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)

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)

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>) 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 lead 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 psycho-social 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	
Emotional blocks to learning and their features	***Strategies***
Anxiety ▪ ***poor concentration*** ▪ ***memory problems*** ▪ ***restlessness*** ▪ ***going blank***	▪ Provide a safe, structured, and predictable environment. ▪ Explain changes, rules, and expectations. ▪ Prepare students, or explain alarming and strange noises. ▪ Provide an alternative, quiet place to the schoolyard. ▪ Be flexible about participation. ▪ Use writing, art, and dance for expression of feelings. ▪ Ask students if something is troubling them. ▪ Allow a graded approach to unfamiliar activities. ▪ Allow exemptions from very difficult tasks.
Withdrawal, grief, and depressed mood ▪ ***loss of interest*** ▪ ***anger*** ▪ ***lack of motivation*** ▪ ***lack of energy*** ▪ ***sadness***	▪ Set achievable goals. ▪ Provide a caring and supportive environment. ▪ Show genuine interest. ▪ Provide for one-on-one discussions. ▪ Provide opportunities for pleasure, play, and laughter. ▪ Enable opportunities for sharing. ▪ Encourage a small group or paired learning environment. ▪ Praise effort. ▪ Invite people from different countries into the classroom. ▪ Facilitate language acquisition for communication. ▪ Promote physical activity.
Anger ▪ **low frustration tolerance** ▪ **aggressive behaviour**	▪ Explain limit setting. ▪ Discuss anger in one-on-one situations. ▪ Discover what is troubling the student. ▪ Acknowledge legitimate problems or provocations. ▪ Address causes such as bullying. ▪ Allow for appropriate expression of difficulties by telling somebody, or through storytelling or drama.
Guilt and shame ▪ **withdrawal** ▪ **anger**	▪ Communicate respectfully (e.g., correct pronunciation of names). ▪ Provide attention. ▪ Respect privacy. ▪ Allow for gradual participation. ▪ Be a model of a caring adult who respects the strengths of students.

(Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2007, p. 34)

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

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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/>.

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 <www.chcrtr.org/toolkit/>.

- 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/.)**

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.

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).

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)

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."

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.

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:

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.

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. Therefore, 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.

© 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=>.

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.

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.

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)

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>.)

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

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- 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.)

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, an inner city high school in 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.

> ***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)***

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 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).

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>).

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>.

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.

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.

Division	*Outline of Programming Components*
Borderland School Division ***www.borderland.ca***	This initiative focuses on afterschool and family literacy supports. The main components are a Homework Club; evening and weekend activities that promote community and cultural awareness, academic language, and literacy growth; registration in recreational programming to encourage integration; strong effort to involve Canadian peers, mentors, and community volunteers.
Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM) ***www.dsfm.mb.ca***	This initiative is intended to support francophone students from refugee and war-affected backgrounds. The main components of the initiative are building an inclusive, local school environment that is welcoming of new students through assessment and development of educational plans. Middle Years (MY) and Senior Years (SY) students receive specialized work on Literacy and Numeracy, EAL, and francisation, if necessary, through connections with community agencies, and learning plans. There is much professional development for staff. Also, cultural liaison workers and teaching assistants from same source countries who can give support and guidance to children in their first languages are hired. A summer program was added in 2009, and continued in 2010, and 2011.
Louis Riel School Division ***www.lrsd.net/***	Intensive Literacy, Academics, Language, and Numeracy Programming: This programming includes clustering of students for intensive programming for newcomer MY and SY students from war-affected and refugee backgrounds. It is based on intake and assessment protocol with a reception centre and is educational. It is tied to stages of EAL development. There are individualized components: intensive Math classes, literacy issues, core academic skills, and socio-economic supports. At René Deleurme, Victor Mager, and St. George schools half the day is devoted to intensive programming and the other half is dedicated to other pathways, depending on individual needs and interests (home school, technical-vocational education, tutorial support). There are multiple exit routes. There is also enhanced social work support and additional PD to support high school transitions.
River East Transcona School Division ***www.retsd.mb.ca***	Intensive EAL-Literacy classroom at Miles Macdonell Collegiate: There is a half day SY intensive classroom initiative focused on literacy, numeracy, and academic skills as well as language development. The classes are small which allows for individualized instruction tailored to individual needs. There is ongoing assessment and exploration of educational and career options. The length of time in the intensive classroom is flexible but usually goes from first semester and beyond, dependent on individual student's progress.
St. James-Assiniboia School Division ***www.sjsd.net***	***Literacy, Academics and Language Centre at Collège Sturgeon Heights Collegiate:*** This centre draws students from across the school division who are initially assessed and referred by their catchment area school and provides an intensive LAL "bridging" initiative for newcomer learners. The centre provides 2-68 minute LAL classes with direct instruction in literacy and numeracy (provincial and school-initiated course credits). The balance of the school day students are integrated into other subject area classrooms with EAL adapted programming (E-designated course credits). The length of programming is six months or longer, dependent on student needs.
Winnipeg School Division ***www.wsd1.org***	EAL-Literacy Centres Initiative: Launched in September 2006, this includes four Senior High centres *(Daniel McIntyre Collegiate, Grant Park High School, Gordon Bell High School, and St. John's High School) a*nd one Junior High centre *(Gordon Bell High School)*. There are two other Jr. High classrooms supported by the INS grant due to the high number of LAL learners. Students are in centres from 50 to 75% of each day and in integrated options for the remainder of the day. Emphasis is on literacy, numeracy, language development, life skills, career education, and content area subjects. A combination of provincially-developed LAL curriculum and School-Initiated Courses (SICs) enable students to receive credit for learning as they prepare to enter regular high school and EAL-designated high school courses. Three-0.5 Community Support Workers, who speak a variety of African languages, provide the students with socio-emotional and settlement support.

What are some examples of promising initiatives from other jurisdictions?

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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>.

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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.

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).