressed by the quality healthcare they experienced at Bridge. They emphasized how happy they were that their children were getting good healthcare. Their one frustration with Bridge was the expense and challenge of transit. Typically, whole families would travel together, making a single trip to Bridge a significant expense if they did not have transit passes.

**Support from co-nationals:**

The first months are intensely challenging both practically and emotionally. This is a critical time for support, in particular from co-national communities as peer support. Many times this sense of community was cited as a positive factor during this critical stage of settlement.

There was a sense of pride shared by refugees who had been able to provide peer support to those who have recently arrived and/or volunteering in the community in other ways.

**The many faces of trauma:**

There was a recognition that mental health problems can sometimes be masked (e.g., aggression) and that mental health literacy and trauma awareness training was necessary to support and engage refugees.

**SETTING-IN**

**Transportation Loan:**

Families are forgoing basic necessities to repay transportation loans.

**Importance of work, lack of meaningful work:**

Refugee participants expressed eagerness to find work and pride in having work. However, almost without exception, the pathway to employment was fraught with difficulties. Across language groups participants voiced frustration with the uncertainty and rejection of job-seeking in the Lower Mainland, discriminatory hiring practices, the requirement for “Canadian experience” on a CV, and the lack of language capacity to carry out jobs they were otherwise capable of.

Introductions by co-national friends seemed to be the most successful job search strategy for refugees. “Because of a friend” was a common refrain among those who had work, highlighting the value of social networks among co-national friends in finding first jobs.

This participant spoke about an informal network within the Karen community to help others find work. Many from the community ended up working in low paying jobs at this particular site. While he was very thankful for the opportunity the participant mentioned that most people who work there feel ‘stuck’ with little prospects for advancement.

Parents are seeking work as quickly as possible due to the fact that social assistance support is often insufficient to sustain a family. However, language competency and lack of credential recognition means first employment tends to be in low-wage, insecure jobs. Many remain in low wage work because financial and scheduling constraints impede their ability to upgrade their language skills or employment credentials.

Consistent with other research, well-educated refugees struggled the most with working low wage manual labour. Having their abilities and status as teachers, social workers, professors and engineers overlooked and undervalued was deeply troubling.

**Importance of education:**

Refugee parents and youth valued access to elementary and secondary schooling for children and adolescents. Parents appreciated the relative ease of registering their children in schools. They felt supported in this process. Schools became an important point of connection and belonging for parents and children.

**English language training:**

Refugee participants’ comments echo research findings that language capacity is central to successful settlement. All expressed eagerness to develop their English language skills both for everyday living and for enhancing their employment prospects. However, waiting lists, access and funding were challenges.
Service providers and advocates working with refugee youth were critical of the fact that high school students in English-language learner (ELL) classes do not earn credits for these classes. For this participant, arriving with the low mood, fatigue and cognitive fog that comes with depression, limited the energy, concentration and social interaction needed for language learning.

Service providers felt strongly that language skills training should not be delivered in a one-size fits all way. Some service providers reported success using small class sizes that are goal-oriented and tailored to the individual needs of the students.

**LONG TERM**

Still hard to focus (for good reason):

The impacts of family separation are significant. One Somali woman noted, on behalf of others, that trying to learn English and pass her English class was extremely difficult as she could not focus and stop thinking about her other family members in Africa.

One of the biggest impacts of this dynamic is a sense of failure, loss of hope. As one Somali speaking women told us, “I failed the citizenship test 3 times.” Other shared similar experiences of multiple failures of tests in a variety of contexts including Surrey school district courses.

A vicious circle:

These refugees are caught in a vicious circle, i.e., language training and credential or skills upgrading that would enhance their employment opportunities are seen as the way forward, however, they are not able to achieve success in these domains because of the interaction of multiple barriers: the inequities of the job market, trauma related psychological impairment, poverty and complex family care demands.

Criminal record checks cannot be provided:

Service providers identified additional issues that may perhaps be remedied through employer education, e.g. - the requirement for criminal record checks and validated education. Many employment opportunities require a criminal record check and validated education as a matter of course, irrespective of the type of the employment.

**SERVICE SYSTEM COORDINATION**

Settlement agencies are greatly appreciated:

Refugee participants generally expressed appreciation and satisfaction with the work of settlement agencies. At the same time, many described confusion and anxiety about service access. Anxieties increased when they had difficulties reaching or making appointments with settlement workers or were on waitlists for needed support. Hearing rumours about benefits others were receiving also fed confusion.

How to enhance coordination?

There was a general consensus among service providers that better integration and coordination of services among direct service providers would be desirable. However, there was a lack of consensus with respect to how best to achieve this goal.

While some suggested that a centralized case management approach would be ideal, others felt that privacy and confidentiality were significant barriers that made this approach untenable.

The challenge of the funding cycle:

There was widespread consensus with respect to one barrier to integration and coordination: the funding model. The current funding model for agencies providing services to refugees is based on competitive applications made every few years.

Service providers identified the need for additional data to help them plan for service delivery. They reported that most of the information they had on refugees – in terms of numbers, settlement practices, availability of services – where based on their own experiences with the services they delivered.
Recommendations

Throughout the course of the project, but particularly during the focus group discussions and examination of the experiences of the study participants at each stage of the settlement process (as highlighted in the Results section of the report), refugees, service providers and community leaders proposed a number of action-oriented recommendations to support refugee settlement and integration in Surrey.

In sum, to support:

- **Additional investment into new (or calibration and streamlining of existing) settlement programs and initiatives in Surrey, addressing:**
  - (i) English language education for both youth and adult refugees;
  - (ii) Employment and self-employment opportunities;
  - (iii) Education and training for service providers, community groups and organizations directly and indirectly (e.g. including employers, landlords, and property managers among others) involved in refugee settlement;
  - (iv) Healthcare, public health education and social services programming, and
  - (v) Affordable, accessible and suitable housing options.

- **Developing a greater understanding and engagement with Surrey residents on refugee settlement and integration, i.e., through:**
  - (i) Increased opportunities and pathways for Surrey residents to engage with new refugee settlers and support all aspects of their transition, settlement and integration;
  - (ii) Diverse approaches that promote and educate Surrey residents about the refugee experience, settlement challenges and needs, as well as the social, cultural and economic benefits that refugees bring to the region.

- **Growing, facilitating and co-ordinating the sharing and communication of information (e.g., settlement programs, initiatives, resources, experiences and best practices) amongst local business, government and community stakeholders, and with regional and national partners and groups with an interest in support refugee settlement and integration.**

- **Continuing to further the quantity, quality, frequency and diversity of opportunities for settlement agencies and community resource providers to interact with new refugee settlers**

- **Developing a city-wide transit programs that improve refugee mobility**

- **Improving the settlement information provided to refugees coming to the region**

- **Supporting continued research into the needs and benefits of refugee settlement and integration in the region**
The study participants were also of the opinion that in considering any of the recommendations in this report, it was important to stress:

- Currently refugee settlement programs and initiatives in the region are often too prescribed and homogenous rather than flexible and heterogeneous to the particular needs of different refugee communities and sub-groups.

- Further assessment and implementation of any of recommendations should be part of a holistic approach (i.e., engages refugees settling (or settled) as the primary stakeholders)) that articulates a shared mission, goals, actions and desired outcomes for supporting refugee communities in Surrey.

- Refugee settlement and integration should be considered as a joint-responsibility, and that there is a need for local business, government (at all levels) and diverse community stakeholders (including refugee communities themselves) to collectively act, direct and support social connectedness, advocacy and co-ordination of resources, social planning and policy development, and communicating with the residents of Surrey.

- There needs to be special consideration given to refugees settling in Surrey with complex and multiple barriers to integration (e.g., due to trauma, physical and mental learning disabilities and demanding family responsibilities).

- All and any recommendations should be viewed to some degree or other as inter-connected.

The OCOV project team encourages the City of Surrey and the Surrey LIP to consider all of these recommendations in this report, including those expressed by the 37 participants of a community-planning day held on March 31st, 2016 at Surrey City Hall (see Appendix, pages 71-72.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Over the past year, the OCOV team has felt privileged to hear from the refugees themselves - their dreams of settling in Canada, their stories of trauma and hardship, their remarkable resiliency and resourcefulness in the face of ongoing adversity, and their deep desire to help inform and improve national and regional refugee policies and services.

We hope this that this report will serve to not only shape Surrey’s ability to support and welcome refugee newcomers, but also inform, direct and accelerate engagement.
INTRODUCTION

The Our Community Our Voice (OCOV) research project examined the challenges refugees’ face settling and integrating in Surrey, and potential solutions, actions and promising practices to remediate these issues. The research was conducted from March 2015 to March 2016 to support the development of the City of Surrey’s immigrant settlement plan in conjunction with the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (Surrey LIP).

The Surrey LIP is a consortium of government, public and private institutions business, non-profit and community agencies working together to strengthen the integration of newcomers and build a more inclusive and welcoming city.

The first phase of the Surrey LIP (April 2014 – April 2016) included the following priorities:

1. Establishing a Surrey LIP Steering Committee;
2. Conducting research and consultations;
3. Developing 3-year Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Strategies;
4. Developing Action Plans to implement the community’s strategic priorities.

The OCOV research project supports priorities 2 to 4 with a specific focus on the settlement needs of refugees. Among the LIPs that have been developed across the country, the City of Surrey is unique in that it is developing a specific plan for refugees that will be incorporated into a larger settlement plan. While the needs of refugees and immigrants are understood to be similar, the City of Surrey has played a leadership role in ensuring the needs of refugees are highlighted because:

1. In the province of BC, the City of Surrey routinely becomes home to the highest proportion of refugees.
2. Refugees have unique needs that require specific strategies and approaches in the settlement process.

This project was grounded to the Active Community Engagement Model (ACEM) developed by Dooley, Gagnon, Bhatt and Tweed (2012). The ACEM builds capacity in the community throughout the course of the research project by directly engaging community stakeholders, city leadership, and refugees themselves throughout all stages of research development and implementation, so that the research became a template of inclusion, relevance, and integration.
OCOV is an amalgamation of a core research team, research assistants and is an advisory committee of 14 different community stakeholders who helped shape the development and delivery of the project. The project also involved the hiring and training of seven research assistants who themselves came to Surrey as refugees. The project also included a smaller group of senior researchers from SFU, KPU and Surrey Schools.

The key research questions were:

1. What are settlement barriers faced by refugees and how are they being addressed in Surrey? Are there Surrey-specific settlement barriers that can be addressed?
2. How do existing settlement practices support refugee integration into Surrey and are there gaps in services that need to be addressed?
3. As the largest recipient of refugees in the province, what level of understanding and awareness do civic stakeholders have of refugees?
4. What constitutes community settlement planning for refugees and how does it impact or support refugees? How does it impact or support the community?
5. Are refugee settlement supports adequate and coordinated in Surrey to the maximum benefit of the community and the refugees themselves? What needs to be done?

For organizational purposes, this report begins with a comprehensive academic literature review that provides a framework for understanding the complexity of issues faced by refugees and describes supports that can help address settlement needs. Following this review, the report provides details about the qualitative research methods used to collect the ideas from new and recently settled refugees, settlement front-line staff and key community stakeholders about the settlement needs of refugees in Surrey. A summary of the findings is then provided, followed by recommendations based on what we heard during the data collection phase of the project.

The synthesis of the literature and the direct findings from this report lead us to two very important conclusions.

First, there are a number of systematic social barriers - poverty, unemployment, housing costs, gender identity, to name a few - that are exacerbated when it comes to the experience of refugees. It is important, therefore, that a strategy to support the needs of refugees is not a siloed plan; the approach must be fully integrated with other efforts to address broadly defined social issues.

Second, we have come to understand that the settlement needs of refugees can be understood as being along a path that is not quite a continuum, not wholly a time orientation, but a semi-porous set of periods of settlement that all refugees go through. We have defined these as: pre-settlement, just arriving, settling-in and long-term integration. The services for refugees should be in alignment and coordination of the different needs of refugees as they move through each of these settlement periods. The bulk of this report – the findings and the recommendations - have been organized according to these periods.

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Before moving to the literature review, it is important to acknowledge that 2015-16 saw dramatic shifts in refugee protection and settlement in Canada created by the change in the federal government and a public awakening in Canada to the on-going humanitarian crisis of unprecedented displacement of Syrians after years of war. The newly elected Prime Minster (November 4th, 2015) Justin Trudeau kept his election campaign commitment to settle 25,000 Syrian refugees in late 2015 and early 2016. The number of Syrian refugees who came to Canada between November 4th, 2015 and March 8th, 2016 was 26,176. British Columbia is to receive 3,500 Syrian refugees between November 4th, 2015 and December 31st, 2016, and 1,625 (including 1,541 GARs, 78 PSRs and 6 Blended Visa-Office Referred) of those arrived between November 4th, 2015 and February 29th, 2016. Close to 50% of these refugees will settle in Surrey, more than any other British Columbia municipality.

The increase in political will, public support and pragmatic resources for refugee settlement has re-energized refugee work, while the capacities of involved organizations and broader stakeholders have been stretched in an effort to meet the challenges of the ambitious timeline. The government, media and public interest in supporting the transition needs of the Syrian refugees has had a significant impact on the evolution of services, the perceptions of refugees and the settlement experiences of refugees, both from Syria and other countries of origin. At the federal level, refugees made it into the official title of the Ministry, as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) became Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRC). The policy on transportation loans was changed, with no loan repayment required for new Syrian refugees. Discussion of extending this to all refugees is underway. The funding for the Interim Federal Health program has been restored as of February 18th, 2016 and starting April 1st, the program will provide health-care coverage to all eligible beneficiaries. By April 1st, 2017, the program will expand to cover certain services for refugees before they come to Canada.
New federal and provincial funding was provided for refugee resettlement, and local agencies responded in record time with proposals for new programs. Across the province at the local level, response teams have engaged and organized the efforts of stakeholders across jurisdictions and sectors. For example, the Province has provided funding for regionalized “Refugee Response Teams” (RRTs) that will aid in making the response to the influx of refugees to the province more collaborative. The City of Surrey initiated a number of staff and community engagement activities to welcome the Syrian refugees to Surrey. The public has enthusiastically responded with goodwill offerings of clothes and other supports, overwhelming organizations’ capacities to process and distribute them. Agencies and community groups involved in refugee settlement support have created new programs to respond to the shifts in priorities.

The OCOV research project was developed and mostly implemented prior to the Syrian Refugee opportunity. Specifically, the development of the research questions, the hiring of research assistants and the implementation of most focus groups, all happened in advance. This point notwithstanding, the media and public interest in supporting the transition needs of the Syrian refugees, has had a significant impact on the evolution of services, the perceptions of refugees and the settlement experiences of refugees, both from Syria and other. The City of Surrey developed a strategy to welcome new Syrian refugees, government policy regarding the transportation loan had temporarily changed (as of April 2016, all refugees including Syrians will have to repay the loan) and services have been inundated with community aid.

The recent Syrian refugee experience has moved the goal posts in ways that have yet to be fully understood. In terms of the OCOV project, it influenced the manner in which later stages of the project were completed. For example, discussions in some of the focus groups, changes to the final community-planning day and conversations with City of Surrey officials. Members of the research team also attended community forums organized to provide more information about the local response to support Syrian refugees coming to Surrey.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Almost a third of refugees resettling in British Columbia will come to live in Surrey, British Columbia, one of the fastest growing cities in Western Canada (ISS of BC, 2014). How do people arriving as refugees engage in settlement in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada? How can community and social supports be organized and mobilized to improve the settlement experiences of local refugees? Generating community knowledge is a critical step in making Surrey a more welcoming city for refugees. Our Community Our Voices (OCOV) is a local research project, initiated by Surrey’s Local Immigration Partnership and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which aims to meet this critical challenge. As a community-engaged research project, OCOV will involve local people in the process of building knowledge about refugee settlement in Surrey with the aim of improving the conditions and supports for refugees now and in the future. Working with refugees and others directly involved in refugee settlement, we aim to jointly develop an understanding of local refugee settlement that will foster a deep appreciation and respect for the efforts of those who arrive in Surrey as refugees—the struggles and possibilities. OCOV will draw attention to practices, programs and policies that are enabling or constraining successful settlement—and identify missing elements. Doing so will enable organizations within Surrey, and the city itself, to advocate for, augment and create the social infrastructure needed to foster safety, active participation and a sense of belonging among refugee residents of Surrey.

In this review of social science research, the OCOV team has worked to convey the complexity of the refugee settlement in a style that is useful for local organizations. Forced migration profoundly disrupts every aspect of life. Survivors of persecution who seek refugee protection in Canada take on the daily, complex, and long-term challenge of rebuilding lives in their new locale. Possibilities for successful settlement are shaped by events and conditions that precede their arrival in Canada: country of origin conditions, exit, and migration trajectories. Our review of the literature starts with an introduction of the refugee protection process in Canada, then it traces the journey of refugees from persecution, forced migration, through to settlement in Surrey. First, in Forced Migration Trajectories: Policies and pathways to protection we describe ways that international and Canadian refugee protection policies create distinct pathways to protection, and the implications of these for refugees. Then, in Refugees: Understanding people impacted by persecution & displacement, we call attention to the diversity of people coming to Surrey as refugees, and highlight the four major cultural populations of refugees settling in Surrey. The next two sections examine the process of settlement itself, and the programs
that aim to support successful settlement. Typically the major settlement tasks supported through community programming are housing, education, employment, mental and physical health. We discuss each of these, while also calling attention to ways that successful settlement involves tasks that precede and extend beyond these areas. We also highlight ways that building new social networks and a sense of social belonging is integral to settlement and key to long-term integration. In the last section, we highlight some of the particular characteristics of Surrey, as a diverse, diasporic and rapidly growing city that impacts possibilities for refugee settlement and integration.

Refugees: Beyond the definition

Hope and faith
Thankful and afraid
This is the opportunity many wait for; this is the world many die for. New struggles, new concerns but alive, that is all I should care.
Not ideal some say, I can’t compare. I have food and shelter; I have a name.
I fear no longer the stranger at the door.
I run no more from the darkness of the world.
I have a place; I miss my place
I can’t complain.
This is the opportunity many wait for; this is the world many die for.

“Refugee” is a categorization used to describe millions of people that for different socio political reasons have had to flee their place of residency. The personal meanings and social implications for individual “refugees” extend far beyond the legal status. In the Canadian context, being a refugee carries different meanings, some of them more positive than others; but, at the end of the day, being a refugee in Canada means having the opportunity and challenge of rebuilding anew.

It is both difficult, and in some ways dangerous, to make generalizations about refugees. Refugees “are highly heterogeneous; they come from different countries, speak different languages, follow different religious and cultural practices, have different education and skill levels, and of course have entered Canada under different admission programs” (Hiebert, 2009, p. 6). All people who have come to Canada as refugees have been found to meet the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees definition of a refugee or person in need of protection. This Convention defines a refugee as someone who:

“owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

Beyond this definition, refugees may have little in common. Under conditions of war, conflict, and political violence, people from all walks of life can be impacted. For those involved in supporting settlement, it is important to recognize this heterogeneity and its implications for settlement. Settlement support for a single male engineer from Iraq who speaks fluent English, and lives with a chronic heart condition, looks very different than settlement support for a mother of seven young children from Somalia, who has had no access to formal education or urban settings. Each person has a unique constellation of challenges to face and resources to draw on as they settle.

