



Students from Refugee Backgrounds



A Guide for Teachers and Schools



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October 2009/Revised December 2015

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

~ Nelson Mandela ~



Ministry of
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Much of the content that appeared in the 2009 version remains in the 2015 revision. Some new information has been incorporated to augment 2009 content. All resource links have been reviewed for currency. The overall presentation of content has been refreshed, i.e., reformatted and reordered in the 2015 version of *Students from Refugee Backgrounds: A Guide for Teachers and Schools*

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Students from Refugee Backgrounds

A Guide for Teachers and Schools

Introduction

Resettling refugees is a proud and important part of Canada's humanitarian tradition. It demonstrates to the world that we have a shared responsibility to help people who are displaced and persecuted.

Individuals and families who arrive in Canada from a refugee background have overcome great obstacles and adversity. They bring with them strengths, abilities, and qualities to share, with hope of thriving in their new home country.

The following is the Geneva Convention definition of a refugee – recognized worldwide, and signed by Canada:

Geneva Convention Definition of a Refugee, 1951, 1967

A refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence..., is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Source: “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, August 2007.

An understanding of the refugee experience of children and youth, awareness of cultural differences, and appreciation of their individual strengths and needs will help receiving school communities create for them, a positive first impression of school in British Columbia, and will encourage their learning progress and success in their new life.

Purpose of this Guide

This *Guide* has been developed for teachers and other school personnel to assist them in welcoming and supporting students, and families who have come from a refugee background. It is designed to

- provide background information about the refugee experience,
- offer support strategies and suggestions for teachers and other members of the school community who will be working with these children and youth and their families, and
- provide information about resources that teachers and other school and district personnel may find helpful as they prepare for the arrival of new students and families – and for their ongoing support.

Understanding the Refugee Experience

New patterns of survival, new relations with neighbours, and new dependencies and alliances have to be established.

In general, refugees are persons who seek refuge or asylum outside their homeland to escape persecution. Their escape may seem to them like the beginning of a long journey to nowhere.

Fleeing their country, their home, and their culture – often having lost family members and friends, or having had to leave loved ones behind – they are forced into a life of uncertainty, with no guarantee of sanctuary or a welcome.

Their escape often leads to the challenges of life in a refugee camp, sometimes for many years. New patterns of survival, new relations with neighbours, and new dependencies and alliances have to be established. Refugee relief agencies work to bring a sense of normalcy to a new existence and stability in the face of uncertainty.

Many refugees become residents of Canada through the generous support of private sponsors. Many more become residents of Canada through the direct assistance of the Government of Canada.

Under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), individuals who arrive in Canada in the Government-Assisted Refugees category are provided with financial assistance that includes loans for their transportation to Canada, a start-up allowance, monthly support allowance, and a bus pass allowance. They are also provided with a basic household goods package. Financial assistance is repayable after one year, or when they become self-sufficient.

The Resettlement Assistance Program process is illustrated in Appendix C of this Guide.

British Columbia welcomes refugee immigrants to the province every year. Currently, refugees are most likely to settle in the Greater Vancouver area. Detailed immigration trends and facts about refugee immigrants in British Columbia can be found at:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/communities/facts_trends/facts.html

Through the years, educators in British Columbia have worked both with immigrant children, youth and families as well as those from refugee backgrounds. While there are some similarities between their experiences – that is, both are new to the country and both must go through a process of adjustment – there are also some significant differences in the transition experiences of these newcomers that may significantly impact their adjustment in settlement in a new country.

The information presented in the following pages provides some general observations of the differences between immigrant and refugee transition experiences, offers insight into potential psychological effects for individuals who have experienced violence, and describes how escape from conflict and a subsequent refugee experience impacts their transition, from a life of instability and uncertainty to a life of new normalcy in a new country and new culture.

Suggestions are made for ways in which all members of the school community can help ease this transition – creating conditions in which children and youth and their families feel welcome and safe, and in which student success enables them to see a positive future for themselves and their families.

Immigrants

Individuals and families who come to Canada as immigrants have, typically, had time to prepare for their transition to a new country – and have developed awareness of or familiarization with their destination country and culture. They have had opportunity to plan and to take care of personal business before leaving their home country. If they are of school age, or were studying at a post-secondary level prior to leaving their home country, their education usually continues uninterrupted. Trauma during their transition to Canada and a sense of loss of their homeland and former life is not necessarily present. The possibility of returning to their homeland in the future is a personal choice.

Families often arrive intact, that is, they include parents and children, or other family members who are also caregivers.

Arrangements – for basic requirements, such as food, housing, and medical and dental care – have usually been made before they arrive in Canada.

Refugees

Individuals and families who arrive in Canada as refugees – whether they come through private sponsorship or the direct assistance of the Government of Canada – have overcome great obstacles and adversity in their journey:

- upheaval and displacement from their homeland caused by increased conflict
- delays and prolonged time periods in refugee camps
- interruption of their education, or a complete lack of schooling resulting in innumeracy and illiteracy in their first language as well as in English or French
- limited current labour market skills, including technology-based skills
- large/extended families, blended families (sometimes due to a loss of parents), or children without parents/adult supports
- use of less commonly spoken languages, causing communication challenges
- limited or no access to healthcare in their countries of origin or in refugee camps
- complex physical and mental health concerns (a consequence of war or torture)
- emotional trauma due to exposure to violence
- poverty, loss of income, depleted financial resources
- lack of awareness of the potential dangers of urban living for those having come from rural/remote settings
- changes to the family unit, and roles and responsibilities within the family unit (e.g., different cultural norms, role reversals, or children taking on adult responsibilities for their parents)
- different parenting styles arising from cultural norms
- negative emotions and significant stress on children, youth and families
- loss of identity and self-esteem
- isolation and loneliness

Because they had to escape from their home in a hurry – fleeing conflict or persecution – their personal business in their home country will likely have been left unsettled. If they are of school age, or were studying at a post-secondary level prior to fleeing, their education may have been interrupted due to strife in their home country, or may have been disrupted or postponed during a lengthy waiting period in a refugee camp before opportunity to resettle in a new country became possible.

Sudden transition to a new country and culture, with little or no advance knowledge about their destination creates many challenges, anxiety, confusion, and uncertainty. They may have a real sense of loss of homeland, and have experienced profound trauma during their transition. They may have lost beloved family members and friends/or personal property – experiences that may have significant psychological impacts. Return to their homeland is not an option unless the crisis situation and/or personal circumstances from which they have escaped stabilizes or ends.

Families very often have been separated – that is, some members may have been left behind and/or children may be without parents, or guardians. Basic requirements, such as food, housing, and immediate medical and dental care, may be urgently needed upon their arrival in Canada.

Lasting Psychological Effects of the Refugee Experience

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Those who have been victims of war, violence, torture, or crime may suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, not everyone in a war environment experiences stress in the same way, nor do they react the same way to similar experiences.

“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is an anxiety disorder caused by exposure to a traumatic event that threatened or caused death or grave physical harm.”

Source: “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” Canadian Mental Health Association, 2009

Some may be able to deal with their traumatic experiences and move on with their lives.

Others may struggle to deal with life in meaningful ways because the horror of their experiences continues to be too much for them to bear. Most adults and children fall somewhere in the middle of the extremes, exhibiting post-traumatic stress in a variety of ways and at different times in their lives.

There is no cure for trauma. However, there is a need for victims of trauma to learn to care for themselves and move on with their life.

Source: “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” Dr. Y. de Andrade, lecture notes, April 28, 1995

Trauma

Specialized school and district personnel will likely be required to guide and support school personnel response to some student behaviours and associated feelings related to trauma and PTSD.

These behaviours may be emotional, cognitive, physical and/or interpersonal. There may be delayed onset of the symptoms of trauma and grief, which may occur in response to unrelated stressful situations or reminders of traumatic events. It may be months, or even years, before symptoms occur.

Traumatic experiences may also have an indirect effect on other immigrant and refugee children, children whose relatives have been or are refugees, children with relatives unable to leave war-torn regions, school staff, or other students in the school.

Recognizing when to refer children or youth for additional services is critical. If there is concern about a student’s emotional wellbeing, the school counsellor or the school-based team will be able to provide advice about supports services that are available to help students who have experienced trauma. These may include the services of a school psychologist or mental health clinician.

There are also immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies that can provide trauma support.

A list of helpful Resources and Community Connections – begins on page 33 of this Guide

The following are common behaviours manifested by children and youth from a refugee background who have experienced trauma:

- difficulty in concentrating and completing tasks
- tiredness because of lack of sleep
- avoidance of particular activities and situations
- physical ailments, such as headaches, vomiting or stomach aches
- irritability or hyper-alertness
- impaired memory
- exaggerated startle responses
- preoccupation with violent events (conversations, drawings)
- unrealistic worries about possible harm to self and others
- excessive distress upon separation or when anticipating separation from parent
- recollection of traumatic events

Students who manifest these kinds of behaviour may also be experiencing:

- violent nightmares or flashbacks
- disturbing memories
- feelings of being in danger
- feelings of betrayal
- anger
- denial
- pervasive or generalized anxiety

Source: “PTSD in Children and Adolescents” and “Survivors of Natural Disasters and Mass Violence,” National Center for PTSD, August 11, 2009.

