

Metropolis BC Dissemination Grant
East Kootenay Friends of Burma
March-August 2010

Nine very successful community meetings were held in six communities in the East and West Kootenay areas of interior B.C. during July and August 2010. These community meetings were organized by volunteers with the East Kootenay Friends of Burma, and included a brief video of our refugee sponsorship experiences in Kimberley and Cranbrook B.C., as well as presentation of relevant research from Metropolis B.C. regarding the impacts and benefits from immigrant settlement in rural communities.

The 6 communities were chosen based on proximity, potential to find suitable housing and employment for newcomers, previous experience with refugee resettlement or potential interest as noted in response to initial email invitation to the event. The corresponding dates of presentation's, and number of persons in attendance are summarized as follows; (see attached posters advertising the meetings in each community for public information and invitation, and pictures taken at each meeting, also attached.)

Castlegar, B.C. July 5. Attendance: 14 persons including general public, representatives from 2 faith-based organizations, 3 members of EKFOB, and 5 Karen refugees resettled to interior B.C. within the past two years.

Grand Forks, B.C. July 6. Attendance: 21 persons including general public, representatives from 3 faith-based organizations, NGO's, Welcome BC staff, 3 members of EKFOB and 5 Karen refugees.

Nelson, B.C. July 7. Attendance: 31 persons including general public, representatives from 4 faith-based organizations, NGO's, meditation groups, film-makers, 4 members of EKFOB and 5 Karen refugees.

Ktunaxa Nation, St. Mary's Band. June 20, July 21 and again August 6. The first meetings were held on Ktunaxa territory, and the 3rd meeting was held at Wasa Lake. In attendance were over 30 members of the Ktunaxa first-nation's band, their chief and many staff from the band, as well as the general public, 4 members of EKFOB, 6 Columbian recently resettled refugees and 11 Karen refugees resettled within the past 2 years.

Kaslo, B.C. July 27. In attendance were 32 persons including members of the general public, representatives from 4 faith-based groups, NGO's, 3 members of EKFOB, 4 Guatemalan, 8 Columbian refugees (4 resettled in Kaslo and 4 from Kimberley) and 5 Karen refugees.

Creston, B.C. July 28. In attendance were 21 persons including members of the general public, representatives from 3 faith-based groups, 3 members of EKFOB, and 5 Karen and 4 Columbian refugees.

Metropolis research disseminated in these community discussions included:

- 1) Regionalization BC 2008: Regionalization and Rural Immigration in B.C. by Catherine Nolin, Katie McCallum and Anisa Zehtab-Martin. # 09-06. Aug, 2009.
- 2) Religious Organizations and the Integration of Immigrants, Refugees, and Temporary foreign Workers: An Annotated Bibliography and List of Community Organizations by Paul bramadat and Susie Fisher. # 10-01. Jan, 2010
- 3) The Integration and Inclusion of Newcomers in British Columbia by Daniel Hebert and Kathy Sherell. #09-11. November 2009.
- 4) Social Capital Formation and Diversity in Canadian Cities: Impact of Individual and Place-Related Characteristics by Fernando Mata and Ravi Pendakur. # 10-02. January 2010.
- 5) Fostering Acceptance and Integration of Immigrant Students: Examining Effective School-based Approaches in Prairie Schools by Darren Lund. WP 01-08. Prairie Metropolis Centre.

Other Relevant Research/Information includes;

- 1) Attracting and Retaining Immigrants, a Tool Box of Ideas for Smaller Centres, prepared by the National Working Group on Small Centre Strategies, Inter-Cultural association of Victoria, 2007.
- 2) Characteristics of a Welcoming Community by V.M. Esses, L.K. Hamilton, C. Bennett-AbuAyyash and M. Burstein of the Welcoming Communities Initiative.
- 3) Refugee Immigrants to British Columbia 2004-2008 Fact Sheet by the Labour Market and Immigration Division of Welcome BC.
- 4) Income Inequity in Canada: A “Racial Divide” by E.M. Gee, and S.G. Prus of Simon Fraser University, December 1998.
- 5) Best Practices in Settlement Services; report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration by David Tilson, MP Chair, March 2010, 40th Parliament, 3rd session. House of Commons, Canada

Summary of Metropolis B.C. Dissemination Project Activities and Results.