In turn, each refugee’s possibilities for successfully settlement are enabled and constrained by intersecting social inequalities. Migration scholarship has demonstrated ways that social inequalities around social class, racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, education and language backgrounds interact and compound each other. Participants in a study conducted by Wilson, Murtaza and Shakya (2010) described how they were impacted by compounded inequalities of racism and refugee status. One of the participants called attention to what she called “double disadvantage” (p. 48) by explaining how being a black female refugee was a disadvantage.

Another participant from Afghanistan explained how after 9/11 the fear of being called a terrorist made people in his community afraid to go to the mosque; thus limiting their access to community support and fostering isolation. These examples highlight ways that multiple social inequalities interact, exacerbating potential for exclusion and vulnerability.

Every phase of the refugee journey from country of origin, country of first asylum, through initial and long-term settlement is impacted by social inequalities of class, race, gender and disability. For example, women and girls face distinct risks and challenges during migration: legal, social, and financial restrictions on mobility limit where they can travel; they face heightened risk of sexual violence and exploitation during migration, and encounter gender discrimination in their efforts to work and settle. In a BC study of
refugee settlement Francis (2009), found that African women earn less than their male counterparts, experience intense racial and income source discrimination, and are more likely to live in poverty than males.

These intersectional social inequalities are active in every level or system that refugees encounter in their migration and settlement process: In macro level disparities of Global North and South that shape global distribution of resources, through organizational practices of agencies, and interpersonal interactions. Jenny Francis (2009) uses the metaphor of an onion to explain how African refugees find barriers to a successful settlement in each layer of the onion. The layers include structural factors that affect Canadian society in general, such as falling real wages or income and limited affordable housing. Institutional barriers are also considered one of the layers and include: “the CIC (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) travel loan for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), long processing times for Refugee Claimants (RCs), and barriers to accessing subsidized housing” (p. 8). Francis (2009) argues that at the heart of the onion we encounter cases of compound marginalization based on intersection of race, class, gender, disability, and immigrant status. This scholarship calls attention to the ways that possibilities for safety, belonging and economic sustainability in settlement, are constrained by social inequalities—creating uneven vulnerabilities and protections, risks and benefits for individual refugees.

**Forced Migration Trajectories: Policies and pathways to protection**

Currently, 59.5 million people are displaced due to war, conflict or human rights violations. Of these, 19.5 million are recognized as Convention Refugees under the Geneva Convention. Another 1.8 million are asylum-seekers waiting for refugee determination (UNHCR, 2015). The vast majority of displaced persons and refugees, over 80%, are sustained in countries in the Global South.

As a signatory of the Geneva Convention, Canada has formally committed to sharing in the international responsibility of refugee protection. Since 2000, Canada has accepted an average of 27,000 refugees a year. In 2013 Canada accepted a total of 24,049 refugees (CIC, 2014). These numbers put Canada’s contribution to international refugee protection in context, showing that Canada provides protection and settlement to well under one per cent of the world’s refugees.

In 1976, the Canadian Immigration Act established a refugee system that has “two main parts: the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, for people seeking protection from outside Canada; and the In-Canada Asylum Program for people making refugee protection claims from within Canada” (CIC, 2015). Based on these criteria there are three main ways for refugees to enter Canada: as Government sponsored or assisted refugees (GAR), Privately-sponsored refugees (PSR), or as a Refugee claimant. These basic categories were maintained in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2002). The following section offers an overview of the three refugee categories recognized by Canada: Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR), and refugee claimants. In each section we highlight policy trends or shifts that impact the current refugee settlement terrain.

**GOVERNMENT ASSISTED REFUGEES**

People who have left their country of origin and been recognized as Convention Refugees may be referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other referral organizations for resettlement to Canada as a Government Assisted Refugee. GARs receive financial and other support from the Government of Canada or Province of Quebec for up to one year after their arrival in Canada. According to CIC (2014), Canada accepted 5,790 Government Assisted Refugees in 2013. According to the Government of BC, the province received an average of about 2,000 Government Assisted refugees between 2004 and 2013 (BC Government, 2013).

GARs may have some initial orientation prior to departure, and in British Columbia, all refugees are met at the airport by a member of SUCCESS’ Community Airport Newcomers Network program (ISS of BC, 2014). Initial temporary shelter is provided at the ISS of BC Welcome House until refugees can find adequate housing (ISS of BC, 2014). The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) funds the settlement programs that support GARs in their initial settlement tasks: initial city orientation, opening bank accounts, securing housing, language classes, and other education. The level of financial
support that GARs receive monthly for the first year is based on provincial social assistance rates. Basic and some extended health care for GARs is covered by the Interim Federal Health (IFH) for the first year.

Significant shifts in priorities for the GAR resettlement program have contributed to the current refugee settlement landscape in Surrey. Between 1976 and 2002, Canadian resettlement policies emphasized selection of the most adaptable. This emphasis reflected nation and economy building priorities. Refugees selected for resettlement under these policies had the advantage of official language capacity, education and employment histories. This approach was criticized on both principled and practical grounds. In principle, refugee protection should be guided by humanitarian values, not economic or national expedience. In practice, Canada was criticized for “cherry picking” the best, leaving the most vulnerable refugees in precarious, under-resourced countries of first asylum. Canada revised its selection criteria. After the implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002 the focus of the Canadian refugee selection process has been on those with “most in need of protection” (ISS of BC, 2010, slide 14). Consequently the refugee population that started to arrive after 2002 faced multiple challenges such as: low literacy in their first language, low educational levels, large households, single parent homes, as well as complex physical and mental health issues (slde 14).

Since 2002, settlement services have been stretching to support settlement of GARs with an increasingly complex range of needs. Yet, for a number of reasons, funding for settlement services have not adjusted to address this complexity. At the federal level, funding for refugee settlement through transfer payments to provinces remained unchanged from 1996-2013 (McGrath & McGrath, 2013; Hyndman, 2014). Second, the program funding and delivery agreement between Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and British Columbia (BC) was revamped in 2013-14. Between 1998 and 2013, BC had designed, delivered and administered its own settlement programming (McGrath & McGrath, 2013). BCs settlement agencies had designed programs around relatively stable five year funding cycles with the province. CIC ended this arrangement effective April 2014, centralizing administration, and requiring all settlement agencies to renegotiate contracts in 2013 and again in 2015. Interestingly enough, despite the change in the contracts and how the funds were administered, federal funding between 2005 and 2013 tripled. In the same period, the federal funding program for healthcare for refugees suffered significant cuts (Chung Yan & Pollard, 2014). Immediate impacts of these cuts included the loss of the trauma programs at the Bridge Clinic for refugees (Elaz, 2013). Longer term impacts remain unclear. The combination of these funding decisions has resulted in a stretched and strained social safety net for refugees (Chung Yan & Pollard, 2014). To note, announced in February 2016 and as of April 2016, the federal government has reinstated full healthcare coverage for all refugees and asylum claimants.

PRIVATELY SPONSORED REFUGEES

Convention Refugees may be privately sponsored to resettle in Canada. In 2013, 6,396 refugees entered the country as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) (CIC, 2014). PSRs arrive to Canada as permanent residents, and have access to the same types of settlement services all permanent residents have, such as: government funded language training, general information and orientation, labour market information and Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI). The “WCI is a three-pronged approach that focuses on creating connections between newcomers and Canadians, eliminating barriers to integration by creating welcoming communities, and educating against racism” (CIC, 2010).

The Private sponsorship program began in 1979. Sponsorships can be arranged by Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), many of which are faith-based organizations,
Groups of Five private citizens, or Community Sponsors: “the majority of Canadian sponsoring entities are religious congregations or affiliates” (Ives, Witmer Sinha, & Cnaan, 2010, p. 85). These sponsors agree to provide financial and other support for PSRs for one year after their arrival in Canada. Ives et al. (2010), citing Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008), report that the “costs for sponsoring a refugee family range from $9,500–$26,400 CDN per family per year. Costs cover housing, food, and clothing and do not include the in-kind financial and technical assistance resources that sponsors provide” (p. 85).

Research shows that PSRs become economically independent sooner than GARs (Ives, et al. 2010; Beiser, 2003; Susan McGrath and Ian McGrath, 2013; Hyndman, 2011, McKinlay Christine, 2008). However, there are some concerns regarding the reasons and the conditions that drive PSRs to economic independence. According to Hyndman (2011), PSRs might be entering the labour market sooner than GARs out of necessity. Beiser (2003), citing multiple authors explains, how in many cases sponsors help refugees find jobs that are “unskilled, dead-end and low paying” (p. 207); this allows the refugees to fend for themselves sooner, but at the same time represents a problem for their social mobility.

In addition to this, Beiser (2003) raises concerns about sponsors being perceived as intrusive and insensitive to the refugees’ needs. Acting in good faith, sponsors impose activities and schedules that can be perceived as disruptive to the refugees and their families. In both the literature and anecdotal information, there are serious concerns regarding the possibility of the development of exploitative relationships between the PSRs and their sponsors given the nature of their relationship. In many cases the sponsors provide services that exceed those mandated by the government; in other cases the support is insufficient, and refugees find themselves struggling to access services and gain economic stability (Beiser, 2003; Hyndman, 2011, McKinlay, 2008).

Research comparing settlement outcomes of PSR and other refugees points to some of the strengths of private sponsorship. Ives et al. (2010) report that “studies have found that refugees sponsored by religious congregations had better outcomes in terms of employment, host-country language acquisition, community integration, and overall experiences of resettlement than those who were sponsored by a family member or who received assistance solely from a resettlement agency” (p. 72). Beiser (2003) states that private sponsorship predicts successful integration. Religious congregations offer social support and community based services that create a strong connection between the refugees and their new locale. In addition to this, both religious and non-religious sponsors encourage refugees to access learning-language classes and provide language support through volunteers (Ives et al. 2010; Beiser, 2003).

REFUGEE CLAIMANT

As a signatory of the Geneva Convention, Canada agrees to provide refugee protection to those reaching its territory who meet the definition of a Convention Refugee. Due to geography and increasingly stringent migration restrictions designed to screen out potential asylum seekers (Kaushal & Dauverne, 2011), the numbers of Inland Refugee Claimants in Canada has remained relatively low. “Refugee claimants are assessed by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), an independent administrative tribunal responsible for hearing asylum seekers and determining whether they should be accepted as refugees” (ISS of BC, 2014, p. 4). From 2004 to 2013 Canada received a total of 245,964 inland claims, and in the same time frame 114,131 refugees claimants were granted permanent residency (CIC, 2014). According to CIC, in 2013, 8,149 cases that qualified as Refugees landed in Canada (CIC, 2014). According to the BC government, the province received an average of 5,324 refugee claimants between 2004 and 2013 (BC Government, 2013). Asylum seekers enter Canada through both recognized channels, as tourists or on temporary permits, and irregular channels. They may initiate their claim at a port of entry or inland CIC’s office. Between 2012 and 2013 the Conservative Federal Government implemented a substantial overhaul of the Inland Refugee determination system, with the Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act (PCISA). The controversial legislation has resulted in increased use of detention, strict timelines, and greater emphasis on removals of refused refugee claimants.

While waiting for their decision, some Refugee Claimants are eligible for social assistance. A small network of NGOs, faith or community based, provide initial orientation, legal referrals and social support. Most CIC RAP funded programs are limited in their ability to serve and support Refugee Claimants by funding restrictions. In 2012, the Federal Government reduced Interim Federal Health coverage for Refugee Claimants, leaving some claimants without basic healthcare. As discussed previously, changes as of April 2016, extend the Interim Health Care program to all refugees.
Diverse Pre-Migration Contexts/Migration Trajectories

The experiences of refugees prior to and during migration have a profound impact on refugees’ abilities to engage in the work of settlement (Riaño-Alcalá, Díaz, Osorio & Colorado, 2008; Weiber, 2012). Recognizing and addressing the impacts of exit and migration conditions in their programming and practices will enhance settlement supports. Surrey has seen significant arrivals of Somali, Colombian, Iraqi and Karen from Burma/Myanmar. This section briefly highlights the specific conditions and the implications for settlement of these distinct countries of origin and different migration trajectories.

IRAQ

Iraqis are one of the largest groups of refugees in Canada. As of December 2014, 20,000 Iraqi refugees had settled in Canada (CIC, 2014). Most of the refugees have arrived as GARs or PSRs, and a few hundred as refugee claimants (CCR, 2007). Most of the refugees arriving from Iraq came from refugee camps in countries such as Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt (ISS of BC, 2014).

According to the UNHCR in 2014 Iraq was the ninth largest refugee source country in the world with 369,900 refugees (UNHCR, 2015). In addition to these, there are 1,903,943 Internally Displaced persons (IDP) receiving protection and assistance from UNHCR (2015).

Under the Sadam Hussein regime, thousands of people were deported or fled Iraq. The systemic persecution of the Kurdish people forced them to flee to neighbouring countries. In many cases the conditions in these countries were harsh. Housing conditions were precarious (CCR, 2007). In Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, Iraqi refugees were typically not allowed to work or go to school.

The American-led occupation and overthrow of Sadam Hussein’s regime triggered a serious internal displacement crisis in Iraq that is still unresolved. In recent years with the Syrian civil war, the displacement crisis has intensified. The Syrian civil war has forced thousands of people from Syria – including Iraqi refugees – to flee to Iraq in search of safety. This new wave of refugees have joined the estimated million IDPs (“internally displaced Iraqis”), already in the country, “internally displaced Iraqis, who are extremely vulnerable and live in constant fear, with limited access to shelter, food, and basic services” (RI, 2011, UNHCR, 2015).

SOMALIA

Military General Mohammed Siad Barre ruled Somalia from 1969 to 1991. Under his rule Somalia entered a war with Ethiopia and conflicts among leaders or “warlords” of different ethnic groups exacerbated. The country’s national security force was given power to arrest and punish without trial, anyone critical of the regime in 1970. Under Barre, Somalia had one of the worst Human Rights records in Africa. (UNDP, Human Development Report 2001-Somalia, (New York: 2001), p. 42). When his regime was ousted, any centralized authority devolved, and the territory was quickly taken over by different “warlords” (ISS of BC, 2014). The power struggle in the country forced the displacement of close to a million Somalis (ISS of BC, 2014). In addition to this the drought and famine of the early 1990s aggravated the humanitarian crisis (UNHCR, 2007).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s Somalia saw some stability, but by 2006 the expansion of the Islamic Courts Union caused tension in the region. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was re-instated with Ethiopia’s help and in consequence the al Shabaab militia began violent attacks against the population, generating more displacement and social instability. In 2014, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somalia National Army started a military campaign against insurgent groups. The operation has caused a new wave of internal displacement.
The situation of the Somali refugees in neighboring countries is very unsafe. In the case of Kenya, Somali refugees are forced to stay in refugee camps near the border of Somalia. The camps are easy targets for the insurgents and common criminals; these attacks further aggravate the protracted displacement situation of the refugees (UNHCR, 2015; PRS, 2012). At the end of 2014 Somalia remained the third largest source country in the world with 1.1 million refugees. Most Somali refugees live in Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen (UNHCR, 2015).

Many of the Somali families in Canada are single parent households with an average of 4 to 9 children; most of these families are headed by single women (ISS of BC, 2013). Somalis have also been categorized as one of the least educated populations, and are amongst the groups with the lowest household income (Capps & Newland, 2015). The low income categorization could be a result of the combination of low education and large households. Most of the Somalis in Canada come from refugee camps, and are on the list of refugees that can be privately sponsored (ISS of BC, 2013).

**COLOMBIA**

Colombia has experienced social and political instability for more than 60 years. Having started as self-defense militias in the early 1940s, the guerrilla movements sought to finance their campaigns by obtaining resources from wealthy regional landowners. Unable to find support from the army, landowners of the northwest region of the country created self-defense groups that targeted the guerrilla around their estates. From 1998 to the year 2002, the right wing self-defense groups expanded to a fully structured army financed through drug trafficking. The paramilitaries sadly became famous for the level of carnage and mayhem with which they carried out their military operations.

The armed conflict among paramilitary and guerilla has impacted mostly rural areas. Consequently rural dwellers have swollen the numbers of internally displaced to three million people (UNHCR, 2015). Despite the rural focus of the conflict, other levels of the Colombian society have been affected. The majority of the Colombian refugees in Canada and in neighboring countries are from urban settings, with varying socio-economic statuses. Colombian refugees leave the country to escape persecution by the guerrilla, the paramilitaries or the Colombian army (Pécaut, 2003). Colombia continues to be one of the top refugee source countries in the world; according to UNHCR in 2014 there were about 360,300 Colombian refugees or in refugee type situations in the world (2015). Since 2001, Colombia has ranked as one of the top source countries for refugees and refugee claimants in Canada and by 2005 it was the number one source country for refugee claimants (Riaño-Alcalá et al., 2008; CIC, 2013). The Colombians that currently come to Canada through the settlement program come from Costa Rica or Ecuador. The Canadian government has committed to settling 900 Colombians from Ecuador by 2017 (CIC, 2014).

**MYANMAR (BURMA)**

Exiled from the state of Myanmar, or Burma, the Karen peoples are a diverse group, composed of multiple distinct languages, religious and cultural sub-groups. Following Burma’s independence from the British in 1948, the country was stricken by a civil war. In the immediate post-colonial period, the Karen, along with several other ethnic groups sought and were denied distinct status as states. In late 1948, forces within the Burmese government began to form an illegal militia; by 1949, some of these militias started attacking Karen Communities (Holiday, 2010). The Karen National Union (KNU), formed in 1947, was forced to relocate to Eastern regions of the country with a large Karen population. Some other insurgent groups organized resistance in response to the Burmese attacks. Karen civilians found themselves in the middle of a war (Kenny & Lockwood, 2011). Both factions of the conflict were making demands to the civilians in terms of food, shelter, information and forced labor. Violent repression of Karen people intensified after the 1988 coup in which the Military government, State Law and Order Restoration Committee (SLORC) seized power after democratic elections. As a result of
these abuses, thousands of Karen have fled to Thailand. Displaced Karen in Thailand have been re-located by Thai government into overcrowded and underserved refugee camps.

Karen refugees in Canada have survived through a multi-generational history of political repression, and prolonged displacement either in remote jungle areas or Thai refugee camps. Some Karen refugees have spent more than 20 years in the camps (Marchbank, Sherrell, Friesen, & Hyndman, 2014). Protracted refugee situations have severe effects in the abilities of the refugees to access education and employment. Many of the Karen people living in Canada today have low levels of literacy in their first language and limited to no English. Most Karen who arrived from camps lack transferable employment skills which pose a challenge to their adaptation process (ISS of BC, 2006; Marchbank et al., 2014).

Between November 2006 and March 2007, 810 refugees from refugee camps in Thailand arrived in Canada. Over 200 of them were resettled as a group in British Columbia. The majority of the refugees in this group were Karen who had spent a range of 11 to 28 years living in refugee camps in Thailand (ISS of BC, 2006). According to UNHCR (2015), Myanmar is the seventh largest source country in the world with about 479,000 people in refugee-like situations.