Their journey into exile and transition to their new life may have caused many children and youth to miss months or even years of school. Some, particularly older youth, may have lost the drive to start again, especially if this requires enrolling in school at a lower level than that which they had previously achieved.

Predictable Anxiety Triggers

Trauma may lie hidden or may manifest in seemingly unrelated behaviours.

For children and youth from refugee backgrounds in particular, occurrences in their new school-based environment may remind them of negative experiences in their homeland or of leaving their homeland and may have detrimental effects.

The following are some potential anxiety triggers:

- dark hallways/institutional ‘feel’ of the school facility
- law enforcement or military personnel in uniform coming to or being in the school facility
- sound of boot-like footsteps
- harsh language
- bells/alarms
- fire and earthquake drills or any evacuation procedures/routines (e.g., lock down)
- groups of children talking loudly/excitedly
- situations that may seem out of control, like children ‘horsing around’
- other children staring at them
- not understanding English, or some of the other languages children speak outside the classroom
- body language that may be misinterpreted
- unfamiliar festivals and celebrations, such as Halloween with masks or firecrackers
- airplanes flying overhead (whether heard from indoor or outdoor locations)

Source: Dr. Y. de Andrade, personal communication, July 26, 1999.

Positive Predictive Experiences/Anxiety Buffers

One way to counteract or prevent negative trigger experiences is to create positive predictive experiences, or anxiety buffers.

School personnel can –

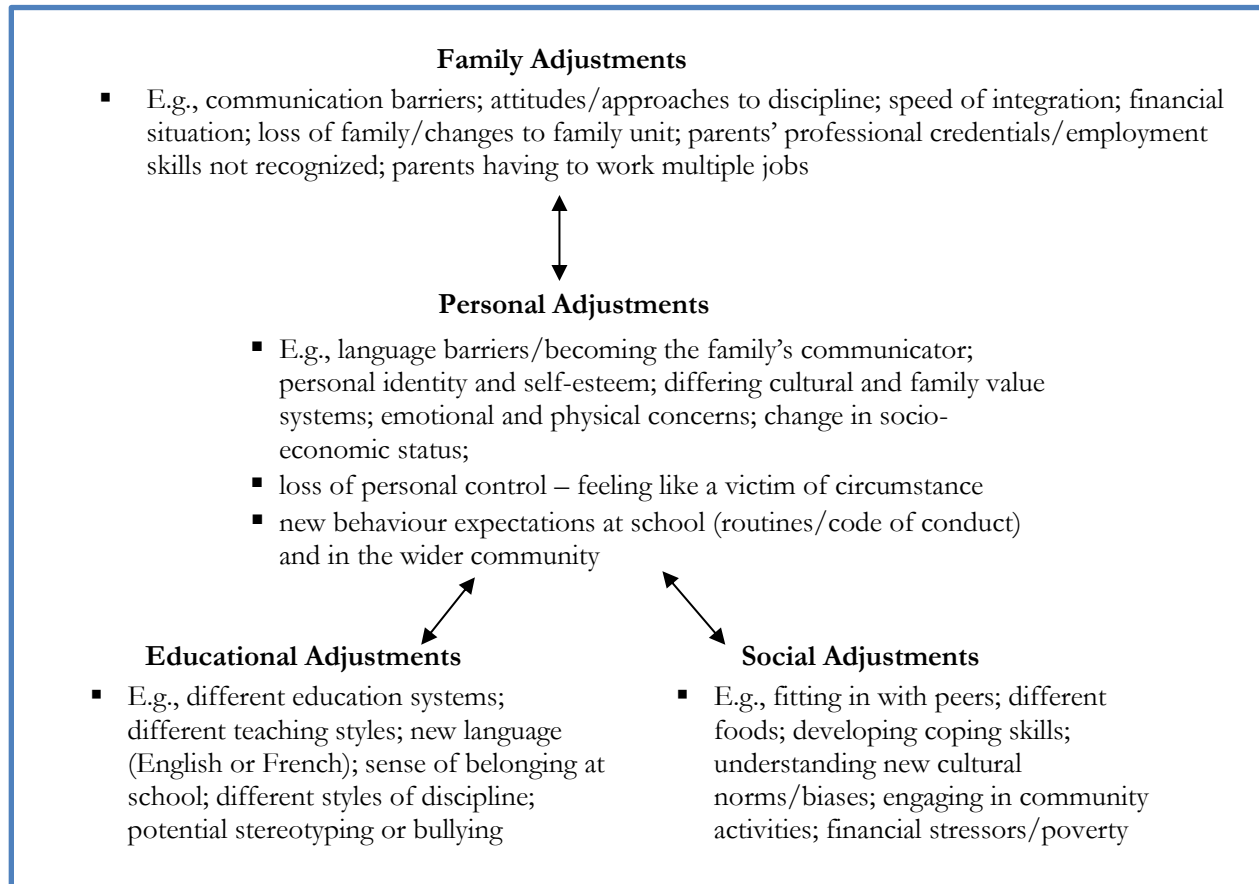
- establishing and following a set schedule and classroom routines/opportunity to practice
- providing advance knowledge about school start and dismissal bells ringing at the same times every day ... and reminders in advance, when bells are about to ring
- familiarizing children with the neighbourhood sounds (e.g., airplanes passing overhead)
- providing a sense of community within the classroom and in the wider school environment
- minimizing number of moves from one class to another throughout, and changing teachers
- utilizing cooperative learning, facilitating peer connections/buddy system
- learning through games/play

Source: Adapted from Dr. Y. de Andrade, personal communication, July 26, 1999.

Resilience

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to bounce back from adversity.

It is important to note that the recovery process may differ for individuals, depending on their age and the experiences they have had fleeing their homeland. Additionally, because they are in a new place, children and youth from refugee backgrounds must make significant life adjustments in their family, school, and community life.



Source: Adapted from "Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Settlement and Immigration," British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, pp. 8-11

All members of the school community – are reminded that it is important to recognize and appreciate that students from a refugee background bring with them strengths, abilities, and qualities to share, with hope of thriving in their new home country.

A person may be able to recover from disruptions or misfortune without being overwhelmed or acting in dysfunctional ways. Sometimes difficulties can be used as a springboard to positive development.

Resilience is fostered by protective factors – the personal attributes and social supports that shape and affect a person’s ability to trust, grow, and learn.

Young people develop a world view and positive habits and attitudes in response to family support, school attachment, and a sense of personal relevance and significance in the community.

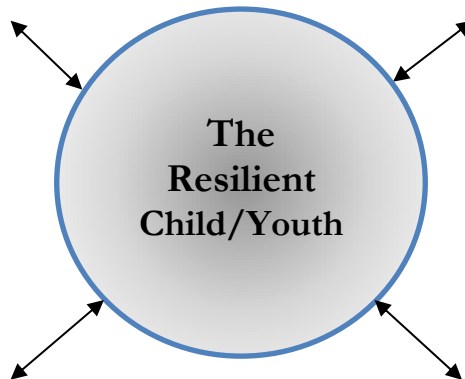
Profile of a Resilient Child/Youth

Skilled at Problem-Solving

- survival – safety/self-protection
- coping skill – ability to successfully manage something difficult or challenging – especially under adverse or unusual circumstances
- ability to develop alternative solutions
- ability to learn/change attitude and behaviour based on experience (non-avoidance)
- self-discipline/self-regulation

Socially Competent

- empathy/care/kindness
- sense of humour
- good inter-personal communication skills
- attachment to school, a sense of belonging and worth
- interacts well socially – engages with others, is culturally aware/ responsive
- expresses him/herself confidently (needs, opinions)
- strives to develop academic skills



Self-confident/Autonomous

- self-aware – positive self-worth, personal identity
- acknowledges personal strengths and abilities
- independent/internal locus of control
- can act independently – self-regulates

