



*Life After War:  
Education as a  
Healing Process  
for Refugee and  
War-Affected  
Children*

2012

## Published by Manitoba Education 2012

This project is the result of the work of a network of immigrant and refugee serving agencies and organizations who felt that educators would benefit from support materials that dealt with the psychosocial and educational needs of children and youth from refugee and immigrant backgrounds. Manitoba Education wishes to thank Manitoba Immigration and Multiculturalism (formerly Manitoba Immigration and Labour) for providing the initial support for this document and the many individuals who contributed to its development. Many educators, advocates for immigrant and refugee communities in Manitoba, and professionals involved in social and health development have contributed to the development of this document. Most importantly, it has been inspired by the thousands of refugee children and families who have made Manitoba their new home in the last decade. Their courage, resiliency, and hopes and dreams have inspired educators and Manitobans from all walks of life and continue to do so.

### Acknowledgements

This document draws on Canadian, Australian, American, and international research, educational literature, and support materials that have been developed with the intent of improving the educational and life outcomes of children and young people who have been forced to seek asylum in or immigrate to distant lands because of war, conflict, and displacement. While best efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, readers are reminded that it is a guide only. It is important that teachers and other professionals using this resource remain vigilant to their professional responsibilities, and exercise their professional skill and judgement at all times.

### Companion Publications

Two companion documents have been published separately but were developed as part of this initiative. These are

- Life After War: Professional Development, Agencies, and Community Supports
- War-Affected Children: A Comprehensive Bibliography

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# INTRODUCTION

How do issues concerning refugee and war-affected children fit into the current social, political, and educational context?

The multicultural face of Canada is constantly changing and evolving because of immigration and other societal and demographic factors. This document is in line with contemporary publications which have sought to raise the collective awareness of the changing nature of our diversity and the value of this diversity, through family and community traditions and experiences. Educators throughout Manitoba and in other jurisdictions have endeavoured to respond appropriately to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population in many schools. However, at times some have struggled with the reality of teaching in a context that is emotionally demanding and necessitates excellent cross-cultural and multilingual teaching skills and competencies.

**Of the more than 43.7 million refugees and displaced persons globally in conflict or war zones, over half are children and young people.** Canada is one of 16 countries with an established refugee resettlement program. This has resulted in up to 16,000 refugee children and young adults (24 and under) resettling to Canada each year. During the 2006 to 2010 period, total refugee immigration to Canada ranged from 25,000 to 32,000 persons each year. Soon after arrival in Canada, school-aged children and youth enrol in the education system.

In many schools, newcomer families, children, and youth are often from refugee or war-affected origins or backgrounds. Many of these individuals come from refugee camps, or directly from war-affected communities or countries. These families come seeking a peaceful place to rebuild their lives and the opportunity to grow and flourish. They face many challenges in their quest, which tests their resiliency and ability to survive in their new social, cultural, and physical environments.

1 billion children are deprived of one or more services essential for survival and development

500 million - 1.5 billion children have been affected by war

18 million children are living with the affects of displacement

**From the State of the World's Children (2010) Executive Report, UNICEF**

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us... we already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

**(Edmonds, 1979, p. 23)**





Every refugee I meet is my teacher.

(R. Mollica, 2008)



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Although most schools in Manitoba have had experience with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, many have not yet worked with students of refugee or war-affected experience. While this document necessarily makes some generalizations about the experiences, culture, language, levels of education, and resettlement experiences of these students, it is important that students be treated as individuals with their own unique story and experiences.

Educators and others who work with students with refugee and war-affected experiences find it to be an enriching and fulfilling experience. Although the work can be challenging and complex, the wealth of life skills, different

perspectives, strong survival skills, and motivation that these students bring with them and demonstrate in the resettlement process is inspiring. In order to help meet the related challenges and to support students appropriately in acquiring a good education and rebuilding their lives, all school staff need a good understanding of these students' backgrounds and the possible influence of trauma on their learning.

The terms *trauma* and *child traumatic stress* are defined in Part 2 of this document. Click [here](#) if you wish to see those definitions now.

Experience and research have gradually raised awareness of the short- and long-term effects of grief and trauma on families, which may affect several generations. This has led to many service providers focusing their attention on war-affected newcomer children and youth, and their families. While many Canadian families have experiences with trauma and grief issues in their family histories, remembrance of war and personal experiences as victims of torture or other forms of violence are very recent and relatively new for many newcomer families. Many come to Canada directly from present-day war and conflict zones and many have lived in camps for displaced persons for

extensive periods. Not surprisingly, many have fresh memories of grief and losses that other Canadians have only seen in a more distant past.

Many students with refugee experiences have had their education extensively disrupted in their country of origin and education facilities in refugee camps are generally quite limited. In times of war and extensive civil conflict, schooling is all too often one of the first casualties. In light of these experiences and the many transitions these children and young people have undergone, their capacity for learning will be affected.



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© United Nations Photo. April 1, 1999. Kukes, Albania. UN Photo/x. Kosovo refugees. CC license. <[www.un.org/av/photo/](http://www.un.org/av/photo/)>.

The challenges which await them upon arrival to Manitoba may include an unfamiliar social system in which they need to find housing, medical facilities, employment or income support, and education. They may experience alienation, anxiety, malnutrition, and the complexities and interconnections of low socioeconomic status and poor health. They may have problems with literacy, numeracy, and other academic foundational knowledge and skills. In addition to such practical challenges, as many are coming from systems which may have been oppressive they will also need to develop trust and a

feeling of safety in a new cultural context. Forced by persecution to leave their own countries and even countries of asylum, they arrive in Manitoba with multiple losses, great personal changes, grief, traumatic stress, and very little information about Canada. Therefore, education is vital for newcomers with refugee experiences, whatever their age. For parents and older youth, first priorities may include: language support and training; finding employment (which often is not in their area of experience and expertise) to support the household after the initial sponsorship period ends; adapting and absorbing many clues as well as much information and learning through their exposure to the dominant culture.

For children and youth, their experiences at school and in the neighbourhood are their first introduction and experience of living in Canada. Sponsors, hosts, and settlement agencies provide much support at first and play an important role in easing the transition to school, and welcoming the children in their new schools. Newcomers from war-affected origins and backgrounds will benefit from educational initiatives that are inclusive, that recognize and respond to their educational needs, and that offer a welcoming environment.

However, while inclusive, welcoming, and positive school experiences will help with the integration of the new students and contribute to the healing, these alone are insufficient for many students coping with the damage caused by war and their refugee experiences. Unimaginable experiences of violence, loss, and grief leave deep wounds that take time to uncover and heal. In addition, new wounds are created by the stress, grief, and guilt that result from leaving behind surviving family members in refugee camps, in difficult and unsafe conditions, needing further sponsorship, or needing help to return to their country of origin. Not surprisingly, the path to self-sufficiency and a fulfilling new life for the family at times challenges the natural resiliency of children and youth. It is important to recognize that refugee and war-affected children and youth will reflect a spectrum of responses to the stress and traumatic events they experienced before and during resettlement. Many exhibit enormous resiliency, while others may be severely traumatized and exhibit a range of post-traumatic stress responses.





## What is the purpose of this resource?

*Life After War: Education as a Healing Process for Refugee and War-Affected Children* is a resource that seeks to help strengthen the capacity of school communities at all levels (early, middle, and senior years) to provide an appropriate and supportive school environment for refugee and war-affected learners and their families: an environment that will nurture their mental health and well-being, and that will enhance their educational and life outcomes. This resource provides a summary and a discussion of the research and the experiences of educators concerning the following:

- common experiences and needs of war-affected learners
- appropriate programming and practices
- promising programming models and strategies

This resource also promotes partnerships and collaboration between refugee families, immigrant and refugee serving organizations and agencies, and the school community.

It is intended to be a practical guide for educators working with and providing educational supports to newcomer students and families with war-affected backgrounds. It includes a summary of research and important information on newcomers from refugee and war-affected backgrounds and some practical ideas and suggestions for increasing school capacity and implementing appropriate programming, as well as a list of resources that are available to educators. It aspires to encourage and assist educators in creating new partnerships and circles of support and solidarity for war-affected families and children through grassroots programming that honours and respects newcomers and listens to their voices about their world, their needs, and their solutions.

For information concerning EAL curriculum, see:

[Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum Framework for English as an Additional Language \(EAL\) and Literacy, Academics, and Language \(LAL\).](#)





## How is this document organized?

The document is divided into six parts.

- **Part 1: Immigration and Settlement of Newcomers of Refugee Origins** provides information on refugees worldwide and immigration and settlement patterns in Manitoba.
- **Part 2: The Effects of War and Resettlement** provides a summary of the effects of war, displacement, and resettlement on the mental health and general well-being of children and families. Resiliency as well as protective and risk factors are discussed. Finally, the major challenges facing newcomers, which may affect their ability to successfully integrate and learn, are explored.
- **Part 3: Supporting Student Success in the Classroom** provides some practical suggestions, ideas, and resources for schools and educators to consider in developing and improving school and classroom programming for newcomer children and youth from refugee and war-affected backgrounds. Topics covered include building resiliency; information on good practices and examples of promising programming; dealing with disclosure, storytelling; and the importance of after-school and summer programs.
- **Part 4: Supporting Teachers and Staff Working with Refugee Children and Families** discusses the impact on teachers and school staff of working with refugee and war-affected children.
- **Part 5: Helping Refugee Children and Youth in Schools** focuses on whole-school approaches, refugee readiness audits, and planning for action. Topics covered are whole-school approaches; building resiliency; information on good practices and examples of promising programming; dealing with disclosure, storytelling; and the importance of after-school and summer programs.
- **Part 6: Learning More About Refugee and War-Affected Learners and Families** provides information on web-based and other resources for educators wishing to continue their professional learning with respect to the topics and themes covered in this resource.



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## Companion documents

Two companion documents have been published separately but were developed as part of this initiative. These are

- **Life After War: Professional Development, Agencies, and Community Supports**
- **War-Affected Children: A Comprehensive Bibliography**



## Immigration and Settlement of Newcomers of Refugee Origins

### What is the refugee situation worldwide?

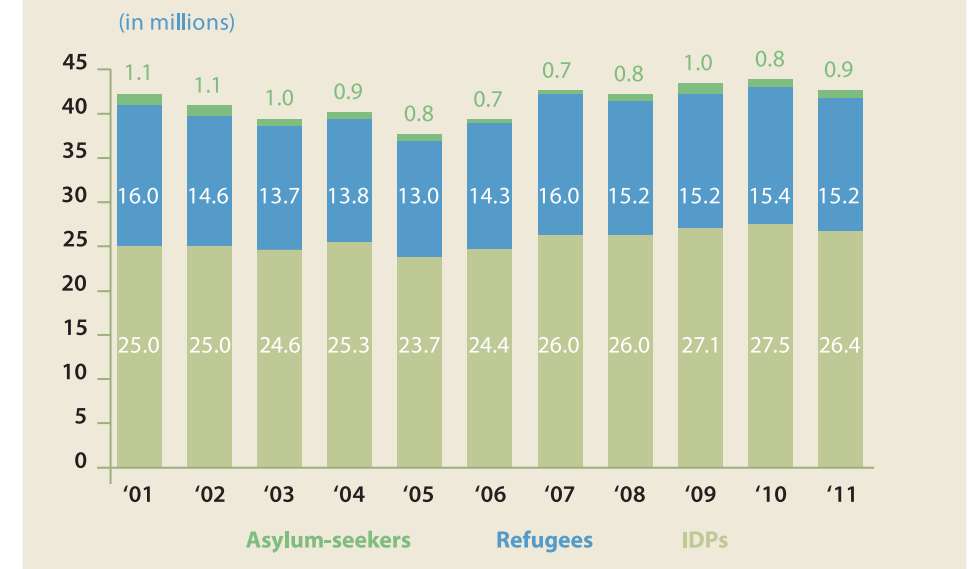
According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [A Year of Crises: UNHCR Global Trends 2011](#) report,

- By the end of 2011, **42.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide** because of conflict and persecution. This represented a small drop of 0.8 million from 2010. Of these, 15.2 million were refugees, 26.4 million were internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 895,000 were individuals seeking asylum whose applications had not yet been decided by the end of the reporting period.
- The year 2011 was notable for a series of major refugee crises resulting from conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan, which forced more than 800,000 refugees to seek asylum in neighbouring countries, the highest number in over a decade. In total, 4.3 million people were newly displaced in 2011.
- Some 7.1 million refugees were stuck in protracted situations at

the end of 2011, just a small drop from 2010 (7.2 million). They were living in 26 different countries.

- **Developing countries hosted four-fifths of the world's refugees.** The 48 Least Developed Countries provided asylum to almost 2.3 million refugees.
- **Females constituted 48% of the world's refugees,** as well as 50% of all IDPs and returnees. **Children** below the age of 18 accounted for **46% of refugees** and 34% of asylum-seekers.
- During 2011, UNHCR submitted to various nations more than **92,000 refugee cases for resettlement,** with 62,000 departing with UNHCR assistance. Canada settled 27,877 refugees and Manitoba settled 1303 refugees (representing 6 per cent of Canada's government-assisted and 14 per cent of Canada's privately sponsored refugees).
- **Worldwide, more than 876,100 people submitted an individual application for asylum or**

Fig. 1 Global forced displacement | 2001-2011 (end-year)



- **refugee status in 2011, an increase of 30,300 from 2010.**
- **Globally, more than 17,700 asylum applications were lodged by unaccompanied or separated children in 69 countries in 2011.** The applications came mostly

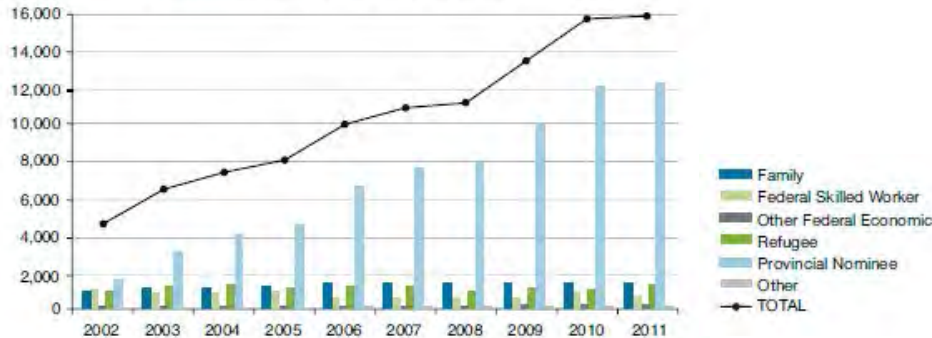
from Afghan and Somali children. This represented an increase of 2,100 applications from 2010.

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011a)

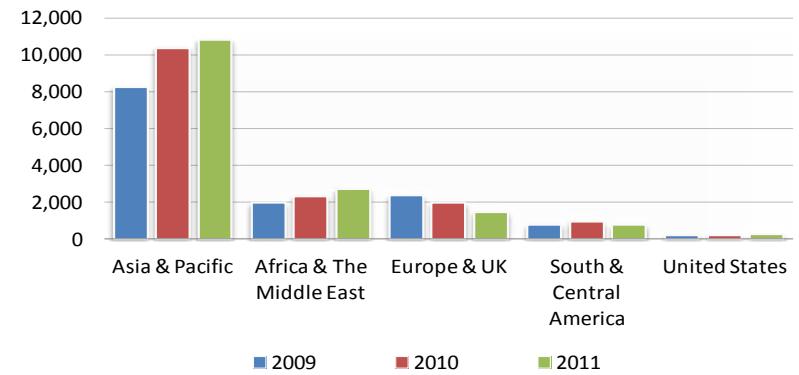
## What are some of the important trends in immigration to Manitoba?\*

Since 2002, Manitoba has received approximately 104,000 immigrants, of which 15,942 arrived in 2011. Of these, 12,342 came as provincial nominees, 1,419 came as family class, 1,303 came as refugees (444 government-assisted and 795 privately sponsored), 809 came as skilled workers/federal economic class, and 89 came that did not fall under any of these four groups.

**IMMIGRATION TO MANITOBA IN THE PAST DECADE**



**Manitoba Permanent Residents by Source Area**



## Composition of Immigration to Manitoba

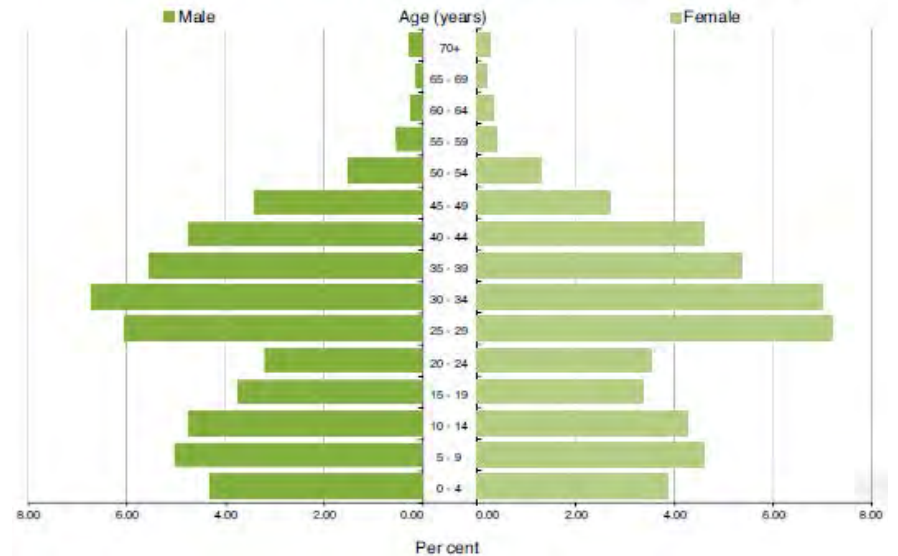
Manitoba's immigrants are from diverse origins. In 2011, 68% of Manitoba's new permanent residents arrived from Asia and the Pacific; however, immigration from Africa and the Middle East represented 17% of the new residents and surpassed immigration from Europe and the United Kingdom (9%). (Click [here](#) for top source countries for refugees.)

Immigrants to Manitoba are much younger than the average population and an almost equal number of men and women immigrate on an annual basis. In 2011, the median age of immigrants was 28 years while the median age of Manitobans was 38.4 years (2011 Census).

For more information on:

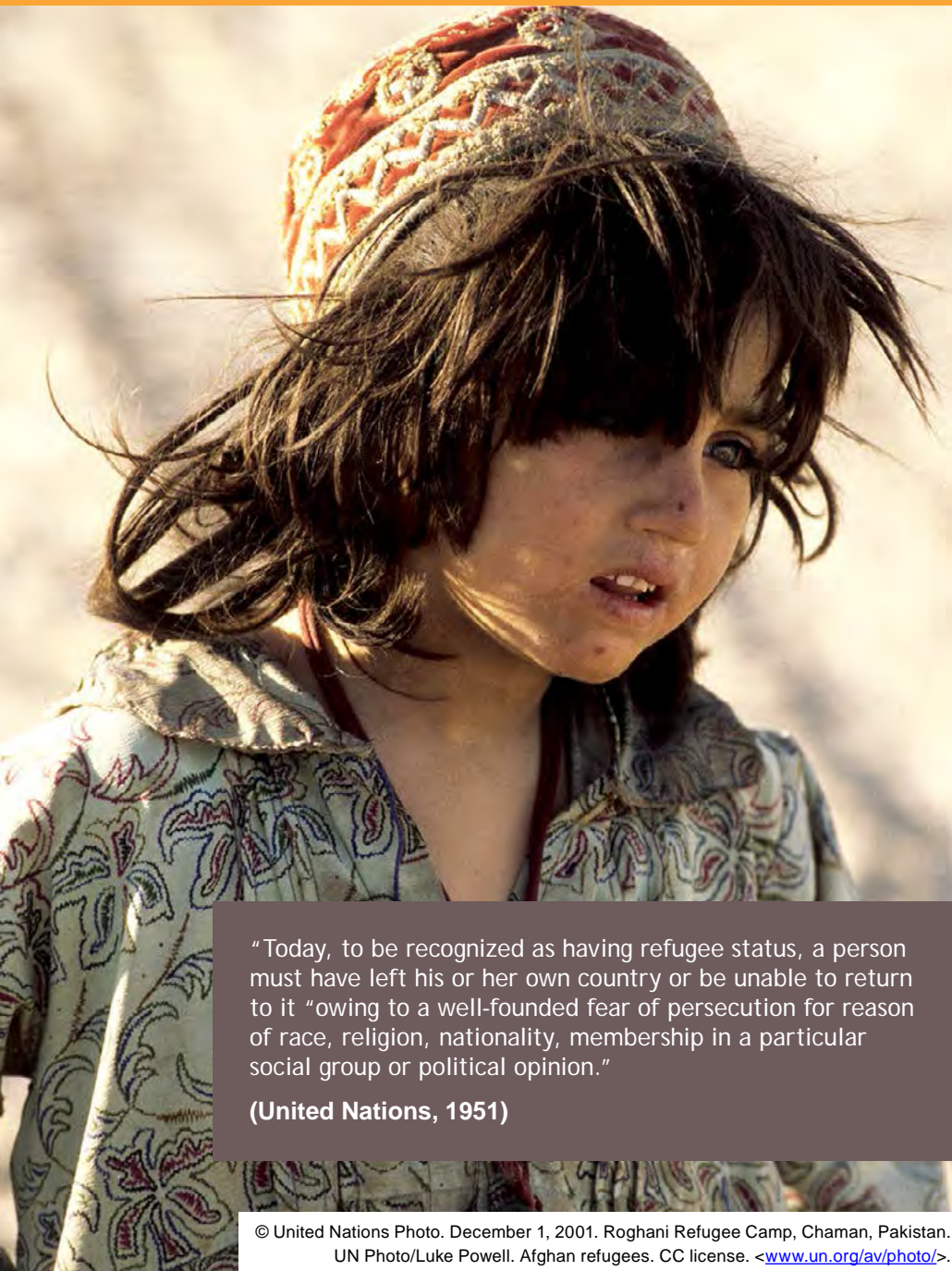
[Canadian immigration facts and statistics](#)  
[Manitoba immigration facts and statistics](#)

**MANITOBA PERMANENT RESIDENTS BY AGE AND GENDER – 2011**



\* Statistics and charts on pages 7 and 8 were provided by Manitoba Immigration and Multiculturalism.