PROTRATED CAMP LIVING

Refugees arriving in Surrey from Iraq, Somalia and Burma, have typically resettled from refugee camps where they have spent years, sometimes decades (CIC, 2007; Marchbank et al., 2014). Life in the camps shapes the arrival and settlement process profoundly. “Some asylum countries’ governments restrict the free movement and access to legal employment and educational opportunities of refugees living in camps, whether for security concerns or to limit local integration” (Capps & Newland, 2015, p. 15). Refugees who have lived in refugee camps for years have very restricted or even non-existent access to city-like environments. Passes and fees are often required to leave and return to camps. Thus, the daily tasks of urban living are completely unfamiliar and unknown for many refugees from camp situations. While in camps, many refugees have not had the opportunity to work or improve their situations (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2009). Access to work or outside mobility can vary dramatically from camp to camp; “in many cases, refugees in camps have better services and safety conditions than do refugees outside (many of them in urban areas), who lack access to the protection of international agencies such as UNHCR” (Capps & Newland, 2015, p. 15). For example, refugees themselves run most of the Karen refugee camps in Thailand. Thus, some Karen refugees have had some opportunity to work as teachers or aides in the infirmary of the camps. Their work in running the camps allowed these Karen refugees to gain some experience, build community and develop transferable skills that have prepared them for post-settlement employment (South & Joliffe, 2015). “In many cases, refugees in camps have better services and safety conditions than do refugees outside (many of them in urban areas), who lack access to the protection of international agencies such as UNHCR” (Capps & Newland, 2015, p. 15).

URBAN

Most Colombian refugees in Surrey lived in urban settings prior to their arrival to Canada. Given the particularities of the internal conflict, Colombian refugees are typically professionals with university degrees that, for different socio-political reasons, experienced persecution. In 2002, Colombia became one of a handful of countries identified as source countries in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. This policy enabled direct access to protected person status, and then migration as a GAR directly from Colombia to Canada. Thus, the pathway to protection for most Colombian refugees in Surrey has been directly from urban setting to urban setting. Citizenship and Immigration Canada repealed source country access to refugee protection and resettlement in 2011.
Settlement Process and Challenges

Both International and Canadian policies influence whether and how forced migrants access protection as a refugee and settlement to long-term safety in Canada. After the implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002 the focus of the Canadian refugee selection process has been on those with “most in need of protection” (ISS of BC, 2010, slide 14). Attending to a population with higher needs has been a challenge for the resettlement agencies, NGOs, and private organizations that serve refugees. In addition to serving a population with higher needs, these organizations have also seen a reduction or removal of funding, as well as significant revisions to the “refugee related federal programs and legislation, including a new refugee claim process, changes to Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage, and new multi-year resettlement commitments highlighting a reduction in source countries, to name but a few” (ISS of BC, 2014, p. 5). To note, as mentioned previously, the IFH was fully restored as of April 1st, 2016. In terms of support at the local level, there are as many as 325 programs spread over 30 agencies in place in Surrey (Surrey Lip).

Despite enormous challenges and constraints, refugees manage to successfully rebuild their lives in Canada. There are many factors that contribute to the success of the refugees in Canada. Some of these factors are the individual and cultural resources the refugees bring with them, others are the social support and programs the host country has in place (Pickren, 2014). The combination of both creates a safe environment where the refugees can re-build their lives. The settlement process is a complex process of negotiation and learning. Depending on the pre-arrival experiences, this process of adaptation can be extremely distressful for many refugees. Language proficiency, educational background and employment experience play significant roles in the ability of the refugees to adapt and succeed in the host country (Beiser, 2009; Simich, Beiser & Mawani, 2003).

It is important to highlight that despite the humanitarian nature of the Canadian society in general, there are still many layers of systematic discrimination that hinder the process of adaptation regardless of the characteristics of the refugees. The settlement process can be more challenging and distressful than the pre-arrival experiences (Beiser, 2009). It is hard to imagine that living in any Canadian city can be compared to a refugee camp in Burma or any town in Colombia, but not speaking the language, lacking social support and being unemployed in foreign country is also terrifying. Alive, yes, but in limbo; unable to communicate without someone else’s voice, with limited economical resources and concern about those left behind. The struggle of the refugees does not end when entering Canadian soil; the struggle of refugee is an on-going, persistent fight for his or her life. It is no longer fighting persecution or avoiding death, it is about staying alive.

Studies carried out with refugee populations in different locations throughout Canada have concluded that the main difficulties experienced by refugees are related to housing, employment, social networks, and mental and physical health (Wiebe, 2013, p.14). In the following section we will offer an overview of the different aspects of the settlement process, highlighting the challenges the refugees could face upon their arrival.
SHELTER TO HOUSING

Housing is one of the first and most significant needs of the refugees. Having a safe and adequate place to stay offers the refugees a sense of stability and safety that serves as the base of their settlement process. For both GARs and RCs in British Columbia, the initial refuge of temporary shelters is time limited. In Canada, Refugee Claimants typically arrive on their own, without pre-arranged shelter. The existing city shelter system is not designed with refugee claimants in mind, and it is unclear to what extent it is accessible or safe for Refugee Claimants. GARs are expected to locate housing within two weeks of arrival. Newly arrived refugees face the daunting challenge of navigating house hunting in an unfamiliar city and unfamiliar language. The vast majority are not yet working, and are therefore limited to social assistance housing rates in a region with some of the most expensive housing in the world (Demographia, 2014). The “hot” housing markets in BC’s Lower Mainland have exacerbated the housing issues for all immigrants, and GARs and RCs are intensely impacted by rising housing costs (Francis & Hiebert, 2013). Refugees have, more than other immigrants, scarce resources to access adequate and affordable housing. “Metro Vancouver has the most expensive housing market in Canada and a consistently low vacancy rate, which is exacerbated by the declining availability of non-market housing and various forms of income assistance” (Francis, 2009, p. 10) making the process of securing housing even more challenging. Surrey draws refugees initially settled in temporary shelters in Vancouver, BC, in part because within the region, housing in Surrey is comparatively less expensive.

In addition to the challenges of the market and the lack of resources of the refugees there are other barriers, such as discrimination and stigma. A local study conducted by Jenny Francis (2009) showed that “members of these “groups” experience well-documented challenges related to low incomes and discrimination based on skin colour, source of income, family size, and immigration status”.

The vulnerability to homelessness varies for GARs and RCs. GARs and PSRs typically arrive as families, composed of at least four people, and sometimes much larger. In contrast, RCs usually arrive on their own due to the difficulties of the journey from their country of origin to Canada, although this is not always the case. Finding affordable housing that meets their needs in safe neighbourhoods is a challenge that large refugee families are facing, in some cases families of up to eleven people (Francis, 2009). While GARs and PSRs grapple “with inadequately maintained, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing units” (p. 17); RCs experience housing instability and hidden homelessness. “GARs’ and RCs’ experiences converge, however, around poverty, language difficulties, sparse social networks, exploitation by unscrupulous landlords and employers, and discrimination” (p. 11) which then hinder the process of adaptation, and can cause further trauma to refugees that have already experienced discrimination and violence due to similar categorizations. Housing challenges increase the risks of homelessness.

The need to access adequate housing forces refugees to enter the labour market soon after arrival. In many cases they are exposed to exploitation and discrimination while working in low paying jobs for which they are over-qualified (Ferede, 2010). The next section will offer an overview of the main barriers refugees face in the labour market.

EMPLOYMENT

Even though the main focus of many of the settlement programs is to help the refugees become financially independent, employment continues to be one of the most challenging areas of the adaptation process (Riaño-Alcalá et al., 2008). Again, depending on the pre-arrival conditions of the refugees, the experiences of accessing the Canadian labour market can be very different. Many refugees arrive without the skills, training or education in demand by Canadian employers. Furthermore, regardless of the levels of education of the refugees, finding well-paid employment related to their education is a challenge that impacts their well-being.

According to a study conducted by Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson (2000) credential recognition and discrimination are some of the main barriers for immigrants, including refugees. According to the study, 36% of participants who had professional credentials from their country of origin reported difficulties having them recognized; credential recognition can be considered a form of systematic discrimination (Henry & Tator, 2006).

The non-recognition of foreign credentials for newcomers represents a loss of socio-economic status that forces them to restructure their lifestyles. This re-structuring includes limited access to education, training and leisure activities. In the case of refugees who already have a lower socio-economic location, this means an additional layer of discrimination (OHRC, 2013). The inability of immigrants to obtain the certification of foreign credentials in Canada represents lower earnings and higher levels of unemployment (Girard & Bauder, 2007; Capps & Newland, 2015).
As way to control who has access to higher level positions within their profession the different professional associations in charge of accreditation follow a status-based system that favors Canadian credentials to the detriment of foreign credential (Girard & Bauder, 2007). In many cases immigrants and refugees find themselves working in areas related to their training for lower wages, in subordinated positions (Bauder, 2003; Riaño-Alcalá et al., 2008). In other cases, refugees and newcomers decide not to pursue accreditation and change their careers completely.

Krahn et al. (2000) also reported that “sixteen percent of the employed refugees in this study indicated that they had experienced racism or discrimination with respect to employment at some point after arriving in Canada” (p. 72).

The experience of discrimination can be based on the intersection of individual identities (OHRC, 2008; Hiebert, 2009). For example, in the case of a 45 year old African woman who is also a single mother, the experience of discrimination can be based on multiple grounds: race, colour, age, gender, and family composition (Girard & Bauder, 2007; George & Chaze, 2014). “A person identified by multiple grounds may experience disadvantage that is compounded by the presence of each of the grounds. For example, research confirms that ...members of racialized groups are more likely to be underemployed” (OHRC, sec 3a, paragraph 3). Employment discrimination can be seen in the form of hiring patterns, income and job mobility (Ferede, 2010).

In many cases employers also require Canadian experience, and often, refugees find themselves doing volunteer jobs in areas related to their former training in order to acquire Canadian experience. In 2013, the Ontario Human Rights Commissioner (2013) concluded that the request of Canadian experience is discriminatory and that all newcomers should be given the opportunity to access jobs based on their level of education, skills and experience. Refugees and immigrants in general are paid less than that their Canadian-born counterparts, and have less access to promotions even when they have higher levels of training and more years of experience (Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2005). Unfortunately, in many cases refugees are forced to take low paying jobs for which they are overqualified, in order to meet their basic income needs (Ferede, 2010; Krahn et al., 2000; Lacroix, 2004; Hiebert, 2009).

Unequal access to employment is a reflection of the intersectional oppressions that impact immigrants and refugees. Exclusion, stigma and discrimination based on accent, race, skin colour, gender, religion and cultural affiliations impact access to employment (Girard & Bauder, 2007). All these layers of marginalization make the process of adaptation even more complex. “Most refugees belong to the low-income segment of Canada’s population. They face higher levels of unemployment and underemployment compared to other immigrant categories and those born in Canada” (Ferede, 2010, p. 83). With time and adequate support, refugees can improve their language skills and obtain Canadian experience. These improvements help them become better equipped to navigate the Canadian labour market; however, the rest of the layers remain the same, keeping the refugees marginalized and oppressed regardless of their efforts to improve their situation and contribute to the Canadian society. Jackson and Bauder (2014) reported that “while ‘refugee jobs’ were described as disempowering, RC’s overwhelmingly indicated their preference for obtaining such a position over accepting government assistance, which was described with disdain and embarrassment” (p. 372). Employment is considered one of the main components of the individual’s life. A stable and rewarding job offers a sense of purpose, belonging and stability. The cultural patterns of oppression present in the labour market makes refugees job experience very challenging (Jackson & Bauder, 2014).

Associated with employment is the need for the development of language skills, specific training and professional development. The following section will explore access to education in the Canadian context.

**EDUCATION**

Education represents an important yet challenging part of the post-arrival process. Education is considered one of the most efficient tools to improve social mobility and socio-economic status within the Canadian social structure (Federe, 2010; Sadler, 2013; Capps & Newland, 2015). From a social engagement point of view, access to education offers the refugee the opportunity to interact with other members of their host society, build community and develop social networks.

The adaption and success of refugees in general and for youth and children in particular is based on the individual’s unique pre-arrival and post-arrival characteristics. Pre-arrival barriers such as trauma, educational background, socio-economic conditions, low language skills and protracted refugee camps experiences shape the adaptability of the youth and could hinder their educational process. In terms of post-arrival challenges, it is important to mention the challenges some refugee parents could experience offering
support and guidance to their child since they are experiencing limitations and challenges of their own. “Parenting in this manner is a new role for many of our refugee parents and a lot to be tasked on them within a short period of time once they arrive in Canada” (Holt & Laitsch, 2015, p. 23).

Other post-arrival challenges are: “socio-economic status, the school environment, stigma attached to being an ELL student, culture shock, identity loss, and lack of guidance” (Sadler, p. 26). In a research study carried out with Karen refugees in Langley and Surrey, many of the students reported discrimination, isolation and lack of support from both the school personnel and their classmates (Shakya, et al., 2010; Sadler, 2013). Sadler (2013) explains that dropout rates for immigrants are higher than those of their Canadian-born classmates, and given the structural barriers and discrimination in the school system, the rates for refugees are even higher.

Another very significant aspect of educational experience of the refugees is language acquisition and development. Language skills continue to be the number one barrier for both youth and adult refugees. “Refugees without basic literacy skills experience significant challenges finding employment; while they may be able to find entry-level jobs initially, they are likely to face difficulties moving up employment ladders without additional education or training” (Capps & Newland, 2015, p. 14). Poor language skills affect school performance, job opportunities, and access to higher level of education and training. In addition “poor English language skills can lead to feelings of withdrawal, fear, confusion, guilt, depression, isolation and marginalization... Moreover, youth [and adults] who cannot communicate in English cannot properly express their feelings” (Sadler, 2013, p. 30).

One of the main components of the Canadian Government settlement program for permanent residents and protected persons is language training. A program called Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) delivers government-funded language training. According to Riaño-Alcalá et al. (2008), the language training offered by the government to refugees is inadequate. Based on their research they concluded that the courses offered were basic and not enough to find a job or access higher education. The courses are not designed to address the specific needs of the refugees. The population accessing these courses is very diverse and so are their needs. According to Riaño-Alcalá et al. (2008), the courses government needs to offer are specialized courses for different population based on their age (seniors / young adults), literacy in their own language, and pre-arrival education level (high school / university), among others.

Refugees understand the need and importance of additional language training and professional development in the Canadian labour market (Weiber, 2013; Riaño-Alcalá et al., 2008); however, access to education is restricted due to high tuition costs and limited income (Jackson & Bauder, 2014). In many cases, due to their low income and high rent prices, refugees are forced to abandon language school to find a job and cover their household expenses, making their access to better jobs even more challenging. Housing, employment and education challenges are interconnected; the lack of stable, affordable housing affects employment and education. Lack of employment, underemployment and low wages limit the ability of the refugees to access suitable housing. Inadequate language training and poor English skills affect social mobility, access to reliable information about housing and employment opportunities, and as research shows, all these ultimately affect the physical and mental health of the refugees. The next section will focus on the way in which the pre-arrival and post-arrival conditions of the refugee affect their physical and mental health.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Health research on Canada’s immigrant populations is highly developed and interdisciplinary, creating a rich understanding of the complex relationship between immigrant health and settlement processes over time (Gushalak, Pottie et al., 2011). Yet, researchers have not given the same level of attention to understanding the health of immigrants who come as refugees or forced migrants. Migration and settlement as a refugee entails distinct potential hazards to health. Under persecution, refugees may have survived or witnessed extreme acts of violence, including torture. Pre-immigration settings involve health risks associated with war, deprivation and loss followed by arduous escapes. Extended periods of time in refugee camps carry additional risks. Among asylum seekers, long periods in precarious, undocumented status constitutes a chronic stressor, limits access to healthcare, and creates vulnerability to exploitation, violence, and work injuries. After arrival, for their first year, refugees are living at social assistance levels—while they deal with loss and dislocation, and the demands of re-establishing lives. Language and cultural gaps may complicate health care seeking and access. Refugee health researchers are only beginning to create an understanding of the relationship between health and settlement for refugees.

In the field of refugee health research, current knowledge is misaligned to the immediate needs of settlement programs supporting recent refugees. The vast majority of refugee health studies have focused on either mental health or contagious acute illnesses—stemming from the “tropical disease” model of refugee health. Yet, for policy reasons, a large percentage of recently arrived refugees in Canada have chronic health conditions or complex health needs.

Unlike other categories of immigrants, refugees are not excluded from health conditions. In fact, over the past fifteen years Canada has shown increasing willingness to resettle refugees with serious medical conditions. This reverses a longtime trend of “cherry picking” the healthiest and most adaptable for resettlement to Canada. In 2011, fully 80% of refugees resettled in Canada were...
classified as “high needs” or vulnerable (Hyndman, 2014). Among the refugee populations that are bound for Canada over the next decade, prevalence of chronic, non-contagious health conditions are high. For example, among Iraqi refugees registered with the UNHCR 36% have a chronic disorder; 20% have hypertension, 19% have musculoskeletal conditions and 9% have diabetes mellitus (Mateen, Carone et al., 2012).

Settlement and health agencies are struggling to adapt to the changing needs of refugee populations with increasingly complex, often chronic, health conditions. Both the UNHCR and World Health Organization have called for greater attention to the management of chronic-conditions among refugee populations. Yet, a systematic review of Canadian refugee health studies (Patil et al., 2012) found only six studies on chronic disease among refugees, within a search producing 5,000 studies. There appears to be no research specifically focused on how refugees manage chronic illness as they go through the pre-migration, migration, and then settlement in Canada.

Studies of trauma and mental health have dominated the refugee health literature. Fully 46.7% of Canadian refugee health studies have a mental health focus (Patil et al., 2012). This focus is relevant given that refugees have faced potential traumas and extreme loss, and have rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and mental illness far higher than the general population (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The PTSD prevalence among 7,000 refugee adults resettled in Western countries is 8-10%, or ten times that of the general population (Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005). These prevalence rates must be understood in the context of conditions of persecution and forced migration:

Having experienced or witnessed war, torture, violence, targeted persecution, forced labour, forced migration and family persecution, [as well as]... living for protracted periods in under-serviced refugee camps in ‘transition countries’ as ‘stateless’ individuals resulted in diminished rights and opportunities, increased exposure to discrimination and abuse and undermined mental health (Wilson et al., 2010, p. 46).

Yet, community based research has shown that among settlement service organizations, understanding of pre-arrival experiences and their potential impact on mental health needs of the refugees is limited (Wilson et al., 2010).

The relationship between mental health and settlement support needs greater attention in both research and settlement support delivery. Some studies suggest that post-migration stress and conditions are as or more important than pre-arrival experiences to refugee mental health (Baiser, 1999, 2006; Simich et al., 2003; Schweitzer et al., 2011). Schweitzer and colleagues (2011) found that “post-migration living difficulties made a unique and almost equal contribution as traumatic events in predicting trauma symptoms... post-migration living difficulties may trigger or exacerbate existing predisposition to PTSD caused by exposure to pre-migration trauma” (p. 306). Post-migration experiences of refugees are important risk factors in the development of serious mental illness among refugees (Beiser, 1999; 2006).