Personal Sense of Purpose and Future

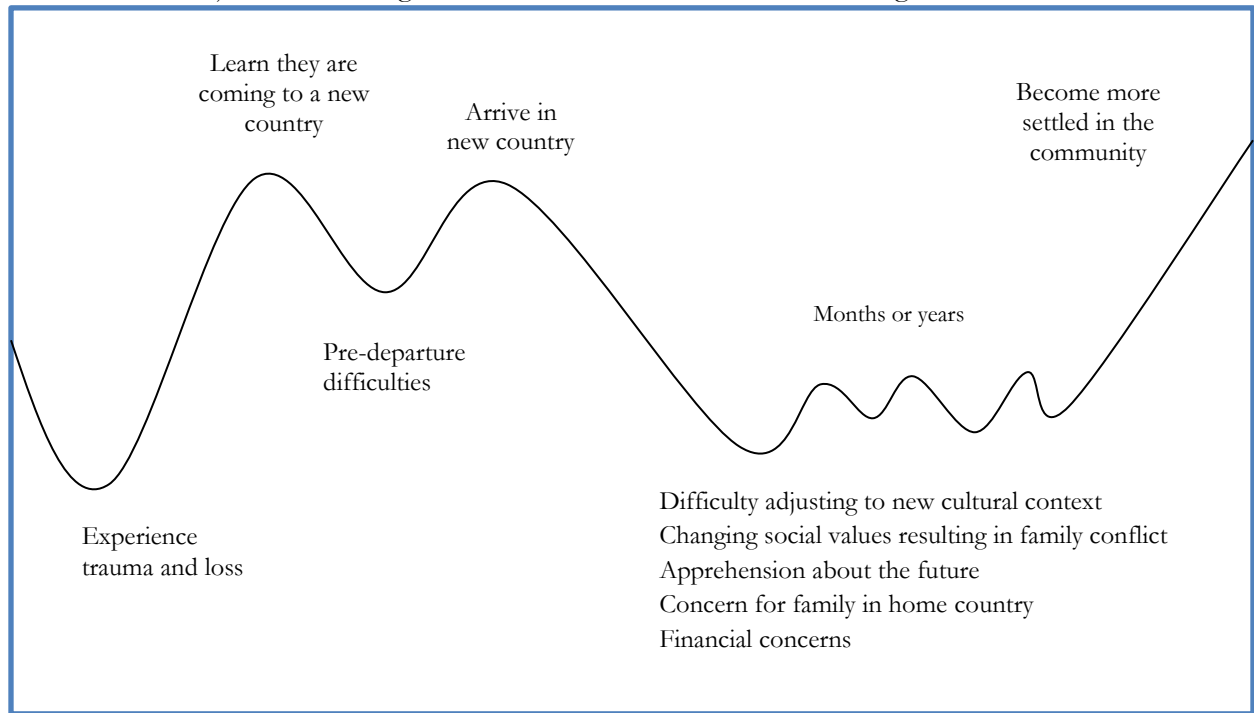
- hopeful
- is goal directed
- views personal future as positive – full of opportunity

Source: Adapted with permission from Dr. Y. de Andrade, lecture notes, 1999.

Adjustment

Newcomers to Canadian culture and school typically go through a period of adjustment during resettlement. Having experienced the trauma of leaving their homeland, and likely coping with a limited ability to understand or speak English they may, upon arrival in Canada, feel a sense of dislocation that may cause them to appear withdrawn, fatigued, or uninterested.

The course of adjustment during resettlement is filled with a series of highs and lows:



Source: Adapted from “Count me in!: A resource to support ESL students with refugee experience in schools,” Minister for Education, Literacy Secretariat, Government of South Australia, 2007.

Stages of Adjustment

This is a time when students and their parents too are trying to make sense of their new world. While individual circumstances and personal responses will vary enormously, it is common for new arrivals to go through four stages of adjustment.

Within all four stages there will be instances where students are silent or seem non-responsive. During the early stages of settlement and adjustment it might be that the student does not yet have adequate English vocabulary. It may also simply be that they are engaged in an internal process of translating that which is being said to them – from English to their home language for understanding and to formulate a response, and then translating their response back to English before speaking/reacting. Later on, this silent period may be due to emotional transitioning.

Parents might have only minimal or no understanding of English/minimal or no ability to speak English; be unfamiliar with social norms when interacting with English-speaking adults or persons in positions of authority; feel embarrassed at having to rely on their children as interpreters; have different cultural experience or view regarding the role of parents in a social or school context.

The following model identifies four stages of adjustment.

1. The Honeymoon Stage

This takes place when people first arrive. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- enthusiasm, fascination, curiosity
- optimism, excitement, and hope for a new life
- unmistakable foreignness
- little identification with British Columbia
- fatigue
- anxiety regarding the future
- superficial attempts to adjust

At this stage, school personnel can – can learn as much as possible about students’ backgrounds and cultural differences – and familiarize the new student and their parents or guardians about the school facility and day-to-day operations, and about available school community programs, routines, and activities.

2. The Hostility Stage

After about four to six months, reality can set in. This is most often the time when culture shock becomes evident. Newcomers know a bit about getting around and have begun to learn how to manage, but where they are now is not like their home: the food, appearance of things, life, places, faces, and ways of doing things are different. Gradually they begin to feel that they ‘hate’ their new country/situation and want to go back home. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- culture shock
- feeling the ‘strangeness’ of BC schools
- little verbal communication, except with others who speak their language
- slow second language retention
- distraction by unsettled family life or growing family problems
- confusion over Canadian social norms and expectations
- frustration and possible withdrawal or depression
- inexplicable or erratic behaviours
- difficulty sitting still
- possible cultural disorientation and misunderstandings, both verbal and non-verbal

At this stage, school personnel can – help the students and families to set realistic goals and expectations; create opportunities to build students’ self-esteem; encourage students to take pride in their heritage and language; show compassion and understanding; and highlight student success.

3. The Humour Stage (or Coming to Terms)

Gradually, after about six months, newcomers begin to work toward resolution of their feelings and their sense of being torn between the old and the new. They begin to accept their new home and to find friends. They begin to discover that there are good things about where they are living and come to terms with both the old and new ways of life. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- proficiency in conversational English
- disengagement from English as a Second Language classes
- peer influence at its greatest
- some attitudinal and value changes
- parent-teen conflict at its worst
- behavioural problems
- improvements in economic situation as at least one parent finds acceptable employment

At this stage, school personnel can – help students to see the value in their original culture as well as in their new culture; present opportunities for students to communicate about their past; and offer students the opportunity to become role models and peer supporters. Introduce students to club activities and team sports in the school and local community – encourage and facilitate their participation.

4. The Home Stage (Integration)

This is the stage at which students and families realize they are here to stay. This last stage may take years, and for some will never fully take place. Students may still respond in unexpected ways to particular classroom situations or events, due to cultural conditioning or because their cultural values and beliefs differ from those of other students. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- proficiency with both their first language and with English
- appreciation of cultural symbols of original and adopted countries
- viewing him or herself as an integral part of a multicultural society
- friendships with individuals from different ethnic origins
- participation in school and community activities associated with both original and new homeland cultures
- acceptance and identification with host culture, without giving up on original identity

At this stage, school personnel can – take pride in the support they have provided throughout each student’s unique process of adjustment and integration.

Source: Adapted from “Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Settlement and Integration,” British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, pp. 2-5.

The Receiving School

Cultural Diversity – Many cultures in the world are represented in the population of British Columbia. Factors such as social class, religion, level of education, the region from which people come within their homeland, whether they lived in a rural or urban setting – all contribute to differences among various cultures – in their beliefs about teaching and learning, their expectations of teachers and school personnel, and often, their willingness to seek help. Traditional beliefs, values, and customs of various cultures may be retained to varying degrees by different individuals.

For many refugee children and youth, school is a safe place where they can learn new things and make friends. It helps them to restore some normalcy in their lives, and develop future goals.

Coming to a new country and adjusting to a new way of life can be difficult and frightening. Older youth may be particularly challenged by starting life in a new country.

While English language learning is essential, children and youth from refugee backgrounds often have additional urgent needs that must be addressed if they are to benefit from their new school experience.

The first year or two are very important to successful resettlement. Schools can smooth the adjustment process by providing responsive services and programs for these students.

Teachers, students, and families all bring their personal and cultural beliefs, expectations, and practices to the education process. When the process involves a student from another cultural background, it may be important to explore the student's cultural experiences, values and attitudes in order to effectively assess the student's learning needs.

Every culture is dynamic, with shared beliefs, values, and experiences among people from a given cultural group as well as widespread diversity within the group. This diversity prohibits generalized assumptions about individual beliefs and responses to specific circumstances. The degree of adaptation to a new life in Canada does not necessarily compare with the length of residence in the country, and integration in aspects of Canadian life does not imply a rejection of traditional ways.

Knowing some of the key characteristics in the traditional cultures among us may help to improve mutual understanding and ability to work effectively with students from different cultures.

To help understand the backgrounds of immigrant and refugee students, this website from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada has very useful information about almost every country in the world: www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/countryinsights-apercuspays-eng.asp .

A Warm and Welcoming Beginning

A child's first impression of the learning environment is affected by the way they are welcomed and introduced to their new life.

This can be a very vulnerable period for students. For example, this is a time when some adolescents and youth may be particularly susceptible to gang recruitment.

Schools have the opportunity to create a warm, friendly, and safe environment with an appropriate educational program and opportunities for interaction and understanding.

School personnel can – help by carefully monitoring students' social, emotional, and cognitive development.