“Today, to be recognized as having refugee status, a person must have left his or her own country or be unable to return to it “owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.”

**(United Nations, 1951)**

© United Nations Photo. December 1, 2001. Roghani Refugee Camp, Chaman, Pakistan. UN Photo/Luke Powell. Afghan refugees. CC license. <[www.un.org/av/photo/](http://www.un.org/av/photo/)>.

## What does the term refugee mean?

The term *refugee*, which in legal terms has a specific meaning, is used throughout this resource.

A “refugee claimant” is someone who has crossed an international border in search of safety and wishes to be legally recognized as being a refugee. A refugee claimant must undergo a legal process to determine whether they should be considered a refugee and be given asylum in the receiving country. Having come of their own initiative, a refugee claimant must meet the same criteria as all refugees in order to stay.

In this resource, we use the term refugee as well as “war-affected.”

By war-affected, we generally refer to those who may not legally be recognized as being a refugee but have had similar experiences and whose lives have been significantly affected and disrupted by war and conflict. The term **war-affected** includes children and youth who may have been child soldiers and those who experienced internal displacement, violence, deprivation of food and shelter, sexual assault, abduction, and/or psycho-social trauma as a result of war and conflict.

“A child soldier is any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.”

**(UNICEF, 1997)**

A *Refugee claimant* is a person who has made a claim for protection in Canada as a refugee. This term is more or less equivalent to the term asylum-seeker, which is often used internationally. A refugee claimant therefore is someone whose legal status as a refugee in Canada awaits determination and may or may not be a refugee. Refugee claimants in Canada are eligible for basic social assistance and emergency health care.

**(Canadian Council for Refugees)**



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## Why is it important to distinguish refugees from other immigrants?

The distinction between refugees and other migrants is an important one. While other migrant groups arrive with their families as a matter of choice, refugees arrive through no choice of their own. While other migrants freely choose to come to Canada, refugees were forced to leave their homes and countries and arrive carrying the scars of their experiences that drove them into

flight. Many young refugees come with emotional, physical, and psychological developmental difficulties. They may have undergone a number of traumatic experiences before arriving in Canada, including torture and trauma, persecution, violent civil discord, arbitrary abductions, sexual abuse, the loss of loved ones, imprisonment, disease and starvation, or periods spent in refugee camps or Third World countries.

The refugee experience may have a detrimental and powerful impact on a young person's ability to learn. For many young refugees, issues of grief, loss, and trauma have a profound effect and may

result in depression and emotional problems. For some, there may be loss of trust toward adults and officials. The effects of torture and trauma overlay with experiences of culture shock resulting in anxiety, anger, depression, and social isolation. Taking into consideration what effects the experiences of pre- and post- displacement for a refugee child or youth is the beginning point for developing supports for the learner.



## How do refugees come to Canada and Manitoba?

Most refugee newcomers in Manitoba come to Canada through government, private group, or family sponsorship. War-affected persons, who share some refugee-like experiences, may also enter under one of these streams of migration. Newcomers who have been sponsored through one of these sponsor groups arrive in Canada as “landed immigrants.” In other words, they have all the rights and privileges of any other immigrant who has been accepted by Canada. Along with the many resources of settlement agencies in Manitoba, there will likely be volunteer supporters or hosts; a small sponsorship group (often from a faith community); and for some, family members or friends, and community associations of those who have arrived earlier from the same countries or ethnic groups. Financial sponsorship from family, government, or the sponsoring community usually lasts for the first year. This period of sponsorship is usually a time of more intensive support from refugee serving agencies and sponsors.

Refugee claimants are another source of refugee immigration to Canada. In 2010, there were **102,124** refugee claimants in Canada and **473** in Manitoba (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Refugee claimants are allowed to remain in Canada on a temporary basis (Minister’s permit) until their request to be recognized as refugees has been completed and a determination of their status is made. Usually, some restrictions are placed on the refugee claimants and they do not have all the same rights as a landed immigrant



© UNHCR. Redfern, J. November 21, 2008. Playing children. <[www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/3048228986/in/set-72157609627549530/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/3048228986/in/set-72157609627549530/)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

or other citizen of Canada. However, school-age children are eligible to be enrolled in the school system during the refugee determination process.

Refugee claimants who are deemed not to meet the requirements for refugee status and have exhausted all legal avenues of appeal will usually

be deported back to their country of origin. Conversely, refugee claimants who are determined to meet the criteria for refugee status will then be granted permission to remain in Canada as a landed immigrant.

## What are some important facts about refugee immigration to Manitoba?\*

The section that follows provides an overview of trends and information pertaining to refugees who arrived in Manitoba in a given period. The information was used with permission of Manitoba Immigration and Multiculturalism.

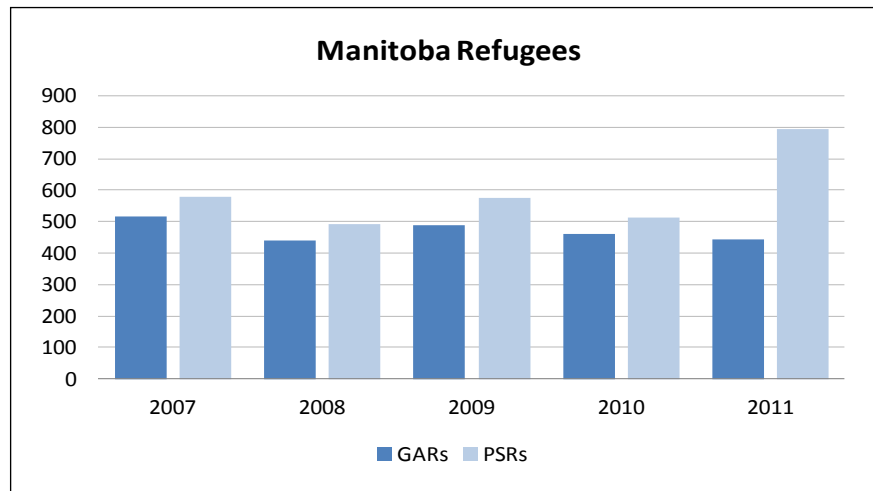
In 2011, 6 per cent of Canada's government-assisted refugees (GARs) (444) and 14 per cent of Canada's privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) (795) settled in Manitoba.

Government-assisted refugees (GARs) are selected abroad for resettlement to Canada as convention refugees under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act or as members of the Convention Refugees Abroad Class and receive resettlement assistance from the federal government (CIC).

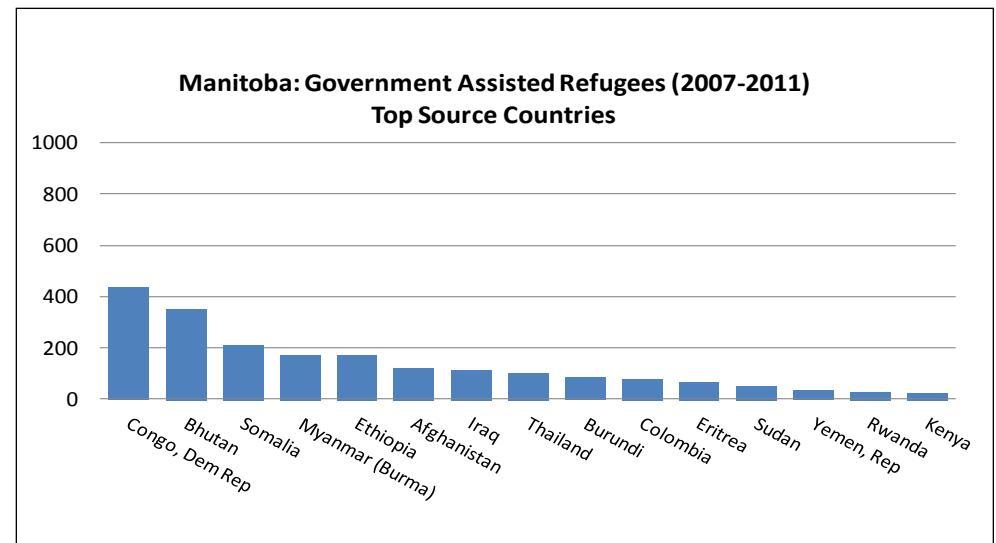
In 2011, 51 per cent of all GARs were female and, of these, 47 per cent were under 19 years of age. During the 2009-2011 period, 865 GARs of 0 to 24 years of age settled in Manitoba.

Privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) are selected for resettlement in the Convention refugee abroad class, the source country class, or the country of asylum class and are privately sponsored by organizations, individuals, or groups of individuals.

In 2011, 40 per cent of the PSRs were female and 28 per cent of all PSRs were under 19 years of age. During the 2009-2011 period, 884 PSRs of 0 to 24 years of age settled in Manitoba.



Note that some provincial nominees may be affected by war or displaced because of conflict or other events prior to arriving in Canada; however, they do not immigrate with refugee status.





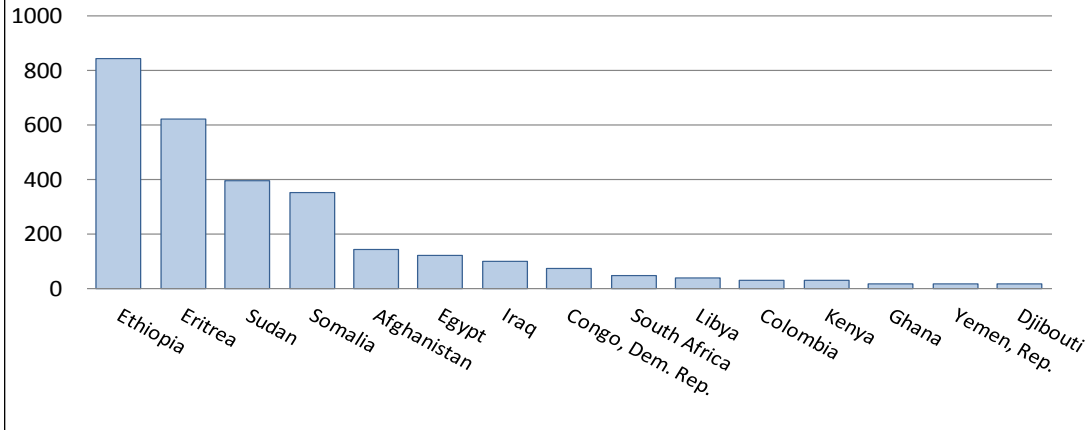
### Manitoba: Government-Assisted Refugees

AGE GROUP	2009		2010		2011	
	male	female	male	female	male	female
0 to 4	21	25	21	26	18	26
5 to 9	35	33	37	22	27	30
10 to 14	40	37	30	28	27	23
15 to 19	40	38	25	36	24	27
20 to 24	30	23	29	26	34	27
25 to 29	13	20	17	28	22	22
30 to 34	15	21	14	19	18	13
35 to 39	14	16	12	–	12	18
40 to 44	8	12	10	11	11	12
45 to 49	–	11	11	14	11	8
50+	21	13	23	17	15	19

### Manitoba: Privately Sponsored Refugees

AGE GROUP	2009		2010		2011	
	male	female	male	female	male	female
0 to 4	30	22	35	21	35	36
5 to 9	27	25	22	21	28	24
10 to 14	32	27	16	20	24	28
15 to 19	24	17	22	10	32	22
20 to 24	31	26	36	31	68	42
25 to 29	65	38	46	41	93	60
30 to 34	54	31	45	31	94	43
35 to 39	30	28	41	14	58	24
40 to 44	12	9	24	11	34	19
45 to 49	14	7	9	8	8	9
50+	16	11	6	–	5	9

Manitoba: Privately Sponsored Refugees (2007-2011)  
Top Source Countries



\* Statistics and charts on pages 11, 12, and 13 were provided by Manitoba Immigration and Multiculturalism.



## Where do refugees settle?

Initially, newcomers may have little choice as to where they may settle, as their destination is largely dependent on being accepted by the host country and finding suitable sponsorship. Newcomers will be attracted to countries and areas where a community of compatriots or members of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or faith group exist, or where other family members have settled. Often, refugees apply to several countries to be accepted for sponsorship.

Once they arrive in the host country, they initially settle in areas determined by the host country. It is not uncommon for newcomers to move frequently after settling in a new city or community as they seek better conditions or move to be closer to employment, family members, or ethnic/community facilities and services.

Refugee settlement agencies and sponsoring groups provide some assistance in helping refugees to settle. Orientation sessions are offered and settlement workers and volunteers help refugees find housing and initial employment, and also help them register students in schools and access other essential services. English as an Additional Language classes are delivered by a variety of agencies. There are also support groups and other services. Short-term financial assistance for housing and essential services is provided by government or community sponsors to assist in the settlement process.

As refugees settle and begin to become more familiar with the social, health, and educational systems, refugee families and individuals are expected to become more independent and to access services from mainstream institutions and service providers.

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<[www.flickr.com/photos/afghanyouthvoices/6045268716/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/afghanyouthvoices/6045268716/)

[in/set-72157627436908300/](http://in/set-72157627436908300/)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.



## Do unaccompanied or orphaned youth resettle as refugees?

Because of safety concerns, some children are brought to Canada without their parents. These youth may be immigrating independently or as orphans. While their numbers are relatively small, they are a real presence in our schools and communities, and must be considered. In some countries, children and youth are conscripted into training for military indoctrination and duties, and some become child soldiers. They may have great difficulty in locating family again. Many more have lost parents who died or disappeared while fleeing dangers. Some have witnessed their parent's deaths due to war, illness, or dangerous circumstances. Families have been separated because of individuals belonging to persecuted groups in their countries of origin and, at times, on the willingness of both parents to come to yet another country of asylum. Some come with the hope of reunification in Canada, but, this is delayed because parents are applying from different countries.

Such children and youth may have special circumstances, such as foster parenting by other family members and sponsorship with fostering as part of the financial and living arrangements in Manitoba. Unaccompanied youth may require specialized, supportive housing that takes into account all of the pressures upon them in the adaptation and settlement process.

Finding affordable room and board and networks of special support may make a crucial difference for completing educational goals.



"I think about what I have been through and this gives me more determination to do well in life."

A 19 year-old male former child soldier from Kono (just promoted to his final year of secondary school) (Betancourt, 2011, p. 37)

© United Nations Photo. December 23, 2009. Abu Shouk, Sudan. UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran. Children at IDP Camp playful during UNAMID patrol. CC license. <[www.un.org/av/photo/](http://www.un.org/av/photo/)>.

For information on the Government of Canada's current policies concerning health and other services for refugees, see [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/arriving-healthcare.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/arriving-healthcare.asp). However, the document *Working With Immigrant Communities: A Guide for Service Providers (2008)* is still helpful. The resource is available online at [www.serc.mb.ca/resource-library/working-immigrant-communities-guide-service-providers-improving-access-project-2008](http://www.serc.mb.ca/resource-library/working-immigrant-communities-guide-service-providers-improving-access-project-2008).

## What do the terms trauma and child traumatic stress mean?

### Trauma

Children and adolescents experience trauma under two different sets of circumstances.

Some types of traumatic events involve (1) experiencing a serious injury to yourself or witnessing a serious injury to or the death of someone else, (2) facing imminent threats of serious injury or death to yourself or others, or (3) experiencing a violation of personal physical integrity. These experiences usually call forth overwhelming feelings of terror, horror, or helplessness. Because these events occur at a particular time and place and are usually short-lived, we refer to them as acute traumatic events. These kinds of traumatic events include the following:

- School shootings
- Gang-related violence in the community
- Terrorist attacks

- Natural disasters (for example, earthquakes, floods, or hurricanes)
- Serious accidents (for example, car or motorcycle crashes)
- Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
- Physical or sexual assault (for example, being beaten, shot, or raped)

In other cases, exposure to trauma can occur repeatedly over long periods of time. These experiences call forth a range of responses, including intense feelings of fear, loss of trust in others, decreased sense of personal safety, guilt, and shame. We call these kinds of trauma chronic traumatic situations. These kinds of traumatic situations include the following:

- Some forms of physical abuse
- Long-standing sexual abuse
- Domestic violence
- Wars and other forms of political violence

For the purpose of this document, we have adopted the definition of trauma and child traumatic stress of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) as found in the NCTSN resource: [Defining Trauma and Child Traumatic Stress](http://www.nctsn.org/content/defining-trauma-and-child-traumatic-stress). Retrieved from <[www.nctsn.org/content/defining-trauma-and-child-traumatic-stress](http://www.nctsn.org/content/defining-trauma-and-child-traumatic-stress)>. For ease of reference, the definitions are reproduced in this document exactly as they appear on the NCTSN website.

### Child Traumatic Stress

Child traumatic stress occurs when children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events or traumatic situations, and when this exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced.

Depending on their age, children respond to traumatic stress in different ways. Many children show signs of intense distress—disturbed sleep, difficulty paying attention and concentrating, anger and irritability, withdrawal, repeated and intrusive thoughts, and extreme distress—when confronted by anything that reminds them of their traumatic experiences. Some children develop psychiatric conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and a variety of behavioural disorders.

While some children “bounce back” after adversity, traumatic experiences can result in a significant disruption of child or adolescent development and have profound long-term consequences. Repeated exposure to traumatic events can affect the child’s brain and nervous system and increase the risk of low academic performance, engagement in high-risk behaviours, and difficulties in peer and family relationships. Traumatic stress can cause increased use of health and mental health services and increased involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Adult survivors of traumatic events may have difficulty in establishing fulfilling relationships, holding steady jobs, and becoming productive members of our society. Fortunately, there are effective treatments for child traumatic stress.



## What is resiliency? What are protective and risk factors?

Children and youth may be particularly prone to dangers and traumatic experiences in times of war. After experiencing trauma, it is normal for them to manifest strong emotional and even physical reactions; however, with time these usually diminish. Refugee children and youth's short and long-term responses to traumatic events are complex and variable factors may influence a newcomer's psychological well-being. Furthermore, refugee children and youth also have resources to draw upon (resiliency) which ensure that they are seldom overcome by a single traumatic event.

Following are some of the factors that affect how they will come to terms with their traumatic experiences and being a refugee:

- the duration and intensity of traumatic events
- the child's age
- the child's personality and character
- the quality of child care
- the refugee youth's experience in a new country

Some factors—adverse or risk factors—make it more likely that problems will arise. Protective or success factors help safeguard a child against psychological distress.

While the number and severity of the traumatic events children may experience are important, they do not necessarily result in worse psychological outcomes. Many war-affected children that have experienced high numbers of

traumatic incidents demonstrate high levels of resilience and do not develop lasting patterns of distress (Bonanno and Mancini, 2008). Conversely, for some, the experience of even one incident of severe war-related violence or sexual assault may constitute a profoundly traumatic and life-altering event (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Resilience in children has been conceptualized in various ways. One definition of resilience is health despite adversity (Masten, 2001). However, there is an emerging, more dynamic conceptualization of resilience which emphasizes that resiliency is a process. From this perspective, resilience is the outcome or result of negotiations between individuals and their environments that allows them to access the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that may sustain their well-being in situations or conditions commonly and collectively viewed as adverse (Ungar, 2008).