A number of post-migration stressors have been shown to contribute to the development of the mental distress in the refugee population. Both direct and indirect discrimination such as: “negative attitudes and perceptions toward asylum seekers generated by media, the post-9/11 context concern over national security, terrorism and increased racism” (Beiser, 2009, p. 558). In more specific areas “discrimination in the labor market is one of the putative causes of high unemployment rates. Concealed and systemic racism can affect mental health indirectly by making it difficult to get and keep jobs, to receive equitable pay and to find adequate housing” (p. 558).

Beiser (2009) also argues that discrimination “can damage self-esteem and diminish feelings of efficacy, thereby creating elevated risk for physical and mental health problems”. In addition to the post-migration challenges mentioned above, Simich (2010) argues that lack of community support and isolation play a significant role in mental health. “Refugees talk about home life in Canada as marked by the absence of extended family; increased family conflict; lack of means of resolving conflict; unbalanced gender roles; disabling underemployment; and lack of opportunity” (p. 70).

In addition, Lacroix and Sabbah (2011) citing multiple authors, argue that concerns and responsibilities related to the family members that are left back home are considered some of the main post-migration stressors reported by refugees. Multiple authors have identified the presence of a strong social support as a salient protective factor for mental health (Beiser, 2006; Wilson et al., 2010); however, the presence of the family related concerns mentioned above are considered a challenge to settlement process.
Research suggests that there is complex interconnection among refugee experiences of country of origin, migration and settlement, their mental and physical health. “Refugees and asylum seekers are affected not only by pre-migration traumatic events, but also by the changed circumstances of their lives that may compound this situation, thus creating a cumulative effect on their ability to cope with the resettlement processes” (Lacroix & Sabbah, 2011, p. 45). The pre-arrival and post-arrival conditions play equally significant roles in the process of integration and adaption of the refugees and their families. The need for social support, adequate information and resources is clear. The challenge then is how to serve a culturally diverse population with vastly different capacities and needs related to health.

Our understanding of refugee health has been further limited by the fact that virtually all research uses a deficit or pathology model, rather than exploring how well refugees and other forced migrants cope with integrating into their new country, adjusting after trauma and loss, and sustaining or managing their health. Trauma research with non-refugee populations has shown that people use a range of strategies individuals after potentially traumatic events (Bonanno & Mancini, 2012). Large-scale studies of disaster survivors found multiple pathways after traumatic loss and displacement. This research demonstrates the need to think beyond the binaries of pathological vs. healthy created by diagnostic criteria. Instead, research suggests that there are multiple paths to recovery and potential resilience. Given the challenges to mental health that refugees have survived, attention to mental health resilience and coping is an area that needs greater focus in both research and programming.

A refugee’s ability to restore or sustain their mental health may be constrained by the institutional settings of healthcare delivery in Canada (Kirmayer, 2011). With the medicalization of mental health as the dominant model of care in Canada, refugees are typically seeking care in systems inclined to pathologize distress and individualize treatment. Fear of further discrimination and stigma associated with mental health needs may hold refugees back from seeking support (Shannon, et al., 2014; Vasilevska, 2010). For clinicians aiming to provide care, understanding symptoms of distress is complicated by varying cultural practices around naming distress. In clinical encounters, refugees may dismiss or hide symptoms of distress. The separation of settlement services and health services, and jurisdictional, policy, and budget constraints mean that the mental health needs of refugees are under attended to in community based settlement services.

Settlement Programs and Practices

In a recent study conducted by Surrey LIP (2015), five categories of needs were identified in the Surrey immigrant and refugee populations. The needs were categorized in the following order: Employment and education, including employment preparation and continuing education; Health and Nutrition Services; Individual and Family Support Services; Community Integration Services; and English Language Needs.

The Surrey LIP conducted research and identified 325 unique, no cost services offered through 30 agencies and organizations, including 11 funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and directed purely at immigrants and refugees” (Surrey LIP, June 2015). However, the current service system lacks the infrastructure needed to effectively support the adaptation and resettlement process of the clients they serve. The refugee populations served by these organizations present serious challenges and require specialized support. The current refugee populations “are more likely than previous cohorts to have low literacy levels in their original languages, physical and mental health issues... lone parent status who are caring for children and youth who were born and raised in refugee camps with limited access to formal education” (LIP, 2015, p.34). The programs in place offer short-term support and are not always tailored to the individual needs of the refugees (Yu et al. 2007). To combat this, smaller agencies are providing “out of the box” services to refugees and refugee youth. For example the Surrey organizations of Umoja and Baobab.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed so far offers an overview of the struggles and possibilities refugees face. We have seen how the conditions of their country of origin shape their journey in terms of socio-political characteristics and pre-arrival experiences – refugee-like situations, displacement and protracted camp experience. Once in Canada, refugees continue to face challenges. The literature shows how housing, employment, health and education needs can be sources for distress for the newly arrived refugees. On many occasions refugees also face different types of discrimination based on multiple aspects of their identity such as: race, colour, age, gender, sexual orientation, and family composition among others. The refugee population in Surrey is very diverse, and their needs are unique; the need for settlement programs that serve the unique needs of each community is evident.
Focus group discussion, September 2015
REFUGEE SETTLEMENT IN THE SURREY CONTEXT

Surrey has one of the fastest growing immigrant and refugee populations in BC, the needs of these groups are complex and unique. For a number of reasons outlined in the literature review above and highlighted by our focus group participants below, Surrey and its cultural and ethnic diversity makes it a desired city to settle in.

By the Numbers: Refugees in Surrey:

Between 2010 and 2013, Surrey received the largest proportion of GARs than any other municipality in British Columbia. In this period, Surrey welcomed 28% of GARs destined to BC, followed closely by Vancouver at 22% (ISS of BC).

As of March 1st, 2016, 299 Syrian refugees (GARs) have settled in Surrey, representing 48% of all GARs moving to permanent accommodations since November 4th, 2015. 60% of GARs settling in Surrey are under 19 years of age with 34% being of school age (ISS of BC, March 1st, 2016).

Many of the refugees coming to Surrey settle in the Guildford, Surrey City Centre, and Newton townships (ISS of BC).

The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (Surrey LIP):

The Surrey LIP is made up of 30 community organizations including community and immigrant serving agencies, education, business, government, libraries, health, parks and recreation, faith and others (SurreyLip.ca). The LIP works with a number of stakeholders in the city to “determine what the community needs to be welcoming and inclusive” (SurreyLip.ca).

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has “tasked the Surrey LIP with conducting research and community consultations towards the development of Immigrant and Refugee Strategic Plans” (SurreyLip.ca). This will allow the City of Surrey to identify priority issues for immigrants and refugees and move towards the means to address these issues.

This project and its findings will help inform the refugee portion of the strategic plan, as identified above. For more information on the work of the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership, please visit www.SurreyLip.ca

Refugee and Immigrant Service Providers in Surrey:

According to the Surrey LIP, more than 6,000 immigrants and refugees arrive in Surrey every year. In order to support their settlement in Surrey, services are available to help with settlement and integration. These services have multiplied rapidly over the last 10 years. As part of the Surrey LIP immigrant and refugee research initiative, a service mapping project identified all of the services available to newcomers in the city. The project “turned up an impressive 325 unique, no cost services offered through 30 agencies and organizations, including 11 funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and directed purely at immigrants and refugees” (Surrey LIP, June 2015). These services can be divided into six major categories:

• Settlement and Refugee Services
• Health and Nutrition Services
• English Language Services
• Employment and Education Support Services
• Community Integration Services
• Individual and Family Support Services

These service providers are essential to the successful settlement and integration of refugees who come to Surrey. As a result, many of these organizations served as advisory members for the OCOV project.

For more on the infrastructure of settlement services, please see the Service Mapping Project at www.surreylip.ca/strategies-projects/service-mapping-research and the interactive service map is available at www.surreylip.ca/service-map.
METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the supports and challenges refugees face when engaging and integrating within the Surrey community, as well as identify potential solutions, actions, and promising practices to remediate these issues. In order to gain relevant and effective insight into this issue, it was critical to draw on the local and experiential knowledge of refugees, community stakeholders (such as city and provincial organizations that offer supportive services to refugees and their families), and civic and community leadership in Surrey.

The key research questions in which the project was grounded in are:

1. What are settlement barriers faced by refugees and how are they being addressed in Surrey? Are there Surrey-specific settlement barriers that can be addressed?
2. How do existing settlement practices support refugee integration into Surrey and are there gaps in services that need to be addressed?
3. As the largest recipient of refugees in the province, what level of understanding and awareness do civic stakeholders have of refugees?
4. What constitutes community settlement planning for refugees and how does it impact or support refugees? How does it impact or support the community?
5. Are refugee settlement supports coordinated in Surrey to the maximum benefit of the community and the refugees themselves? What needs to be done?

1 The 22 community stakeholders include: Simon Fraser University, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey School District (#36), City of Surrey, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, ISS of BC, Fraser Health Authority, Options Community Services, Pacific Community Resources Society, Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS), Semiahmoo House Society, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Immigrant Settlement & Integration Program, Surrey Libraries, and Surrey RCMP.

2 Meetings held – March 13, 2015; April 10, 2015; June 12, 2015; July 10, 2015; September 11, 2015; December 11, 2015; February 4th, 2016; and April 8th, 2016.
The Our Community, Our Voice (OCOV) project began in March 2015 and was completed in early Spring 2016. The project was funded by the City of Surrey (via the city’s Local Immigration Partnership, which is funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC, now Immigration, Refugee & Citizenship Canada]) and lead by Simon Fraser University (SFU).

The principal researchers include Stephen Dooley, Executive Director of SFU’s Surrey campus; Sharalyn Jordan, faculty member of Counselling Psychology/Faculty of Education at SFU; Nathalie Gagnon, Faculty Member of Criminology at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU); and Tara Holt, Principal of Invergarry Adult Education Centre, Surrey Schools. Additionally, the project was coordinated by Melissa Roberts, Criminal Justice Instructor, Langara College.

This qualitative research project is grounded to the Active Community Engagement Model (ACEM) developed by Dooley, Gagnon, Bhatt and Tweed (2012). The ACEM is designed to build community capacity during project development and implementation, and to enhance knowledge mobilization at the community level. The OCOV research team directly engaged community stakeholders, city leadership, and refugees themselves throughout all stages of research development and implementation, so that the research itself would be a template of the inclusion, relevance, and integration.

The key features of the ACEM and specific implementation components for this project are as follows:

**Project Steering Committee:**

The Our Community, Our Voice Steering Committee (OCOVSC) was comprised of 22 community stakeholders who guided the development and implementation of the project. The OCOVSC met 8 times and provided support to the project in the following areas: helped to develop the specific research questions, identification of peer research assistants, recruitment of focus group participants, facilitation support during community meetings, and review findings and recommendations.

**Peer Research Assistants:**

Community members were hired and trained to work as project research assistants. A total of 12 RAs - 4 SFU students, 1 KPU student and 7 community RAs were hired for the project. The 7 community RAs were themselves refugees and came from Myanmar/Burma, Somalia, Iraq, and El Salvador. The languages represented by the research assistants are Karen, Somali, Arabic, Spanish, and Swahili. Two senior RAs were graduate students at SFU. The primary role of the RAs was to directly facilitate focus group sessions and to provide translation services. The RAs also provided support during community planning days. One of the senior RAs participated in the development of the literature review.

All RAs went through an extensive and rigorous training program. Given that the research assistants came to the project with different levels of experience with conducting research, it was essential to bring the research assistants together with the core research team in order to ensure that everyone was on the same page. The main purpose of the RA training was to provide a basic understanding of action research, the focus group process, note-taking skills, active-listening skills, body-language, and most importantly, introduce the research assistants to research ethics. The principles of human dignity, informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, respect for participants, safety, and self-care were discussed. Additionally, the research assistants all successfully completed the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)”. All RAs successfully completed the TCP tutorial on research ethics, which was a requirement of both the SFU, and KPU Research Ethics Boards. During the training the RAs also participated in team-building exercises, shared knowledge and experience of pertinent issues affecting integration and engagement within their communities and families, and offered invaluable insight into possible solutions, actions, and promising practices to remediate these challenges. RAs received training in research ethics, active listening, and focus-group facilitation. They also received instruction in some mindfulness and relaxation practices to support them in the encounter of potentially distressing material.

**Ethical Review**

Given that the senior research team was comprised of faculty and staff from both SFU and KPU, it was necessary for the proposed research plan to receive approval from the Research Ethics Board at each institution (this process required an ethics application submission. As a result, this process delayed the implementation of the field research.
Community Planning Days

The purpose of the community planning days was to present the results of research project with a view to giving the community an opportunity to comment on the meaning of the data. Two planning days were held for OCOV— one at the beginning of the project, the other at the end.

PLANNING DAY 1: INITIAL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION, MAY 7TH 2015

Held at SFU Surrey a total of 65 participants attended to discuss the literature review and to identify key issues, challenges, and constraints faced by refugees coming to the City of Surrey, specifically, the availability and adequacy of housing, employment/income-earning opportunities, health care services, education and other community resources (e.g., libraries, recreation and cultural centres, places of worship, policing services, etc.). Participants were asked to self-select themselves into one of five general areas or sectors concerning refugee settlement (Education, Health, Employment, Housing, and Community Resources) and to comment on the needs and challenges of refugees at various stages of the settlement process: pre-arrival, arrival, settling-in, long term.

The community consultation was an opportunity for the participants to learn about current research on refugee settlement and integration, openly talk about their experiences as refugees or engaging with refugees, share their views on the current practices and resources supporting refugee settlement and integration in Surrey, and offer their perspective and ideas for improving the settlement process.

Graphic Facilitator, Sam Bradd, captured all of the participant feedback via graphic art in real time. Much of the discussion was focused on the “Interactive Settlement Timeline” in which participants were asked to identify key issues at various points in a refugee’s settlement from pre-settlement to five years post-settlement.

In subsequent discussions in the five smaller groups, participants were asked to reflect on the current practices in providing to support refugees answering questions like “what does your organization do?” and “what do you wish you could do?” After the brainstorming session, groups were able to walk around the room in carousel format to learn about the perspective of the other sectors and provide feedback. The key questions here were: “How can other sectors inform what we are doing?” and “how can different sectors work together?”
Images by Sam Bradd, May 7th, Community Planning day
PLANNING DAY 2 - COMMUNITY CONSULTATION, MARCH 31ST 2016

Where the initial May 7th consultation day was designed to get feedback on the literature review and solicit initial impressions of the settlement needs of refugees in Surrey, the second planning session aimed to develop a ‘grounded’ list of practical recommendations based on focus group results. A total of 37 people attended this meeting held at the Surrey City Hall.

The participants were asked to self-select into one of four groups (unbeknownst to them what the purpose of these four groups was). The first task for each of the groups was to list all of the new developments and settlement services that had arisen since May 2015 (See Appendix page 70). The results were presented and were graphically captured by graphic artist Yolanda Liman.
Subsequently each of the four groups had an opportunity to, based on the results they had just heard and with the aids of printed summaries of the results, develop recommendations for each of the four Refugee Settlement timeline points (Pre-Arrival, Arrival, Settling In, and Long-Term). This was done in a “round robin” style where each group received the list of recommendations devised by the previous group(s) and had a chance to review, revise, and add to the list. Once each group had seen the lists for all four points on the timeline, all the recommendations were posted on the wall (sorted by the stage of the timeline). Participants were asked to partake in a “dotmocracy” where each person was given three dots per timeline stage to vote on the most important recommendations in their opinion (a total of 12 votes per person). A complete list of all the recommendations per settlement stage and the results of the “dotmocracy” can be found in the Appendix, page 71. In addition, Yolanda Liman graphically captured the top voted recommendations and designed the following image:
Focus groups
This qualitative research project utilized the focus group method as the primary means of data collection. Figure 1 below provides an outline of the focus groups conducted for this study. A total of 16 focus groups (with 104 total participants) were held during Fall 2015. Focus groups were conducted with recent refugees – both youth and adult – across 5 distinct cultural and language groups – Karen, Arabic, Spanish, Somali, and Swahili. Additionally, focus groups were held with diverse classifications of service providers (i.e., frontline staff who work directly with refugees, front-line staff who work in-directly with refugees, City of Surrey leaders and sectorial leaders).

Figure 1: A categorization of Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sectorial Focus Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 City of Surrey Planning Leaders&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Frontline Refugee-Direct Services&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Frontline Mainstream Non-Direct Services&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sectorial Leaders&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refugee Focus Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Refugee&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Arabic speaking</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Karen speaking</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Somali speaking</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Spanish speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Swahili speaking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refugee&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Arabic speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Karen speaking</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Somali speaking</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Spanish speaking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Swahili speaking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privately Sponsored Refugees&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ Refugees&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup>City of Surrey Planning Leaders (8 people) – held September 9th (2 representatives from Surrey RCMP; 1 from Surrey School District #36; 5 from City of Surrey)
<sup>2</sup>Front Line Refugee Direct Services (15 people) – held October 13th (DiverseCity, ISS of BC, Options, PICS, Semiahmoo House, Surrey School District (SWIS), SUCCESS)
<sup>3</sup>Front Line (Mainstream non-direct services) (10 people) – November 17th (Access ProBono, City of Surrey – Community Services, Employment Assistance – Ministry of Social Development, New Canadian Clinic, Provincial Language Services, Surrey Memorial Hospital Emergency Services, Surrey Memorial Hospital Mental Health Services, Surrey Mental Health Services, WorkBC, Youth Services).
<sup>4</sup>Sectorial Leaders (5 people) – December 8th (Representatives from: BC Ministry of Child and Family Development, BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, Fraser Health Authority, Immigrant, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada, and Service Canada)
<sup>5</sup>Refugee Adults (31 people) – October 17th (had representation from all 5 language groups)
<sup>6</sup>Refugee Youth (24 people) – October 3rd (had representation from all 5 language groups)
<sup>7</sup>Privately Sponsored Refugees (5 people) – February 1st
<sup>8</sup>LGBTQ Focus Group (6 participants) – January 4th
RECRUITMENT

Recruitment strategies were different for refugees (youth, adults, PSRs, and LGBTQ), compared to service providers.

Refugee participants

Focus group participants were recruited through consultations with the OCOVSC (by sharing invitations to participate in the focus groups with their clients) and, more directly, through the informal networks of the peer research assistants. This ensured that participants were recruited from a variety of social clusters and that multiple cultural groups were represented. A demographic profile of both youth and adult refugee participants is provided in the Appendix, page 73, 74.

Participants were contacted by researchers and offered $50 gift cards to either Guildford Mall (for youth) or the Superstore (for adults) as a gesture of appreciation for their time and contributions.

Service provider participants

Service provider recruitment was completed primarily via the OCOVSC and Surrey LIP contacts. After developing a list of potential stakeholders and specific participants, the list was shared with the OCOVSC to ensure that no important groups were omitted. Given the experience of the OCOVSC members in working directly with refugees, they were able to provide the core research group with specific groups to contact within Surrey that are engaged in the settlement of refugees.

FOCUS GROUP FORMAT

Service providers

After completing the informed consent documentation, participants were asked to provide anonymous individual written responses to each of the research questions. The next step was to ask participants for a verbal response to each of the questions, specifically we asked participants to provide, one at a time, their most important response to each question and at the same time, participants in the focus groups often engaged in more open discussion with one another. These focus groups were facilitated by at least one researcher, while a research assistant or another researcher recorded these responses. Sessions were also audio recorded to assess reliability of the comment recording process.