School and District Personnel

Much of the student's introduction to their new life in Canada and early relationship building may take place at school, with the support of the school principal, teachers, other support staff, and peers.

A school and district team made up of various professionals can best support these students:

- School Principal
- Counsellors
- English Language Learning (ELL) Teachers
- Learning Support Teachers
- Settlement Workers
- Other student support staff who may be accessed through the district's support services, school administrators, or existing school-based teams

School and district personnel have an opportunity to make a positive first impression on families and set up new students for early success.

School Principals – have a leadership role to play, ensuring that students are provided with the support they need and that the school is a welcoming place for all students and their families.

Counsellors – can assist with information and support in understanding the emotional needs of the student and can assist with referral to youth mental health services and other community support agencies.

Teachers – can begin to have a positive impact as soon as children and youth with refugee experience arrive by establishing and maintaining a positive, welcoming classroom climate. It is important to recognize that teachers may not have all the necessary training to help the student deal with traumatic experiences.

English Language Learning (ELL) Specialist Teachers – along with classroom teachers, can play a significant role in helping refugee children and youth learn English, adjust to a new way of life in a new country, and achieve success in school.

Learning Support Teachers – can provide classroom teachers with teaching strategies, behaviour management support, and assistance with adaptation and modification of materials.

Settlement Workers – can offer information and support services to students and their families, helping to smooth their transition into a new school and community.

Local immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies have expertise that may help.
See the Resources – Community Connections section – beginning on Page 33 of this *Guide*.

It is important to provide receiving school personnel with professional development and in-service opportunities geared toward understanding and addressing the unique needs of students and families from refugee backgrounds.

School Community

Many members of the wider school community will be interested in participating in school plans for the arrival of new students, and may be keen to learn how they too can help new parents and school/classmates feel welcome and included in school and community life.

Students and families within the receiving school community can also contribute in positive ways to creating a warm and welcoming beginning for newcomers.

Reassurance

A safe and predictable environment, with routine and stability is very important for students who have experienced many uncertainties and challenges as refugees, and are beginning a new life in a new school environment – all the while dealing with the universal trials of growing up.

For the first few days at school, it may be difficult for students who have spent much of their recent past living outdoors to remain inside the school building or to remain in the same classroom for long periods of time. While keeping safety in mind, build some flexibility into students' daily schedules.

Families who have fled from violence or persecution and have often experienced humiliation, discrimination and marginalization during their search for sanctuary, and then the challenge of life in a refugee camp. Safety – their own and that of their children has been, and will continue to be, a top priority.

Upon arrival, children and their families may feel happy that they are safe and away from conflict. There is a great deal of optimism because they may now begin a new life.

British Columbia schools strive to develop positive and welcoming school cultures, and are committed to fostering optimal environments for learning. Members of these school communities share a commitment to maintaining safe, caring and orderly schools.

- ✓ They focus on prevention of problems and use school-wide efforts to build “community,” fostering respect, inclusion, fairness and equity.
- ✓ They set, communicate and consistently reinforce clear expectations of acceptable conduct.
- ✓ They teach, model and encourage socially responsible behaviours that contribute to the school community, solve problems in peaceful ways, value diversity and defend human rights.

BC schools are safe schools

School personnel can – reassure newcomer parents – that in British Columbia, schools work to prevent problems through community building, fostering respect, inclusion, fairness and equity; they set, communicate and reinforce clear expectations of acceptable conduct; they teach, model and encourage socially responsible behaviour; they work to solve problems peacefully; and they place high value on diversity and defending human rights.

Talk with parents about ways in which the school responds and works to prevent bullying, harassment and intimidation – also explain how parents and students can inform school authorities of safety concerns.

Safe schools are ones in which members of the school community are free of the fear of harm, including potential threats from inside or outside the school. The attitudes and actions of students, staff and parents support an environment that is resistant to disruption and intrusion, and enables a constant focus on student achievement.

See also – ERASE Bullying - website
<http://www.erasebullying.ca/>

BC schools are caring schools

School personnel can – share, both with parents and with students, ways in which the school honours diversity, and works proactively to build ‘community’ and a sense of belonging among its members.

The school’s Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and all school parents can – help newcomer parents learn how to advocate for their children’s well-being, and they can encourage their own children to be kind and supportive of their new school/classmates.

BC schools are orderly schools

School personnel can – plan in advance for newcomer arrivals, this will increase the chances that all will ‘go right’ – and prepare to respond proactively if/when things ‘go wrong’.

Endeavour to minimize distractions for newcomers from purposeful learning activities. Provide a climate of mutual respect and responsibility.

Help both newcomer parents and students understand school and classroom routines and other established operational protocols.

Caring schools know that a sense of belonging and connectedness – not just for students, but for everyone in the school community – is a necessary element in the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment. In caring schools members of the school community feel a sense of belonging and have opportunities to relate to one another in positive, supportive ways. All aspects of school life embrace and reflect diversity. School is an inviting place for students, staff, parents and visitors. Staff members make conscious and concerted efforts to help other members of the school community feel connected.

Orderly schools are free from chaos and confusion, and alive with the sights and sounds of purposeful learning activities. Routines for repetitious activities are well established so students’ minds and bodies are free to focus on the learning and development work at hand. A businesslike atmosphere exists, yet there is creativity and fun in abundance. Everyone has work to do and does it in a timely way – and in a way that doesn’t interfere with the learning and development of others. Everyone feels a sense of meaningful accomplishment, and feels that school is a good place to be. All members of the school community are informed about, and exercise their rights and responsibilities as school citizens.

Source: *Safe Caring and Orderly Schools – A Guide* – website <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/>

Social Responsibility – a role for students

The arrival of newcomers from other countries and other cultures can provide many opportunities for students in the receiving school to learn about cultural differences, and to model for their new school/classmates the kinds of socially responsible behaviours expected of students in British Columbia schools.

School personnel can – encourage students to be kind and helpful to their new school/classmates – they too will then begin to learn these expected behaviours.

Many of the behaviour expectations held for students in British Columbia schools are universal – and therefore may already be familiar to newcomers. For some students from refugee backgrounds, their very survival during their recent experience may well have depended upon, or sharpened, these behaviours. Some expectations may however be unfamiliar or culturally different from behaviour expectations in their former homeland.

School personnel can – share the school’s Code Conduct/behaviour expectations with parents and students as part of their school orientation.

Being able to interact positively with others is essential in social situations at school, at home and at work – throughout one’s life.

School personnel can – play an important role in helping children and youth develop this essential aspect of their social development – both by teaching healthy relationship skills and by modeling healthy relationship skills in practice.

- ✓ Students learn to reflect on their actions, respond appropriately to others, manage their emotions, recognize and control impulsive behaviour, and resolve conflict peacefully.
- ✓ Students learn and practice kindness, respect, and compassion for others in their actions, speech, and ways of thinking; and gain an understanding of what it means to be a ‘good friend/partner/citizen.’
- ✓ Students cultivate and practice such qualities in their day-to-day activities and in their relationships with others within and beyond the classroom.

In this way, children and youth come to understand and value healthy relationship skills as essential for success in social situations at school, at home and at work – throughout their lives.

All students benefit from opportunities to learn and practice socially responsible behaviour:

- ✓ *Contributing to the Classroom and School Community* – Being welcoming, friendly, kind and helpful; participating willingly in classroom activities and working cooperatively; and volunteering for extra responsibilities.
- ✓ *Solving Conflicts in Peaceful Ways* – Expressing feelings honestly, managing feelings of anger appropriately and listening respectfully; showing empathy and considering differing points of view; working to solve interpersonal problems calmly; and knowing when to get adult help.
- ✓ *Valuing Diversity and Defending Human Rights* – Treating others fairly and respectfully and trying to be unbiased and ethical; showing interest in correcting injustice and speaking out; and taking action to support diversity and defend human rights.
- ✓ *Exercising Democratic Rights and Responsibilities* – Showing a growing sense of responsibility; following school rules; showing a sense of community-mindedness; being accountable for personal behaviour; and taking action to improve the world.

Source: *The BC Performance Standards – Social Responsibility* - website
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf_stands/social_resp.htm

Introduction to the School

Orientation for Families

- introduce the whole family to the school facility, teaching and support staff gradually; include an introduction to *StrongStart BC* early learning program for families who have both school and pre-school aged children
- provide a map and a tour of the school and school grounds, including entrances/exits and explain routines for entering and leaving the building
- provide a map and orientation to the surrounding neighbourhood
- explain behaviour expectations for students (school code of conduct)
- provide ongoing information about school events
- provide all initial information in the family's first language if possible (consider using translator services to prepare materials; some Ministry resources for parents are available in multiple languages)
- consider using an interpreter to ease communication during initial contact

Families with pre-schoolers – *StrongStart BC* early learning programs are located in schools within every school district in British Columbia. These programs can play a significant role welcoming and supporting refugee families – offering newly arrived parents the opportunity to learn how they can support their pre-school aged children's early learning and school readiness.

