



2011-2012 MBC FUNDED DISSEMINATION PROJECT

ABSTRACT

TITLE: CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE TO PORTRAYAL OF “REFUGEES” IN THE WESTERN CANADIAN MEDIA AND RECENTLY CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE TO PORTRAYAL OF “REFUGEES” IN THE WESTERN CANADIAN IMPOSED “CAPS” FOR PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES.

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This project expands and compliments the project completed last year with funding from Metropolis B.C., entitled “Spreading the Word on the Benefits of Rural Refugee Sponsorship.” wherein 6 rural communities were engaged in community discussions regarding their capacity to resettle refugees. The results of that project have been overwhelmingly positive, and include civil society groups in Nelson, Cranbrook and Creston B.C. forming sponsorship groups, and a profound relationship developed between the local Ktunaxa first nations community and the recently arrived Karen (Burma) and Kunama (Eritrea) refugees, with huge impact potential and many valuable lessons to be learned.

This dissemination project is extremely timely. Recent media bombarding Canadians with misinformation eluding to the potential that refugees could be terrorists has the potential to illicit fear instead of compassion, towards any vulnerable and persecuted population. Civil society deserves thoughtful, informed and quality information and discussion about these issues. Through such discussion, community members will be empowered to respond with compassion and be encouraged through this project, to speak out about the important implications to building supportive, inclusive and vibrant communities. Community discussions about local media and the importance of civil society voice in media for support of refugees and newcomers to our communities are a vital component of this project. In stark contrast to some recent media portrayal of refugees as “potential terrorists” are the work of civil society groups in interior B.C and the resultant supportive media in those communities striving to sponsor refugees and create welcoming inclusive communities for their reception.

Through promoting a deeper understanding and commitment to ensuring that the voices and actions of civil society groups regarding commitment to embrace newcomers, this project has huge potential to contribute to enhancement of our rural social fabric.