The following questions guided focus-group discussion with service providers. It should be noted that these research questions were slightly modified to align more appropriately with the portfolios of each of the service provider groups. For example, the City Planners focus group were asked questions based on the same themes below, but modified as they do not directly interact with refugees in their daily work. A list of these questions asked to each focus group can be found in the Appendix, page 75. Additionally, in the Appendix, page 76, there is also a chart tallying the total number of responses from all the service provider focus groups.

The key research questions were:

1. What are settlement barriers faced by refugees and how are they being addressed in Surrey? Are there Surrey-specific settlement barriers that can be addressed?
2. How do existing settlement practices support refugee integration into Surrey and are there gaps in services that need to be addressed?
3. As the largest recipient of refugees in the province, what level of understanding and awareness do civic stakeholders have of refugees?
4. What constitutes community settlement planning for refugees and how does it impact or support refugees? How does it impact or support the community?
5. Are refugee settlement supports coordinated in Surrey to the maximum benefit of the community and the refugees themselves? What needs to be done?
Refugee focus groups

Participants gathered for the focus group at a local Surrey school. At the beginning of each session participants were introduced to the OCOV project, discussed informed consent, and engaged in ice-breaking activities before going into formal focus groups (all translated into one of five languages).

Focus groups were organized by cultural community (and language), and were led by community RAs as well as non-refugee RAs and researchers. Some groups were led entirely in participants’ native language and were later translated with the support of community RAs, whereas other groups were conducted in English with the support of on-the-spot translation when needed.

Focus group conversations were semi-structured and were modeled on key topics and questions identified through earlier collaboration with the lead OCOV investigators, the OCOV Advisory group, and community RAs. An outline of these questions asked to each focus group can be found in the Appendix, page 77.
RESULTS & DISCUSSION

From exile to settlement in Canada, refugees’ journeys are made possible by their hope, courage, resourcefulness and sheer tenacity. Every refugee who arrives in Canada is a survivor of war, atrocities, or hate, bringing hopes for safety and belonging. During the late 20th century unprecedented international cooperation created systems to support the humanitarian migration of refugees. In the early 21st century, these humanitarian aspirations vie with logics of geopolitics and global capitalism — creating hypermobility for a privileged few, while simultaneously excluding many from legal avenues to migration. Refugees seeking protection face increasingly stringent border controls, risk of detention, and prolonged precarity in countries of first asylum. The current border and migration systems that govern international migration reinforce social inequities — women, children, those without property or education, people with disabilities, people who live diverse genders or sexualities — have the least access to legal migration channels. Countries in the global south sustain 80% of the world’s refugees and displaced persons, and the vast majority of the world’s refugees will remain in the region of their country of origin. Those who arrive in Canada have defied these odds.

Each refugee’s pathway to and through settlement is unique and complex; produced through the efforts of multiple governing bodies, organizations and individuals working within and across international, national, provincial, metropolitan and organizational levels. These dispersed and loosely coordinated networks manage and conduct the work of refugee protection, migration, and settlement. Refugees seek protection from the UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), their daily subsistence needs may be provided by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the UNHCR itself, applications for resettlement are processed by consular officials, orientation and transportation by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In Canada, refugee resettlement is Federally-funded with centralized oversight, but managed by NGOs on contract. These settlement agencies provide for the most pressing needs of new refugees: shelter, initial orientations, language supports and facilitate efforts to connect them with services funded by provinces and often administered locally: income support, healthcare, education, employment services, public transit.

At every level, the resources needed to make refugee protection and settlement possible are stretched. Internationally, the UNHCR has been underfunded by donor countries every year since 2008 (UNHCR, 2014). The UNHCR ran its programs on 55% of the funds it required in 2014, as numbers of refugees reached historical highs. Federal funding for refugee settlement has not kept pace with the increased cost of living or the increasingly complex health and social needs of recent refugee arrivals. The devolvement of the Federal-BC settlement funding agreement in 2013 placed additional strain on the management of settlement agencies. The tight funding and administrative changes has everyday impacts felt most intensely by refugees themselves in daily struggles to keep
themselves and their families safely housed, fed and healthy, and to rebuild lives towards a future. The stretch to offer appropriate, timely supports with the same funds, to people with increasingly complex needs is felt acutely by front line workers, and throughout the settlement sector.

Widening economic inequality in Canada as a whole, and BC in particular, impacts quality of life for BC’s refugees. The tight funding of the settlement sector parallels a tightening of social spending more broadly. Over the past three decades successive federal governments have favoured neoliberal policies of limiting state spending on social services while increasing privatization, weakening the social welfare system in the process (Root, Gates-Gasse et al. 2014). Over the same period, the wealth gap in Canada has increased. In BC in 2015, an adult working full-time for minimum wage made $19,019, meaning many working families are still poor. Fully one third of BC’s children in poverty have working parents (FirstCallBC, 2015).

Refugees’ efforts to successfully settle are constrained by the social inequalities and systemic discriminations that persist in the local labour market, housing market, social institutions and society at large. The day-to-day work of settlement confronts refugees with the intersectionalities of racism, xenophobia and sexism. These are compounded, for some, by the current climate of Islamaphobia, some face stigma and exclusion around dis/ability and others heterosexism and transphobia. The possibilities for safety and belonging, as well as access to the resources and opportunities that enhance to chances of successful settlement are intersectionally constituted by these systemic inequalities.

Refugee participants shared their visions of successful settlement in Surrey: an everyday sense of safety and belonging, satisfaction in supporting themselves and their families, opportunities for meaningful participation in work and community, access to healthcare, good schooling for children and youth, dreams of family reunification, and hopes of a comfortable home. Participants acknowledged the challenges they arrived with: the mental distress of compounded loss, trauma and chronic stressors, limited language abilities, and a complete lack of knowledge of the locale and way of life. In parallel, they demonstrated some of the strengths they embody: courage, flexibility, care for their families and communities, and strong desire to make life better for their families and communities. The meanings participants made of their settlement experiences were diverse. For some it remained a day-to-day struggle, with periods of deep despair, and few signs of relief. Others were cautiously hopeful, describing a mix of satisfactions and frustrations, and imagining ways forward. Their experiences call attention to the ways that systemic constraints create everyday struggles for refugees that undermine possibilities for successful settlement, and highlight the need to work collectively, across differences of language, culture, sector, jurisdiction and profession to create conditions conducive to successful refugee settlement in Surrey.

In conversations with both service providers and refugees, and in keeping with lessons from the literature review, it was decided to organize the presentation of results according to the following settlement stages: Pre-Arrival, Arrival, Settling In and Long-Term. These stages are by no means perfectly demarcated. Indeed while issues like housing, employment and language training can and do span all stages; the categorization is useful for identifying critical pathways in the settlement process and thereby to understand how best to coordinate service delivery.

Pre-Arrival Shapes Settlement

Refugees have survived prolonged war or conflict, political violence or other forms of persecution. During forced migration and in countries of first asylum, they may have faced further hardships including food shortages, unsafe living conditions, violence and exploitation, inadequate healthcare and extremely limited schooling or work opportunities. Along with these histories of trauma and hardship, refugees are bringing resiliency, resourcefulness, courage and survival skills. Surrey Refugee participants referenced the difficulties they had left, and hinted at ways these experiences may have longer term implications for settling in.
Deeply painful losses suffered both in their country of origin and as a result of displacement, remain intensely felt. The relief of making it to Canada was tinged by grief and guilt for many. Definitions of family codified in Canada’s refugee policies do not align well with the lived experience of family for many of the cultural groups who are settling in Surrey. Almost every Somali woman who participated had made the impossible, forced decision to leave children behind. As single mothers with divided families, the children left behind are never off their minds. The guilt over the family members left behind interferes with concentration in school, and other aspects of their lives, “I can’t focus at Surrey School District 36, Surrey”. Among the Somali women, it was noted that all of them experience some level of this guilt, “It’s not only me; it’s everyone.” Iraqi’s, Syrians and Spanish speaking participants also shared grief over relatives or close friends who were not successful in their resettlement applications. Worries and yearning for those left behind was on-going. Refugees articulated the challenges around learning when intense emotions of grief and guilt are compromising concentration, motivation and well-being.

Alongside the guilt and grief of divided families, refugees are experiencing the on-going mental health consequences of trauma. The prolonged precarity, deprivation and repeated exposure to threat or violence that are fairly common among refugees are conditions that increase the risk of psychological impairment. Impairment related to trauma manifests in a range of ways. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a diagnosis given to patterns of symptom clusters. Though depression is actually a more common response to trauma exposure humans show a remarkable capacity to recover from trauma; PTSD is not an inevitable outcome of trauma exposure. In fact the vast majority of people who experience traumatic events will recover, regain psychological functioning and potentially build new strengths and deeper sense of meaning in life; however, the potential for recovery varies markedly with conditions of living after the trauma. At present, the conditions of settlement do not support trauma recovery, and may in fact exacerbate risk of development of serious psychological impairment.

Recovery from trauma is facilitated by several conditions. A day-to-day sense of safety created by having needs for shelter, food and physical comfort met; social connectedness and engagement in meaningful activities are critical to recovery after trauma. Refugees in this study reported experiences that fall far short of providing the security, connection, and meaning needed by trauma survivors. Poverty undermined the security of most. Social isolation became an issue for many once they left the close-knit living of the reception centre—particularly those with limited English language capacity. Unemployment and limited access to classes frustrated participants’ efforts to re-establish meaning and purpose in their lives. Insecurity, isolation and lack of meaning can result in feelings of despair and hopelessness. One participant felt completely isolated to the point of wanting to return to the refugee camp. She is willing and able to work, but has not been able to gain employment. Her situation has led to her feeling that, “I’m living a terrible life” and “I am worse in this country; now I am getting crazier and crazier”. At the time of the interview she indicated that she feels hopeless and in need of help, “My conclusion is, I need help, I really need help”. This was not what she, and others expected their new life to be.

Refugees described leaving their countries of first asylum with high hopes—perhaps too high. Many described arriving over dreaming, yet underprepared. Pre-departure communications, both formal and informal, created an overly optimistic picture of resettlement in Canada. One participant recalled being told the jobs were easy to find and fifty dollars an hour was an average wage. Unfortunately, many refugees arrive expecting much greater opportunities than the stark reality they are faced with. As one participant suggested:

I do advise the people who want to come here to learn the language before they come. It will help a lot, and they should consider that their life will turn upside-down. Overall, they should expect everything, and don’t dream so much. (Refugee Participant)

Participants like the Iraqi man above, wanted more emphasis on practical language and life skills in their pre-departure preparations and a clearer picture of the settlement challenges they would face. Pre-arrival conditions and expectations shape the settlement process further complicating the experience of early arrival.
Pre-arrival assumptions of what would happen when they came to Canada was a central theme in the discussion for privately sponsored refugees (PSRs). “They hoped the country would hug them and welcome them.” Hope. Employment. Stability. A great education for their children. These were the dreams and aspirations about life in Canada. Free medical care was especially important to one participant who came to Canada with his disabled father. At the stage of determining which country he should go to he had three choices: Canada, Australia, or the Netherlands. He was told to pick Canada because it had a free medical system and therefore he could get the care he needed for his father (this did not happen). As this participant explained he did not get the care he needed – especially home care – the word that best described his general disposition was bitterness.

And yet when probed about what they were told about Canada prior to arrival they mentioned they had been advised to expect extremes: great hopes, and great fears. The video depicts a woman from Africa who tells the viewers that it took her 5 years before she felt settled in Canada. The participants recalled that many of the passengers began to cry when they saw the video and wanted to go back home.

The refugees were processed through the International Organization of Migration (IOM), which is a third party international immigration organization. All focus group participants felt they could have been given more detailed information about what to expect when they got to Canada. But they wanted to learn more about specific services and how to access them – not a ‘scared-straight’ orientation desired to dissuade from expecting too much. The general consensus was that specific information about Canada could be provided before they actually arrive in the country. In the absence of specific information their thoughts tended to shift between two extremes: great hopes, and great fears.

Arrival

RECEPTION CENTRE TO HOUSING

Refugee participants described their early days as intensely emotional, a blur of confusion and excitement, uneasiness with the unfamiliar and uncertain, all compounded by extreme physical exhaustion. For GARS and PSRs, airport greeting and ground transport, shelter and meals in the reception centre (or with hosts) took care of immediate needs and eased the disorientation. Among GARS, the early weeks in the reception centre were recounted with stories of close-knit living with ample social interaction. Relationships formed in the Welcome House reception centre became important sources of social support.

Due to limited funding, the amount of time GARS can stay in the reception centre has declined sharply, from months to weeks, with most GARS being expected to be leave the reception centre within two weeks of arrival. In the past, refugees experienced a more gradual transition from rest and recovery, to orientation on basic life-skills and cultural norms, and then a search for independent housing. With limited stays in the reception centre, orientation begins on day two and refugees are expected to be independently housed within two weeks. However, most participants reported being far too exhausted and confused to take in the information. Refugees are navigating the incredibly important and difficult transition to independent housing within the first few weeks of arrival. While temporarily sheltered in one of the most expensive areas of downtown Vancouver, refugee families are encouraged by settlement workers to seek housing in surrounding cities of BC’s Lower Mainland because of the lower housing costs and relative availability of settlement services. As a result, in recent years, Surrey has become the arrival city for 25-40% of BC’s refugee newcomers.

For this Iraqi father of three teenage children, coming to Canada was a long-term dream:

CANADA IS A GOOD COUNTRY AND RESPECT[S] HUMAN RIGHTS. SINCE WE CAME TO CANADA EVERYTHING WAS ALRIGHT, BUT OF COURSE THERE WERE SOME ISSUES WE FACED.

Canada is a good country and respect[s] human rights. Since we came to Canada everything was alright, but of course there were some issues we faced. The first problem is language. The second problem is finding a place to live. First we come here brought us to and we stayed a shelter for 20 days. They ask us to go find a place to live and we have no language. (Refugee Participant)

I did not want to live in Surrey as some of my friends told me a few things about Surrey that it’s not a good place, but the welcome house employees forced me to live in Surrey according to how much I can pay for rent even though it’s not cheap. If I go to live in Burnaby or Vancouver I will pay all what I get from the government for the rent; I receive $1400 and my rent is $1100, excluding internet. Then there is transportation, food, etc..... (Refugee Participant)

Some residents feel relegated to Surrey, rather than choosing Surrey, because Surrey has the lowest rents in the superheated housing market of BC’s Lower Mainland. Reluctance to settle in Surrey reflected concerns about crime and safety. Other
In the context of the profound shortage of affordable housing and long waiting lists for social housing in BC’s Lower Mainland, refugees are limited to social assistance rates and attempting to locate housing for larger than typical families. As the quote above indicates social assistance housing allowances do not reflect market prices. A single family can typically only afford, at best, a two-bedroom apartment. Among participants, a household of 5–12 living in small apartments is common. Some refugees cited that having a large family made it difficult to find housing and some experienced discrimination in this regard. As one service provider shared:

The way that we consider traditional families and the size of that family...a two bedroom and bathroom, it’s affordable, but it’s not enough to house an extended family and a larger family. And people don’t want to rent 9 people when they can rent to 2 people. That’s an extra cost incurred for water, electricity, all of those types of things versus you could find a couple with no kids and all your utilities and all of that. It’s the rent plus some of the cost of the utilities and housing larger families that people think, “Okay, definitely don’t want to do that.” So you’ll get passed up by the opportunities for affordable housing.

Refugee families consistently reported their housing search as a bewildering and difficult process because of the lack of affordable homes for larger families.

Single adults face a related, but different challenge. With the high cost of housing, renting an apartment on the social assistance allowance of $375 is virtually impossible. Single adults turn to shared housing arrangements. However, sharing housing with relative strangers creates compatibility and safety issues. Participants described crowded and sometimes unsafe or exploitive shared housing conditions. These concerns were particularly salient for single women and LGBT refugees for whom living with co-national housemates would be unsafe. One Somali woman described that the owner landlord gave her the doormats to sleep on in a small shared suite. “That’s how I live,” she revealed during the focus group. In addition, her landlord does not provide any privacy for her. She lives in constant fear that her landlord will come into her suite.

Many Surrey-based refugees in this study reported living in substandard housing conditions. The social inequalities of the housing market are compounded by the difficulties of negotiating leases without knowledge of their rights as tenants. Families adjust to their small quarters as best they can, but overcrowding, intermittent utilities, and disrepair of their home environment have longer-term social, mental and physical health consequences.

Finding affordable housing may be by the first hurdle; however, many other issues around housing were articulated by the participants. If the first hurdle of housing for refugees is finding a place they can afford, the second is sustaining themselves in Canadian homes. Electrical appliances, central heating and indoor plumbing were completely unknown to many new refugee arrivals. With a mix of humour and embarrassment, participants shared stories of mishaps during their first months of establishing a home in Surrey.
The washroom was one of the problems that made it difficult. Not knowing how to use the toilet was hard especially when the toilet paper gets trapped and there’s running water everywhere. Additionally not knowing how to use the water or the handle from the sink and accidently was breaking, letting hot water everywhere and calling for help. (Refugee Participant)

Not knowing using the washroom instead of flushing take the water from the sink and pour it to the toilet bowl. (Refugee Participant)

Those who had lived in protracted camp situations, the Karen and some Somali, arrived with no working knowledge of electrical appliances or plumbing.

Due to no electricity and power in the refugee camp, we had to have coal and get wood in the forest and later chopped them to get the fire started. In Canada it’s all about electricity and power and it makes it hard for people like us who don’t have any experience and knowledge of it so we would have to learn it to from the beginning. (Refugee Participant)

There is no such thing as fan in the refugee camp. When we cook our Karen traditional food here in Canada, it usually has a very strong smell and makes the alarms go on. We later on know that we have to use the fan to not let the alarm go on and make the smell a little less strong. (Refugee Participant)

Orientations to housing issues are provided in the first few days, and participants admitted that they were too weary and worried about finding housing to focus at the time. Those who had settlement workers or community volunteers who could do home visits, co-national friends experienced in Canadian living or privately sponsors fared better. Participants suggested in house orientations to basics of appliances, plumbing, fire safety and appropriate use of 911 emergency calls. Conducting these orientations in house would ensure refugees learn the relevant skills in memorable ways at a time when they are ready. Service providers readily acknowledged the challenges of adjusting to Canadian homes, and that there was more to be done to support refugees in this area.

**FOOD INSECURITY**

With 50–80% of household income going to housing, money left for other basics is inadequate. Single people on social assistance typically had $40 – $80 dollars per month for food once rent and utilities were paid. Families are turning to food banks, not on an emergency basis, but as the only means for providing sustenance for families. Most refugees indicated that access to local foodbank services was essential to their families. The Muslim Food Bank reported that 70–80% of their clients are refugees.

Recently we found that three of my family members have anemia. (Refugee Participant)

Service providers were aware that many refugees faced challenges with respect to food. There was recognition among them that more had to be done in terms of introducing refugees to preparing nutritious meals using Canadian foods. Service providers recognized that food and food security worked to further isolate refugees. They were aware that for some, culturally appropriate foods resulted in stigma and discrimination, particularly for children who were sometimes “made fun of for the food that they eat” at school.