Many families from refugee backgrounds have experienced trauma, and the ability for parents to remain in close proximity to their older children, i.e., participating with their younger children in the school's *StrongStart BC* program while their older children attend school, can help to lessen separation anxiety for both parents and children during their introduction to school.

StrongStart BC programs offer newly arrived parents opportunity for community engagement and peer socialization. Here, they will meet other neighbourhood parents with children of similar ages who can help familiarize them with local school and community life. *StrongStart BC* program staff can also help families connect with other support agencies and programs within the wider community. There are often opportunities for English Language instruction for adults alongside the *StrongStart BC* program.

More information about early learning programs including, *StrongStart BC*, is available at: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning>; and information about Early Years Centres is available at: http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_years/centres.htm

Orientation for Students

- utilize a gradual entry process in accordance with individual student's confidence/comfort level
- introduce the student to their assigned teacher(s) and classmates
- provide a classmate or older student 'buddy' for the new student
- assign a locker or other personal/private compartment storage space
- provide access to a quiet area or place of refuge for times when the student feels overwhelmed
- ensure the student has necessary school supplies, textbooks/resource materials (also lunch/snack)
- ensure necessary school and district level support services are in place
- minimize the number of teachers the student will interact with, at least initially
- explain and provide opportunity for the student to practice school routines (bells, alarms, drills) and use consistent messaging to encourage expected behaviour

The Classroom and Learning

Starting Points for Student Learning

Much of students' initial healing may take place in the classroom with the support of the teacher and other school and district

While in school, students spend a great deal of time in the classroom – so what goes on there is very important.

support personnel. Teachers have the opportunity to create a warm and welcoming environment, designing an appropriate program of instructions, and providing opportunities for positive teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction and understanding.

Students too can learn about ways to support their new classmates' recovery.

Some children and youth may have had little formal schooling in their homeland or during their refugee experience, or had their formal education interrupted by their need to flee conflict. These students may be unfamiliar with some cultural conventions associated with schooling in Canada.

School personnel and students can – help their new students/classmates understand and become accustomed to these cultural conventions – they may serve as a practical starting point for student learning. Examples:

- using bathroom facilities
- opening and closing doors
- waiting in line
- waiting one's turn
- speaking one person at a time
- sitting still
- staying in one room or indoors for long periods of time
- staying inside the school for long periods of time
- understanding common non-verbal cues
- recognizing the letters of the alphabet (in English or any language)
- recognizing that information in English is oriented from left to right, top to bottom
- holding a writing instrument
- using a notebook; copying passages from an original source, e.g., whiteboard, textbook
- using technology, e.g., cell phones and computers, tablets

Communicating

School personnel can – help to ease and facilitate communication by:

- encouraging and acknowledging student efforts to communicate
- speaking slowly and clearly – and at a normal conversational volume
- keeping vocabulary and sentences direct and simple
- avoiding the use of metaphors, jargon or popular sayings
- repeating if necessary and/or paraphrase
- using examples to illustrate your point
- using visuals (diagrams, photographs, etc.) whenever possible
- providing key information in writing (points, details)

- linking verbal and visual cues
- allowing time for the student to formulate a response
- being patient
- checking frequently for understanding
- making communication/information sessions short; communicating across languages is demanding and exhausting

It may also be helpful to research differing cultural body language cues. A person's body language sends signals that can be confusing or misunderstood ... both for new students and their families, and for members of the receiving school community.

Adapted from: "Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Cross-Cultural Communication," British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, pp. 14-16.

Interacting with Peers

Classroom interaction also helps teachers ascertain the level of need of individual students. Observation of student-to-student interaction will help teachers assess how well children and youth from refugee backgrounds are managing their adjustment to Canadian society. It can also provide an opportunity for helping students begin to cope with their past traumatic experiences.

Children and youth learn best by interacting with their peers and by practising what they have learned.

Students who are shy need to be encouraged to participate in the context of an accepting, safe learning environment, in which class members can confidently express themselves. Children and youth who are reluctant to interact with others need to be encouraged to work in situations where they have a significant role to play in the success of the group. It is through meaningful interactions that children and youth develop friendships.

It is important to keep in mind that, while not fully skilled in the academic domain, students from refugee backgrounds possess valuable life experience and skills that can serve as a basis for academic learning.

School personnel can – utilize some of the following instructional strategies for facilitating interaction:

- Varying group size: pairs, triads, small groups, circle of knowledge.
- Using cooperative learning strategies: brainstorming, role playing, jigsaw, think-pair-share.
- Using questioning strategies.
- Providing opportunities to practise conflict resolution techniques.
- Focusing on similarities among children and cultures; as children learn about the things they have in common with others, they develop a sense of belonging and overall comfort in the classroom.
- Communicating that school-wide rules and behavioural expectations apply to all children equally and equitably.
- Being explicit about classroom rules, and posting them in a location where they can provide visual cues and reinforce positive behaviour expectations.

Sources: "The Multiple Intelligences Handbook," B. Campbell, 1994, p. 50; "Educating Everybody's Children," R. Cole, 1995, pp. 24, 38, 65, 146, 149, 152; and "Teaching to Diversity," M. Meyers, 1993, pp. 72-82.

Cultural Awareness – differences that may impact behaviours, expectations, or practices in school learning environments.

As we learn about other cultures we need to be sensitive to the fact that not all people from a particular culture or society behave in the same way. Just as regions and peoples within Canada manifest a variety of cultures and social behaviour, even though we share many common characteristics, so there are regional and cultural variations among people from other nations.

Behaviours, expectations, or practices that are common in BC school learning environments may be perceived differently in other cultures.
Praise is expressed overtly/and is welcome.	Praise is experienced as embarrassing.
Making direct eye contact is appropriate/expected.	Making direct eye contact is inappropriate/may be seen as rude.
Physical contact between peers and between teachers and students is unexceptional, particularly in working with younger children.	Physical contact between individuals is taboo, particularly physical contact between males and females.
The polite or acceptable physical distance between individuals is 40-70 cm.	Physical distance is either much closer or much further apart.
Silence is never prolonged; an instant answer is expected.	Silence is comfortable and can imply thought.
Most feelings may be displayed but not necessarily acted upon.	Feelings must be hidden, or, in other cases, displayed with gusto.
Some personal topics can be discussed openly.	Taboo topics are highly variable and culturally defined.
Punctuality is prized.	Time is flexible.
Relative status is not emphasized.	Status is very important.
Roles are loosely defined.	Role expectations are strict.
Competition is desirable.	Group harmony is desired.
Politeness is routine; lapses occur and are forgiven. Thank you is enough.	Politeness and proper conduct are paramount, especially in children.
Education is for everyone.	Education is for primarily or for males first.
Girls and boys are educated together.	Girls and boys are educated separately.

Source: “Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Cross-Cultural Communication,” British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, p. 12.

Predictable Stressors

School personnel can – be aware of and sensitive to some common school and classroom activities that may cause students from refugee backgrounds unnecessary stress if they are asked to participate/respond in the beginning stages of their adjustment.

- Show and/or Tell – may evoke painful memories of what they no longer have/or what they have endured during their refugee experience.
- Current Events Discussions –while a common activity in many classrooms; asking students from refugee backgrounds to share their experiences, discuss their views of the events underway in their homeland, or comment on the plight of refugees in general – may be distressing to them. When/if students feel able to discuss some of the more sensitive aspects of their experience, they will do so.
- Detentions – may be an unfamiliar concept, both to students and their parents – and may even be construed as a form of arrest. It will be important to explain clearly – both to students and parents (an interpreter may be needed) how expectations are established and how consequences are applied in the school.
- ‘Busy Work’ – i.e., activity that simply has students filling in time is not recommended. All assigned learning activities should clearly relate to the subject and lesson content being taught and take into consideration the challenge level/complexity of tasks as well as any language limitations.
- Seating – situating the student next to a positive student role model or ‘buddy’ will help students who may have little or no school experience be learn how to conduct themselves in schools and classrooms. Seating the student close to the teacher may help to facilitate communication and comprehension and enable the teacher to monitor and support student success.
- Field Trips –plans need to be communicated, especially for outings involving ‘camp or camping’. The word/concept of ‘camp’ may evoke association with ‘refugee camp’ and subsequent misunderstanding of the outing that is being planned.

Families will benefit from an explanation of how field trips are incorporated as learning activities. An explanation will also be helpful regarding school requirements for permission forms to be signed by parents and procedures for returning these to the school before the event.

- Cultural Views on Gender – will differ from on culture to another. Cultural customs may not allow for some students to participate in activities that include both boys and girls (e.g., physical education, or group learning activities). School personnel can – check with students or parents regarding participation in co-ed activities
- Clubs – a ‘club’ is, in many cultures, often understood as a ‘night club’. An explanation that ‘school clubs’ such as a ‘drama club’ or a ‘chess club’ as part of the school learning experience may be helpful.