Approximately 150 residents of six communities in the East and West Kootenay areas of interior B.C. were involved in discussions about their past experiences with, and future potential for, rural refugee resettlement to their community. Discussion centered on relevant research findings for rural communities, personal experiences with sponsoring refugees, and as sponsored refugees resettled to rural communities, components of a welcoming community, forming coalitions of volunteers from faith-based groups and the general public, and the process involved in Private Sponsorship of Refugees.

The six community meetings involved were Castlegar, Nelson, Grand Forks, Kaslo, Creston and the Ktunaxa nation near Cranbrook at St. Mary's. Nine meetings have been held to date (Aug 10, 2010) with these 6 communities. Three meetings were held with the local Ktunaxa first-nation's band, as follow-up activities were initiated by Ktunaxa band members to increase inter-cultural understanding and relationships between First Nation's folks and the newcomer's.

A valuable component of each presentation was the video produced as part of this Metropolis BC Dissemination grant by the East Kootenay Friends of Burma which reflects the experiences of the community sponsors and the refugees themselves, resettled in Kimberley and Cranbrook over the past 20 years. This video provides information about refugee resettlement and captures the incredible emotional experience of sponsoring and resettling refugees to a small, inclusive and supportive community. It includes first voice from a number of refugees sponsored over the past 20 years and still living in interior B.C., as well as their sponsors and members of the general public affected by their resettlement to the community.

Another valuable component of each community discussion was the presence of newcomers who had been resettled to Kimberley or Cranbrook within the past 2 years and were originally sponsored as refugees from the Karen ethnic group refugee camps on the Thai/Burma border, and from Columbia.

Invitations were sent to a broad range of local residents in each community, including faith-based organizations. The general public was invited through posters, community events listings in local newspapers and local radio broadcasts. Comments were made at each meeting about the difficulty other resident's may have had attending a meeting during the month of July, but this was the only time available as the meetings were conducted by volunteers from the EK Friends of Burma and their volunteer schedule combined with the host organization's availability in each community, dictated the schedule of these meetings.

A great deal of knowledge, experience and wisdom regarding the resettlement of newcomers to each of these communities was shared at each meeting. Reflection, analysis, contribution of relevant research and personal opinion and experience was encouraged, which contributed to lively, thoughtful discussion at each community meeting. The majority of the community meetings resulted in the formation of a coalition or committee that intends to work together to further discuss their potential for local refugee sponsorship and resettlement. Some very interesting coalitions were formed, for example in Nelson, between the United Church, the Shambala Meditation centre and the general public. Creston, Kaslo, and Grand Forks similarly formed coalitions between a variety of faith-based organizations and general public to look into their potential for refugee resettlement. They continue to investigate issues such as fund-raising, housing, employment, availability of ESL instruction, volunteer commitment, cultural and social supports, and services to meet any special needs of newcomers, etc.

Each of these community coalition's now have their own community group email list and the group email lists from each of the other communities as well as the East Kootenay Friends of Burma. Information is circulating between all of the communities regarding their issues, questions, concerns, knowledge, experience and progress on determining their decision to resettle refugees to their community. The groups are committed to working together to support each other, perhaps coordinating to bring refugees from the same ethnic background, and are even considering joint fund-raising ventures. This communication is currently facilitated by volunteers from the East Kootenay Friends of Burma, through this Metropolis B.C. Dissemination grant. Each community group's will become self-maintaining and remain in communication in order to support each other, and continue to share their learning as they work together and continue to grow as they gather more volunteers and participants from their community. Liaison between these groups and refugees recently resettled within interior B.C. will continue, as will communication with East Kootenay Friends of Burma as the facilitators of this project, and with Metropolis B.C. as the funder's of this most worthwhile dissemination project.