**INTERPRETATION & TRANSLATION**

Early and on-going availability of interpretation and translation services was critical to refugees; helping them meet healthcare needs, communicate with potential landlords, enrol children in school, and decipher official documents. Even those who had some spoken English required interpretation support for completing applications and forms. Healthcare appointments were times of critical need for interpretation.

When I arrived here in Canada I did not know how to speak and was lacking in English; however, I have a settlement worker like Diversity and school district welcome centre who provided interpreter and translator. (Refugee Participant)
When I first arrive here in Canada my family and myself were also struggling with the language barrier however my children are now able to support me with some of the things. I used to be very unhealthy when I first arrive but my health is now improving. I really appreciate that the Settlement worker was there for my family and still is here to help me with the interpreting and translating. (Refugee Participant)

Informal support networks for interpretation, both language and cultural were critical in augmenting official services.

When I first came to Canada I did not speak English and it was really hard, but I have a friend who knows that I did not speak English and was helping me a lot with everything. It was really helpful to have someone that understand you and knowing your experiences and what going through. (Refugee Participant)

There are some people helping us with language and translations but of course they can’t be with us every time. (Refugee Participant)

A wide range of experiences related to interpretation were reported — many very positive, but some language groups, in particular Somali, reported frustrations with limited availability of reliable interpretation.

Front line staff were well aware of the importance of interpretation services for refugees and expressed frustration with the lack of availability of those services, especially in some languages. The lack of interpretation in the provision of healthcare services was seen as particularly problematic.

I also think that there is need for more medical interpreters in Surrey. We have a major lack of medical interpretations. (Service Provider Participant)

The use of their children as interpreters, a strategy used by many out of absolute necessity, is particularly problematic in healthcare situations. As one service provider shared:

Many families are using their kids as interpreters. This is a concern especially in medical situations. Because in my opinion the kid might not even know how to interpret. And sometimes they cannot say whatever to the child. And then the child should not even hear what’s wrong with the parents before the parents themselves.

One recommendation made by service providers was that more documents and forms be translated into more languages:

One thing that I hope can come out of this project is to do a lot of translation with a lot of documentation, health documents, ICBC, transportation. All of these things need to be translated. (Service Provider Participant)

**WAYFINDING & MOBILITY**

Accessing to public transit and public transportation was very challenging. Not being able to find places and not able to ask for direction[s] in English was very hard. (Refugee Participant)

Efforts to get around Surrey in their early days were recounted by refugee participants with a mix of humour and frustration. Refugees depended on public transit as they attempted to get around to classes, appointments and other settlement tasks. Learning a new city, in an unfamiliar language is anxiety provoking, and many refugees were using public transit for the first times in their lives.

One day my son and I were visiting my friend. Not knowing the bus route instead of taking the right stop, went the opposite direction. (Refugee Participant)

In all of the focus groups, participants, in retrospect, shared now humorous stories of their early experiences with public transit. Stories of going the opposite direction, as noted above, and arriving far from their intended destinations in unfamiliar areas were almost universal. The cost of these mishaps result in more fares for refugees, who are already struggling financially, and in some cases missed appointments. In hindsight participants joked amongst each other, but the reality at the time was terrifying and stressful. This camaraderie shared by participants is indicative of the importance of social connectedness and sense of belonging for refugees, and the way connectedness eases the distress of difficult settlement experiences.

Cost of service and limited transit service was a major constraint for refugees in their settlement efforts. Some services are simply not available in Surrey, and refugees are
travelling into Vancouver for appointments. For many in their first year, healthcare appointments required skytrain trips to the Bridge clinic. When an entire family travels the cost of three zone return fare is considerable. For LGBT refugees, leaving Surrey to connect with community events or groups in Vancouver was important, yet costly and potentially dangerous. Both a lesbian woman and a transgender woman described travelling two hours into Vancouver to connect with support groups, and then leaving the group early to arrive in Surrey before bus service ended at 9:30pm. Missing the bus meant long walks on dark, isolated streets.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS/BELONGING

The first months are intensely challenging both practically and emotionally. This is a critical time for support, in particular from co-national communities as peer support. Many times this sense of community was cited as a positive factor during this critical stage of settlement. Community organizations, settlement agencies, and schools can play an enormous role in the process and offer promising practices for early arrival.

When I first arrived in Canada I participated in community kitchen program with Diversecity Community Resources Society and I met with others immigrants and newcomers. I made more friends with people from different cultural and learn many new things about Canada. I have learn so many things through the program such as cultural food, food safe, nutrition and hygienist. (Refugee Participant)

The benefits of community kitchen programs designed to meet participants’ immediate needs for social belonging while teaching practical skills for safely preparing healthy food on a budget in a Canadian kitchen were a tremendous support for refugees.

By and large, school was noted more often as a positive connection.

When I first arrived in Canada I did not know anyone, but when I went to school I make more friends and I start to have a positive feeling and senses of belonging. (Refugee Participant)

I attended after school multicultural youth program (My Circle) making me realize that I am not alone and there are other people share similar experience as me. (Refugee Participant)

There was a sense of pride shared by refugees who had been able to provide peer support to those who have recently arrived and/or volunteering in the community in other ways.

Volunteer and getting involve[d] in the school (i.e. getting involve in the school and volunteer in the community making us feel good and making us feel that we are giving back to the community). (Refugee Participant)

Two weeks ago I took my grandmother to the clinic without any one[‘s] help. I feel more confident and independent that I able to help my grandmother right now without anyone. (Refugee Participant)

Consistent with research that shows risk elevates in country of settlement when: lack of social connections and lack of meaning and purpose, isolation and alienation as contributors to mental health problems. Thus, social connectedness plays a key role in successful settlement.

In addition to the importance of connectedness with co-nationals, service providers shared the importance of connectedness with the greater community and the role that language, stigma and discrimination might play in limiting the opportunities for social connectedness with the greater community.

They are so isolated. I don’t think because they want to be, but I think it’s all these language barriers, even the most basic thing of not knowing how to phone 911. They’re really isolated that way. (Service Provider Participant)

Community wide initiatives and activities that bring the broader community together with refugees was seen as a potential solution to ease the intense isolation felt by many refugees.
My thought was that the primary issue is relationship development with the broader community...I’m wondering whether there could be opportunities for the broader community to be more aware or be more inclusive or have activities in broader relationship building opportunities. (Service Provider Participant)

ATTENTION TO MENTAL HEALTH

Service providers recognized the importance of dedicated mental health services. However, they stressed that all service providers had a role to play in mental health and in particular, in alleviating the secondary impacts of mental health problems. There was a recognition that mental health problems can sometimes be masked (e.g., aggression) and that training was necessary to help service providers recognize the many faces of trauma.

And I think that whole mental health piece gets lost sometimes, because when the anger is masking all of that, you’re first dealing with the anger, the natural thing to do is get frustrated by a really angry kid. And then make that a teenage boy and you just deal with the anger stuff before you ever get to the trauma or the boy’s mental health. (Service Provider Participant)

Mental health literacy and trauma awareness for all services providers. Training in Trauma-informed practices in all sites is necessary and essential.

SETTLING IN

Schooling for Children and Youth

Refugee parents and youth valued access to elementary and secondary schooling for children and adolescents. Parents appreciated the relative ease of registering their children in schools. They felt supported in this process. Schools became an important point of connection and belonging for parents and children.

However, as noted, schools can be a place of discrimination for some refugee youth. Discrimination experienced in schools was alienating:

When I first came to Canada I went to the school and there was a student who said “eww” to me. It was making me feel sad and not welcoming in the school. (Refugee Participant)

Refugee youth expressed hopes of entering post-secondary education and parents expressed desire to send children to Post-Secondary school. Both expressed fears that post-secondary education would be affordable. Parents reported having to use child tax credits to pay off their transportation loans. They are unable to save enough money for post-secondary education for their children. For example, refugee youth are selecting short term diploma programs because college/university out of reach. Those that were in post-secondary studies were working to offset costs, and were very aware of the sacrifice their parents were making to help them stay in school.

Service providers and advocates working with refugee youth were critical of the fact that high school students in English Language Learners (ELL) classes do not earn credits for these classes. This disadvantages them by slowing their progress through high school; it also potentially sends a message that their development of multilingual capacities is undervalued. These advocates suggested it would be fairer to give equal credit to all second language classes, whether those credits are for English speaking students learning French or Mandarin, or newcomer students learning English.

English Language/Adult Education

Refugee participants’ comments echo research findings that language capacity is central to successful settlement. All expressed eagerness to develop their English language skills both for everyday living and for enhancing their employment prospects. Research participants included people with a wide range of English competencies—from minimal English to fluent. Most stressed that the year of income support and language classes provided by the Federal Government is not enough to develop proficient working competency in English. The language programs offered in Surrey do not seem to be meeting the full range of English language learning needs of refugee newcomers.

Waiting lists to get into classes were a common experience, particularly for those needing more advanced level classes.

I have been in Canada 5 months trying to get in school but I can’t, I have to wait in the line and it takes about a year to get in. (Refugee Participant)

Wait lists created gaps in access. Refugees’ income support ends after 12 months, yet waits of 5 months were not unusual. Refugee parents in particular needed to enter the workforce before language competency is achieved.
A misalignment may also be occurring for learners at the very basic language level. Service providers reported that some adult students were needing to repeat beginner level classes multiple times. Learners who do not have literacy or numeracy skills in their first language face very different challenges in the classroom than new English speakers who are educated, literate, and numerate in their first language. Some Somali adults who were educators prior to migration suggested creating roles for cultural interpreters in basic English language classes. They had witnessed members of their community struggling with homework, and had been able to explain concepts and bridge knowledge. These educators recognized and were very attuned to the gaps in experience and knowledge between their fellow Somalis with less education, and the assumptions of adult education in Canadian classrooms.

Some participants spoke of ways their limited language capacity and mental health challenges reinforced each other.

I was already depressed in the refugee camp, because of the challenges and the difficulties there. However, when I came to Canada I become more depressed, because I did not know English and I did not know anyone here to ask for help. I felt very depressed and I felt like no one could help me. (Refugee Participant)

For this participant, arriving with the low mood, fatigue and cognitive fog that comes with depression, limited the energy, concentration and social interaction needed for language learning. Low language skills in turn, interfered with help-seeking and social interaction—reinforcing the social isolation that sustains depression.

Service providers felt strongly that language skills training should not be delivered in a one-size fits all way. Some service providers reported success using small class sizes that are goal-oriented and tailored to the individual needs of the students.

We have a client who lacks literacy in his or her own language. If you put him in a classroom of 20 people it’s kind of embarrassing for him at the age of 55 to not know how to hold a pencil, right? With this model we can actually create a self-esteem and confidence, and it has been working very well. I can’t think of anything else like the model. (Service Provider Participant)

**Meaningful Employment and a Way out of Poverty**

The government give only a year assistance and they cut it after one year. How can we learn the language and find a job and get used to the country within a year? Plus if we work, they cut the benefits. I suggest they let us work and don’t cut the benefits so we can assist ourselves. Plus, our transportation loan is $8,300. (Refugee Participant)

Parents are seeking work as quickly as possible, because Social Assistance rates cannot sustain a family. Yet, language competency and lack of credential recognition means first employment is in low-wage, insecure employment. Many remain in low wage work because financial and scheduling constraints on opportunities to upgrade their language or credentials. Repaying transportation loans takes up any possible savings. Families are forgoing basic necessities to repay transportation loans.

They want a way out of poverty. They want their children to see them as people who contribute and who work and who take care of the family. (Service Provider Participant)

My first year in Canada was very challenge. I have three children and my husband left behind in the refugee camp. I had to support my family and taking care of my children by myself. I receive federal income assistance during my first year in Canada. I attended school while I rely on federal income. (Refugee Participant)

After one year then I start to look for a job to become independent in order to be able to support my family financially. However, I couldn’t find a job after one year of federal support. I was having a hard time looking for a job. So I had to apply for income assistance while I was looking for a job. While I was on income assistance they were helping to attend cleaning school. I attended cleaning school for year in Vancouver. It was very from my house. I don’t want to rely on income assistance, so I study really hard in order to become independent financially and be able to support my family. (Refugee Participant)
This Karen woman was the sole provider for herself and three children for her first three years in Canada.

Refugee participants expressed eagerness to find work and pride in having work. However, almost without exception, the pathway to employment was fraught with difficulties. Across language groups participants voiced frustration with the uncertainty and rejection of job-seeking in the Lower Mainland, discriminatory hiring practices, including the requirement for “Canadian experience” on a CV, and the lack of language capacity to carry out jobs they were otherwise capable of.

*When I first arrived in Surrey I was really worry that I couldn’t find a job. My friend was helping me with getting my first job in the ___ industry.* *(Refugee Participant)*

Introductions by co-national friends seemed to be the most successful job search strategy for refugees. “Because of a friend” was a common refrain among those who had work, highlighting the value of social networks among co-national friends in finding first jobs.

*It was really hard for me to apply for a job and get hired. I applied for several places for a job, but they did not hire me. I got a job because of my friend. My friend was helping me to apply for a job at his workplace. That’s how I got a job. My boss is nice and he relies on me a lot. I am hardworking person.* *(Refugee Participant)*

*My wife also got a job because her friends as well.* *(Refugee Participant)*

When refugee adults felt respected at work, workplaces were important source of social connection and sense of mattering.

A concern around employment through friendship or community connection may have a downside. The statement, “My friend was helping me with getting my first job in the ___ industry”, both demonstrates the importance of community connections for finding work, but also raises a potential concern about the ghettoization of employment opportunities. This participant spoke about an informal network within the Karen community to help others find work. Many from the community ended up working in low paying jobs at this particular site. While he was very thankful for the opportunity the participant mentioned that most people who work there feel ‘stuck’ with little prospects for advancement. To get higher paying jobs they must look elsewhere, but at the same time they depend on the wages they earn. It is difficult to look for new jobs while working long hours.

However, respectful workplaces were not the typical experience of participants. On the job discrimination, subtle and overt, was a common experience reported by refugee participants. Racist micro-aggressions of slurs, threats, invasive questions and derogatory remarks were relatively common experiences. Accounts of refugee participants raise concerns about potentially exploitive dynamics of worksites that rely heavily on recent newcomer refugees as employees.

*Sometimes my wife gets look(ed) down (on) at work, because she did not speak English. There was several times when my wife came home and cry, because of the way she gets treated at work.* *(Refugee Participant)*

*When I start working there I didn’t get treating very well. One of the lady who was teaching me to do my work and I didn’t get it the first time. She told me if you don’t know how to do your job, you should not come to work.* *(Refugee Participant)*

Consistent with other research, well-educated refugees struggled the most with working low wage manual labour. Having their abilities and status as teachers, social workers, professors, and engineers overlooked and undervalued was deeply troubling.

*Hard to be a role model for my child, because where I am looking for light, it seems the light is being shut off. My ambition is wasted working labour.* *(Refugee Participant)*

Many participants expressed interest in entrepreneurship, and a frustration with the difficulties of establishing a business in Canada.

*As this father described, his sense of himself as accomplished and a role model, suffered when he saw no way out of low-wage manual labour. Many participants expressed interest in entrepreneurship, and a frustration with the difficulties of establishing a business in Canada.*
Complex Constraints on Successful Settlement

Discussions with refugee adults shed light on the complex interaction of the multiple constraints refugees face in successful settlement. Refugees arrive experiencing psychological distress – in varying levels of severity – owing to experiences in their country of origin. Upon arriving in Canada there are numerous new pressures they must face – securing housing, learning English, finding employment. However, many are simply not able to fully focus their attention on these matters.

Most refugees are living at poverty level, initially while on social assistance and even once employed most are working low wage jobs with long hours that leave them with little time or energy for upgrading language or skills. Moreover, some refugees are dealing with extremely complex caregiving demands for family members—disabled elders, children with fragile health or developmental disabilities.

One of the biggest impacts of this dynamic is a sense of failure, loss of hope. As one Somali speaking women told us, “I failed the citizenship test 3 times.” Other shared similar experiences of multiple failures of tests in a variety of contexts including Surrey school district courses.

These refugees seem caught in a vicious circle: where language training and credential or skills upgrading that would enhance their employment opportunities are seen as the way forward. However, they are not able to achieve success in these domains because of the interaction of multiple barriers: the inequities of the job market, trauma related psychological impairment, poverty, and complex family care demands.

There was a real sense among service providers that as a group, refugees had a strong desire to work and to be employed. However, despite this strong desire, multiple barriers to employment were present. Service providers echoed the voice of refugees with respect to the barriers to finding employment; lower English skills, in particular literacy, limit job prospects, while systemic racism and discrimination in the job market undermine opportunities. Service providers also identified lack of affordable child-care as a serious impediment to employment, particularly for single parents.

Service providers identified additional issues that may perhaps be remedied through employer education: the requirement for criminal record checks and validated education. Many employment opportunities require a criminal record check and validated education as a matter of course, irrespective of the type of the employment.

As part of the process of employment, you often need a 5-year police information check. We can’t get that with new refugees. That information is just not available. So that presents a real barrier for a lot of employment opportunities. Validated education also presents a real barrier. (Service Provider Participant)

Service providers felt strongly that these requirements were often not truly necessary given the nature of the employment but rather were an artifact of bureaucracy. Service providers shared that while some employers, particularly smaller employers, sometimes waived these requirements many of the larger employers did not. Service providers felt that educating and training the larger employers in Surrey around the barriers faced by refugees in finding employment, and their potential to be extremely valuable employees, could have a significant positive impact.

What I think we need to do, and we’ve been doing some of that, is doing a lot more education and a lot more workshops with potential employers in Surrey. We have some large employers in Surrey and we need to start educating them. (Service Provider Participant)

MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH

The Bridge Clinic was the first source of healthcare for refugee arrivals in Surrey. Bridge continued to provide service to refugee claimants, GARs and PSR (despite cuts in federal funding to refugee health care in 2012 that impacted funds available for claimants and PSRs). As noted previously, the interim federal health care program was fully restored as of April 1st, 2016 after much of our data was collected, thus the participants were operating with the understanding that funding was still cut. Some participants accessed healthcare at Bridge’s Surrey based clinic (The New Canadian Clinic), however, most reported taking public transit to their Vancouver location. Refugee participants were impressed by the quality healthcare they experienced at Bridge. They emphasized how happy they were that their children were getting good healthcare. Their one frustration with Bridge was the expense and challenge of transit. Typically, whole families would travel together, making a single trip to Bridge a significant expense if they did not have transit passes.

Optimally, Bridge patients transition to primary care providers in their own communities within a year. However, accounts of providers and refugees alike suggest that this transition is a challenging one, and as a result, refugees continue to seek out care at Bridge beyond their first 12 months. Refugees reported reluctance to leave the familiarity of Bridge, with its explicit attention to refugee-
centred cultural safety and trauma-informed care. Providers raised the need to support local family physicians in building competency and willingness to work inter-culturally with refugee patients. The complexity of healthcare needs of many refugees was raised as a challenge for a general practice primary care provider. Many refugees are living with a combination of chronic physical health conditions and trauma related mental health issues.

Refugee participants’ experiences of accessing healthcare outside Bridge were mixed and complicated. Several described needing emergency care in Surrey; distress and confusion caused by rerouted ambulances or long waits, were compounded by language gaps.