Learning Supports and Services

Students from refugee backgrounds have many needs that are similar to all children and youth, and have some special needs that are unique to their personal experiences. Coming to a new country and adjusting to a new way of life can be difficult and frightening.

Learning supports and services can ease the way.

In providing specialized supports and services for students from refugee backgrounds, it is important to remember that the goal for the majority of these students is integration into a regular classroom setting. Ultimately, it is anticipated that most students will perform to the same standard as is expected of all British Columbia students once they become familiar with the English language and Canadian culture.

Supports for English Language Learners (ELL)

There is no such thing as a typical English Language Learner – a student whose primary language (or languages) at home is not English. Some students require additional support, but not all require the same type of support.

Because English Language Learners come from varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and bring with them a wide variety of life experiences, they enrich our schools and enhance learning for all students.

English Language Learning Specialists together with classroom teachers play a significant role in helping students learn English, adjust to a new way of life, and achieve success in school.

The Ministry of Education has developed several resources to assist school districts and schools to assess students' language learning needs and provide necessary supports and services.

- **ELL Policy and Guidelines (PDF)**
Provides information about rules and procedures regarding English Language Learning.
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/guidelines.pdf> ENGLISH
http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/guidelines_fr.pdf FRENCH
- **ELL Students: A Guide for Classroom Teachers (PDF)**
This guide is for Kindergarten – Grade 12 classroom teachers who have had limited experience working with students.
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/classroom.pdf>
- **ELL Students: A Guide for ELL Specialists (PDF)**
This guide is aimed at ELL specialists, including district consultants, school-based teachers and itinerant teachers who work with students at several different schools.
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/special.pdf>

- **ELL Planning Tool** ([PDF](#)) ([WORD](#))

The Ministry of Education has developed a tool to facilitate a planning process and to determine the instructional support needs of students with ELL needs. Paralleling work undertaken in recent years to create a similar set of tools for students with special needs, the ELL Instructional Support Planning Tool is a new, research-based approach that can be used as an educational model for instructional and support planning.

http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/ell_planning_tool.pdf

- **ELL Standards** (PDF)

The standards are designed to assist schools with language assessment and ongoing instruction for students.

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/standards.pdf>

The English Language Learners *Standards* have been developed by British Columbia ELL teachers and language professionals to complement the Province's English Language Learners Policy and Guidelines (May 2013). They are founded upon the knowledge and experience of ELL educators, as reflected in literature from various educational jurisdictions, and interpreted by representative BC practitioners. The *Standards* describe characteristics that English language learners typically exhibit at various stages of the English acquisition process. Together, the standards address the range of language abilities found among K-12 ELL learners

The standards are intended as a complement to the various approaches that districts have already developed for use with ELL student populations. ELL educators may accordingly wish to use existing district-developed standards (descriptors) as an alternative or supplement to these standards.

Learners with limited or no formal schooling or pre-schooling experience

At any age or grade level there may be students who have had limited or no formal schooling or pre-schooling experience.

It is important to keep in mind that, while not fully skilled in the academic domain, students from refugee backgrounds possess valuable life experience and skills that can serve as a basis for academic learning.

Despite their age, life experience and level of developmental maturity, some may have received limited formal schooling or pre-schooling. Their backgrounds differ significantly from the school environment they are entering. Some may have been engaged in schooling that was interrupted for various reasons, including war, poverty, or migration. Some may have come from remote rural settings with little prior opportunity for formal sequential schooling.

These students may have:

- little or no experience with print
- semi-literacy in their native language
- minimal understanding of the function of literacy
- limited awareness of school organization or culture
- language performance that is significantly below their age/grade level
- insufficient English to understand what is being asked of them to accomplish learning tasks

Although many such students are at the beginning level of oral proficiency in English, some may have other more developed proficiency levels.

However, even the Standards for Level 1 (on the Primary, Intermediate, or Secondary matrices) may not yield a helpful description to determine their level of performance. These students typically require intensive, customized support (including cultural bridging experiences) before they are able to benefit from participation in regular classroom activity.

In terms of language skills, students with little or no previous school experience may benefit from:

- using pictures to express ideas (meaning)
- using single words to express ideas (convention)
- practicing copying letters, words, and phrases (style)
- stringing single words together to create simple sentences (style)
- using samples and other instructional aides to increase their awareness of spelling, capitalization, or punctuation (convention)

Sources: *ELL Standards*, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001, page 9-10.

The Multiple Intelligences Handbook, B. Campbell, 1994, p. 50; *Educating Everybody's Children*, R. Cole, 1995, pp. 24, 38, 65, 146, 149, 152; and *Teaching to Diversity*, M. Meyers, 1993, pp. 72-82.

Supports for Students with Special Needs

Special needs are those characteristics which make it necessary to provide a student undertaking an educational program with resources different from those which are needed by most students. Special needs are identified during assessment of a student; they are the basis for determining an appropriate educational program (including necessary resources) for that student.

All students should have equitable access to learning, opportunities for achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs. This includes students with special needs – those who have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioural nature, or have a learning disability or have exceptional gifts or talents.

Standards for all students, including students with special needs, are developed with high but appropriate expectations for student achievement. Students with special needs are expected to achieve some, most, or all provincial curriculum outcomes with special support.

To the maximum extent possible, supports and services should be organized for delivery at the school level. However, a support system should be available at the district level to ensure that schools have access to expertise and services which are so specialized as to preclude their replication in each school.

It is important to recognize that teachers may not have all the necessary training to help students work through lasting psychological or physical effects of trauma resulting from their refugee experience. A team approach is the best way to proceed.

Counsellors and/or Critical Incidence Response Teams (CIRTs), for example, are found in many school districts. They may be accessed, either through the district counselling department, or Student Support Services personnel. Additionally, schools may have teams composed of CIRT members and/or school personnel including the classroom teacher, the counsellor and ELL specialist.

In schools, counselling services are provided primarily by school counsellors and by other mental health professionals (e.g., youth and family counsellors, behavioural therapists). School counselling services should be co-ordinated with services provided in the community by other ministries (such as mental health services) and community agencies.

Detailed information regarding access to supports and services for students with special needs is provided in the Ministry of Education's *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* – September 2013 <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/ppandg.htm>

Child and youth mental health services are also offered throughout British Columbia by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Information about available supports and services, is accessible at the MCFD website: http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/index.htm

Supports for Older Students

Older youth who immigrate to Canada in their mid to late-teens or early adulthood with little or no English and limited formal or interrupted education and/or work experience in their home country may need help with the following issues:

- ambitious academic goals and aspirations as they arrive as well as the frustrations that may follow if these are not immediately achieved
- inability to meet BC graduation requirements within the expected time
- social isolation
- lack of knowledge about BC learning, vocational training, and recreational opportunities
- need or desire to enter the work force before they are able to acquire adequate BC education or orientation
- vulnerability in the labour market (e.g., with little opportunity to move beyond minimum wage employment)
- in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, negative outlook for the future or vulnerability to problematic behaviour, including violence, gang membership, criminal activities, and substance abuse

School personnel can –

- Encourage and support students to stay in school, i.e., continue their education for as long as possible.
- Connect students with adult education programs and clearly explain opportunities for school completion as an adult – see www.aved.gov.bc.ca/abe
- Provide time for students to complete all work during class, rather than assigning homework.
- Offer support blocks in their timetable where necessary.
- Consider work experience programs as appropriate.
- Focus on literacy and work skills programs for those not able or not intending to graduate.
- Provide translated information where possible.
- Discover and nurture student interests.
- Display posters and signs reflective of the diversity of students.
- Offer interpreter-supported clubs, e.g., homework or computer.
- Recognize efforts or accomplishments, formally and informally.
- Encourage peer supports and buddy systems.

Transition Planning

In addition to the challenging adjustments that students from refugee backgrounds face, like all students, they will experience significant transition points throughout their education. Transitions from home or daycare to kindergarten, from grade to grade, school to school, perhaps from school district to school district, and school to post-secondary or work situations – are times when students will benefit from support.

Transition planning is the preparation, implementation and evaluation required to enable students to make major transitions during their lives – from home or pre-school to school; from class to class; from school to school; from school district to school district; and from school to post-secondary, community or work situations.

School and district personnel can – help by establishing processes to ensure the transition process:

- is continuous
- occurs as part of a planned education program
- includes preparation, implementation of supportive strategies and evaluation
- includes awareness and use of support services by school teams

Transition planning – involves individual transition plan development, follow-up with students, and long-range planning. It is essential that schools and school districts establish procedures to support collaborative consultation in the transition of students into, within, and from the school system.

Planning should involve both parents and students, and include school and district personnel, as well as representatives from community services such as pre-schools and post-secondary institutions, professionals from other ministries.

Source: “Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools,” British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001.