A resilient child will perform competently and has the ability to adapt under stress, especially in the context of severe hardships and disadvantageous life circumstances (Crawford et al, 2005). From this perspective, resilience is not a personal characteristic or trait but, rather, the **individual's response to adversity** (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000) and ability to draw on environmental and other protective factors. Resilience is a measure of the way children use and develop their resources to positively respond and adapt to life situations and challenges (Yates, Egeland, and Sroufe, 2003).



iStock. Suriname, pointing at a globe. File 12349372.

### *Resilience*

- Resilience is a dynamic process characterized by positive development in spite of significant adversity.
- Severe adversity does not necessarily have a major or lasting effect on adaptive behaviours.
- Maladaptive profiles emerge when adversity is high and protective resources are weak.
- Low protective resources rather than adversity in itself result in maladaptation.

(Montgomery, 2010, pp. 477–489)



The following three types of factors are commonly considered important with respect to resiliency and protecting the child from developing maladaptive behaviours and patterns:

- individual factors such as experiences, personality, intelligence, sociability, effective coping strategies, and other characteristics of the child
- relational factors such as a supportive family environment, close relationships, interpersonal interactions over time, cohesion, structure, emotional support, secure attachment, and a close bond to at least one caregiver
- social factors or external support factors such as positive, appropriate teaching and learning experiences; close affirmative relationships (good peer relations and positive relations with other adults); an external social group with a supportive ethos and behavioural style

(Rutter, 2000; Masten, 2001; Fraser, 2004; Waaktaar & Christie, 2000; Waaktarr, 2004; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Werner & Smith, 1992)

While research related to immigrant children and families has demonstrated and identified the adverse factors related to exposure to war-related trauma (armed conflict, displacement, and resettlement) and their consistent links or relationships between children's development and overall psychological well-being, the research is relatively limited regarding the protective factors, positive experiences, and coping strategies of these children and youth.

There is, however, a variety of research related to protective factors drawn upon by non-immigrant children. As a result, "resiliency theory" that

draws on this research has become the cornerstone for building programming for youth from a 'strengths' perspective or approach. A 'strengths' approach focuses on working with clients to identify and build upon the strengths, skills, and resources that they bring to their situation. While this research on non-immigrant children is valuable as a beginning point to understand the strengths paradigm, the application to immigrant and refugee children is less clear. The lack of research on resiliency with regard to immigrant, refugee, and war-affected children limits the possibilities of applying this approach in designing policy and programming.

Nevertheless, the small body of work that has emerged concerning the resiliency, mental well-being, and coping skills of immigrant, refugee, and war-affected youth is promising (Ahearn and Athey, 1991; McEwen, 2007; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2003). There is emerging recognition in the literature and from clinical experience that war-affected children demonstrate tremendous resilience (Garmezy, 1988; Klingman, 2002). In addition, there is an increasing interest in the research about the idea that biological processes caused by access to love and continuous and



iStock. Portrait Hmong baby. File 11517549.

Hope arises from a sense of moral and social order embodied in the expression of key cultural values: faith, family unity, service, effort, morals, and honour. These values form the bedrock of resilience, drive social aspirations, and underpin self-respect and dignity.

**(Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010)**

personalized care in a child's development are of great importance for the long-term development of health and well-being (Cloninger, 2004; Gerhardt 2004; Lewis et al, (2001).



iStock. Outdoor portrait of young cheerful attractive Indian mother and daughter. File 5455952.

The *anthropology of hope* also links well-being with social structures, but receives comparatively less attention. Ideologies of hope have significance for individual and collective resilience, social identity, and social dynamics across successive generations... Hage (2003) forcefully argued that in contexts of marked inequality, society is a mechanism not only for the distribution of social opportunities, but also for the distribution of social hope: access to resources reduces or encourages dreams of social mobility. Such hope is about "one's sense of the possibilities that life can offer... Its enemy is a sense of entrapment, of having nowhere to go, not a sense of poverty."

(Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010, p. 20)

There is still much to learn about the multiple factors, in addition to exposure to trauma, that contribute to both risk and resilience in the adjustment of refugee children and families over time (Betancourt and Kahn, 2008).

Nevertheless, when working with immigrant and refugee children and youth, it is important to identify risk factors and it is equally important to identify the protective factors that are present in the family, peer group, and school environment. This perspective has shifted the focus away from individual deficits to individual strengths, competencies, and capacities and is a critical step in understanding resilience within the context of the individual and the family (Brooks, 1994).

Another aspect of resiliency is the cultural and religious resources that children and youth have available to them that help mediate their experiences of a crisis and aid in their recovery from devastating loss. An appreciation of such resources should form the basis of psychosocial responses and protection mechanisms for immigrant and refugee youth.

The ability to cope with trauma and misfortune is often promoted through cultural training in resilience and risk management during adolescence. Ceremonial traditions that focus on transitions from childhood, as an example, can prove to be a source of strength in times of crisis. For example, research related to the mental health of unaccompanied Somalia children demonstrated that the protective factors mitigated the effects of war.

"Interviews conducted with young Somali refugees living in three cities in Canada (Montreal, Ottawa,

and Toronto) highlighted the sources of resilience and protection. The Somalis' experiences are an accumulation of nomadic tradition, beliefs, and myths as well as exile and migration to the West. For the young Somalis, forced exile was not benign. However, in the context of their traditional upbringing, which includes sending boys off to learn about nomadic pastoral existence, the experience of exile becomes less weighted with negative attributes. Moreover, young Somalis' capacity to recuperate quickly from exile was attributed by the interviewees to their training, from an early age, to survive in harsh conditions away from home." (Rousseau, Said, Gagné, and Bibeau, 1998)

For many children, religion or spirituality is a central part of their identity, and the associated beliefs, practices, and social networks offer important tools for coping with adversity. Children learn to manage stress or come to terms with grief through praying. A sense of personal security and well-being may be restored by appealing to the belief that a wise and benevolent creator is in control of their fate. Some children are encouraged to find meaning in suffering and see it as an opportunity for growth or redemption. Religion and spirituality also provide specific activities for actively coping with stress and loss, such as prescribed mourning and burial rituals. Finally, religious institutions often provide children with their first point of contact with the larger community and serve to welcome them fully into the social world of their family, community, and society (Wessells and Strang, 2006).

A 2009 report, *Silent Suffering: The psychosocial impact of war, HIV and other high-risk situations on girls and boys in West and Central Africa*, on a five-country study by Plan International and Family Health International (FHI) provides some important insights concerning resiliency. The study examined some of West Africa's most vulnerable children and provided some evidence of the factors that build resiliency, even in the harshest and most violent conditions. The researchers interviewed more than 1,000 adolescents in Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Togo. Their aim was to assess the mental health and psychological needs of the children, and the protective factors that allowed these children to cope with often extreme and difficult experiences. Many of the children that were part of the study had experienced conflict, human trafficking, or the loss of a parent. This is what they found:

"Our study illustrated several internal or individual factors that build up and maintain the resilience of children and help them to carry on even in circumstances of long-lasting and extreme adversity. Besides hope, dreams and faith [...], these factors were:

- self-esteem
- feeling in control
- a sense of belonging
- connection to community values

In addition to the internal factors, there were different external factors at [a] family or community level that make children strong. These were:

- a solid relationship with a caregiver
- relationships with peers
- sufficient food, clothing, shelter
- access to education and healthcare
- a close link to their culture, and participation in traditional rituals"

(Morgan and Behrendt, 2009)

Over the past decade, children were conscripted into armed forces and armed groups in 87 countries...

At any given time, approximately 250,000-300,000 children are involved in armed forces worldwide...

(Betancourt, 2011, p. 8)



© United Nations Photo. Photo ID 20834. June 12, 2003. Harar, Ethiopia. UN Photo/Eskinder Debede. Primary school classroom. CC license. <[www.unmultimedia.org/photo/](http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/)>



## What are some of the common challenges refugees experience because of war or conflict?

Refugees face many challenges because of their experiences with war and conflict, their forced displacement, their flight from war or persecution, and their resettlement experiences. They often have suffered significant disruption, trauma, and stress prior to being forced out of their homes or communities. Access to schools, shelter, and food may be very limited during their displacement or flight. Forced displacement or flight may be very

arduous physically and emotionally. Deprivation of food, shelter, medical care, and other necessities, as well as exposure to parasites and disease, are quite common during displacement or flight. Refugees have often experienced severe physical and emotional stressors and children are increasingly recruited and used by armed groups and armies. Torture and other forms of physical and psychological abuse are common before and

during flight, and sometimes even after flight in initial places of asylum.

Refugee camps or temporary places of asylum may offer only minimal services and support. Some camps are not secure and may be quite violent. Refugees may be repeatedly traumatized or subjected to violence and deprivation of the necessities of life.



© United Nations Photo. May 1, 1998. Borkeza, Liberia. UN Photo/John Isaac. Refugees in Liberia. CC license. <[www.un.org/av/photo/](http://www.un.org/av/photo/)>.

## What about refugee families and those left behind?

As defined earlier, refugees are people who have survived persecution in their home countries. For those who manage to flee from war, their recent experiences may still have been horrific. Although many are grateful to be alive and given asylum in a peaceful country, they may face many stresses related to Canada's immigration and settlement policies, and issues related to family members left behind.

Newcomers who have found safety in Manitoba often feel a great responsibility for missing family members, or those left behind or in other places of asylum. One of the primary stressors resettled refugees face is the constant reminders of the difficulties that family and close ones left behind may be experiencing. This is especially true in our contemporary world where international news coverage and communication technologies allow for almost instantaneous information about major events, famines, catastrophes, and conflicts. Children, parents, and extended family members left behind may be living in difficult circumstances in refugee camps, other countries of asylum, or

in the country or region of conflict from which the newcomers fled in the first place.

Another stressor is the difficulties that may occur in reunification with family members left behind. The process for reunification may be quite difficult with many delays and disappointments. Newcomers may find it difficult, at least initially, to meet financial and other criteria for sponsoring family members left behind. Unaccompanied youth must reach the age of 18 years before sponsoring their parents and other family members when no other sponsorship assistance can be found. Many individuals and families send their limited surplus funds to family members left behind as part of their loyalty and personal support. Some newcomers do without food and clothing and adequate shelter to help family members and friends. Family resources often thin out after the initial immigration support allowances conclude and the full expense for rental accommodation is born by the newcomer family. Additionally, refugees are expected to begin repaying the airfare and medical check-up loan from the



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federal government within the first year of arrival.

For others, looking for, finding, and contacting family members that may have survived but whose whereabouts are unknown are a major and ongoing concern. In times of conflict and civil breakdown, families are often separated and

information about each family member's status and survival may be difficult, if not impossible to obtain. Years may pass before accurate information may become available and families are able to establish contact.



## What are some of the common experiences and characteristics of refugee children and youth?

In this section, a number of experiences and characteristics common to many children and youth from refugee backgrounds are discussed. While these generalizations are useful, it is important to recognize that refugees are a diverse group who have a wide range of educational, social, and political histories; individual experiences; and personal characteristics, which determine their short-term and long-term needs. There are four common experiences or challenges that refugee children and youth experience.

### Interrupted schooling and experience in camps

The majority of young people from refugee backgrounds enrolling in Manitoba's schools will have experienced some disruption to their education prior to arrival in Canada. Some will have experienced the difficult, often insecure and harsh conditions in refugee camps. They are almost certain to have been exposed to disease, malnutrition, lack of medical care, and high levels of stress. It is also equally certain that they will not have had adequate, appropriate, and continuous access to schooling in their countries of

origin and of asylum. Disruption in their schooling is a direct result of their refugee experience and the longer the disruptions and the absence of the most basic of services and conditions, the greater the likelihood that their lives have been broken by war and displacement. Therefore, it is critically important that educators and service providers understand that low levels of education among young Canadians from refugee backgrounds typically correlate with long-term exposure to traumatic experiences. (Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008)

Although primary schooling may be offered in camps, many children do not attend for a number of reasons: they may be needed to queue for food at distribution points, they may be ill or have inadequate clothing or money for materials to allow them to attend, or they may be prevented from doing so due to gender biases. The quality of the schooling that may be available also varies enormously. Others may have experienced several interruptions in their schooling and restarts in one or more school systems as they may have spent time in a number of different countries before arriving in Canada. As a result, even though they may have

attended some form of school in a number of places, their schooling will have been severely disrupted such that they are likely to lack literacy and other learning skills. Children from refugee backgrounds who have limited literacy in their home or first language will experience greater challenges in learning English. Because they have not experienced schooling, they often have to develop the concepts needed to understand abstract academic concepts or the language which describes them. On the other hand, some gifted newcomers are self-taught or had family members who were able to provide educational support.

Not surprisingly, many learners from refugee backgrounds find it difficult to adapt to school life and integrate. Their limited schooling or lack thereof means that they have not experienced the socialization that comes with attending school. They may not know how to be organized. They may find it difficult to sit for extended periods in the classroom and may also find it difficult to concentrate. Cultural and social norms of refugee camps or of their countries of origin may also be quite different and they may have some difficulty in understanding, adapting to, and dealing with the norms of behaviour prevalent in Canadian schools and society.

Every change of country threw me unprepared into whole new languages and sharply different habits of mind. Each time, I made a child's forlorn, often vain, attempt to adapt.

(Ali, 2010)



© United Nations Photo. June 8, 2009. Kabul, Afghanistan. UN Photo/Fardin Waezi. Afghan primary school children attend classes. CC license. <[www.unmultimedia.org/photo/](http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/)>.



## Exposure to Trauma

For many students, the trauma related to the refugee experience will also interfere with their capacity to learn. As such, it will take them longer to learn English. Refugee children and youth may have experienced a multiplicity of different stressful events in the past and may continue to do so in the present. The majority of newcomer children and youth are able to cope with these stressors most of the time. Children and adults may be extremely resilient and overcome most of the negative effects of the many traumatic events and experiences in their lives. Many refugee children and their families are survivors with great motivation and desire to succeed and overcome challenges. They may have suffered and witnessed traumatic events, but not suffered trauma: they have been traumatized but not incapacitated.

Children and youth are particularly vulnerable during periods of war and social conflict. Learners from refugee or war-affected backgrounds have often lived through some terrible experiences. In the last decades, millions of children have witnessed and felt the terrible effects of war. The recent developments in warfare have made it much more dangerous for children. Millions of children

have been killed, disabled, left homeless, or separated from their parents, and many millions have been psychologically traumatized.

Children experience many different types of trauma during war and conflict. The list on this page summarizes these.

Children, as well as adults, will often try to suppress memories of horrific experiences rather than confront them when they are deeply disturbing or overwhelming. However, many trauma researchers believe that the repression of such memories and feelings is at the heart of short- and long-term suffering. Time alone does not heal trauma. A child must be helped to express suffering and to confront bad memories, with the support and guidance of an empathetic and informed adult. The very act of talking, writing, or drawing about, or acting out traumatic events is a way for a child to begin to heal and to start on the road to recovery.

Every culture has its own way of dealing with traumatic experiences. Much also depends on the family circumstances of the children, as well as on their age and the nature of their exposure to traumatic events. In all cultures, one of the most important factors is the cohesion of

### *Types of trauma experienced during war and conflict*

- Intense war operations, civil war, bombings, shootings, and executions
- Destruction of homes, landmarks, cities, villages, and countryside
- Violent death of family or friends
- Separation from family, friends, and neighbours
- Physical injury, wounds, beatings, and deprivations
- Arrests of members of their families, or fear of discovery or arrest
- Being arrested, detained, or even tortured
- Being forced to join the army or militias, or being subjected to indoctrination
- Sexual trauma and rape, observing the rape of loved ones
- Serious shortages of food, water, or other daily necessities
- Betrayal by governments, neighbours, and other authorities
- Hostility and culture shock in new communities and countries
- Material deprivation in the present circumstances

the family and community, and the degree of nurture and support that children receive. Indeed, one of the most significant war traumas of all, particularly for younger children, is simply separation from parents—often more distressing than the war activities themselves.

Adolescents face particular problems. Adolescence is a time of life when children undergo many physical and emotional changes. This makes

them, in some ways, more vulnerable than younger children since they are much more aware of the significance of the events occurring around them. It is not uncommon for aid and settlement workers, as well as educators, to report adolescents who have a 'weeping crisis', talk about or attempt suicide, are in a state of depression, and demonstrate increased levels of aggression and delinquency.



© United Nations Photo. Photo ID 442508. August 30, 2009. Sari Pul, Afghanistan. UN Photo/Eric Kamalstein. Afghan former refugee at UNHCR returnee camp in Sari Pul, Afghanistan. CC license. <[https://www.flickr.com/photos/un\\_photo/4843308691](https://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/4843308691)>.

Conflict increases the vulnerability of those who are already vulnerable, especially children. A child needs a family and a community that provide a nurturing and protective environment. The effects of war on the young can be devastating. In 2008, the number of children who had been forced to flee their homes, either as refugees crossing an international border or as internally displaced persons (IDPs), stood at 18 million.

Conflicts, which today are often internal in nature, spare no one. Children are imprisoned, raped, maimed for life, and even killed. Armed conflict tears families apart, forcing thousands of children to fend for themselves and to care for very young siblings.

**(International Committee of the Red Cross, 2009)**

While most children and youth are able to overcome the trauma related to war and the refugee experience, some youth remain emotionally unsettled and psychologically vulnerable. A small number of newcomer children and youth present at risk behaviours and require specialized support from school guidance services, child guidance clinics, or some of the other specialized referrals such as those listed in the last part of this booklet. Some may only require short-term support and services while others may have more complicated and numerous symptoms which may require longer-term supports and services.

Recent longitudinal research (Montgomery, 2010) suggests that

- the cumulative effect of traumatic experiences appears to be more important than the specific war and organized violence related experiences
- the traumatic experiences prior to arrival do not seem to be of primal importance for recovery during the period in asylum
- attending school or work is a very important aspect of the process of recovery of children and youth

## Loss

Newcomer children and youth may have lost their parents and other key caregivers, their siblings, their extended family, and their friends. They may have lost physical items such as their home, their material possessions, and their favourite toys. Exile also results in the loss of familiar surroundings, familiar ways of doing things, and perhaps their parents' full attention and support in their new country. The loss experienced takes different forms. They may have

- experienced a loss of childhood and all that this entails; including loss of play, loss of parents and family, and loss of continuous caregivers
- suffered, with their parents, a severe drop in their standard of living and status as educated, professional, and influential people as they begin a new life in entry-level work
- lost the love and care of adults in their life due to death, or because parents and caregivers are emotionally absent (as a result of managing their own multiple experiences with grief, losses and changes, and challenges) or are physically absent (due to separations here and abroad)



I stowed away in a great steel boat, but the horror stowed away inside me. When I left my homeland I thought that I had escaped—but out on the open sea, I started to have nightmares. I was naive to suppose I had left my country with nothing. It was a heavy cargo that I carried.

(Cleave, 2008)

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UN Photo/Jorge Aramburu. United Nations mission in  
Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE). CC license.  
<[www.un.org/av/photo/](http://www.un.org/av/photo/)>.

## Transitions: Post-Flight and Resettlement Challenges

Children, from refugee backgrounds, and their families arrive in Canada with great hope and expectations for a safer and better life. However, the resettlement process and the challenges of integrating into a new environment, culture, and community can be quite stressful for children and their families. These may include the following:

- Continued separation from loved ones: uncertainty regarding the whereabouts of family members or friends left behind; potential reports of bad news from their country of origin
- Poverty: may be living without some basic necessities that Manitobans take for granted (such as sufficient resources for shelter, food, clothing, transportation and cars, entrance fees for activities, and so forth) and may find difficulty in continuing studies because of family responsibilities, lack of resources, and lack of benefits
- Language skills: speak little or no English or French upon arrival in Canada, while perhaps speaking several languages from the countries or regions of origin, or the place of first asylum
- Lack of knowledge of their educational, social, and legal rights and responsibilities, and are faced with racial and ethnic discrimination: may

suffer bullying or isolation, and institutionalized or personal racism in the school and community which often stems from a subtle lack of knowledge about the newcomers' culture, religion and family customs, educational histories, and individual experiences; racism happens at many levels, even among well-intentioned helpers

- Developmental, physical, and health issues: as a result of extended periods of malnutrition, lack of water, exposure to disease and parasites, and lack of medical care; post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and possibly other anxiety disorders
- Upheaval in family roles: many children and youth, because of being acculturated more quickly in schools and work, become the family translators and experience role reversals with usual caregivers out of cultural necessity and concern for family members who may be more marginalized in rates of adjustment

Children may feel that they have been 'let down' by parents and other responsible adults who have been caught up and disempowered by war and persecution. Exile and resettlement may bring about changes in a child's relationship with his or her parents. They may see their parents as being vulnerable or dependent. This may result in a lack of trust or faith in adults, parents, or authority figures.