A number of participants reported extreme difficulties accessing assessments and services for family members with physical or developmental disabilities. Settlement workers expressed frustrations with their own inability to access timely assessments for their clients. When entitlements to benefits require assessments, families are left without needed supports—accessibility modifications, funds for nutritional supplements or special diets, respite care.

**FAMILY SEPARATION/ REUNIFICATION**

The impacts of family separation are significant. Families were separated in the chaos of displacement or when definitions of family used for resettlement differ from refugees’ understandings of family. In many collectivist cultures, adult siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents are an intrinsic part of a family household. Until these family members are able to join them, families will feel incomplete.

Many of the Somali women are single mothers with divided families. Some had to make the unthinkable decision as to which children to bring with them to Canada. The children left behind are never off their minds. One Somali woman noted, on behalf of others, that trying to learn English and pass her English class was extremely difficult as she could not focus and stop thinking about her other family members in Africa. There was a general sense of defeat amongst the Somali women interviewed. This results in an inability to fully concentration in school, and other aspects of their lives, where they are working toward upgrading their skills, “I can’t focus at Surrey School District 36, Surrey”. This student articulated the challenges around learning when your mind is elsewhere and your emotional mental health is compromised. Often these women are plagued with guilt over the family members left behind. In discussion around this it was noted that all of them experience some level of this guilt, “It’s not only me; it’s everyone”.

Along with the emotional toll, family separation has economic implications. Refugee families are often struggling to save money to sponsor separated family members. For a successful sponsorship, enough funds to support the sponsored person for a year must be raised in advance. Years of collective efforts of family members, youth included, working low-wage jobs are needed to raise the funds.

Reunification of families should be a priority for everyone not just certain groups of refugees. Settlement is never easy but when you have the support of your family and loved ones the process might just become simpler.

(Refugee Participant)

This youth’s perspective reflects the value of prioritizing family reunification, and the benefits to refugee families and broader communities when families are reunited.

**Service System Coordination**

Refugee participants generally expressed appreciation and satisfaction with the work of settlement agencies. At the same time, many described confusion and anxiety about service access. Anxieties increased when they had difficulties reaching or making appointments with settlement workers or were on waitlists for needed support. Hearing rumours about benefits others were receiving also fed confusion.

There was a general consensus among service providers that better integration and coordination of services among direct service providers would be desirable. However, there was a lack of consensus with respect to how best to achieve this goal.

I think we are working together, but I think we’re just at that there’re lots of opportunities to do more and understand each other’s services better than we do. (Service Provider Participant)

While some suggested that a centralized case management approach would be ideal, others felt that privacy and confidentiality
were significant barriers that made this approach untenable. Similarly, while some suggested that services should generally not be duplicated by multiple agencies, others felt that each agency brought a unique perspective to those services and that clients should be provided with opportunities for choice.

There was widespread consensus with respect to one barrier to integration and coordination: the funding model. The current funding model for agencies providing services to refugees is based on competitive applications made every few years. The uncertainty of the funding results in a lack of a sense of security and leads to fierce competition among agencies, each attempting to secure some portion of the available funding every few years.

All of our focus is on how much funding we can get. (Service Provider Participant)

If there’s a sense of security among agencies, we’re not going to have this fierce competition. So the biggest consequence of this model is that a reliable referral system, that we should have, is absolutely dysfunctional. (Service Provider Participant)

Moreover, every few years, as a result of “new” funding, the programming offered by an agency, the way they might partner with another agency is all subject to change. This adds to confusion and hinders the ability to truly integrate and coordinate services over time.

The challenge becomes the funding cycle for these agencies and I don’t know these new contracts they just put in or the new proposals that they’ve just put in further change. I think if that’s every two years, every three years. There was awhile going through a proposal process and knowing the system I have trouble keeping the track of who got what, what they’re allowed to do, what they want from us, or who at any given time has partnered with a different agency versus competing with another agency. I think one of the challenges we’ve always had is series of competition between these agencies belonging to part of that mainstream, that doesn’t compete for funding. I can see on the edge of the playing field. I think it makes it a challenge to work with them effectively. (Service Provider Participant)

There was a call on additional leadership with respect to an overarching refugee strategy. At least one city leader who participated in a focus group felt that the city had a role to play in this leadership:

If you don’t start addressing these issues, the first question is how we get there, I put it as our responsibility to lead it, our being the collective institutions that make up the city. It is our responsibility to show leadership in this area. So I really don’t put it on settlement agencies to lead this area. They support that, but in this issue I really see the success is going to be leadership. (Service Provider Participant)

NEED FOR ADDITIONAL DATA

Service providers identified the need for additional data to help them plan for service delivery. They reported that most of the information they had on refugees – in terms of numbers, settlement practices, availability of services – where based on their own experiences with the services they delivered. Moreover, they reported that the media was sometimes quick to identify and share negative stories with respect to refugees (e.g., potential association with gang violence) but that there was a lack of awareness with respect to stories of resilience and success.
Digging Deeper: A Case Study Approach

FOCUS ON PRIVATELY SPONSORED REFUGEES (PSRS)

“Government Assisted refugees have it a lot easier than us”

“They hoped the country would hug them and welcome them”

“One person in Iraq can support the whole family, here it is not possible”

“How can this be a good life if I don’t have a job? How can I be safe if I don’t have a job?”

“Not even (from the sponsor) did they hear about the different settlement agencies”

We talked with a group of 6 PSRs adults, 5 of whom had only been in Canada for two months. All 6 were from Iraq by way of Syria. While in general terms the group expressed appreciation for being in Canada, they all articulated numerous frustration’s about the initial stages of settlement, particularly their pre-arrival experiences, and a general sense of hopelessness about their prospects moving forward. There was a strong feeling that the hope for the future was really about the hopes and dreams they had for their children.

Pre-arrival assumptions of what would happen when they came to Canada was a central point for them in the discussion. “They hoped the country would hug them and welcome them.” These were the dreams and aspirations about life in Canada. And yet when probed about what they were told about Canada prior to arrival they mentioned they had been advised to expect frustrations when they got to Canada. “Don’t expect there won’t be challenges in Canada” was a title of a video they all saw before traveling to Canada. One participant mentioned she saw the video on a bus travelling to Lebanon from where she would be flying to Canada. The video depicts a woman from Africa who tells the viewers that it took her 5 years before she felt settled in Canada. The participants recalled that many of the passengers began to cry when they saw the video and wanted to go back home.

The refugees were processed through the International Organization of Migration (IOM), which is a third party international immigration organization. All focus group participants felt they could have been given more detailed information about what expect when they got to Canada. But they wanted to learn more about specific services and how to access them - not a ‘scared-straight’ orientation desired to dissuade from expecting too much. The general consensus was that specific information about Canada could be provided before they actually arrive in the country. In the absence of specific information their thoughts tended to shift between two extremes: great hopes, and great fears.

One very important misconception they had about was the transportation loan. Prior to coming to Canada all of them were told they would have one year without interest on the loan so they could get settled and begin paying back the loan. All of the participants expressed that the repayment loans began arriving as early as two or three months after arrival. It was very interesting that participants compared themselves to GARs without a prompt or probing from the focus group facilitators. The statement “Government Assisted Refugees have it a lot easier than us” was made when asked about challenges they first faced when they came to Canada. All the other participants nodded in agreement to the comment.

The participants thought their situation was a little harder because the government is not supporting them financially or medically. They believed that because they were PSRs they were meant to rely on the sponsor for support and not to seek out the services of settlement agencies. Moreover, what also became clear during this discussion is that the amount of support received by sponsors can vary significantly. There seemed to be confusion about what is it that the sponsors are required to do. At the same time the participants were very thankful and loyal to their sponsors.

A related theme was how the respondents learned about settlement services. For most of the PSRs, “Not even (from the sponsor) did they hear about the different settlement agencies”. They received very little information about settlement agencies and most found out about services literally by accident or someone telling them about various agencies in passing. For example, one woman told the story that while at the Guildford Mall she ran into a Lebanese woman who spoke Arabic and told her about a settlement worker who could help with school and language training. It might have been a long time before she learned about what was available had she not run into this woman.
Another topic of considerable discussion was the struggle in securing stable and well-paying jobs.

“One person in Iraq can support the whole family, here it is not possible”. The statement reflects a sense of relative deprivation between the jobs they had back home and what is possible in Canada. All participants talked about the high paying jobs they held in Iraq and that they are just struggling to get by in Canada. At various stages they have struggled with unemployment, under-employment and living on welfare. Lack of stable employment opportunities takes its toll: How can this be a good life if I don’t have a job? How can I be safe if I don’t have a job?”

We asked participants about their children; how they are adjusting to life in Canada. Most expressed a deep optimism about the future of their children. They suggested that mentally, the children are different from them, more resilient. The children learned faster, absorbed things easier. At the same time a few male participants expressed a sense of shame that they could not provide enough for their children, and especially that the children had to work and provide financial support to help ends meet.

FOCUS ON SOMALI WOMEN REFUGEES

Housing: “I am worse in this country; now I am getting crazier and crazier”.

During the focus group this Somali woman shared that she is sleeping on three doormats that the landlord gave her. She has only $60 dollars left at the end of each month and is barely surviving. The owners gave her the doormats temporarily, “That’s how I live”; she revealed during the focus group. In addition, her landlord does not provide for any privacy for her. She lives in constant fear that her landlord will come into her suite. She feels completely hopeless and the situation is not changing. She is willing and able to work, but has not been able to gain employment. Her situation has led to her feeling that, “I’m living a terrible life” and “I am worse in this country; now I am getting crazier and crazier”. At the time of the interview she indicated that she feels hopeless and in need of help, “My conclusion is, I need help, I really need help”.

Employment: “Hard to acquire the education here because the family must be taken care of, so one has no choice”

During the Somali women’s focus group there was much discussion around employment. Some of the barriers cited were: passing the Canadian citizenship test, language skills and discrimination. The citizenship test proved to be a large obstacle for many, “Government help is needed to pass the test (citizenship)”. One participant noted, “I failed the citizenship test three times”. Some participants cited discrimination as a barrier to their employment, “In classes, they say there will be equality in the job market, but in reality there is not when trying to get a job”. There was definitely an expressed eagerness to work; however, the opportunities are not there.

FOCUS ON LGBTQ REFUGEES

Surrey is becoming home to a small but growing number of refugees who have sought protection in Canada because of persecution related to sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI). Along with the caveat that any categorization of refugees comprises a very heterogeneous group, we recognize the limitations of using LGBTQ or SOGI to describe the myriad ways that sexual and gender diversity are understood in cultures both within Canada and around the globe. SOGI refugees express varied connections with lesbian gay bisexual transgender or queer as identities and nexus of community belonging. Participants in focus groups and interviews included Lesbian, gay and bisexual women and men, as well as gender diverse or transgender individuals. Surrey based SOGI refugees include people of diverse ethno-cultural, linguistic, and religious background from most regions of the globe including, Western Asia (Iraq, Iran, Syria), South and South East Asian (Pakistan, Sri Lanka), Africa (Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria), and Eastern Europe (Russia).

Violent persecution and criminalization of gender and sexual diversity persists in at least 80 countries internationally. In most former British colonies, laws against gender variance or same-sex relationships were imposed during colonial rule. In other jurisdictions, moral or religious laws carry severe penalties. Criminal sanctions, combined with intolerance or hate among political, religious authorities and violence within families create conditions of extreme and pervasive danger for gender and sexual minorities.

Canada’s refugee protection system has been among the first in the world to grant protection to refugees fleeing homophobic and transphobic persecution. Over the past two decades, legal and program reforms have made it possible for SOGI refugees to seek safety in Canada through all three protection pathways: as inland claimants, GARs, and PSRs. Canada’s Inland Refugee Protection system has been granting refugee protection to people fleeing homophobic or transphobic persecution since the mid-1990s. Canadian consular officials began referring SOGI claims for resettlement at GAR in the early 2000s. In 2011, CIC (now IRCC) piloted a blended sponsorship initiative with Vancouver based Rainbow Refugee to encourage private sponsorship of SOGI refugees by community groups in Canadian LGBTQ communities.

SOGI refugees are drawn to Vancouver by its international reputation as a LGBTQ friendly city. However, like many new arrivals, SOGI refugees turn to surrounding cities, including Surrey, when they find housing and living in Vancouver prohibitively expensive.
Rainbow Refugee estimates that in 2014-15 between 30-50% of the inland claimant members reside in Surrey. Settlement service providers at the stakeholder consultations identified LGBTQ refugee settlement as an area where greater attention and resources are needed in Surrey.

SOGI refugees carry impacts of having lived a highly stigmatized and persecuted identity, while adjusting to their new locale. Some carry the impacts of early childhood abuse, sexualized violence, and recurrent traumas. For most SOGI refugees, covering or hiding their sexuality or gender was a protective survival strategy in their country of origin. Arrival in Canada does not automatically create a felt sense of safety. Living in BC offers legal protections, and an often confusing mix of social attitudes from open celebration and acceptance through stigma and deep hatred. Very real threats to safety for people LGBTQ people persist, with those who are gender nonconforming or racialized being particularly at risk of homophobic or transphobic bashing.

LGBTQ refugees described feeling safer, yet still stigmatized during settlement. The ease of acceptance and everyday openness felt exciting and disorienting, exclusion and harassment were jolting, yet common, occurrences and the threat of violence remained palpably present. LGBTQ refugees described expending considerable effort gauging their emotional safety, and feeling anxious uncertainty about who can be trusted with what aspects of their histories and lives. They were anxiously self-monitoring during common interactions with settlement workers, doctors, fellow refugees in shelters and classes, potential housemates and employers. They also described vigilance to physical safety threats in parts of Surrey and while on transit.

Participants described challenges that parallel and amplify those of other refugees: difficulties in finding reliable LGBTQ affirming interpretation; being unable to find affordable housing in LGBTQ safe neighborhoods; needing good trans-knowledgeable medical care; and safety concerns related to limited public transit schedules. Their settlement priorities spoke to the intersectionality of gender and sexuality, racialization, social class and migration status, reflecting ways that the process of settlement, its opportunities and challenges, resources and risks must be understood with an intersectional lens that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Settlement Supports**

Living a marginalized sexuality or gender shapes every aspect of settlement: forming friendships and relationships, seeking safe housing, wayfinding in a new city, job seeking and sustaining work. Yet, with some important exceptions, the vast majority of community and social service organizing in BC continues to operate on the assumption that people are either LGBTQ or refugee newcomers, but not both. Community or service initiatives designed with SOGI refugees in mind are unfunded or in early pilot phases of funded development.

Like most mainstream social services, refugee settlement services are typically structured around traditional binary gender and heteronormative family structures. In the process, LGBTQ lives are made invisible in these institutions. Participants described examples of ways prevailing gender and sexuality norms and erasure impact their everyday settlement experiences:

- first placements are in shelters separated by binary gender
- LGBTQ cultural events or social services are not named in orientations
- English class materials and discussion topics exclusively represent heterosexual family forms

When SOGI refugees gauge how welcoming settlement services will be, they are seeing few apparent signs of organizational recognition and responsiveness.

Efforts to create welcoming environments, engage in outreach and design LGBTQ responsive programming are underway in settlement organizations of BCs Lower Mainland. At the time of this report, no settlement programming specifically for LGBTQ refugees existed in Surrey. Participants were transiting to downtown Vancouver or New Westminster for opportunities to connect in an openly LGBTQ refugee groups met and openly LGBTQ affirming settlement supports existed. Perhaps because of the longer history of LGBTQ...
refugees arriving through claims within Canada, services geared towards inland claimants were quite far along in their outreach and programming for LGBTQ refugees. The Vancouver Association for the Survivors of Torture (VAST) and Settlement Orientation Services (SOS) have over a decade of experience offering LGBTQ refugee-focused programming. LGBTQ refugees who arrived as inland claimants travelled from Surrey into Vancouver to VAST or SOS for settlement supports and counselling with staff they knew were affirming or openly LGBTQ identified. A strong commitment from organizations leadership and a decade of collaborations among LGBTQ refugee community organization Rainbow Refugee, VAST and SOS contributed to creating this welcoming environment. VAST and SOS staff and counsellors engage in outreach to Rainbow Refugee. Rainbow Refugee volunteers liaise with VAST and SOS to support individual claimants. Similar collaborative efforts were underway at MOSAIC, who in 2014, began hosting a twice monthly group for LGBTQ newcomers, regardless of status, in New Westminster. Surrey based DIVERSEcity has LGBTQ outreach and programming proposals underway.

Interactions with settlement staff were varied - openly affirming, subtly invalidating and profoundly alienating. Both GAR and Inland refugee participants described positive relationships with individual staff within service organizations. Some GAR participants had their first experience of being able to “come out” and feel fully respected when they spoke with settlement workers and counsellors who conveyed openness and acceptance. Subtly invalidating interactions included awkward conversations about gender on documentation or lack of knowledge about LGBTQ resources by settlement staff. More alienating were instances when staff perceptibly shut down or stiffened or when interpreters had only pejorative language to talk about sexuality or gender. Participants also described being mocked or harassed, not by settlement staff, but by other students in classes, residents in shelters, and support or administrative workers on site at settlement agencies.

Safety and Belonging in Surrey

SOGI refugees described complex relationships with their co-national communities and the wider diasporic communities of Surrey. Some participants were able to benefit from practical support and shared cultural connections without raising questions about their sexuality or gender. Some were relieved and surprised to meet members of their co-national communities who were accepting and affirming of their LGBTQ identity. Others experienced members of co-national communities as excluding and hostile.

Most SOGI refugees living in Surrey sought out social connections, and particularly connections with LGBTQ community, outside of Surrey. When asked about spaces that felt safe and affirming within Surrey, several could not name a single place. One participant suggested that the library provided a real sense of peace and enjoyment, and others agreed.

Connecting with LGBTQ Communities & Spaces

Surrey based SOGI refugees were travelling, sometimes for two hours by transit, into Vancouver or New Westminster to participate in organizations that focus on LGBTQ community building or spend time in public LGBTQ spaces and events. The cost and limited service hours of public transit were substantial barriers to full participation. Participants were having to leave evening gatherings by 8pm, or face substantial wait-times or walks along isolated streets.

Community events, social services and resources organized by and for LGBTQ communities can be less than welcoming for SOGI refugees. Many organizations are mono-lingually English with limited multilingual capacity. Attending LGBTQ community events requires financial resources that are impossible for many refugees. Full participation entails a level of public openness that is uncomfortable or unsafe for SOGI refugees who must continue to cover in order to function in their co-national communities, places of faith, and workplaces.

SOGI refugees experience subtle and overt racism in LGBTQ events where White Anglo-European cultural aesthetics and ways of organizing are dominant. With a few important exceptions leadership and staff are predominantly white English speakers. Overtly racist exoticization and exclusions are commonplace in clubs and online dating sites.

**MOST SOGI REFUGEES LIVING IN SURREY SOUGHT OUT SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, AND PARTICULARLY CONNECTIONS WITH LGBTQ COMMUNITY, OUTSIDE OF SURREY. WHEN ASKED ABOUT SPACES THAT FELT SAFE AND AFFIRMING WITHIN SURREY, SEVERAL COULD NOT NAME A SINGLE PLACE.**
Forging a sense of belonging for LGBTQ refugees entails forming supportive relationships by connecting with sub-cultures within sub-cultures. Accessing the informal social networks among LGBTQ affirming people within diasporic communities as well as ethno-culturally diverse or racialized LGBTQ communities.