The Ministry of Education document *Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools* offers information about transitions for students learning English (pages 43 to 51) at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/moe_clt_resource_rb0144.pdf .

Resources – Community Connections

Many communities have immigrant-/refugee-serving agencies that offer various supports for individuals and families. For a complete list, refer to www.amssa.org.

Making community connections can be of great benefit to students, their families, and the school.

Making these community connections can be of great benefit to students, their families, and the receiving school. The receiving school or school district may already be closely associated with these organizations or may be involved in special projects to promote the immigration/settlement of individuals and families who are new to Canada. The following are examples of services offered by immigrant- /refugee-serving organizations:

- out of school transition programs for youth
- programs for youth at risk
- pilot projects and initiatives to promote welcoming communities
- early childhood development programs for young siblings of school-aged children and youth
- youth buddy programs

Refugee relief agencies work to bring a sense of normalcy to a new existence and stability in the face of uncertainty.

The following is a listing of resources – agencies, publications and websites that offer helpful information for assisting students and families from refugee backgrounds.

Please note that possible services for immigrants/refugees may be provided in your community by organizations not listed below, such as church groups or cultural centres.

Information Services Vancouver – www.communityinfo.bc.ca/index.html – offers the *Red Book* containing a list of agencies in the lower mainland that may be able to support schools.

- **WelcomeBC** <http://www.welcomebc.ca/home.aspx>

WelcomeBC helps ensure new British Columbians are able to settle successfully, gain employment, become active members of their communities, and contribute fully to the social and economic prosperity of British Columbia and Canada.

WelcomeBC's online channels have been designed to help prospective immigrants/refugees, and other newcomers, community leaders, and service providers find the information, tools and resources that they need, when they need it and by whichever means they choose to search for it.

Responsive design makes WelcomeBC.ca easy to view on both desktop and mobile devices.

In addition to WelcomeBC's website, individuals can access up-to-date information through a number of features and tools including:

- WelcomeBC [Ask the Expert](#)
- WelcomeBC [Cost of Living Calculator](#)
- WelcomeBC [YouTube](#)
- [Newcomers' Guide](#) (now available in video)
- WelcomeBC: [In your Language](#) (Info and resources in more than a dozen languages)

Resources in the Greater Vancouver Region

Health

- **Bridge Community Health Clinic**

Located in Vancouver, this health clinic provides primary health care services for refugees with or without legal status and within their first three to five years in Canada.

www.welcomebc.ca/shared/docs/community_health.pdf

Telephone: (604) 709-6540

- **Health Regional Offices**

This website provides contact information for all of British Columbia's health authorities:

www.health.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html

- **New Canadian Clinic**

Located in Burnaby and Surrey, these clinics provide health care services for newcomers to Canada who have difficulties accessing the regular medical system. A referral is required from health or social service providers. These are not walk-in clinics; service is by appointment only.

Burnaby – Telephone: (604) 412-6580

Surrey – Telephone: (604) 953-5030

Refugee Claimants Services

Many settlement service organizations provide a variety of services for refugee claimants in Metro Vancouver and in British Columbia. For details please check with settlement organizations in your community.

- **First Contact – Canadian Red Cross, BC Lower Mainland Region**

First Contact provides refugee claimants with one place to access assistance, on arrival, through a 24/7 multilingual information and referral phone line and an accompaniment service.

Multilingual Assistance includes:

- accurate, timely information
- referral to immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies; legal, paralegal and health services; housing; and other settlement services such as English classes and employment services
- accompaniment to appointments

www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=27715&tid=078 and <http://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/migrant-and-refugee-services/syrian-refugee-crisis-and-refugee-arrival-in-canada>

Telephone: (604) 787-8858 for Vancouver area

Telephone: 1-866-771-8858 Toll free outside Vancouver area.

- **Legal Services Society of British Columbia**

The Legal Services Society provides a guide explaining the process of requesting refugee protection in Canada. Called *Your Guide to the Refugee Claim Process*, this handbook includes information on starting a claim in BC, filling out the required forms for the process, and getting legal help. An overview of the refugee claim process found in this guide is provided in Appendix B. The complete guide can be found at:

www.lss.bc.ca/publications/pub.aspx?p_id=286

- **Vancouver Refugee Services Alliance**

An alliance of immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies formed to provide a continuum of services for refugee claimants: www.vrsa.ca

Refugee relief agencies work to bring a sense of normalcy to a new existence and stability in the face of uncertainty.

Schools

- **Settlement Workers in Schools**

Many school districts in British Columbia employ settlement workers in schools to address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant students and their families. These specialists can be of great assistance to families and school staff, helping to ease the transition of newcomers to school:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_program/stream1/swis.html

Contact numbers for school district Settlement Workers in Schools programs are included on this link from the WelcomeBC website:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_agencies.html

- ***StrongStart BC* Early Learning Programs**

There are *StrongStart BC* early learning programs located in schools within every school district in British Columbia. These programs can play a significant role welcoming and supporting refugee families – offering newly arrived parents the opportunity to learn how they can support their pre-school aged children’s early learning and school readiness.

Many families from refugee backgrounds may have experienced trauma, and the ability for parents to remain in close proximity to their older children, i.e., participating with their younger children in the school’s *StrongStart BC* program while their older children attend school, can help to lessen separation anxiety for both parents and children during their introduction to school.

StrongStart BC programs offer newly arrived parents opportunity for community engagement and peer socialization. Here, they will meet other neighbourhood parents with children of similar ages who can help familiarize them with local school and community life.

StrongStart BC program staff can also help families connect with other support agencies and programs within the wider community. There are often opportunities for English Language instruction for adults alongside the *StrongStart BC* program.

For more information on *StrongStart BC* early learning programs, visit:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning>

- **Student Support Services**

Find out from the school district counselling or student services department who the team members are and be prepared to work with them. These may include professional learning assessment and specialist development of student learning supports, critical incidence response teams or trauma support teams.

Settlement Services

- **Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)**

An affiliation of immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies throughout British Columbia, their website provides a complete listing of all associated refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia communities: www.amssa.org

Telephone: (604) 718-2780 for Vancouver area

Telephone: 1-888-355-5560 outside Vancouver area

- **Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services**

Along with a wealth of useful information for newcomers to BC, the *British Columbia Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services* includes a listing of all the immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia. This information is found on pages 15 to 20:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/publications_and_reports/publications/newcomers_guide.html

- **Settlement Workers in Communities**

Throughout BC are immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies that employ settlement workers to address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant families. Many of these community agencies have relationships with schools and can provide information to families in schools where settlement workers are not on staff. They can also be of assistance to families outside of school. Links to the community agencies can be found at: www.amssa.org

Trauma Support Services

- **DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society**

Located in Surrey, this agency offers a wide range of services and programs to immigrant and refugee communities, including grief and trauma counselling: www.dcrs.ca/index.php

Telephone: (604) 597-0205

- **Immigrant Services Society (ISS) of BC**

With offices in Burnaby, Coquitlam, New Westminster, Richmond, Surrey, and Vancouver, this multicultural immigrant-serving agency provides a variety of services to Lower Mainland immigrant and refugee communities. These services include trauma support services for government-assisted refugees and refugee claimants residing in Vancouver and Burnaby. ISS of BC is also the contracted service provider for all immediate support services, including first language services and housing, for all Government-Assisted Refugees destined to British Columbia: www.issbc.org and www.issbc.org/refugeeservices

Telephone: (604) 684-7498

- **Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture**

This organization provides support services for and promotes the well-being of people who have survived torture and violence: www.vast-vancouver.ca Phone: (604) 299-3539

Resources – Outside of the Greater Vancouver Region

▪ **Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)**

An affiliation of immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies throughout British Columbia, their website provides a complete listing of all associated refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia communities: www.amssa.org

Telephone: (604) 718-2780 for Vancouver area

Telephone: 1-888-355-5560 outside Vancouver area

▪ **Health Regional Offices**

This website provides contact information for all of British Columbia's health authorities:

www.health.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html

▪ **Legal Services Society of British Columbia**

The Legal Services Society provides a guide explaining the process of requesting refugee protection in Canada. Called *Your Guide to the Refugee Claim Process*, this handbook includes information on starting a claim in BC, filling out the required forms for the process, and getting legal help. . The complete guide can be found at:

www.lss.bc.ca/publications/pub.aspx?p_id=286

Note: An overview of the refugee claim process is provided in Appendix B of this guide.