There are a number of Internet resources that provide insights into the experiences of refugee and war-affected youth.

*Beyond the Fire: Teen Experiences of War* is an interactive website dedicated to the stories of fifteen refugee teenagers (from eight different countries), who experienced war and fled their homes. To help bring their stories to life, photographs of family and loved ones are included. The website also briefly describes the events in each country in order to explain how the conflict developed. The life stories of these fifteen refugee teenagers are good examples of the experiences that refugee youth encounter abroad before settling in a new country.

*Mapping Memories* is a bilingual project collaboration in which personal stories and a range of media tools (video, sound walks, mapping, and photography) are used to better understand the experiences of youth with refugee experience in Montreal. Resources available from the site include Mapping Memories (a book/DVD of first-person narratives by youth with refugee experiences), videos, and educator resources.

*Starting Again: Stories of Refugee Youth* is an online video produced by School's Out Washington, which partnered with documentary filmmaker Jill Freidberg of Corrugated Films to produce a film chronicling the lives of refugee youth in Washington State. The film highlights four youth from Burma, Nepal/Bhutan, Russia, and Somalia.

The *Documentary Project for Refugee Youth* was a workshop led by Raeshma Razvi, which sought to explore the refugee condition through photography, video, interviews, and journal writing. Twelve teenaged refugees from Africa and Europe met weekly for three years, using creative projects as a means to work through their past and make sense of their new future in New York City. The site provides some of the works produced and the stories of the participants.

For more information on resources related to child soldiers, children, and war, click [here](#).



© United Nations Photo. March 1, 1999. Blace. UN Photo/R. LeMoyne. Kosovo refugees. CC license. <[www.un.org/av/photo/](http://www.un.org/av/photo/)>.

## What role do religion and spirituality play?

Newcomers to Canada may come from diverse faiths, belief systems, and religious traditions or practices. This is an important aspect of the multicultural face of Manitoba and of newcomers of refugee origins. For some newcomers, religious persecution or conflict forced them to flee their home country: the experience or threat of sustained persecution and organized violence made them fearful for their survival. Similarly, poorly understood faith differences and internalized biases often form part of subtle and unintentional prejudice and discrimination these newcomers may face in the host nations and communities.

Spirituality or religious beliefs as well as beliefs about life may be severely shaken through the painful accumulation of traumatic stress in the lives of children, youth, and their families affected by war. Ultimately, each person in such circumstances must find their own answers and meaning about the problems of suffering and the horrors they may have witnessed or experienced. Traumatic experiences can challenge beliefs about the value of life, humanity, and one's faith. For some, war deepens and strengthens their spirituality and faith, while for others, it leads to doubts, inner conflict, questions, or even the elimination of once deeply held spiritual and religious beliefs. These questions of spirituality, faith, and religion are part of the complexities of dealing with the affects of war and trauma.



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Is there a model that may be helpful for understanding the major categories of challenges experienced by children who come to Canada from refugee backgrounds?

Jan Stewart (2011) developed a model for understanding and considering the major adjustment challenges that refugee children who come to Canada may experience. It is a reflection of her research and work with refugee children and educators in Canada and abroad. A description of the model follows.

At the center of the model, Stewart places the individual and the core characteristics (human capacity, hope, and resilience) which mediate the effects of the array of challenges they encounter. Individuals will possess protective factors which emerge and provide a means for coping and dealing with the challenges they experience. (Stewart, 2011, p. 126)

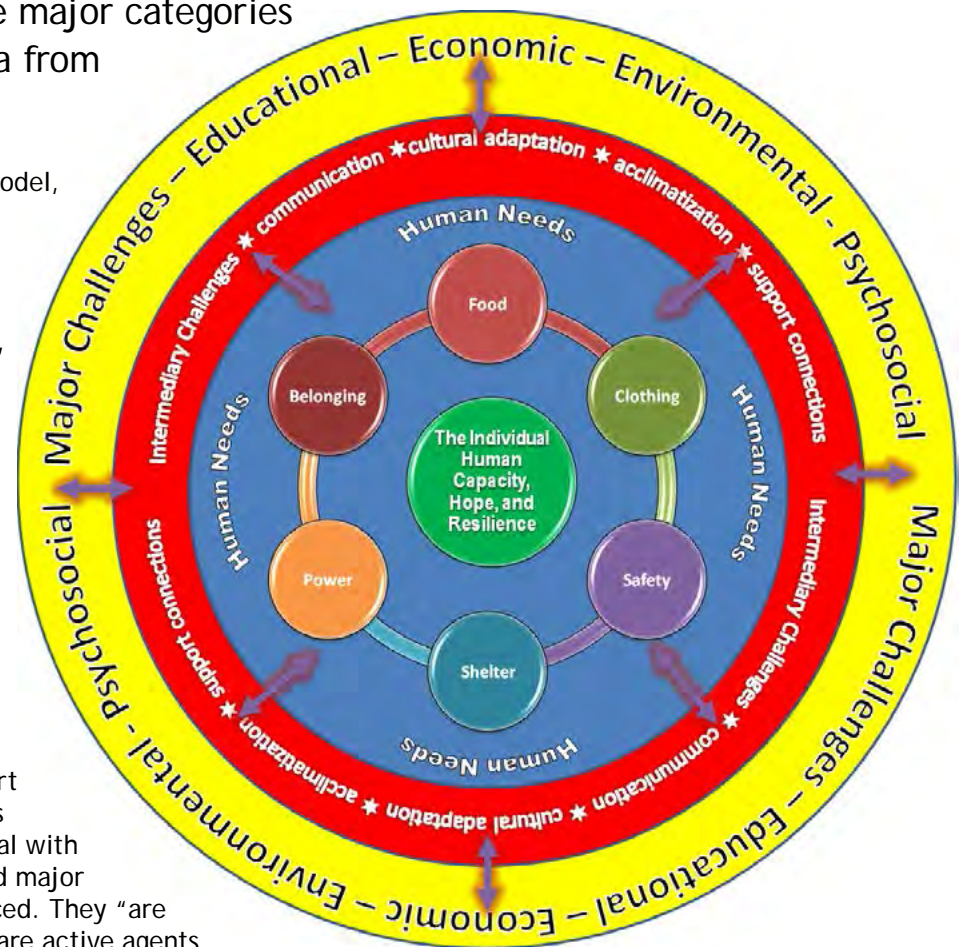
Surrounding the individual are the six basic needs of the individual (food, clothing, shelter, safety, belonging, power) that emerged from her research and are present at the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration stages of the individual's life.

In the next layer of Stewart's 2011 model are four intermediary categories of challenges: **basic communication, cultural adjustments, acclimatization** (adjustment to the physical and natural environment), and **support connection** (links to the ecological system; e.g., support worker, reception centre counsellor, teacher, etc.). (Stewart 2011, p. 128)

At the extremity of the model, Stewart places the four major dimensions of the challenges they may experience: **educational, economic, psychological, and environmental**. The image that follows is a graphic adaptation, created by Tony Tavares (Consultant, Manitoba Education), based on Stewart's model. (View Stewart's model on page 127 of her book, *Supporting Refugee Children: Strategies for Educators*.)

From her research, Stewart (2011) found that students were generally able to deal with both the intermediary and major challenges they experienced. They "are not passive victims; they are active agents who negotiate, compromise, and forge ahead despite adversity." (Stewart, 2011, p. 129) While not all students experience the same level of success and individuals often face challenges in different ways, she found that in most cases, the "outlook was positive". (Stewart, 2011, p. 129) In addition, she found that the success of refugee children and students can greatly be enhanced by removing "the barriers and challenges we impose

on students so that they have a chance at success." (Stewart, 2011, p. 129) She suggests that initiatives that combat racism and provide financial support for refugee and war-affected learners to attend school, and that develop and provide culturally and linguistically appropriate programs are a "good place to begin".





## Why do we need to consider the whole child in developing supports for newcomer and refugee learners?

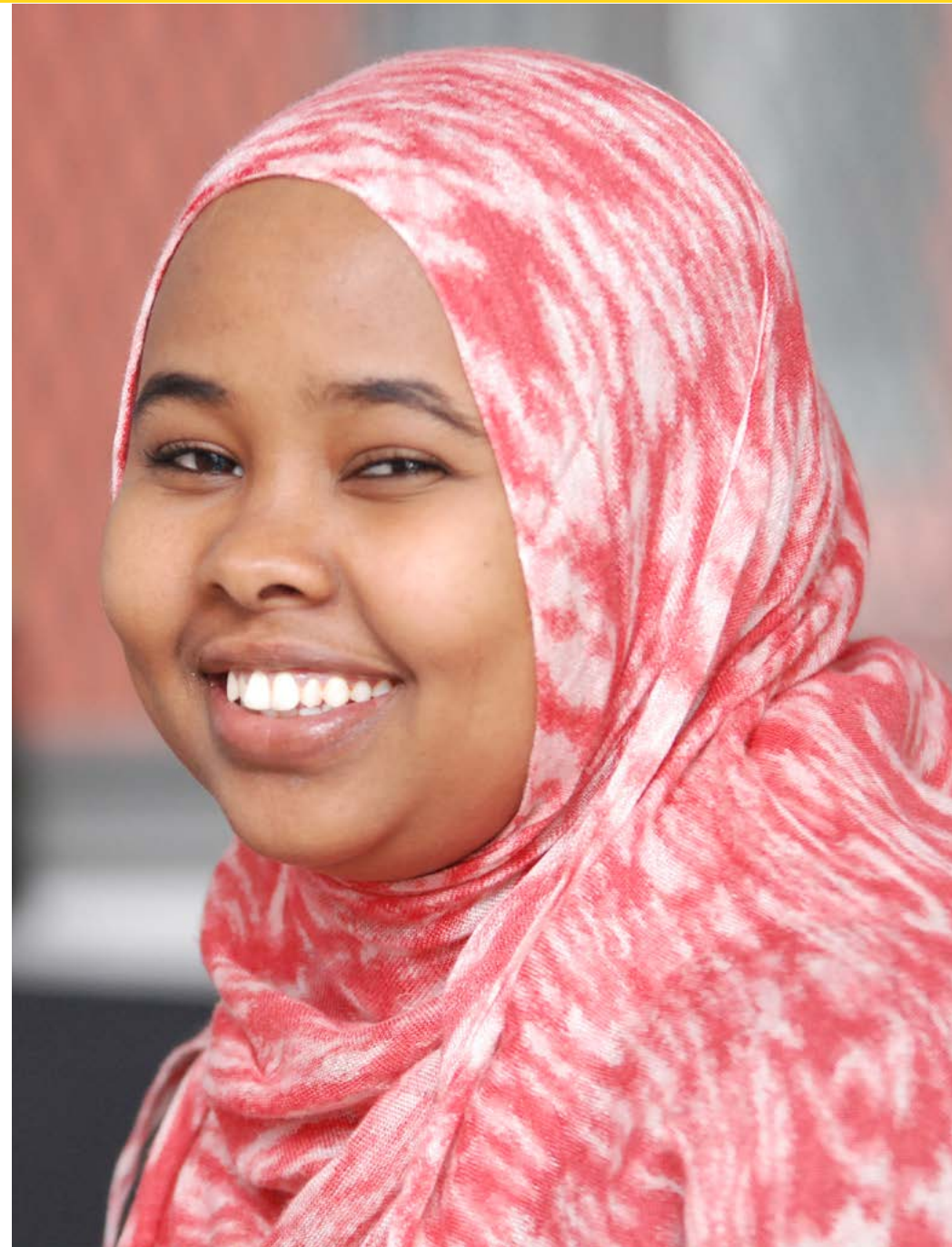
Newcomer and refugee children in many aspects are just like all children. They reflect a similar range of characteristics, gifts, needs, and aspirations. In many ways, they benefit from the same programming and instructional approaches that create effective and safe learning environments for children in general. Refugee children can be extremely resilient and reflect enormous ability to adapt to new and challenging environments. They also, however, have specific needs related to their immigrant and refugee experiences.

“Adolescence and young adulthood are times of transition when many changes take place” (Department of Victorian Communities, 2005). Thus, refugee youth arrive in Canada at a particularly important time in their personal development and this can contribute to them being a particularly vulnerable group, which may result in marginalization in their schools and community. Their marginalization may lead to negative and destructive behaviours, exploitation by gangs, and other undesirable outcomes.

The challenges confronted during this stage include identity formation, gaining independence, finding their place in the community, dealing with religious beliefs, developing relationships with peers and family, determining life goals, and discovering their sexuality. These challenges play an important role in a young person’s development.

Schools can “create learning environments and spaces for participation, communication, relationships, friendships, belonging, and learning about one and others. To this end, what are required are systematic, whole-school approaches addressing school policy, organisational procedure, pedagogy, and curricula which are informed by understandings of post and pre-displacement issues.” (Matthews, 2007) As well, drawing on support from outside school resources (whether they be health services, social service agencies, grass roots community organizations, ethnic/ cultural groups, or faith groups) will enhance service delivery and support for the refugee learner.

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For further information on learning disabilities and English as an additional language learners see:

- Fraine, N., & Mcdade, R. (2009). Reducing bias in psychometric assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students from refugee backgrounds in Australian schools: A process approach. *Australian Psychologist*, 44, 16–26.
- Laing, S., & Kamhi, A. (2003). Alternative assessment of language and literacy in culturally and linguistically diverse populations. [PDF] *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 34, 44–56.
- Pearl Pirie (2003). *Assessing learning disabilities in ESL*. <[www.teslontario.net/uploads/research/ESLLDStrategies.pdf](http://www.teslontario.net/uploads/research/ESLLDStrategies.pdf)>.
- Regional Educational Laboratory. *How Do We Identify Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners?* <<http://archive.relnei.org/newsletters.php?nlid=27&nlapno=2>>.
- Centre for Applied Linguistics. *English language learners with special needs*. ELLs with Special Needs—CAL Resource Guide Online.



In developing programming for newcomer students, it is important to consider three aspects of learner characteristics and needs as follows:

- **Linguistic: First Language and English Language Fluency and Literacy**—It is important to consider a learner’s first and English language development. For learners with limited experience and exposure to English, their first language skills will provide important information on the nature of EAL and educational programming required. Students with limited first language literacy will require support that is more intensive and may progress more slowly.
- **Academic Background and Experiences:** Some refugee children may have had their schooling interrupted for extended or significant periods or were not able to attend a formal school at all. Other children may have transited through several different educational systems and languages of instruction. Other newcomer children may have very complementary or equivalent educational experiences to those available to Canadian students.
- **Learner Experiences and Personal Characteristics:** There are a range of individual or personal experiences and characteristics or factors which may significantly affect a learner’s ability and readiness to learn. These include
  - learning styles and preferences: learners will exhibit different preferences about how they learn that may be influenced by their cultural backgrounds and prior experiences
  - learning disabilities: some learners may experience learning disabilities that are related to differences in the brain,

which affect how information is received, processed, or communicated, which may be difficult to identify as learning disabilities due to linguistic factors

- physical characteristics and health: newcomer children may have significant health and physical issues because of war, violence, or deprivation of food, shelter, and access to health care
- culture shock and socio-emotional well-being: the adaptation to a new culture, social environment, lifestyle, and climate may present an enormous challenge for many newcomers. As a result, some may become quite alienated and overwhelmed by the whole experience. Culture shock may result in depression and feelings of isolation
- mental health: the immigration and adaptation to a new culture combined with the effects of trauma may result in significant short- and long-term mental health issues. Post-traumatic stress reactions may severely hamper students’ abilities to learn and communicate
- educational and personal aspirations: newcomer students reflect a diversity of interests and career aspirations. They may not be familiar with the educational system and the opportunities available. They may also underestimate the time required to learn a new language and meet their academic goals. Teachers need to be aware of personal and cultural biases that may limit their expectations of certain groups of learners



## What do we need to consider regarding the assessment of war-affected and English as an additional language learners?

The appropriate educational assessment of war-affected learners is a complex and challenging task because of the many factors which can affect those learners, and the linguistic and cultural barriers that may limit or impede effective communication and assessments. Educators need to be cautious in their use of assessment and screening tools. The literature on this topic points to the insufficient number of assessment and screening tools appropriate for young children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the fact that the most commonly used tools were not developed for use with these populations (Lyman, Njoroge, and Willis, 2007).

Gokiert, *et al.* (2010) state that, "In Canada, many of the standardized tools that are used have been normed on Euro-American populations and may not be valid for use with children from diverse cultural groups (Gladstone *et al.*, 2008; Padilla, 2001). This makes examining child development a challenging process in families marginalized by income, cultural, and language barriers. Parents of immigrant and refugee children have culturally-influenced knowledge and experiences that are not well understood by mainstream providers and that may not be captured through traditional screening and assessment tools." (Gokiert *et al* 2010, pp.10-11)

There are also concerns related to

- cultural biases that are present in intelligence tests and other assessment tools (Rhodes, Ochoa, and Ortiz, 2005)
- invalid outcomes/results related to the linguistic complexity of assessments and from assessments designed for native English language learners (Abedi, 2011; Abedi, 2012; Abedi & Gándara, 2006)



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For further information on the educational assessment of war-affected and refugee learners, see:

- Espinosa, L. M., & López, M. L. (2007). Assessment considerations for young English language learners across different levels of accountability. The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, Retrieved from <<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2007/08/11/assessment-considerations-for-young-english-language-learners-across-different-levels-of-accountability/>>.
- Gottlieb, G. (2006). Assessing English language learners—Bridges from language proficiency to academic achievement. Illinois Resource Centre.
- Ortiz, S. O. (2004). Comprehensive assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students: A systematic, practical approach for nondiscriminatory assessment. Retrieved from <[www.nasponline.org/resources/culturalcompetence/ortiz.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/culturalcompetence/ortiz.pdf)>.
- Rhodes, R. L., Ochoa, S. H., & Ortiz, S. O. (2005). Assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students: a practical guide. New York: Guilford Press.
- Schon, J., Shaftel, J., & Markham, P. (2008). Contemporary issues in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 24(2), 163–189. Retrieved from <[https://cete.ku.edu/sites/cete.drupal.ku.edu/files/docs/Publications/2008/2008\\_issues\\_in\\_assessment.pdf](https://cete.ku.edu/sites/cete.drupal.ku.edu/files/docs/Publications/2008/2008_issues_in_assessment.pdf)>.



## What are the elements of good educational practice with respect to learners from refugee and disrupted education backgrounds?

Refugee and war-affected learners face many challenges, which may be conceptualized as falling into four major categories: educational, environmental, economic, and psychosocial challenges (Stewart, 2011). Stewart (2011) suggests that society, and refugee-serving agencies and institutions can contribute to the successful integration and long-term well-being of these students by removing barriers and developing appropriate programming and supports. Drawing on Stewart's (2011) and others' work, Tony Tavares (Consultant, Manitoba Education) created the following four diagrams to show some examples of initiatives or actions that help remove barriers or address the four categories of challenges. (Stewart 2011, p. 147 & 148, charts 5.2 and 5.3; American Psychological Association, 2010.)

Click on the links below to view the diagrams.

In addition to these broader initiatives, the local school and classroom can do a great deal to create a welcoming, appropriate, and supportive environment. Some examples follow.

For more information on effective classroom practices, see [\*Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum Framework for English as an Additional Language \(EAL\) and Literacy, Academics, and Language \(LAL\) Programming\*](#) as well as [\*Towards Inclusion: Supporting Positive Behaviour in Manitoba Classrooms\*](#) (Manitoba Education, 2011).