Across BC’s Lower Mainland, there are greater opportunities for LGBTQ people of colour can connect. In the process, these groups and networks are forging a stronger visible presence for racialized LGBTQ in BC. Our City of Colours, Sher, Trikone, Salaam, Pinoy Pride, and Qpocolype are some of the organizations currently contributing to these efforts. Some of these groups, Salaam and Trikone in particular, have engaged in outreach to refugee members of their communities.

**Needs & Priorities:**
- Affordable housing
- Neighbourhood safety
- Safe, affordable public transit
- Trans-knowledgeable healthcare with interpretation support (Arabic, Farsi and Spanish)
- On-going knowledge-exchange and case-consultation among LGBTQ and settlement organizations
- Culturally responsive LGBTQ affirming settlement services, social support groups, mental health and primary care
RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Table 1.1 reflects a set of recommendations derived from the focus groups with refugee study participants, service providers and community leaders throughout the course of the project.

We encourage the City of Surrey and the Surrey LIP to consider all these recommendations, including those expressed by the 37 participants of a community-planning day held on March 31st, 2016 at Surrey City Hall (see Appendix 71).

As researchers, we felt privileged to hear from the refugees themselves - their dreams of settling in Canada, their devastating stories of trauma and hardship, their remarkable resiliency and resourcefulness in the face of ongoing adversity and their deep desire, through this research, to help inform and improve national and regional refugee policies and services.

In many ways, refugees face the same complex systematic barriers that many other people do including poverty, mental health difficulties, lack of affordable housing and limited employment opportunities - but often at increased levels. Limited English language skills, geographical and cultural displacement and significant exposure to trauma all contribute to amplify and aggravate the challenges refugees face. The study finds that refugees settling in Surrey need additional services and supports to successfully settle and ultimately thrive in their community.

The most pressing issues identified in this report, and highlighted in the recommendations, is access to English language training, to employment opportunities, to health care services and to suitable housing options, of which are interconnected. For example, low English skills were identified as a major barrier to both accessing health care services and accessing employment opportunities. Similarly, limited employment opportunities made finding suitable housing difficult while both of these challenges contributed to increased distress and poorer mental health. This interconnectedness is a challenge in-of-itsel and points to the importance of coordinated services.

While the study findings and recommendations indicate that refugees need access to additional services and supports, the way these services and supports are delivered is equally important. The current experience for many of the refugees who shared their stories with us is that settlement and integration programs and processes are often too prescribed, too homogenous and too fragmented. It has been our experience that service providers are working very hard, on limited budgets, to meet the complex and varied needs of refugees. There is a strong desire among service providers to increase access and coordination but there remain challenges to achieving these goals including legislative barriers around information sharing, short-term funding cycles and the lack of an overarching community plan.
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<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Pre-Arrival</th>
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<th>Settling In</th>
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<td>Additional investment into new (or calibration and streamlining of existing)</td>
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<td>Access and provision to formal and informal learning opportunities, and</td>
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<td>settlement programs and initiatives in Surrey, addressing:</td>
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<td>assessment of learning needs.</td>
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<td>English language education for both youth and adult refugees</td>
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<td>Supporting work experience (e.g., internships, volunteer and mentorship</td>
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<td>Employment and self-employment opportunities</td>
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<td>Education and training for service providers, community groups and organizations</td>
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<td>Healthcare, public health education and social services programming</td>
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<td>Socio-cultural, language, trauma and mental health training</td>
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<td>Affordable, accessible and suitable housing options</td>
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<td>Aligning programming and language services to the specific needs of diverse</td>
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<td>Develop greater understanding and engagement with Surrey residents on</td>
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<td>and marginalized refugee communities</td>
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<td>Supporting and incentivizing recreational programming, as well as social</td>
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<td>Increase opportunities and pathways for Surrey residents to engage with new</td>
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<td>and emotional well-being initiatives</td>
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<td>Through diverse approaches, promote and educate Surrey residents about the</td>
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<td>cultural and economic benefits that refugees bring to the region.</td>
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<td>Grow, facilitate and co-ordinate the sharing and communication of information</td>
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<td>Actively engage the general public, local businesses, public institutions,</td>
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<td>practices) amongst local business, government and community stakeholders, and</td>
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<td>Engage in practical initiatives that welcome refugees to the community and</td>
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<td>with regional and national partners and groups with an interest in support</td>
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<td>Continue to further the quantity, quality, frequency and diversity of</td>
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<td>In addition to media, increase and leverage business, government and</td>
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<td>opportunities for settlement agencies and community resource providers to</td>
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<td>interact with new refugee settlers</td>
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<td>Develop city-wide transit programs that improve refugee mobility</td>
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<td>Co-promoting services and co-creating initiatives (i.e., with policing</td>
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<td>Improve the settlement information provided to refugees coming to the region</td>
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<td>Support continued research into the needs and benefits of refugee</td>
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<td>Furthering active engagement with community resources and settlements</td>
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<td>Obtain a deeper understanding of refugees (as individuals, sub-groups and</td>
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Table 1.1
The Syrian refugee crisis abroad and the large number of Syrian refugees settling in Canada has the potential to bring the community together to support refugees in a way it never has before and to improve the public’s understanding and perception of refugees. However, in our zeal to help Syrians settling in our communities, we should be mindful not to implement a stratified system of refugees where some get more services, others less. Refugee settlement and integration is everyone’s responsibility -- individually and collectively. Business owners, landlords, doctors, teachers, neighbours. The current Syrian Refugee situation could be a game changer in terms of public perceptions of refugees.

Importantly, it has placed a lens on the need for leadership and collective action, i.e., successful refugee settlement and integration in Surrey, and the design of a strategy, will require advise, guidance and support from the whole community, and a sense of shared responsibility and response.

We hope that the implementation of the recommendations in this report form part of a holistic community approach and that refugees, stakeholders and the wider community continued to be engaged in implementing and evaluating locally implemented services and initiatives.
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APPENDICES

List of new refugee initiatives or settlement developments from March 31st, 2016 participants:

- DiverseCity expanded “Bundle Up” campaign (Partnered with SFU, etc.)
- Options expanded services: M.A.P. (with Diversecity, PCRS)
- Diversecity doing research on youth transitioning – focused on immigrants
- City of Surrey reinvigorating a public safety strategy
- News releases – featured stories
- Trauma informed services?
- Children with disabilities
- Housing coordinator – help with refugee housing
- Fraser Valley regional Refugee Response Team
- Million dollars ISS to set up refugee hub
- Delta – New Hope purchased refugee apartment building
- One time funding
- Moving Ahead Counselor – working with higher needs immigrant populations
- Abbotsford Employer donations – hard to figure out how to help refugee families
- Landlord discount – donation receipts, did not go through, secondary suites
- City held two training sessions for City Staff for settlement processes, call for action, staff engagement
- IRC Funding – settlement services have additional funds for 2 months and one year
- Hired more Arabic support workers (2 FTE)
- Sheraton Hotel as temporary housing (30 families – Options, Diversecity, Success – WRAP programs, Hotel based)
- BC Housing not available
- Difficulties finding housing for big families
- Housing must be first – cannot have credit cheque/references
- Welcome Centre
- Bought new apartment building in Surrey to house refugees
- FH some contributions (e.g. hot line)
- Surrey Memorial Hospital/Mental Health in the Community – collecting data on refugee admissions and services
- Increase in referrals of mental health in the community
- Increase in referrals in the Mental Health portion of ER at Surrey Memorial
- Community readiness/engagement in refugee settlement (what can I do? How can we help?)
- Some reactivity/hostility in community
- Increase training for service providers
- More funds and more services for refugee children
- Cultural sensitivity (e.g. Muslim Food Bank)
- Increase media
- Education for employers
- Getting message out to “community” through MPs
- Increase partnerships between organizations
- Government openness and commitment to refugees
### Settlement Timeline Recommendations from March 31st Community Planning Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF DOTS</th>
<th>PRE-ARRIVAL</th>
<th>ARRIVAL</th>
<th>SETTLING IN</th>
<th>LONG-TERM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong># OF DOTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>RECOMMENDATION</strong></td>
<td><strong># OF DOTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>RECOMMENDATION</strong></td>
<td><strong># OF DOTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Set up mentor/mentor cohort before arrival</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Fraser Health needs its own Bridge Clinic (a second location OR MORE)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Need to educate Canada about the contributions of refugees beforehand</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>A longer term time-frame to allow refugees to orient themselves before independence</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Practical language lessons before arriving at the airport in Canada</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Buddy system - connect families to one another. Have a database of volunteers and what they can do. Vetting might be an issue. Partner with RCMP, etc?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Orientation groups re: Accurate expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Free Transit passes and education/tours around transit</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Newcomer guide should be given right after the visa (include the “reality”)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Waive transportation loans</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Support rituals of leaving, loss, etc. (Perhaps this will also come later)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Revamp orientation process - too much important information too soon</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lobby for acceptance of academic credentials</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Place ESL/EAL students with age group</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Matching database for employment and employers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Continuing information and education from Pre-Arrival</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Police processes training - understand that police are friendly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mistrust of authority (especially police) - minimizing fear around deportation and family separation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Getting info on people (eg. Youth) to service providers prior to arrival</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Volunteer families/teams for connections</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Language training provided in camps</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Address systemic delay in setting up finances, eg. Bank accounts (this gap can take several weeks).</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Best practices for mentorship - learn from homestay, other programs on low to vet volunteers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Need to better understand the process of initial (RAP) settlement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Build more housing for refugees</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rental subsidy must be raised above $375 per single person (or a shelter allowance?)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provide practical information about weather, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Increased awareness about limitations re: official documents, eg. ID Documents. Recommendations - create some kind of official/temporary ID</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plan here before refugees arrive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Research positive outcomes of free transit, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Resources to avoid exploitation and navigation of services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Resources to avoid exploitation and navigation of services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>More diversity awards to employers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>More diversity awards to employers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Childcare based on parents’ availabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Childcare based on parents’ availabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Consider group therapy in specific languages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Consider group therapy in specific languages</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Our Community, Our Voice: The Settlement and Integration Needs of Refugees in Surrey, BC

#### PRE-ARRIVAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF DOTS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How can local government provide information on where the refugees are going prior to arrival, at least for PSRs (may not be possible for GARs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lengthening orientation period (CRITICAL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Benefits to welcoming refugees to our country rather than costs to our system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Showcasing different regions/areas of the province before arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Decreased choice about where to settle - allocate ahead of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Know what to pay for/fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Develop newcomer curriculum in digestable parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Provide community-specific information guide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ARRIVAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF DOTS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Be more flexible about age restrictions for services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Free Surrey Leisure access pass - make more accessible and less onerous for refugee families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Incentivize municipal participation - municipal tax break?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Harvest box education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Standardized assessments for English classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Create spaces/means for connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Community gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Education for youth easily accessible</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### SETTLING IN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF DOTS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Set goal of all refugees to reach Level 1 ESL by 6 month mark and how to facilitate this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coordination of housing search for larger families by community agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Living wage education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Stabilized program - government to put infrastructure to sustain programs long term (no more one-time funding)</td>
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</table>

#### LONG-TERM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF DOTS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Facilitate/provide additional support for English learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trauma counselling and grief support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Education around stigma/not putting vulnerable groups against each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Need social innovation re: illiteracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stabilized program - government to put infrastructure to sustain programs long term (no more one-time funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Include everyone in refugee programs that work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Dedicated vocational workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Support diversity of refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Funding - local, provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Leadership and coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Ongoing conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Project to address mental health in culturally sensitive ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Engage youth and parents</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Demographic Information for Youth Refugee Participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee Focus Group (n=24)</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Information</strong></td>
<td><strong>Category (# of participants)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Refugee Path | Government Sponsored (20)  
Inland Claimant (1)  
Private Sponsorship (1)  
Don’t know (2) |
| Age | 15–26 |
| Gender | Female (16)  
Male (8) |
| Languages Spoken | Acholi (2)  
Arabic (6)  
Assyrian (1)  
Burmese (2)  
English (15 at home, 24 outside home)  
French (1)  
Karen (6)  
Kirundi (1)  
Kiswahili (6)  
Somali (8)  
Spanish (1) |
| Country of Origin | Burundi (1)  
Honduras (1)  
Iraq (3)  
Kenya (3)  
Somalia (6)  
South Sudan (1)  
Syria (1)  
Thailand (8) |
| Year Arrived in Canada | 2007 (3)  
2008 (4)  
2009 (1)  
2010 (1)  
2011 (2)  
2012 (1)  
2013 (6)  
2014 (5)  
2015 (1) |
| Year Arrived in Surrey | 2007 (3)  
2008 (4)  
2009 (1)  
2010 (1)  
2011 (2)  
2012 (1)  
2013 (6)  
2014 (5)  
2015 (1) |

**Note: For some participants, they arrived in Canada elsewhere and moved to Surrey in the same calendar year of arrival***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee Focus Group (n=24)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Information</strong></td>
<td><strong>Category (# of participants)</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Religion/Faith | Buddhist (2)  
Christian (12)  
Islam (5)  
Muslim (3)  
Not disclosed (2) |
| Parents Jobs in Country of Origin | Driver (1)  
Farmer (2)  
Free-workers (2)  
Housekeeping (1)  
House Wife (3)  
Lawyer/Notary (1)  
Mechanic (1)  
Missionary (1)  
Plumber (1)  
“Save the Children” worker (1)  
Teacher (2)  
Not disclosed (10) |
### Demographic Information for Adult Refugee Participants:

#### Refugee Adult Focus Group (n=31)

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<thead>
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<th>Demographic Information</th>
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<td>Government Sponsored</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inland Claimant</td>
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<td>Private Sponsorship</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td>27–66</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not disclosed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages Spoken</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Assyrian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmese</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>French</td>
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<td>Karen</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Kiswahili</td>
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<td>Kizigua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swahili</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
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<td><strong>Country of Origin</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Burma/Karen State Burmese Mayamar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<td>Ethiopia/Somalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
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<td><strong>Year Arrived in Canada</strong></td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not disclosed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year Arrived in Surrey</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>after arrival</strong>*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religion/Faith</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Muslim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslim/Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parents Jobs in Country of Origin</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear, Nose, and Throat Doctor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer/Babysitter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/Aids Counselor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Pastor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Save the Children Outreach Community Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Business</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not disclosed</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Service Provider Focus Group questions:

**Sectorial Leaders Questions**

1. What are the primary settlement barriers faced by refugees in Surrey?
2. Within your portfolio, what do you see as the primary issues related to supporting the settlement of refugees in Surrey? How do you work with refugees and/or refugee groups within your portfolio? What are the challenges and opportunities in the process of connecting with refugees?
3. To what extent are your portfolios/organizations integrated or set up to meet the needs of refugees?
4. If better integration were a goal, how can you get there? What are some recommendations that you have for moving forward? Innovative and feasible?
5. Other comments?

**Frontline (Refugee Direct) Service Providers**

1. What is working well? What are the strengths of services that support refugees?
2. What are the primary settlement barriers faced by refugees in Surrey?
3. What are the primary gaps in services when it comes to addressing the barriers faced by refugees in Surrey?
4. How are you currently partnering with other services/organizations?
5. What would a coordinated approach to service delivery look like? How do we get there? What are the obstacles?
6. Tell us about an experience of working with a refugee where you felt you couldn’t do anything, where you could not meet the person’s needs?
7. Any other comments?

**Mainstream (Non-refugee Direct) Service Providers**

1. What are the primary settlement barriers faced by refugees in Surrey?
2. Within your portfolio, what do you see as the primary issues related to supporting the settlement of refugees in Surrey? How do you work with refugees and/or refugee groups within your portfolio? What are the challenges and opportunities in the process of connecting with refugees?
3. To what extent are your portfolios/organizations integrated or set up to meet the needs of refugees?
4. If better integration were a goal, how can you get there? What are some recommendations that you have for moving forward? Innovative and feasible?
5. Other comments?

**City of Surrey Planning Leaders Questions**

1. What are the primary settlement barriers faced by refugees in Surrey?
2. Within your portfolio, what do you see as the primary issues related to supporting the settlement of refugees in Surrey?
3. How do you work with refugee groups within your portfolio? What are the challenges and opportunities in the process of connecting with the leadership within refugee communities?
4. To what extent are your portfolios integrated to meet the needs of refugees?
5. If better integration were a goal, how can you get there?
6. Other comments?
Number of Comments made by Service Provider focus groups by Group and Questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions Asked</th>
<th>City of Surrey Planning Leaders</th>
<th>Front Line Refugee Direct Services</th>
<th>Front Line Mainstream (non-direct services)</th>
<th>Sectorial Leaders</th>
<th>Row Totals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the primary settlement barriers faced by refugees in Surrey?</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within your portfolio, what do you see as the primary issues related to supporting the settlement of refugees in Surrey?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you work with refugee groups within your portfolio? What are the challenges and opportunities in the process of connecting with the leadership within refugee communities?</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent are your portfolios integrated to meet the needs of refugees?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>If better integration were a goal, how can you get there?</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is working well? What are the strengths of services that support refugees?</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the primary gaps in services when it comes to addressing the barriers faced by refugees in Surrey?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you currently partnering with other services/organizations?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would a coordinated approach to service-delivery look like? How do we get there? What are the obstacles?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell us about an experience of working with a refugee where you felt you couldn’t do anything, where you could not meet the person’s needs?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some recommendations that you have for moving forward? Innovative? Feasible?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other comments?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solid blue box denotes that the focus group was not asked that particular question</strong></td>
<td><strong>Column Totals</strong> 134</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Row Totals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>556 Comments</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Refugee Focus Groups Discussion Guideline:

Timelines

A. Sketching timelines, with helpful and hindering incidents

Supplies/Set up: Large piece of paper in the middle, with markers and pencils

1. Big Circle/cloud in the middle “Successful settlement in Surrey”
   What would successful, or positive settlement in Surrey look like for you?

2. If the edge of page is your arrival in Canada, and middle here is positive settlement sometime in the future...or maybe you are there now. Can you mark some of the important steps you have taken.
   When you first arrived, what were the most important things you did to help you get settled?
   Over time, what things have you done that have helped you get settled into Surrey?
   what activities or events have you participated in?
   important people or community organizations?
   What are the important milestones that have made getting settled go better, or perhaps go worse?
   (Give people time to draw symbols for the steps)

3. Can we go around the group, and can you share the story of one of the earliest things you did to help you get settled in Surrey.
   Listen, reflect meanings and probe
   What were you thinking about...
   How were you feeling about...
   What did you want to have happen?
   Sounds like...was helpful
   Sounds like you needed more...? Is that right?
   fleshing out both helpful and hindering elements.

4. Can we go around the group, and can you share one of the biggest challenges you’ve faced in settling into Surrey.

5. Can we go around the group, can you share something you have been doing recently that helps you feel more settled into Surrey.

B. Closing Round.

1. Looking back, can you share one thing you have accomplished in Surrey that you are proud of or feel is positive in your life.

2. Any thoughts about what it was like to participate in today’s group?