## Examples of effective classroom practices

- Strong leadership on the part of school administrators, which includes mobilizing resources to support the acquisition of basic skills by all students
- Teachers who believe they are responsible for students' learning and capable of teaching them effectively
- High expectations for student learning and behaviour on the part of administrators and teachers, and active communication of these expectations to students
- Creation of an environment of safety, trust, and mutual respect
- Safe, orderly, and well-disciplined, but not rigid, school and classroom environments
- Teachers who are adept at adapting instructional strategies and materials in response to diverse learning styles and needs
- Provision of incentives, reinforcement, and rewards to enhance student-learning motivation and acknowledge achievements; regular, frequent monitoring of student progress and provision of feedback
- Teachers who make a practice of not assuming or generalizing about newcomer students; rather, they are open to viewing each student as an individual and to learning about each one's uniqueness
- Staff professional learning initiatives which are focused on school improvement and influenced by teachers themselves
- Use of time, personnel, money, materials, and other resources in support of the school's priority goals
- Active involvement and use of parents for instructional support, classroom help, and input into governance decisions
- Coordination among staff of different programming serving the same children
- Use of cooperative learning structures (rather than competitive)
- Computer-assisted instructional activities, which supplement and complement traditional teacher-directed instruction
- Peer and cross-age tutoring
- Provision of early childhood education programming
- The use of small learning units within large schools (e.g., school-within-a-school) and other alternative learning initiatives
- Promotion policies that allow accelerated remedial instruction or transition classrooms as alternatives to retention
- Provision of support targeted to the learning needs of those students who are retained in grade; coordination between school and community resources as needed to support children in need of services outside the school
- Diversity education, which is integrated into the overall school curriculum; belief of belonging, learning, and growing can be further explored at [<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/diversity/educators/index.html>](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/diversity/educators/index.html)
- Recruitment and hiring of minority teachers
- Learning activities to reduce racial and ethnic prejudice
- Personnel, material, and activities to meet the needs of language minority students

## What are some of the curriculum strategies and classroom practices that are appropriate for learners with EAL and disrupted education backgrounds?

In Manitoba, students who have EAL and learning gaps are often referred to as needing foundational Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL), to emphasize that educational programming must not only develop language skills, but also literacy and basic academic concepts in order for them to transition into regular EAL and content-area learning. Students who have not had schooling opportunities will require longer and more intensive support for learning than EAL students with age-appropriate education. Furthermore, the older students are when they commence school, the greater the support needed.

The [Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum Framework for English as an Additional Language \(EAL\) and Literacy, Academics, and Language \(LAL\) Programming](#) discusses the educational needs of these students in more detail (sections 5 and 6) and sets out a continuum of LAL development that can guide planning for individual students.

All students, no matter what their prior schooling, should have the opportunity to develop their potential, preparing for the same educational and workplace opportunities as their Canadian-born peers. Although many of the approaches and practices that are effective for EAL learners in general can work well for LAL learners, research and experience with learners with limited formal schooling indicate that a number of other components are essential for providing an effective



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and appropriate programming. These components include

- **theme-based curriculum** that is intellectually challenging and fills gaps in foundational learning through age-appropriate topics and processes (Gibbons, 2009); foundational academic concepts and skills, as well as

common school-based activities and tasks, such as reading a graph or map may need to be taught, but students also need to develop higher-level thinking skills and the associated language

- **extended or double periods of EAL instruction**



- **smaller classrooms (lower student to teacher ratios)** that allow for more individualized support from the classroom teacher(s)
- curriculum and learning experiences that **draw on students' backgrounds, life experiences, and concrete, real-world skills** (Freeman and Freeman, 2003)
- **collaborative activities** (student-student and teacher-student) that provide more opportunities for meaningful interaction and the shared construction of knowledge
- **scaffolded instruction for language and content**—through visuals, manipulatives, models, graphic organizers, think-alouds, sentence frames, and so on, building step-by-step in manageable chunks toward independent learning; scaffolding begins with assessing the kinds of support students need to work independently just ahead of their current level and then, as that level is achieved, moving the scaffolds ahead to the next level—scaffolding always moves students ahead
- **a balanced approach to literacy development** that weaves together bottom-up and top-down processing, providing access to the written language they will find in their new environment in and out of school; often learner-generated texts, (e.g., the Language Experience Approach) based on individual or shared class experiences, can be a vehicle for connecting learners' lives and oral language development with bottom-up reading skills (Vinogradov, 2009)
- **explicit instruction of literacy skills, strategies, and knowledge of different kinds of texts required for academic purposes;** this should include substantial coverage in the key components of reading, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension, and provide extensive modeling (August et al, 2007; Calderón, 2007; Tuchman, 2010)
- **a strong focus on numeracy skills,** which are often below the grade expectations; mathematical concepts, thinking, and the associated mathematical and language skills are essential foundations for learning and living in today's developed world
- **incorporation of arts** as a vehicle of expression and a medium of learning; students may express a far greater sense of their self and their learning through non-verbal representation, whether dance,

visual arts, music, or drama; drumming and jazz chants may scaffold language learning, and drawing may scaffold writing; for example, students may together form a living model of a cell structure with each one acting out a component; students who come from traditional oral societies may have sophisticated oral and non-print communication skills based on art, dance, singing, music, or other elements; these may provide a basis for the development of literacy and academic skills



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- **socialization into formal schooling;** students with limited formal schooling may need orientation to the expectations and practices of formal classrooms and schools, even though they may be well-developed informal learners (Williams, 2010); other researchers point to the mismatch of cultural values and expectations around schooling experienced by many LAL learners entering North American schools as another significant factor (De Capua & Marshall, 2011a; De Capua & Marshall, 2011b; De Capua et al., 2009; De Capua et al., 2007); they argue that this cultural dissonance is largely responsible for the lack of educational success that older students in particular experience; students need instructional approaches that build bridges between their own understanding of schooling and the new expectations and values that are part of their current school environment
- **“school readiness” and study skills;** students may need explicit instruction and modelling of skills and learning strategies that are assumed present in students of their age, such as sequencing, classification, comparison, using reference tools, taking notes, transferring information from one context to another, organizing a binder, and following a timetable
- **expanded learning opportunities,** through after-school, tutoring, weekend, and summer programming, to continue filling gaps in learning and consolidate current learning;

first language support and mentoring by older students who are role models of successful academic engagement can reinforce the work of the school

- **a teacher or school team** that has responsibility for **monitoring the student’s progress** and sense of well-being within the school and encouraging the home-school connection
- **help with goal setting;** students new to Canada, but especially those from families that do not have connections to established communities (“social capital”), are often not aware of the huge range of career opportunities available and the varied pathways to them, some of which begin in high school; students need help in setting short- and long-term goals and developing a realistic plan to achieve them, as well as seeing the connection between schooling and future educational and career choices
- **support toward developing an identity of competence** (Manyak, 2004a & 2004b); often students experience frustration with the complexity of the educational challenges facing them; they need to see small successes from the beginning in order to begin to build confidence in themselves as learners; students need to develop resiliency and persistence to achieve their goals

- **time, patience, and long term supports;** students and their families will have to deal with many other challenges in their lives, in addition to the challenges of learning a new language, academic content and subjects taught in that new language, and a new culture and ways of doing things, all the while trying to catch up with their age peers; it is important that schools recognize the need for sufficient time and duration of supports that will truly allow students to succeed; both learners and teachers will need to be patient to see the rewards of their efforts

Students who come from refugee and war-affected backgrounds can be very successful in their schooling, but they will need a whole-school approach that is attuned to individual needs and provides both appropriate programming and adequate time to progress toward their goals.

Teachers in some schools have worked with specialized agencies like the Cross-Cultural Counselling Unit of Mount Carmel Clinic to learn how to provide supportive learning conditions. Teachers are trained to recognize distress symptoms and to access professional assistance when needed. They are also trained to evaluate the suitability of topics, resources, and activities for use with these learners and to implement appropriate classroom strategies (e.g., working with aggression, distress, and inattention).

# PART 3

## Supporting Student Success in the Classroom

What can schools and teachers do to strengthen resiliency?

### Factors Supporting Success

Researchers with the *Good Starts Study*, a longitudinal study of 120 young refugee people in Australia, found that boys and girls from refugee backgrounds succeed when several factors are present. Interestingly, although both boys and girls benefit from some similar factors, equally important are the gender differences. The factors that support success are as follows:

#### Factors Supporting Boys' Success

- strong supportive family (especially a parent) and positive ways to deal with family conflict
- stability of housing
- family employment
- teachers who care about them and are helpful and supportive
- having an adult mentor or role model in the school environment that boys can turn to for advice
- opportunities to become involved in school and community activities including sport and arts, and safe places to "hang out" with friends
- achievement of English language and literacy
- being able to participate in, feel part of, and feel valued by the wider community

(Refugee Health Research Centre, 2007, Broad sheet # 1)



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#### Factors Supporting Girls' Success

- teachers who provide individual recognition of girls' achievements and successes in school
- having an adult in the school environment that girls can turn to for help and advice and who provides general support, positive interactions, and encouragement
- having good peer relationships and supportive friends at school
- tutoring and educational support that is available during school hours, not only after school where family responsibilities may compete
- families that are supportive of girls' school attendance and find ways to help girls balance family and school demands
- external support and resources for families so that girls are not overburdened with family responsibilities of caring for younger siblings or advocating for the family with regards to housing, health, and other settlement issues

(Refugee Health Research Centre, 2007, Broad sheet # 3)



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The school can play a very important part in helping to minimize adverse factors and maximize protective factors. Providing emotional support for refugee children and youth is an integral part of any school's EAL/Newcomer policy.

*Growing Up in a New Country: A Positive Youth Development Tool Kit for Working with Refugees and Immigrants* (<[www.brycs.org/documents/upload/GrowingUpInANewCountry-Web.pdf](http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/GrowingUpInANewCountry-Web.pdf)>) from Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) is a useful resource for considering how a focus on resiliency can be built into programming. BRYCS developed this resource to support service providers in their efforts to develop effective and quality programming for the newcomer youth in their communities. BRYCS promotes a "strengths approach" to working with refugee children and youth which has led to growth in the use of the "Positive Youth Development" approach—or one that emphasizes helping kids grow into successful and mature adults rather than just preventing problem behaviours.

## What can we do to help learners overcome blocks to learning?

Research suggests that emotional and psychological trauma can have a damaging and long-lasting impact on the brain (Bremmer, 1999). The damage caused by trauma can have significant consequences for learning and for the psychosocial well-being of affected individuals. Physical trauma to the brain (traumatic brain injury), suffered as a result of war or other experiences, may also cause an array of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioural effects. (Langlois, *et al.*, 2006) In addition, individuals who have experienced unresolved childhood trauma will be more susceptible to trauma as adults. (Middlebrooks & Audage, 2008)

Many strategies can be used in schools and the classroom to overcome blocks to learning. Some of these strategies are summarized in the table that follows.

In a TESOL Language Curriculum Development Series (2006), Slotin and Macpherson described a year-long content-based EAL Human Rights unit taught to grades 7 to 9 newcomer and refugee students. As the students were acquiring information about their rights (many of whom experienced regimes that did not recognize human rights during their pre-migration), they came to the understanding that with rights also come responsibilities. They became actively involved with fundraising for victims of the 2004 Tsunami. It gave them satisfaction knowing that they could be of help and that no donation was too small. Potocky-Tripodi (2002) noted that refugees and immigrants coming from situations of war or violence are at high risk for feelings of guilt. Referred to as survivor's guilt, a newcomer may ask themselves repeatedly why they survived. They will do whatever they can to make it up to those left behind by sending money or clothing, or making a commitment to bringing the remaining family members to Canada as soon as they can. Refugee children and youth are not in a position of offering the financial support that an adult may be able to but, through human rights activities that involve projects for developing countries including fundraising for things such as school kits, mosquito netting, building wells, and so forth, they feel that they too are contributing and giving back.

Emotional blocks to learning and strategies to overcome them

## How do we recognize learners who need more robust and intensive interventions?

Schools can play a very important role in helping refugee and war-affected learners in healing and improving their psychosocial well-being. It is, however, important to recognize that some learners may need more intensive interventions and support. Positive and appropriate educational programming may help but may simply be insufficient for some.

While not all refugee children are former child soldiers or were exposed to frequent incidents of violence, a follow up study on the reintegration of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone points to some important considerations for all war-affected children. The study reaffirmed that sustained access to education remains an important consideration for the well-being of former child soldiers. They “found that staying in school was associated with improved pro-social attitudes and behaviors.” (Betancourt *et al.*, 2010, p. 15)

However, the study also demonstrated the limitations of schooling as a protective factor and the need for clinical and other therapeutic interventions. Overall, the “study identified only a few protective factors that might assist the recovery of former child soldiers who have experienced the most severe and cumulative forms of war trauma. In fact, the magnitude of the effects of war-related stressors, particularly surviving rape and being involved in killing, were much larger than the positive effects of protective factors such as staying in school and experiencing improvements in community acceptance. Our finding that the stress-adjustment effects in this sample are generally weaker than the stress accumulation effects has important public health implications. It suggests that we have a long way to go before being able to fully mitigate the effects of particularly toxic stressors such as rape and involvement in killing in the lives of war-affected youth.” (Betancourt *et al.*, 2010, p. 15)

The Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma in [A school counselling guide to working with students from refugee and displaced backgrounds \(2007\)](#) provides the following advice:

“It is important that students experiencing distress as a direct or indirect result of their refugee background be identified as early as possible so that assistance can be offered. It should be noted that a lack of obvious negative responses does not automatically mean that there has been no negative impact on the student’s mental health. The effects of trauma are often delayed until the initial resettlement period has been completed, and can even manifest a number of years later, so it is important to be aware of the persistence and severity of symptoms.”

The Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma offers additional educational resources for schools at <http://qpastt.org.au/resources/for-schools/>.



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The following questions can assist in such a risk assessment:

- How does the student relate with other students?
- Do the student's life experiences prior to living in [Canada] find expression through play, art, or acting?
- Does the student have difficulty in remembering daily activities, routines, or tasks?
- Does the student appear to experience mood swings?
- Is the student able to concentrate on a set task?
- Does the student appear frightened or fidgety?
- Are there any recurrent themes in the student's drawings?
- What are the student's strengths (e.g., coping mechanisms, abilities, interests, etc.)?

If the risk assessment determines that the student is at high risk, a pro-active course of action may need to be planned. If needed, consultation with, or referral to, another agency may also be considered.

## How do we assess levels of risk?

Generally, the literature suggests that selective or targeted screening of immigrant and refugee students may be a more efficient and appropriate approach to identifying children with potential problems (Birman and Chan, 2008). Birman and Chan also suggest that settings familiar to immigrant and refugee students, such as EAL classrooms, after-school programs, and summer camps, may be appropriate sites for selective screening.

Birman and Chan (2008) provide a very useful review of various screening tools and their efficacy and effectiveness, the types of screeners, and the assessment process with respect to immigrant and refugee populations. (See [Dina Birman and Wing Yi Chan. Issue Brief #1: Screening and Assessing Immigrant and Refugee Youth in School-Based Mental Health Programs. Spring 2008.](#)) They found that various screening instruments have been developed or identified for use in schools, but few have been used extensively with refugee and immigrant populations. Nevertheless, because of the few options that exist, the existing tools may be useful when used appropriately.

One notable effort to develop a useful screening tool is the Boston Children's Hospital, Center for Refugee Trauma and Resilience (CHCRTR), which developed a web-based tool, Refugee Services Toolkit (RST). The RST helps service providers understand the experience of refugee children and families, identify the needs associated with these individual's mental health, and ensure that they are connected with the most appropriate available interventions. Educators may find the Toolkit useful for

- identifying risk factors
- exploring possible interventions
- identifying resources

The Toolkit allows users to assess all four core stressors (traumatic stress, resettlement stress, acculturation stress, and isolation stress) or choose a specific core stressor. The information on the Toolkit and how to use it may be accessed online at <<http://learn.nctsn.org/course/view.php?id=62>>.

When a student manifests repeated patterns of distress, it is important to find the appropriate intervention for the student, the student's family, and, quite possibly, the student's community. In recent years, there has been a movement away from the standard western mental health services model. Miller and Rasco (2004) indicate that,

**services are often underutilized because they are culturally alien to most refugees, the majority of whom come from non-Western societies and bring with them culturally specific ways of understanding and responding to psychological distress.**

Therefore, intervention needs to take into consideration the constellation of systems that impact on the daily lives of newcomer children and youth (see Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework). Interventions may look quite different to what one is accustomed to from a traditional western psychological approach. For example, sand play, art, music, storytelling, drama, and relaxation therapies, to name a few, have become important tools in assisting newcomer children and youth with their resettlement and acculturation process.

The Boston Children's Hospital Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights provides a free online course Caring for Torture Survivors. The course is for individuals who want to learn about survivors of torture and refugee trauma, as well as the health consequences of torture, uprooting, and other human rights violations. Participants will also learn how to approach survivors and recognize clinical signs and symptoms in order to screen, treat, and support individuals at risk. (See <[www.bcrhhr.org/](http://www.bcrhhr.org/)>.)



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## How should educators respond to disclosure?

It should be expected that from time to time students' stories or disclosures of violent or traumatic experiences will come out in the classroom spontaneously or during the course of a classroom activity or school event. These may take different forms such as drawing disturbing pictures, bringing in articles or photographs, and, for those whose English language skills are more developed, bringing up stories or referring to personal experiences in the classroom or in their groups. In such situations, it is important that the teacher makes the child feel comfortable about telling the story that they wish to share and expresses empathy for the child. It is also equally important that other children who may be present and participating in the sharing event are respectful and express their empathy (Birman, 2005).

Teachers should not be "afraid to talk about the traumatic event; students do not benefit from 'not thinking about it' or 'putting it out of their head' (Perry, 1995). If a student does disclose, do not avoid discussion: listen to the student, answer questions, and provide comfort and support on a one-to-one basis. Children and young people

can be afraid of upsetting adults by displaying fear, sadness and anger and, therefore, may be reluctant to show their feelings. The best possible response is to (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2011, p. 123):

- listen to what a student is saying without moving on to something else too quickly
- acknowledge that all children and young people feel sad or angry at times but that these feelings are all right
- appreciate that children mix fact and fantasy when they recall events and it is best not to correct fantasies."

In situations where these types of disclosures occur often, the development of classroom rules or practices/traditions may be developed for times when a student shares something significant. The teacher may invite students to participate in a sharing circle or to show their support for the person who has revealed something painful. Teachers can help refugee students to express their feelings in other ways (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2011, p. 124) as follows:

One of the most important activities that a teacher can do to help is talk with newcomer children and youth. Listen to what they say and take their communication seriously. A sympathetic listener can be enormous support and comfort. To be effective in doing this an educator or supporting adult has to make time to meet with the student and ensure that a safe and private area is available.

(Perry, 1995; Birman, 2005; Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2011; Rousseau et al, 2005)

**Letterbox:** Students can 'post' letters to their teacher; the teacher then writes back, 'posting' letters to their students.

**Journal:** A journal is a writing book with the student's name in it. It is used to write personal things such as 'what makes me sad', with the teacher writing comments. The student can ask for their journal at any time to convey messages. If a student desires, they should be able to write in their own language and translate some or all of it with their teacher.

### *Cautionary note: Limitations of classroom and school interventions*

While teachers and schools can help refugee and war-affected learners heal and overcome the challenges of settlement by welcoming them and attending to their educational, social, and other needs, it is important to recognize the limitations: classroom teachers are not therapists, social workers, or clinicians. Teachers and schools need to help learners and their families identify and access mental health and other services when they are required. It is important to refer these learners and their families to appropriate agencies and supports. The companion document *Life After War: Professional Learning, Agencies, and Community Supports* will be helpful in this regard.

As well, teachers should follow their divisional policies and protocols for referring students for assessment and other student services.





**Story writing and diaries:** These can be integrated with artwork, photography, and other media to express feelings and narrate personal history.

**Art:** For students with language difficulties, as well as for others, artwork is extremely effective for expressing feelings and depicting aspects of life in the past, present, or future.

It is also helpful to explain to these students that they may approach the teacher in private, at an appropriate time and place to talk.

While the literature on working with refugee and war-affected children points to the healing power of storytelling, it is not generally helpful for teachers to probe or request students to share their stories of personal traumatic events in class or in private. Students generally appreciate others' interest about them, their cultures, and their background. The sharing of personal experiences and perspectives is welcomed; however, it must be clear that the students' right to privacy is respected and they must not feel compelled or required to share or reveal anything about their background and past. Consequently, it is important that learning activities and classroom discussions allow for and invite the sharing of diverse cultures and the experiences and backgrounds of students, if they choose to do so: choice is extremely important.

See the following resource documents:  
[\*In the Setting of War: Teachers' Guide for Talking to Your Students\*](#) and [\*Talking to Children about War and Terrorism\*](#).

## What is the importance of play and creative activities?

Play is the work of children: parents need to encourage children to play, especially during stressful times. Play allows children to relate to events around them and to express these events in their own simplified way. Their participation in community activities can raise their spirits and occupy them in meaningful ways.

As Richman (1998) states:

... many refugee children have been denied opportunities for play and have had little fun in their lives. Creative activities have a special relevance for all children who are deprived or who have special needs.

When we realize how important play is for the development of a child, we can recognize the need for providing traumatized children with a place to play, an opportunity to play, and things to play with.



© United Nations Photo. Sarhan, S. July 22, 2010. UNRWA attempt Guinness record for biggest basketball bounce. CC license.  
<[www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=442/442425&key=0&query=GuinnessRecordforBiggestBasketballBounce&sf=>](http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/detail.jsp?id=442/442425&key=0&query=GuinnessRecordforBiggestBasketballBounce&sf=>)

They can thus re-enter their development cycle, which has been so violently interrupted. It would seem that the sooner we can intervene with play in the life of a traumatized child, the sooner the child can appropriate the healing effects of the play environment and the sooner hope will re-enter the child's world. (Aguilar and Retamal, 1998)

Richman (1998) notes the following benefits for refugee (and other) children of play and creative activities:

- provides relaxation and enjoyment, and improves motivation to learn
- encourages integration into a group
- develops social skills and friendships
- enables success even if not good at English, raises self-esteem, and does not overemphasize academic skills
- affirms a positive identity through activities related to the children's culture
- explores sensitive issues such as anger and bullying
- allows expression of feelings in a safe way

Although Richman refers only to children in her book, it has been very clear that adolescents also benefit from creative activities such as being in an African drumming group, creating a video, playing on a school team, being part of a school musical, learning to juggle, or writing/drawing about their own experiences. Other types of beneficial activities for refugee children and youth include drama programs, oral history projects, photo stories, art, singing, dancing, sports, weaving, and gardening.

An example of the use of art in a successful initiative for traumatized children and youth is *Real Life Heroes: A Developmental,*

*Attachment-Centered Curriculum for Children with Traumatic Stress.* Real Life Heroes is an activity-based workbook that helps children experiencing traumatic stress acquire and expand their skill and resource set in order to cope with painful memories and to proceed with their emotional healing. (See <[www.reallifeheroes.net/Home\\_Page.php](http://www.reallifeheroes.net/Home_Page.php)>.)

Another example of an initiative that draws on play and the arts is *International FACES: International Family Adult and Child Enhancement Services, Heartland Health Outreach.* The IFACES initiative provides comprehensive community-based mental health services to refugee children, adolescents, and families. Some of the key components of the initiative are

- client-centered and community-based, extensive outreach, and openness to problem-solving any barriers to treatment
- multidisciplinary team includes psychotherapists; art, occupational, and dance therapists; psychiatrists; and ethnic mental health workers from refugee communities served
- multicultural ethnic mental health workers provide cultural and linguistic competence and work as part of a mental health team

For more information on International Faces, click on the following link: [BRYCS: Promising Practices Program.](#)

One EAL literacy class became responsible for the school's garden which was at the front entrance to the school. The teacher noted that many unexpected sharings of past experiences came about as the students worked in the garden. They talked about the plants in their countries and drew comparisons between what they knew as gardeners in their countries with what they were learning about the plants and the climate in Manitoba. The students looked forward to working in the garden and took great pride in how lovely their garden looked in time for the school's year-end closing exercises. The teacher also noted that, for many students who came from rural environments and now were in urban settings, the garden project was very therapeutic and became a link to positive memories from their pasts.

(Isle Slotin, personal interview, 2011)



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## How does storytelling help in the healing process?

Newcomer youth, including those of war-affected backgrounds, will benefit from informal and formal opportunities to talk about their experiences regarding adjusting to a new culture, and experiencing culture shock and the effects of war and other traumas. Classroom themes, which focus on peace studies, human rights, and international development, provide opportunities for students to reflect on and process their experiences. They also provide opportunities for other students to develop some empathy and awareness of the situations and challenges newcomer youth face.

Creating an environment of trust is of utmost importance. "The refugee experience can impact on the capacity to trust; therefore, it is important to actively rebuild trust through interactions with the refugee young person." (Department of Victorian Communities, 2005)

### Planning for and creating opportunities for sharing stories

Teachers can facilitate the healing, peace, and community building by planning for and creating opportunities for refugee, war-affected, and other learners to be invited to share personal experiences and stories. Two examples of such attempts by educators in Winnipeg follow.

One was a teacher-initiated project at Gordon Bell High School, an inner city high

school in the Winnipeg School Division. The school has 57 different cultural groups represented in its student population. In spite of all these cultures, including Canadian-born students from Aboriginal and European origins, the students largely kept to themselves and their groups. From the teacher's perspective, they did not know very much about each other. During a summer institute on peace education and storytelling, the teacher, Marc Kuly, read Ishmael Beah's memoir *A Long Way Gone* (2007), which recounts the author's perilous story about his experiences as a boy soldier in Sierra Leone during the 1990s. Inspired by the book and the institute, Kuly decided to assign the book to his grade 12 class.

Kuly used the book as a starting point for a storytelling project with volunteer students. Meeting once a week outside of regular class, the teens agreed to tell each other their stories and, more importantly, to listen to each other's stories, as a way of bridging the various solitudes that existed in the school (Walker, 2009). It was noted by the Manitoba Foundation for the Arts (2008) that through Marc's work, students learned to listen, respect each other's differences, and build bonds of friendship that cross the

Normally sceptical, the class came alive. Many of these kids, from disadvantaged core-area homes or from war-torn lands themselves, had their eyes opened. Here was a young man confessing to experiences vastly worse than their own. (Walker 2009)



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traditional lines found in most contemporary schools. (See <<http://artsfoundation.mb.ca/>>.) The students involved came to recognize that regardless of where they were born, how rich or poor they are, or what religion they practice, their story and the perspective it gives them on the world matters. Furthermore, they have learned that it is possible for people from a stunning array of diverse backgrounds to come together, learn, and discover a common cause (Manitoba Immigration and Multiculturalism).

In *Using Digital Narratives With Refugee and Immigrant Youth to Promote Literacy, Healing, and Hope* (2010) a teacher in Saskatchewan, Koreen Geres, details how she used the Pharos resources with digital storytelling tools in her classroom. The study provides an opportunity to explore how digital storytelling may be incorporated into an EAL class to promote literacy, to assist in healing the effects of forced migration, and to build hope. See <[www.mcdowellfoundation.ca/main\\_mcdowell/projects/research\\_rep/200\\_using\\_digital\\_narratives.pdf](http://www.mcdowellfoundation.ca/main_mcdowell/projects/research_rep/200_using_digital_narratives.pdf)>.

The second example is the Peaceful Village initiative specifically developed to improve educational outcomes for refugee and war-affected learners in two Winnipeg School Division schools. The initiative was developed through research as well as a consultative process with interested parties (students, schools, parents, and communities) by Manitoba School Improvement Program's consultant Alysha Sloane. The initiative involves two host-school communities and is aimed at creating positive peace/solidarity toward

actualizing the community participants' best collective self and best individual selves. The Peaceful Village model is largely an after-school project that draws on creative school improvement strategies. Some of the elements of the Peaceful Village initiative include student photo voice projects, peace banners, storytelling, student voice documentary films, enrichment learning centres, literacy centres, passion projects, a village kitchen, and a forum theatre. These strategies overlap and are intended to contribute to a "web of support" or "blanket of care" that will envelop students and families in the community throughout the day and throughout the year (Manitoba School Improvement Program, <[www.msip.ca](http://www.msip.ca)>).

[LitWorld's Resilience Project](#) is focused on helping learners draw on their protective factors that create resilience. The approach is based on the understanding that reading, writing, and verbal storytelling skills are fundamental to stability and success. LitWorld's Resilience Project provides reading and writing workshops to help youth cope with traumatic experiences, including surviving war and living as a refugee, and use writing as a tool for rebuilding strength.

Another example of classroom approaches utilizing creative expression and storytelling is one from Montreal, where the transcultural psychiatry team at the Montreal's Children's Hospital (C. Rousseau *et al.*, 2005) partnered with schools in Montreal to implement creative expression workshops for kindergarten, elementary schools, and high schools to "help immigrant children and youth bridge the gap between past and present, culture of origin and host society." The creative expression workshops were sand play for preschoolers; storytelling and drawing in elementary school;

and drama therapy workshops for adolescent immigrants and refugees.

Rousseau *et al.* (2005) noted that the following four aspects played a key role in all the workshops in Montreal schools:

- the construction of a safe place
- the acknowledgement and appreciation of diversity
- the establishment of continuity
- the transformation of adversity

Creative expression workshops or learning activities can be replicated and adapted to class programming for immigrant and refugee children as long as three key points are kept in mind.

- First, a verbal and non-verbal means of expression must always be paired, to offer the children more than one way of expressing themselves and to circumvent the inevitable language barrier.
- Second, the programming should metaphorically represent cultural diversity to allow a give-and-take between mainstream and minority cultures.
- Third, it is essential to provide a secure place for working through issues. This can be done by alternating opportunities for personal expression and small group discussions to foster empathy and solidarity.

The Montreal team's experience with the creative workshops also affirmed the importance of raising awareness and sensitizing the teachers to the children's life experiences and supporting them in the process of adapting and integrating in a new society and school.

## Do after-school and summer programs matter?

After-school and summer learning programs are a critical strategy for improving educational opportunities and helping develop positive social networks for refugee youth. Refugee youth benefit from the additional academic opportunities, as well as the healthy recreational and social support that these initiatives provide. In Manitoba, Australia, and the United States, such initiatives are being recognized as a critical strategy in the effort to meet the educational and social supports required for newcomer learners to be successful.

Schargel and Smink, 2001, define mentoring and tutoring, service learning, and out-of-school enhancement (after-school and summer scholastic, recreation, and social initiatives) as **being basic core strategies** in preventing students from leaving school and in improving educational opportunities for low-income, disadvantaged, and newcomer youth.

After-school tutoring and recreational programming are also proving to be effective tools, especially for young learners from low-income and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Pathways to Education model provides support for youth throughout the academic year. The model provides academic support and tutoring, academic counselling and advocacy, scholarships, mentorships, as well as a variety of supports concerning personal

finance, culture, and other issues important to low-income and refugee youth.

Initiatives such as the Community School Investigators (CIS) summer initiative offered by the Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club in the inner city of Winnipeg and after-school and summer initiatives offered by community based groups such as the Helping Hands Resource Centre for Immigrants, the Eritrean Community in Winnipeg, the Sierra Leone Refugee Resettlement, and the Congo-Canada Charity Foundation are examples. The latter have formed the *Newcomer Youth Education Support Coalition* to develop initiatives, advocate, fundraise, and promote awareness of the profound need for educational supports. They work with approximately 250 youth from a total of 14 different African countries.

The *Coalition* encourages learning through sports and play as well as cultural and language immersion. It has recruited university students from the African community to serve as positive role models; developed teen mentors; and invited African elders to promote cultural and intergenerational learning. Parental involvement and support is also strong.



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## What are some examples of promising initiatives for higher needs refugee learners?

Newcomer children with EAL and significant academic gaps will benefit from more intensive EAL and content-based instruction. There is increasing evidence from Canada, the US, and Australia that such initiatives are the most effective in providing such learners with meaningful opportunities to develop literacy skills and access training and employment opportunities. All too often, a lack of such programming supports results in students being frustrated and being “pushed” out of the educational system. Traditional EAL programming is not as effective for EAL learners with limited literacy skills and significant academic gaps. In addition, the organization and structure of high schools severely limit the opportunity for students to receive the attention they require.

Newcomer and EAL literacy initiatives, beyond the EAL and academic support, provide important career and psychosocial supports. They provide students of similar backgrounds with the opportunity to share experiences and to participate in group and classroom counselling and support activities. For some, it may be their first school experience. Transitional newcomer programming that initially places and clusters newcomer/refugee students in specialized and intensive EAL/ Literacy classroom settings is often a key strategy for supporting war-affected learners. Such programming and classroom settings provide the learners the opportunity to begin developing familiarity with the Canadian educational system in a comfortable and welcoming environment. Newcomer learners with

limited school experiences need to learn the basic elements of school life such as everyday school routines, timetables, lockers, homework, the grading system, subjects, and co- and extra-curricular activities. Intensive newcomer programming and classrooms allow the learners to develop relationships with the teacher or teachers, and with other learners who share

similar backgrounds and experiences. As a result, such programming acts as a *bridge* that allows them to successfully meet the challenges they face in overcoming their educational gaps and the adaptation to the Canadian educational system. These initiatives often operate as a school within a school, and offer a small, multigrade/ungraded classroom environment.





The chart that follows provides a brief outline of some of the projects as of February 2011.

## What are some examples of promising initiatives from other jurisdictions?

In the last few decades, some very promising school and classroom initiatives have been developed specifically for refugee children in various parts of the world. There are many attempts to include preventative psychosocial supports in the language and educational programming developed for these learners. A few examples follow.

[Project SHIFA](#) provides culturally appropriate mental health care to Somali youth and their families in Boston, Massachusetts. In general,

Somali youth are significantly affected by war and violence prior to their resettlement and face many difficulties related to trauma and to acculturation and the stress of resettlement. Many of them also experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Project SHIFA's emphasis when working with these youth is on prevention, intervention, and resiliency.

Project SHIFA is comprised of three main components as follows:

- **Parent outreach:** Information is provided on how stress and mental health issues alter a child's ability to function and learn.
- **School-based groups for students and training for teachers provided within the school:** The goal of the early intervention groups is to help with acculturation and socialization, and to help identify youth who would benefit from more mental health services. The teacher training sessions and consultations create a supportive environment for the students and reduce the stress of acculturation within the school. It also informs teachers on how learning and behaviour may be altered by trauma and stress.
- **Direct intervention for youth using the Trauma Systems Therapy model of treatment:** This treatment is for students with significant mental health needs. They receive school- and community-based care under the Trauma Systems Therapy (TST) model, which incorporates home-based care, school-based therapy, and legal advocacy.

For further information on Project SHIFA, see <http://healthinschools.org/Immigrant-and-Refugee-Children/Caring-Across-Communities/Boston.aspx>.

Project SHIFA is expanding and has received community-wide acceptance. Parents are now more involved and there is 100% engagement in treatment among the youth that participate in the program. Early results indicate that the program has led to increased access to services, reduced mental health symptoms, and more academic success support.



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The '*PHAROS*' *World United and Welcome to School* prevention initiatives are school-based and were developed in the Netherlands before being implemented in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

Within the PHAROS initiatives, schools serve as a link between the refugee children and the new society and they have healing capacities because they provide personal attention and structure, and they encourage children to socialize with peers and build important relationships with meaningful adults. (Rousseau and Guzder, 2008)

The PHAROS initiatives focus on elementary and high schools. There is a training initiative for teachers at each level. "Both elementary and high school initiatives rely on combined verbal and non-verbal techniques (e.g., the creation of a personal book that brings together representations of family and home as well as representations of school through pictures, drawings, and stories). These activities cover a wide range of issues pertaining

to both past and present (with a focus on daily life, school, and social relations). They also address identity issues, feelings of trust and safety, and the development of a sense of agency." (Rousseau and Guzder, 2008)

[\*Schools In for Refugees: A Whole School Guide to Refugee Readiness\*](#) was developed by Foundation House, the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Victoria, Australia. The resource manual provides tools and strategies to help school communities support refugee background students as well as their schooling experience in Australia. *Schools In for Refugees* provides school staff with resources to create a supportive school environment, promote the mental health and well-being of students, and improve their educational outcomes.

*Klassroom Kaleidoscope* was also developed by Foundation House for middle years students. Though it initially was designed for students from refugee backgrounds, it has now grown to focus

on the classroom and the school as a whole. The focus is on building relationships and connections between students and their school, embracing cultural and linguistic diversity, and promoting mental health and resilience. The initiative uses an approach that centres on connectedness, acceptance of difference, and empathy. Activities include role-playing, brainstorming, group discussions and decision making, writing in journals, individual artwork, retelling stories, cooperative games, listening to music, and an excursion. The first part of the initiative focuses on identity and culture (e.g., exploring diversity, self-identity), while the second part explores emotions (anger, fear, etc.) and how they might affect people as well as how to deal with them. The initiative also touches on communication with family and friends (e.g., difficulties in making friends and solutions to such difficulties, conflicts that can occur in families, and ways of dealing with such conflicts).



# How do we support teachers and staff working with refugee children and families?

## What is vicarious trauma?

*Burnout, compassion fatigue (CF), and vicarious trauma (VT)* are related conditions, which may develop and affect individuals in the helping professions. They can have significant and devastating effects on an individual's personal and professional life. (Trippany, Kress, & Wilcoxon, 2004) Educators and other helping professionals who work in emotionally, socially, and cognitively demanding jobs are susceptible to developing one or more of these conditions. (Simpson & Starkey, 2006) Recognizing the unique aspects of each of these conditions and differentiating between burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma will be helpful in preventing the development of these conditions and addressing them when and if they do occur.

*Burnout* refers to the physical and emotional exhaustion that come from prolonged stress and frustration. (Freudenberger, 1980; Maslach, 2005) When the individual feels that they have too many demands, not enough support, and lack resources, they may begin to feel powerless and overwhelmed. Burnout is not specific to education or the helping professions, it can happen in any field or role.

Burnout is preventable and results from organizational factors such as inadequate support and supervision, lack of communication and positive feedback, as well as unmanageable workloads and inadequate training. (Bell, Kulkarni, & Dalton, 2003; Leiter & Maslach, 2005) The development of burnout is associated to a large degree with the work environment rather than with the presence of a history of trauma on either the part of the student/client or the educator/helping professional. (Hudek, 2007) The effects of burnout can be significant and include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced feelings of accomplishment. (Maslach 2003)

Following are links to resources for self-study and training, as well as in-depth information on vicarious trauma and its prevention and treatment:

- The Headington Institute supports humanitarian organizations by promoting the well-being of their staff. They offer online training resources and self-study guides, including one on vicarious trauma. See <[www.headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2647](http://www.headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2647)>.
- National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (2001). Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers (PDF) can be downloaded from <<http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/327305/publication.html>>.
- The Faculty of Social Work at Columbia University developed an online course called Helping Students Cope with Trauma and Loss-Online Training for School Personnel. Part 1 of the course includes information on self-care and vicarious traumatization. Part 1 is available online for self-study. See <<http://ci.columbia.edu/w0521/index.html>>.
- Helpguide.org is a not-for profit organization that provides resources to support good mental and emotional health. The web site offers online resources on post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma. See <[http://helpguide.org/topics/ptsd\\_trauma.htm](http://helpguide.org/topics/ptsd_trauma.htm)>.
- Netce.com is the website of CME Resource, an organization that provides curricula that assists healthcare professionals in raising their levels of expertise while fulfilling their continuing education requirements. Free access to this course (Course # 6662) is available on the Vicarious Trauma and Resilience website and may be downloaded as a pdf. See <<http://www.netce.com/coursecontent.php?courseid=1060>>.
- [The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children](#) offers online courses and a variety of resources on various topics related to trauma and loss in children.
- Compassion Fatigue Solutions (<[www.compassionfatigue.ca](http://www.compassionfatigue.ca)>) is a Canadian organization offering training and educational resources.
- The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project© also offers original training materials, workbooks, and texts. See <[www.compassionfatigue.org/index.html](http://www.compassionfatigue.org/index.html)>.

*Vicarious trauma* and *compassion fatigue* are conditions that are associated with the evolving concept in the field of traumatology known as *secondary traumatic stress*. (Figley, 2012) The term compassion fatigue was first used by C. Joinson in her 1992 article on nursing, *Coping with Compassion*, to describe the condition of nurses who were worn down by the daily demands of the hospital and emergencies. (Figley, 2012, Coetzee & Klopper, 2010) Most often, this condition is associated with the “cost of caring” (Figley, 1982; Headington Institute) for individuals experiencing emotional pain. Other commonly used terms that describe this or related conditions are *empathic strain*, *secondary victimization* (Figley, 1982), *secondary trauma* (Pross, 2006), *vicarious trauma/traumatisation* (McCann & Pearlman, 1989; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995), and *secondary survivor* (Remer & Elliott, 1988a; 1988b).

*Vicarious trauma* (VT) and *compassion fatigue* (CF) are the result of the negative changes that occur to people in helping professions, usually over time or occasionally as the result of one single, but particularly challenging or extreme case. (Cunningham, 2003; Panos, 2007) They develop because of the

caregiver’s strong ability to care for and empathize with those that they serve. (Figley, 1995) It is the ‘cost of caring’, and the result of sustained interaction with victims of trauma and frequent exposure to their traumatic stories, suffering, and pain. (Figley, 1995; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Stamm, 1999; Stamm, *et al.*, 2003; Pross, 2006; Headington Institute)

While some authors use the terms vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue interchangeably, others distinguish between the two (Trippany, Kress, & Wilcoxon, 2004). Compassion fatigue (CF) refers to “a state of exhaustion and dysfunction (biologically, psychologically, and socially) as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress” (Figley, 1995, p. 253) that takes place when helpers are unable to refuel and regenerate (Figley, 1992, 2002c, 2012). Compassion Fatigue is used to describe someone who regularly hears/witnesses very difficult and traumatic stories and loses their ability to feel empathy for their clients, co-workers, family, and partners. (Figley, 1992, 2002c) This is a condition of deep physical and emotional exhaustion that leaves the individual feeling drained and having nothing to give to others. Compassion-fatigued professionals find it difficult to maintain an appropriate balance of objectivity and empathy. Compassion fatigue may be reflected through a variety of behavioural, emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual symptoms. It can sometimes be misdiagnosed as depression; however, it is preventable and treatable through self-care and appropriate supports. (Figley, 2002c)

The term *vicarious traumatisation* was first used by McCann and Pearlman (1989, 1990) to describe the cumulative negative effects that those in helping professions experience over time as a result of their work with traumatized individuals. Vicarious trauma, like compassion fatigue, may develop specifically because of the individual’s work with trauma victims/survivors (McCann and Pearlman, 1989). Usually, it is the result of the *cumulative* effect of contact and interaction with survivors of violence, war, and disasters. With repeated exposure to traumatic stories and imagery, helping professionals may begin to incorporate an accumulation of their students’/clients’ traumatic material into their own view of self and the world. (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Stamm, 1999; Stamm, *et al.*, 2003; Pross, 2006; Headington Institute) Vicarious trauma thus is used to *describe the “life-changing effect on individuals, ultimately affecting their view of the world and their relationships and connections to families, friends and community.”* (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2001, p. 3)



© United Nations Photo. Photo ID 21963. June 23, 2003. Algeria. UN Photo/Evan Schneider. Western Sahara refugees. CC license. <[www.unmultimedia.org/photo/](http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/)>.

Burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma have features that overlap and have an interactional effect (Hudek, 2007; Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995). Therefore, an individual may experience these conditions sequentially or simultaneously.

Most of the research and literature on compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma to date has focused on the experiences of trauma workers such as first responders (police, firefighters, emergency workers) and anti-violence workers such as social workers, counsellors who work with victims of torture and sexual assault, and therapists (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2001). However, all educators, because of their close interaction and relationships with students and their families, may be exposed to the trauma that their students may have experienced. This is especially true for educators who specifically choose to work with war-affected and other traumatized children. Such educators often experience repeated exposure to traumatic stories in the form of direct disclosure by the student or their family members or indirect disclosure through student writings, classroom discussions, and reactions to events or learning materials.

Teachers enter the profession because they enjoy working with children and youth and want to help them grow and develop. As a result, they tend to be empathetic, compassionate, and caring people. Teachers, counsellors, and other educational staff who choose to work with survivors of trauma are no

exception. However, the very qualities that can make them effective as educators of war-affected learners in combination with the intensity of their work in the classroom and school, and personal factors in their lives can put them at high risk for compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization.

For persons who work with trauma survivors, the most important part of coping with the intensity of the work is to acknowledge it will affect you. If you've been trained in crisis intervention and empathic, active listening skills, this work will affect you. If you really listen to what the client is telling you, this work will affect you. Recognizing that it is "normal" to be affected by this type of work is the most important coping skill that you can give to yourself. You're not alone. It's okay to feel outraged, horrified, shocked, saddened, or vulnerable.

(Nelson, 2012)

## How do I know if I am experiencing vicarious trauma?

Vicarious traumatization should be considered a normal and common aspect of working with individuals and groups of people who have suffered major losses or experienced terrible events (Trippany, Kress, and Wilcoxon, 2004).

The personal characteristics of educators, their life experiences, the social context, and organizational factors can influence whether or not educators will experience vicarious trauma. Some of the factors that influence the development of vicarious trauma include the following (Headington Institute, <<http://headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2650>>; Bloom, 2003):

- educators/caregivers with a personal history of trauma experiences
- the degree of emotional connectivity to the student(s) or victim(s) of trauma
- overextending oneself over and above the normal role or service expectations of their profession by overworking, ignoring healthy boundaries, or taking on too many trauma survivors
- limited training or experience with trauma and supporting victims of trauma
- the ability to nurture oneself through self-care, rest, and play
- the ability to engage in a supportive community and the access to such a community
- dealing with a high percentage of traumatized children, particularly sexually abused children
- experiencing too many negative outcomes
- problematic or severe reactions by the affected students and community
- organizations that don't recognize the severity and pervasiveness of traumatic experience in the population they are serving and that fail to provide social support for educators/caregivers



## Symptoms or Signs of Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious traumatization can be conceptualized as a form of infectious trauma or emotional infection (Pearlman & Maclan, 1995; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Pross, 2006). From this perspective, the student's/client's horrific stories, memories, nightmares, fears, despair, and distrust, infect the teacher or helping professional who, in turn, develops similar symptoms. Some of the common symptoms or signs of vicarious traumatization, include the following (Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995; Pross, 2006; Trippany, Kress, and Wilcoxon, 2004; Headington Institute, <<http://headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2650>>):

- symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder—nightmares, sleeplessness, intrusions, avoidance behaviour, irritability
- denial of client's trauma
- over-identification with client
- no time and energy for oneself
- feelings of great vulnerability
- problems managing the boundaries between oneself and others (e.g., taking on too much responsibility, having difficulty leaving work at the end of the day, trying to step in and control other's lives)
- problems in relationships, disconnection from loved ones, and social withdrawal
- generalized despair and hopelessness
- loss of feeling of security
- increased sensitivity to violence
- cynicism
- loss of meaning and hope, loss of confidence that good is still possible in the world
- feeling disillusioned by humanity
- disrupted frame of reference
- changes in identity, world view, spirituality
- diminished self-capacities
- impaired ego resources
- alterations in sensory experiences (intrusive imagery, dissociation, depersonalization)
- physical problems such as aches and pains, illnesses, and accidents

## Assessing Vicarious Traumatic Stress Reactions

Self-awareness is the starting point for preventing and addressing vicarious trauma. Assessment of one's own condition is a part of this process. There are a few resources that educators and other helping professionals may utilize for self-assessment of vicarious traumatization. These are the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Scale-R-IV (Stamm, 2009), the Secondary Trauma Scale (Motta, Kefer, Hertz, and Hafeez, 1999), and the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride, Robinson, Yegidis, and Figley, 2004).

Of these three resources, the ProQOL is one of the commonly used measures. It provides an assessment of both the negative and positive effects of helping others who experience suffering and trauma. The ProQOL has sub-scales for compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue. The measure has been in use since 1995. The ProQOL 5 is the current version. Information and access to the ProQOL is available from <[http://proqol.org/ProQol\\_Test.html](http://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html)>.

## What can I do to prevent burnout and vicarious trauma?

### Self-Care for Educators

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network provides six tips for educators to help them identify vicarious trauma in themselves and be in a better position to seek help. The tips and their descriptions can be found on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network; however, the six tips are listed below for your convenience. Please refer to <[www.nctsn.org/products/self-care-educators-dealing-secondary-traumatic-stress](http://www.nctsn.org/products/self-care-educators-dealing-secondary-traumatic-stress)> for a detailed description of each item.

1. Be aware of the signs of vicarious trauma.
2. Don't deal with it alone.
3. Recognize vicarious trauma as an occupational hazard.
4. Seek help with your own traumas.
5. If you see signs of vicarious trauma in yourself, talk to a professional.
6. Attend to self-care.

## What can our school do to prevent vicarious trauma or help people cope with it?

The organization plays a large role in the prevention and management of vicarious trauma. It is critically important that the school be trauma-informed and supportive of school staff, especially those working with war-affected learners and other trauma survivors.

Schools can implement a number of strategies that will prevent or minimize the incidence of vicarious trauma and that will help address it when it affects school staff. A summary of the principal organizational strategies that have been suggested in the literature for both prevention and intervention follow (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Hamilton, 2007; Mathieu, 2007a, 2007b; Trippany, Kress, and Wilcoxon, 2004; Bell, Kulkarn, and Dalton, 2003; National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 2001):

1. An organizational or school culture that 'normalizes' the effects of working with trauma survivors can provide a supportive environment for educators, social workers, and other personnel to address those effects in their own work and lives.
2. The organization or school provides a safe and supportive working environment.
3. Trauma-specific education that addresses the impact of the refugee experience and other forms of trauma on student well-being and learning is an important aspect of preventing vicarious trauma. Teachers and all school staff will benefit from this type of training, as it will assist in providing a context for situations that may arise in the classroom or school. The provision of training for school administrators and staff with respect to vicarious trauma is an important aspect of trauma-specific training.
4. Measures are implemented to recognize and acknowledge the potential for vicarious trauma and to learn to identify early warning signs of vicarious trauma among self and colleagues.
5. Social support is offered within the organization or school for those coping with vicarious trauma. Opportunities for group debriefings and for staff to meet and discuss stressful situations on a regular basis are essential. This process is supportive of staff and it provides an opportunity to learn more about "what works". Reinforcement and an opportunity to discuss and share useful strategies are important in maintaining levels of confidence and skill. Support groups are an effective tool for educators and others who are exposed on a continuous basis to survivors of trauma.
6. School protocols are developed in advance for dealing with traumatic events or emergencies that may occur in the school. These need to include opportunities for debriefing. There are many models, both formal and informal, used to debrief responders and others. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing developed by Jeffery Mitchell is one of the frequently used crisis debriefing models for caregivers.
7. The presence of effective and positive supervision of teachers and other staff, within the organization or school, creates a relationship in which individuals feel safe and can express fears, concerns, and challenges. In addition to providing emotional support, school administrators can also teach staff about vicarious trauma in ways that are supportive, respectful, and sensitive to its effects.
8. Clear delineation of roles, responsibilities, and boundaries within the school structure are important. Knowing when to refer a problem to someone else is critical and requires anticipation of distressing situations that are likely to arise.
9. Support for self-care, therapy (if required), and provision of structured stress management and physical activities are offered on site by the organization or school.

The resource [\*Mental Health and the ESL Classroom: A Guide for Teachers Working with Refugees\*](#) (2000) produced by the International Institute of Boston and Immigration and Refugee Services of America is intended for teachers of adult learners. However, it has some very useful advice that is applicable to K to 12 settings.

How can we use a bioecological framework to support refugee and war-affected learners?

Urie Bronfenbrenner is a developmental psychologist and a co-founder of the Head Start preschool program in the United States. He has had a major impact on the study of child development and the education of children. In his work, Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the importance of the social environments in which children are raised and offers a holistic perspective on the development of human psychology that takes into account many interrelated factors.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is based on the idea that a person's development reflects the influence of five environmental systems with which an individual child or person interacts. (Stewart, 2012; Betancourt & Kahn, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) The model is premised on the fact that "the person is both influenced by the environment and the person also influences the environment. Secondly, the environment is not a single entity; rather it is a compilation of several multilevel environments (systems) and the interconnections between them (Bronfenbrenner, 1989)." (Stewart 2011, p. 16) The systems include a microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

At the center of the **microsystem** is the individual child or person and the immediate setting in which they live. Therefore, the microsystem includes the individual characteristics and needs of the individual and of those individuals that interact with the person in the immediate environment. This includes the family and other caregivers, the teachers and the classroom, as well as sports/recreational teams and groups. It also includes the objects and symbols in the immediate environment. The microsystem reflects the patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships the student or person experiences in their immediate setting—home, school, child care facility, and neighbourhood. (Lewthwaite, 2011; Stewart, 2011)

The **mesosystem** is two microsystems (the student/person and people and objects in the student's/person's immediate environment) interacting, such as the connection between a child's home and school or the linkages of family to peers. Experiences in one microsystem may affect experiences in other microsystems. (Stewart, 2011) For example, a child who experiences neglect by parents may have difficulty with school.

The **exosystem** is an environment in which the student/person is only indirectly involved and does not have an active role, but yet it may influence their immediate environment. For example, the student's parent's workplace and their experiences there can affect their family life, which in turn affects the student. The exosystem may include friends of the family, community members, social agencies, school boards, neighbours, and so on. For example, a school board may set policies or introduce programs that may have a positive or negative effect on individual learners. (Stewart, 2011)

The **macrosystem** is the larger cultural context. It refers to societal and cultural ideologies, practices, values, customs, and laws that impact on the individual. (Lewthwaite, 2011; Stewart, 2011)

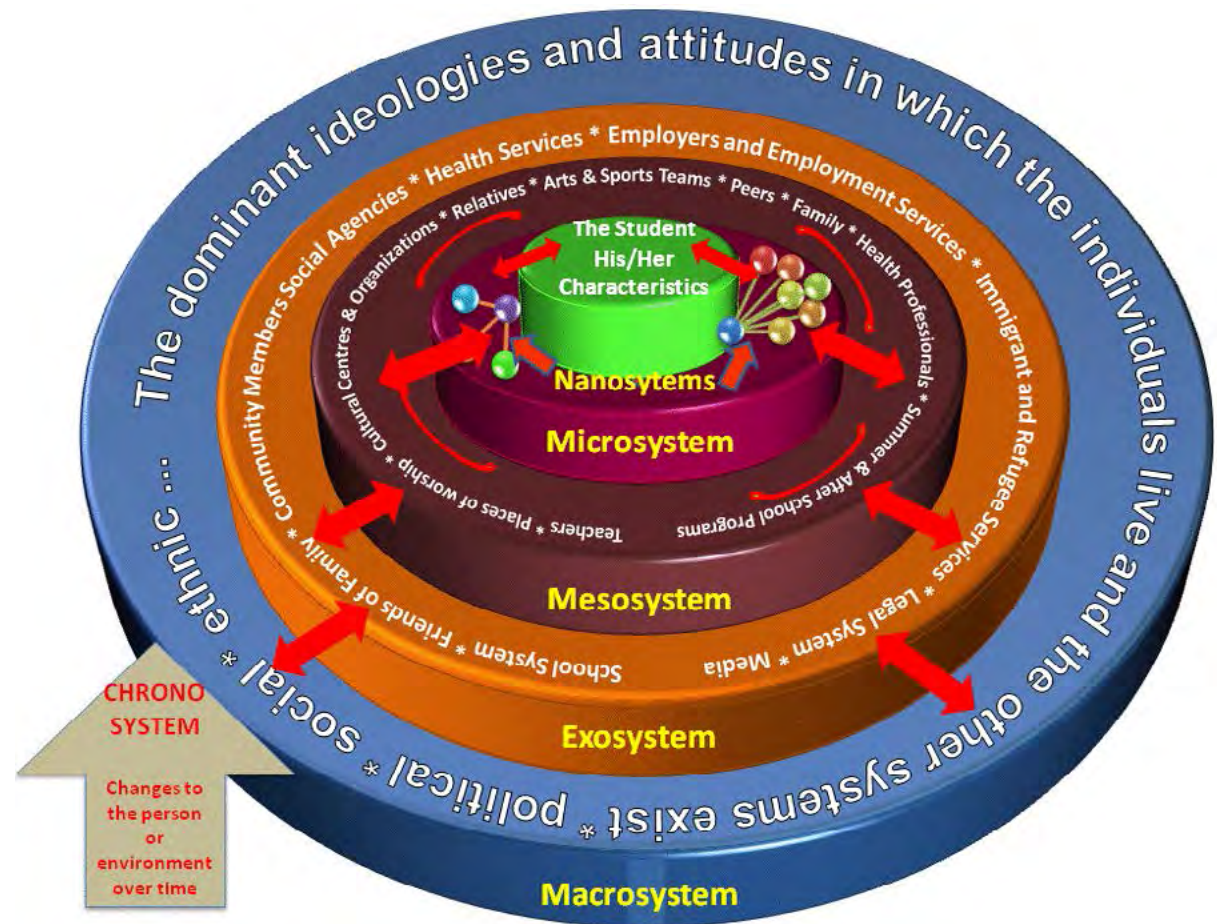
The **chronosystem** refers to the patterns of environmental events and transitions over time in the student's/person's life. These developmental changes may be triggered by life events or experiences that occur both internally (within the individual), or externally, in the environment. (Stewart, 2011) For example, the onset of puberty (internal) or the divorce of one's parents (external).



Bronfenbrenner's theory and corresponding model have evolved since the original 1979 conceptualization of the environment in terms of nested systems ranging from *micro* to *macro*. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) Since the student's/person's own biology is often considered part of the microsystem, Bronfenbrenner's theory has more recently been called bioecological systems theory.

Stewart (2011) built upon Bronfenbrenner's model by adding an additional dimension or refinement to the concept of the microsystem. From her research with refugee youth, she noticed that, within the microsystem of a specific student, there appeared to exist several smaller and more "intimate systems" of relationships which provide support for the student. She calls these systems that operate within the microsystem and the student, nanosystems. From Stewart's perspective, microsystems describe the context within which the student lives and include possible relations, whereas the nanosystem describes the patterns and groups of close relationships that exist within the student's life. A nanosystem may be a relationship a student has with another person, or it may be a relationship with a circle or group of individuals.

Graphic representations of this theory are often identified as *Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model*. (Stewart, 2011; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) A graphic depiction of Bronfenbrenner's model, which includes Stewart's concept of a nanosystem, created by Tony Tavares (Consultant, Manitoba Education), is shown on this page.



A brief overview of the basic components of the revised bioecological model as described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) follows.

The core of the bioecological model is the idea of *proximal processes*. *Proximal processes* refer to the types and forms of interaction between the individual and the environment that operate over time and are considered to be the primary mechanisms that produce human development. "However, the power of such processes to influence development is presumed, and shown, to vary substantially as a function of the characteristics of the developing *Person*, of the immediate and more remote environmental *Contexts*, and the *Time* periods, in which the proximal processes take place." (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p. 795)

The three additional defining properties of the model begin with the formulation of the qualities or biopsychological characteristics of the individual student/person. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) identify three types of personal characteristics that they deem are "most influential in shaping the course of future development through their capacity to affect the direction and power of proximal processes through the life course." (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, p. 795) The three types of characteristics are *dispositions*, *bioecological resources*, and *demand*. These three forms of personal characteristics and their combination influence the nature of the proximal processes and their developmental effects. In addition, the three types of personal characteristics

are also incorporated into the "definition of the *microsystem* as characteristics of parents, relatives, close friends, teachers, mentors, co-workers, spouses, or others who participate in the life of the developing person on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time." (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796)

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model also introduced a very significant aspect of the structure of the microsystem: that of the interaction with objects and symbols (whereas his earlier conceptualization focused on interactions with other humans). As well as his new conceptualization, he introduces concepts and criteria that differentiate between those aspects of the environment that 'foster' in contrast with those that 'interfere' with the development of proximal processes. With respect to those that interfere, Bronfenbrenner points to the hectic nature of contemporary life, and the instability and chaos in the family, child-care facilities, schools, peer groups, and neighbourhoods. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796)

Stewart (2011) believes that the nanosystem helps the students adjust to school. The connections established with people in the school and the close relationships formed as a result of the nanosystem, help the students connect to other systems and navigate between systems and access them. The concept of the nanosystem is very much in keeping with the concept of proximal processes. The nanosystem is the result of the complex interactions that occur between the students

and selected individuals in their microsystem. The people in the nanosystem have genuine connections with the students and, as a result, can play crucial roles in their lives.

For Bronfenbrenner, perhaps the most important aspect of the current bioecological model and the one that sets it apart the most from the initial conceptualization is the dimension of *time*. In the new conceptualization, *time* has a prominent place at three successive levels: micro-, meso-, and macro-. "*Microtime* refers to continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal process. *Mesotime* is the periodicity of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks. Finally, *macrotime* focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations." (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p. 796)

Stewart (2011) finds Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model a more useful tool than his earlier conceptualization for exploring the development of refugee and war-affected children and youth. In addition, she indicates that the bioecological model is further enhanced by the adaptations made by Anderson et al (2004) "to include three phases of migration: pre-migration, transmigration, and post-migration, which acknowledge the disruptions in the individual's life in addition to other developmental or ecological changes (e.g., puberty, starting a new school year)." (Stewart, 2011, p. 17)

The bioecological model is useful for developing an understanding of the variables and factors that affect child and adolescent adaptation to armed conflict and resettlement. Researchers propose that, in addition to the direct relationship between trauma and mental health, a range of additional factors or variables affect children's adaptation to traumatic events in the short- and long-term. (American Psychological Association, 2010) These variables can include both risk and protective factors. Bronfenbrenner's model "provides a helpful framework for understanding these risk and protective factors in children's lives by identifying the presence of individual, family, and community systems that overlap and interact as children develop and grow." (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 21)

Refugee children and youth's well-being, depends to a major degree on their school experiences, successes and failures.

(Richman, 1998 as cited in Hek, 2005)

However, the model also indicates that when considering the individual refugee or war-affected learner, we need to go beyond the individual learner (microsystem) and the immediate school, family, and social environment (mesosystem) and also consider how the exosystem (broader community) and the macrosystem (the dominant culture and nature of society) impact on the learner.

Educators working with refugee and war-affected learners need to be aware of the many factors involved in the personality development of the learner, as well as the factors involved in that learner's behaviour and their successes or difficulties in school. The *bioecological model* emphasizes that there is a complex set of relationships that affect a child's behaviour, personality, acculturation, and adjustment. A learner's behaviour is not just the result of personal characteristics and choices, but also the result of a number of factors including, but not limited to, the learners relationships in the classroom, school, and home; the economic situation of the family; the appropriateness of the programming; the socio-economic status of the student and the student's family; and the status of the cultural or religious group to which the student belongs in the broader society. (Stewart, 2011)

Bronfenbrenner's model has very practical implications for educators and schools who seek to help and support refugee and war-affected learners. It reminds us when assessing learners that we need to go beyond the personal characteristics of the individual learner. It also reminds us that successful interventions, programming, and supports need to go beyond students and their immediate environment. Jan Stewart (2008, 2011), in her research focusing on teachers, and refugee and war-affected learners, found that the 'systems' were not working together and worked in relative isolation. She stressed that, in order to provide learners with appropriate educational programming, the microsystem, mesosystem, and

exosystem must work together to improve the educational and life chances of these vulnerable learners and to support the work of the teachers in the classroom. She concluded on the basis of her research that

...a multi-ecological and coordinated program to support refugee children would likely ameliorate many of the challenges that they experience. Instead of working with children as isolated individuals, there need to be more culturally-appropriate and contextually-inclusive approaches that focus on children who are part of a much larger ecological system. (Stewart, 2008, p. 28)

Jan Stewart's 2011 book, *Supporting Refugee Children: Strategies for Educators*, provides a more detailed analysis of the issues and possibilities drawing on *Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model*.



## What do we need to consider in developing effective policies and plans for these learners?

Local governments, agencies, school boards, and schools need to develop policies and practices, which will compassionately and effectively support refugee children and youth in schools. Planning for EAL and newcomer programming and other supports is essential.

A whole-school commitment to the well-being of all students provides a supportive environment for learning and is built upon three layers or levels of support: providing universal care for all learners, providing additional support for individuals or groups, and providing tailored intervention for learners requiring intensive support.

Each of these layers may be conceptualized as being five areas of practice. For schools responding to students with refugee experience, these can be described as

- a learning environment which values cultural diversity, is supportive and understanding of refugee experiences, and promotes positive relationships
- curriculum and pedagogy which are inclusive and provide specific support for developing English or French language literacy skills
- policies and procedures which support transition, enrolment, and ongoing support, including the use of translators and interpreters when required
- partnerships, which are fostered with parents, communities, and outside agencies



iStock. Ethnic circle with handicapped people—paper concept. File 11778701.

It is important that school divisions and schools identify tools and strategies to strengthen the capacity of school communities to support immigrant refugee background students and their schooling experience in Canada. One such resource is the Australian resource, *School's In for Refugees* (see <<http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/schools-in-for-refugees/>> or [Part 4](#) of *Life After War: Education as a Healing Process for Refugee and War-Affected Learners* for additional details), that provides teachers, support staff, and school administrators with strategies to help build a supportive school environment that promotes the mental health and well-being of students from refugee backgrounds and that improves their educational outcomes. The resource takes a whole-school approach by focusing on the following five aspects of school management:

- school policies and practices
- school curriculum and programs
- school organisation, ethos, and environment
- partnerships with parents
- partnerships with agencies

A beginning point for schools and school divisions is to undertake a review of the existing policies and practices. To that end, *Blackline Master 3: A Planning Checklist for Schools, Families, and Communities* is provided. It is intended to stimulate discussion and provide some ideas of things that should be considered. These should not be seen as special programming but simply as good education which is normal to a country and province such as Canada and Manitoba that support immigration to stimulate growth.



UNESCO's *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction* provides detailed information and guidance to support ministries of education in countries affected by conflict or natural disaster, as well as UN organizations, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in support of these ministries.

See <[www.preventionweb.net/files/8401\\_guidebook.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8401_guidebook.pdf)>.

© United Nations Photo. January 1, 1978. New York, United States. UN Photo/Marcia Weistein. International year of the child (IYC)—1979. CC license. <[www.unmultimedia.org/photo/](http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/)>.

## What is a whole-school approach?

A whole-school approach means that all members of the school community share responsibility for creating a positive and appropriate learning environment for all students and for collaboratively working to create and maintain such environments. In the context of this document, a whole-school approach is collective, connected, and collaborative action in and by the school community that has been strategically developed to improve student learning, behaviour, and well-being for all learners in general and specifically for refugee and war-affected learners.

From this perspective, the ultimate goal of a whole-school approach is the promotion of excellence and equity in the school, and the contribution to building an inclusive and democratic community. Schools that have adopted a whole-school approach consciously and systematically seek to identify and address the conditions that leave behind or exclude some learners.

The Whole Schooling Consortium (see <[www.wholeschooling.net/](http://www.wholeschooling.net/)>) sets out eight principles that are at the core of whole-school approaches. These have been adapted for this document and described as follows.

1. **Create learning spaces for all:** Organize the school and the classrooms in ways that support effective teaching practice and learning for all students.
2. **Empower citizens for democracy:** Help learners become empowered citizens in a democracy by involving them in sharing power and decision-making in the daily life of the school and classroom. As well, include power sharing as an integral part of the culture of a school among adults. Also include the promotion of collaboration among staff in partnership with parents and the community.
3. **Include all in learning together:** Welcome diversity in the school and create school and classroom contexts and conditions that allow learners to interact and learn together across cultures, ethnicities, languages, abilities, genders, and ages.
4. **Build a caring community:** Build community. It is an essential aspect of creating effective schools and classrooms, especially in the presence of diverse learners. School staff care for and support learners, which are experiencing learning or other challenges in their school.
5. **Support learning:** Utilize all resources available to the school, teachers, and learners to support learning. This includes utilizing specialized school and community resources to strengthen learning in all classrooms. It requires that support personnel collaborate with the classroom teachers to include children with differing or specialized needs in classroom activities and to design effective instruction for all students.
6. **Partner with families and the community:** Commit school leaders and staff to collaborate and partner together within the school and with families and the broader community to improve learning and community conditions. Engage students, parents, teachers, and others in decision-making and guide the direction of learning and school activities.
7. **Teach all by using authentic, multi-level instruction:** Students reflect a diversity of strengths and their development reflects different developmental paces and pathways. Schools must design instruction for diverse learners that engages them in active learning in meaningful, real-world activities at multiple levels of ability, providing scaffolding and adaptations as required.
8. **Assess students to promote learning:** Assessment as, for, and of learning is essential. Assessment for learning uses authentic, curriculum-based assessment tools and practices to determine what students know and do so that learning strategies can be targeted to help students progress. Assessment as learning tools and practices engages learners in the learning process and helps them develop ways in which they can improve their learning. Assessment of learning provides important information on the progress of learners within a classroom and across a school.



## Why do we need a whole-school approach?\*

While this resource focuses on refugee and war-affected learners, it is designed to complement the types of services and supports provided by schools to all students. Manitoba's policies on appropriate education and inclusion provide a framework that promotes a whole-school approach to student support that is based on the needs of students and the whole-school community. This framework acknowledges that students bring with them a wide range of skills and experiences that may influence their potential to learn and the ways in which they learn most effectively. Manitoba Education recognizes that all teachers have a responsibility to respond when students experience difficulty with their schooling. It is therefore important that teachers have access to tools that enable early identification and effective intervention for students.

A whole-school approach to student support should include strategies to help teachers identify students' needs, take action to meet these needs within the school program, and monitor and review progress. A key aspect of this process is enabling teachers to meet student needs by providing them with a planned, sequential, and detailed whole-school approach to student support with appropriate professional development to assist with the implementation of strategies.

The chart that follows highlights the key points of the whole-school approach to student support.

## A comprehensive whole-school approach to student support



\* Text and image adapted from Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. (2011). *School's In for Refugees*. 2nd ed. Victoria, Australia: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

## What is a refugee readiness school audit and how can it help us develop a school plan?

It is important that, from time to time, schools review their programming and support for their learners to ensure that the needs of all learners are being met. This is especially true for schools that have relatively minimal experience with refugee and war-affected learners or those that have not focused on this group of learners for a while. The Australian support document, [School's In for Refugees](#) (2011) developed by the Foundation House, in Victoria, provides extensive background information about the impact of the refugee experience on learners and offers numerous practical suggestions for supportive teacher practices.

The remainder of this Australian resource presents *refugee readiness audit* tools for assessing and building a school's capacity for supporting refugees. The ***Refugee Readiness Audit*** addresses five areas that are consistent with the comprehensive whole-school approach to student support services presented earlier. For each area, the document provides an overview of good practice and strategies as well as an audit tool.



iStock. Teacher and students in a classroom.  
File 3962686.

The five areas are

1. school policies and practices (p. 65)
2. curriculum, teaching, and learning (p. 91)
3. school organisation, ethos, and environment (p. 109)
4. partnerships with parents and careers (p. 129)
5. partnerships with agencies (p. 139)

Although specific suggestions clearly are for the Australian context, there are many useful ideas applicable to Manitoba schools. The Refugee Readiness Audit will be helpful in identifying gaps and developing strategies to address student needs and build capacity. It may be used by schools as part of their annual school planning process or as part of a more targeted divisional or school capacity building and planning initiative.

## PART 6

# Learning More about Refugee and War-Affected Learners and Families— A Bibliography of Selected Web-Based and Text Resources



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November 21, 2009. Panpandiar,  
Sudan. UN Photo/Tim McKulka.  
Special representative for  
children visits former child  
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celebrate International Day of  
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Children at play in Timor-Leste.  
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# PART 7

## References

Click [here](#) for a full listing of the references in the print version of this document.





### Video Resources for the Introduction

These video resources complement the content in this section and help to highlight some of the issues.

FilmAid is a not-for-profit organization that seeks to harness the power of film and media to bring “life-saving information, psychological relief and much-needed hope to refugees and other communities in need around the globe.” FilmAid’s YouTube station offers a collection of video resources, such as the powerful [When I Close My Eyes](#), that capture life in refugee camps and the challenges and hopes that refugees face in their quest for asylum and survival.

*The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* is the agency mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. UNHCR offers a series of videos, UNHCR Moving Pictures, that give an idea of the daily struggle for survival that refugees face, as well as the nature of the work UNHCR does throughout the world. Every refugee has a unique story of courage and determination, and through these videos, their voices can be heard and their needs perhaps better understood. The videos also illustrate the kind of challenges UNHCR and other agencies experience in the field, often working close to the front lines.

This is a video from FilmAid International made by the students of Friends Primary School, IFO Camp in Dadaab, Kenya for the UNHCR.

### Music Videos

This is an inspirational music video based on the hit single ‘A Heavy Abacus’ by indie rock band The Joy Formidable, and directed by award-winning filmmakers Paola Mendoza and Topaz Adizes by FilmAid. Paola and Topaz spent a month volunteering as Visiting Teaching Artists for FilmAid in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya where they were inspired to shoot the video.

This is the winning film in Michael Kiwanuka and FilmAid’s music video contest released on Vev. The video captures the conditions, hopes, and dreams of refugee children.

# 1

## Video Resources for Part 1: Immigration and Settlement of Newcomers of Refugee Origins

These video and print resources complement the content in this section and help to highlight some of the issues.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada offers a series of videos on *Helping refugees and those in need* that shows the experiences of refugees resettling in Canada.

Students at Hess Street School in Hamilton, a culturally diverse school, compare life in Canada to life in their country of origin.

This video highlights the inspiring stories of five refugees in Australia.

Refugees International offers videos on conditions and issues in refugee camps. *Urban Refugees: Access to Education* explores the importance of accessing education for refugees seeking asylum in urban areas.

This video highlights how a school-based program supports 10,000 immigrant children and youth entering schools in British Columbia each year.

# 2

## Video Resources for Part 2: The Effects of War and Resettlement

These video resources complement the content in this section and help to highlight some of the issues.

### Experiences in Refugee Camps

[Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), and [Part 3](#): Videos from World University Service of Canada (WUSC). Five journalism students from the four corners of Canada travel to two refugee camps in Kenya: Kakuma and Dadaab. Their journey takes them into the heart of these two camps in Northern East Africa and emphasizes the hardships that are an everyday reality for the thousands of refugees from mainly Somalia and Sudan. A film by: Julien Abord-Babin, Marie-Hélène Lafond, Marianne Laroche, Renaud Philippe, Carmel Wolfson. Produced in collaboration with the Government of Canada in partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

An exploration of the trying and difficult conditions in the Dadaab Refugee Camp. This documentary was produced by refugees in Dadaab through FilmAid's participatory video program.

This is a 2013 video about Save the Children's education and child protection work in Doro Refugee Camp. Sixty percent of this camp's refugee population is under the age of 18. Save the Children has been working to provide children in the Doro Refugee camp with schools where they can continue their education, and child friendly spaces where they can play in a safe environment with other children.

### Resettlement

This is a bilingual short documentary film featuring the lives of refugee and immigrant youth settling in Anglophone and minority Francophone communities in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada offers a series of videos on *Helping refugees and those in need* that shows the experiences of refugees resettling in Canada.

This is a collaborative media project which uses personal stories and a range of media tools (video, sound walks, mapping, photography) to better understand the experiences of youth with refugee experience in Montreal. There are a number of video resources that feature a diverse range of youth and topic. The website offers resources in French and English.

This website is dedicated to a three-year documentary project about refugee youth in the United States including three award-winning videos.



## Video Resources for Part 2: The Effects of War and Resettlement (*continued*)

### Refugee Youth and Mental Health

This is a video featuring *Lecture 8: Rethinking Migrant and Refugee Children's Mental Health*. Dr. Cécile Rousseau discusses refugee and migrant experiences through the lens of children's mental health. She analyzes common misconceptions about the migrant experience and explores the specific contexts that impact mental health of migrant youth. The presentation was part of the Summer Program in Social and Cultural Psychiatry from the Division of Transcultural Psychiatry.

Children of War is a video that may be ordered from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). It is a powerful video presentation in which refugee youth tell their own stories about the experience of war. It is recommended for educators and others who work with immigrant and refugee youth and children. Because the stories are deeply moving, the video is not recommended for students younger than high school age, and any presentation to youth should be handled with sensitivity and made only after the video has been previewed.

# 3

## Video Resources for Part 3: Supporting Student Success in the Classroom

These video resources complement the content in this section and help to highlight some of the issues.

This is a video that discusses how refugee children cope with school and life in Canada, what they bring with them, and how we can help them feel safe.

For young people with different language and cultural backgrounds, successfully completing high school can be difficult. Last year, 25 percent of the 2,220 immigrant students across the Victoria Regional District dropped out of high school before completing grade 12. The key to supporting young people coming to Canada from other countries is to ensure they have a place to go where they can make friends, express themselves, and access life skills training and educational programs. Samantha built the connections she needed to successfully transition to Canadian life by accessing services available to immigrant youth through United Way's funded community partners Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society.

This is a short video about students of refugee backgrounds in Austin, Texas.

This video features stories of refugee youth restarting their lives in American schools.

This is a 2011 TV video about refugee children in British Schools.

This is a British video about the issues and needs of refugee learners in schools and promising practices.

Young Bhutanese refugees share their reflections and experiences about living and learning in the United Kingdom.

The Cultural Orientation (CO) Resource Center at the Center for Applied Linguistics provides technical assistance and resources regarding refugee orientation, provided either before resettlement in the United States or after arrival, to refugees, refugee-serving agencies, mainstream service providers, and local communities. The organization offers several videos focusing on refugees of different origins, some bilingual such as [Darfuri Refugees in the United States](#).

This is a program which helps students build understanding and empathy for students of refugee backgrounds.

This is a video about a volunteer-run school that is attempting to provide Syrian refugee youth in camps in Turkey help with the healing process.

# 4

## Video Resources for Part 4: How do we support teachers and staff working with refugee children and families?

These video resources complement the content in this section and help to highlight some of the issues.

This is a video featuring Dr. Laurie Pearlman, a world-renowned expert on vicarious trauma.

This is a video of a vicarious/secondary trauma lecture.

Frank Ochberg explains the differences between Compassion Fatigue, Secondary PTSD, burn out, and Caregiver Burden.



# 5

## Video Resources for Part 5: Helping Refugee Children and Youth in Schools

These video resources complement the content in this section and help to highlight some of the issues.

### Prevention and Other Programming

[Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#): This is a video about the Emotional and Trauma Support Team (ETS) which is part of the Diversity and Inclusion Team, Manchester City Council, United Kingdom.

This is a video featuring Amy Lerner, a second year Ph.D. student in the Early Childhood, Special Education, and Literacy Program at UNC, Chapel Hill, Missouri.

Kristina, a teacher, outlines a comprehensive support system for refugee students and families.

*First Steps to Canadian Life—Project Helps Child Refugees Prepare for New Lives:* British Columbia's First Steps Early Childhood Development refugee settlement pilot project was designed to serve newly arrived, government-assisted refugee children from birth to five years old as well as their caregivers. A comprehensive range of services are provided at two locations in Surrey.

*Refugee Children Succeed In School with the Help of Tight-Knit Community:* This video discusses some of the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds in Syracuse schools and promising initiatives.

*Caring Across Communities—Helping immigrants and refugee students succeed* is a video about project SHIFA at Frederick Middle School in Dorchester, Massachusetts that is supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The program recognizes the unique mental health challenges facing immigrant and refugee children. Caring Across Communities is a national program supporting mental health services in schools that has fifteen sites across the United States of America.

### After-School Programs

After-school programs, such as The Peaceful Village Program and Pathways to Education in Winnipeg that are funded by Manitoba's Bright Futures Initiative and others elsewhere are important initiatives. The videos that follow provide examples of such programs.

A school in Phoenix, Arizona has implemented a new program to help integrate its refugee students and parents.

This is a video about an after-school program designed to help refugee learners succeed in school.

## Video Resources for Part 5: Helping Refugee Children and Youth in Schools (*continued*)

This is a video about a College Prep Program for high-school aged refugee youth in Arizona.

Peaceful Village is a unique after-school program focused on helping students of refugee background succeed in Winnipeg schools. The program is facilitated by the Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP). Further information is available from [Manitoba School Improvement Program](#) and [Canadian Education Association \(CEA\)](#).

### Summer Programs

Summer Programs such as offered in Boys and Girls Clubs in Winnipeg and Accueil in St. Boniface are extremely valuable. The videos that follow provide examples of such programs from other places.

*Artists Striving To End Poverty (ASTEP)* provides after-school and summer programs in Florida and New York City. This video captures the many moments of joy and empowerment experienced by volunteers and children at Refugee Youth Summer Academy (RYSA).

The Refugee Youth Summer Academy in Manhattan helps immigrant children and their families find their footing in the United States of America.

This is an hour-long documentary that follows newly arrived students at the International Rescue Committee's intense, New York-based academic and cultural "boot camp" for children seeking asylum from the world's most volatile conflicts. The film presents an intimate, emotionally gripping account of the students' stories of escaping war and conflict and resettling in America, chronicling their triumphs and setbacks as their lives unfold over the course of one formative summer.

The Interfaith Refugee Youth Program in Chicago, Illinois is for newly resettled refugees between 5 and 17 years old. They support young refugees and their families as they transition to a new culture.

Episcopal Migration Ministries' local partners at Interfaith Refugee Ministry are working with the district in New Bern, North Carolina to help refugee youth succeed in school. The Refugee School Impact program benefits students, parents, and school districts in many communities around the United States of America. The experience of one fourth grader and her family shows the transformative impact the program is having.