▪ **Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services**

Along with a wealth of useful information for newcomers to BC, the *British Columbia Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services* includes a listing of all the immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia. This information is found on pages 15 to 20:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/publications_and_reports/publications/newcomers_guide.html

▪ **Settlement Workers in Communities**

Throughout BC are immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies that employ settlement workers to address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant families. Many of these community agencies have relationships with schools and can provide information to families in schools where settlement workers are not on staff. They can also be of assistance to families outside of school. Links to the community agencies can be found at: www.amssa.org

▪ **Settlement Workers in Schools**

Many school districts in British Columbia employ settlement workers in schools to address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant students and their families. These specialists can be of great assistance to families and school staff, helping to ease the transition of newcomers to school:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_program/stream1/swis.html

Contact numbers for school district Settlement Workers in Schools programs are included on this link from the WelcomeBC website:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_agencies.html

- **Student Support Services**

Find out from the school district counselling or student services department who the team members are and be prepared to work with them. These may include critical incidence response teams or trauma support teams.

- **Victoria Coalition for Survivors of Torture**

In Victoria, a coalition of agencies and individuals responding to the needs of survivors of torture: www.vcst.ca

Education Publications (Pre-school and Kindergarten to Grade 12)

- **Caring for Syrian Refugee Children: A Program Guide for Welcoming Young Children and Their Families** provide program staff with the knowledge and tools they'll need to better understand and respond to the unique experiences and needs of Syrian refugee children. The resource also includes tip sheets filled with practical strategies that are designed to be taken straight off the page and put into practice.”

- **Caring for Kids New to Canada.** Online health information for parents in other languages. More information on Assessment and Screening, Child Development and Parenting, Nutrition and Physical Activity, Pregnancy, and much more is accessible online at: <http://www.kidsnewtocanada.ca/care/parent-info>

- **Career/Life Transitions**

The Ministry of Education document *Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools* offers information about transitions for English language learners (pages 43 to 51): www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/moe_clt_resource_rb0144.pdf

- **Diversity**

The BC Ministry of Education document provides a framework to assist the school system in its ongoing efforts to create and maintain learning and working environments that are responsive to the diverse social and cultural needs of the communities it serves:

Diversity in BC Schools: A Framework

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/diversity/diversity_framework.pdf (English)

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/diversity/f_diversity_framework.pdf (French)

Website – Diversity: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/diversity

- **English Language Learning (ELL)**

The following Ministry of Education documents pertain to policy and guidelines for English Language Learning programs in British Columbia’s public schools. :

English Language Learning Policy and Guidelines

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/guidelines.pdf> (English)

http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/guidelines_fr.pdf (French)

English Language Learning Standards

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/standards.pdf>

English Language Learning Students: A Guide for Classroom Teachers

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/classroom.pdf>

English Language Learners: A Guide for ELL Specialists

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/special.pdf>

English Language Learning Planning Tool

http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/english-language-learners/ell_planning_tool.pdf

ELL Website: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/diverse-student-needs/english-language-learners>

▪ **Safe Schools**

The Ministry of Education's *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* provides provincial standards for codes of conduct and identifies attributes of and outlines strategies for safe, caring, and orderly schools. The guide was developed to support boards of education and schools as they strive to make the schools of our province as safe, caring, and orderly as possible:

Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/guide/scoguide.pdf

Websites: Safe Caring and Orderly Schools www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/ and ERASE Bullying <http://www.erasebullying.ca/>

▪ **Special Education (Students with Special Needs)**

This Ministry of Education document provides policies, procedures, and guidelines that support the delivery of special education services in British Columbia's public schools:

Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines
www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf

Website: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed

Information re Funding for Special Needs:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/k-12-funding-special-needs>

Child and Youth Mental Health Publications

▪ **Ministry of Children and Family Development**

To reduce the burden of suffering resulting from children's mental illness, child and youth mental health services are offered throughout British Columbia by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). These services provide a wide range of community-based specialized mental health services to mentally ill children and their families.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development provides a number of guides and information sheets about mental health issues for children and adolescents. These publications, along with information about programs and services, are available at:
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/publications.htm

Website: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health

Resources – General Information

International

- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada**

The federal government department responsible for immigration, their website provides links to a wealth of information about immigrating to Canada: www.cic.gc.ca

Telephone: 1-888-242-2100 (in Canada only)

Deaf and hearing-impaired: 1-888-576-8502 (in Canada only) 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. your local time

- **Country Information from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada**

The Centre for Intercultural Learning in Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada offers useful information about almost every country in the world:

www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/countryinsights-apercuspays-eng.asp

- **International Organization for Migration**

An inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and working with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners: www.iom.int

- **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

Since 1950, this office has been mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide, and to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. The website provides detailed information about refugees throughout the world:

www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home

National

- **Canadian Council for Refugees**

An umbrella organization for refugees and immigrants focused on the rights and protection of refugees and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada: www.ccrweb.ca

- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada – Refugees**

The federal government department responsible for immigration provides detailed information about refugee settlement in Canada, found on this website:

www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/help.asp

- **Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada**

The independent administrative tribunal that makes decisions on immigration and refugee matters. Details can be found at: www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/ENG/Pages/index.aspx

- **Immigration and Refugee Protection Act**

The federal legislation regarding immigration and the protection of refugees in Canada: www.laws.justice.gc.ca/en/I-2.5

- **Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)**

This national humanitarian program provides funding to agencies to support Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) in their first year in Canada. The program also provides income support to GARs in their first year in Canada. Information about Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Resettlement Assistance Program can be found at: www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-assist.asp

Provincial

- **Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services**

The Province of British Columbia provides a guide for newcomers that includes comprehensive information to help newcomers settle in BC in the first few months after they arrive: www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/publications_and_reports/publications/newcomers_guide.html

- **Statistics from British Columbia**

Specific data and information about refugee immigrants to British Columbia is available through the WelcomeBC website at:

www.welcomebc.ca/shared/docs/communities/fact-refugees.pdf

- **WelcomeBC**

WelcomeBC is the Province of British Columbia's main website for immigration and settlement, and includes helpful information for immigrants, service providers, and those wishing to find out more about immigration and settlement in BC. www.welcomebc.ca/en/index.html

Municipal

You may find helpful information in your local town or city, accessible at community centres, public libraries or on municipal government websites.

For example, Vancouver offers a *Newcomer's Guide to the City of Vancouver* in five languages at:

www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/newtovancouver

- **Union of British Columbia Municipalities**

The Union of British Columbia Municipalities provides links to the web pages of local governments in BC through: www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/about/ubcm-members.html

Appendix A – Immigration Policy and Legislation

Immigration and Refugee Protection

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) is Canada’s legislation pertaining to immigration. Implemented on June 28, 2002, it replaces the *Immigration Act* of 1976.

The IRPA reflects current Canadian values and enables faster and fairer processes to welcome immigrants to Canada, including those needing protection and a safe haven. At the same time, the IRPA strongly enforces national security and public safety. The full document can be found at www.laws.justice.gc.ca/en/I-2.5.

Policy

Canada, in its humanitarian efforts, responds to global crises and UNHCR special requests regarding those needing refuge. Refugees come from different countries, depending on current global crises.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada is the federal government department responsible for immigration. Immigration policy is guided by three established, broad objectives:

- to reunite families
- to fulfill Canada’s international obligations and humanitarian tradition with respect to refugees
- to foster a strong viable economy in the regions of Canada

“Canada offers refugee protection to people in Canada who fear persecution or those whose removal from Canada would subject them to a danger of torture, a risk to their life or a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.” Individuals needing refugee protection may obtain permanent resident status in Canada.

Source: “Refugees,” Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009.

Immigration Categories

There are different types of refugees within Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s refugee category. Some refugees are directly sponsored by the Government of Canada or private organizations and are afforded permanent resident status. Others apply for refugee status.

Immigration Categories – Refugees	
Government Assisted Refugees	Individuals who enter Canada as permanent residents and are supported by the federal government for up to one year from their arrival in Canada.
Privately Sponsored Refugees	Individuals who enter Canada as permanent residents and are sponsored by private citizens. Private sponsors commit to assisting and supporting these individuals throughout their first year of residence in Canada.

Refugee Dependants Abroad	Individuals who are dependants (living abroad) of permanent resident refugees landed in Canada.
Asylum Refugees (includes private sponsorship, self-funded, and refugee claimants)	Individuals in refugee-like situations who seek asylum in Canada because they cannot safely return to their home country (would face persecution).
<p>Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada</p> <p>www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-gov.asp</p> <p>www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/index.asp</p> <p>www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/canada.asp (in Canada Asylum)</p> <p>www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/asylum.asp (outside Canada Asylum)</p> <p>www.welcomebc.ca/shared/docs/communities/fact-refugees.pdf</p>	

Refugee Claimants (In Canada Asylum Program)

Some refugees seeking asylum are living in Canada and have applied for refugee status. These persons, also known as refugee claimants, are awaiting decision by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. This board examines claims for refugee protection and decides if refugee claimants will be granted permanent residence.

The process of transition into Canadian society may be more difficult or confusing for refugee claimants than for other persons from refugee backgrounds who have already been granted refugee status. Claimants may be unsure of legal processes and their rights. The claim process may take years and the outcome is often uncertain.

The Refugee Claim Process is illustrated in Appendix B

Resettlement Assistance

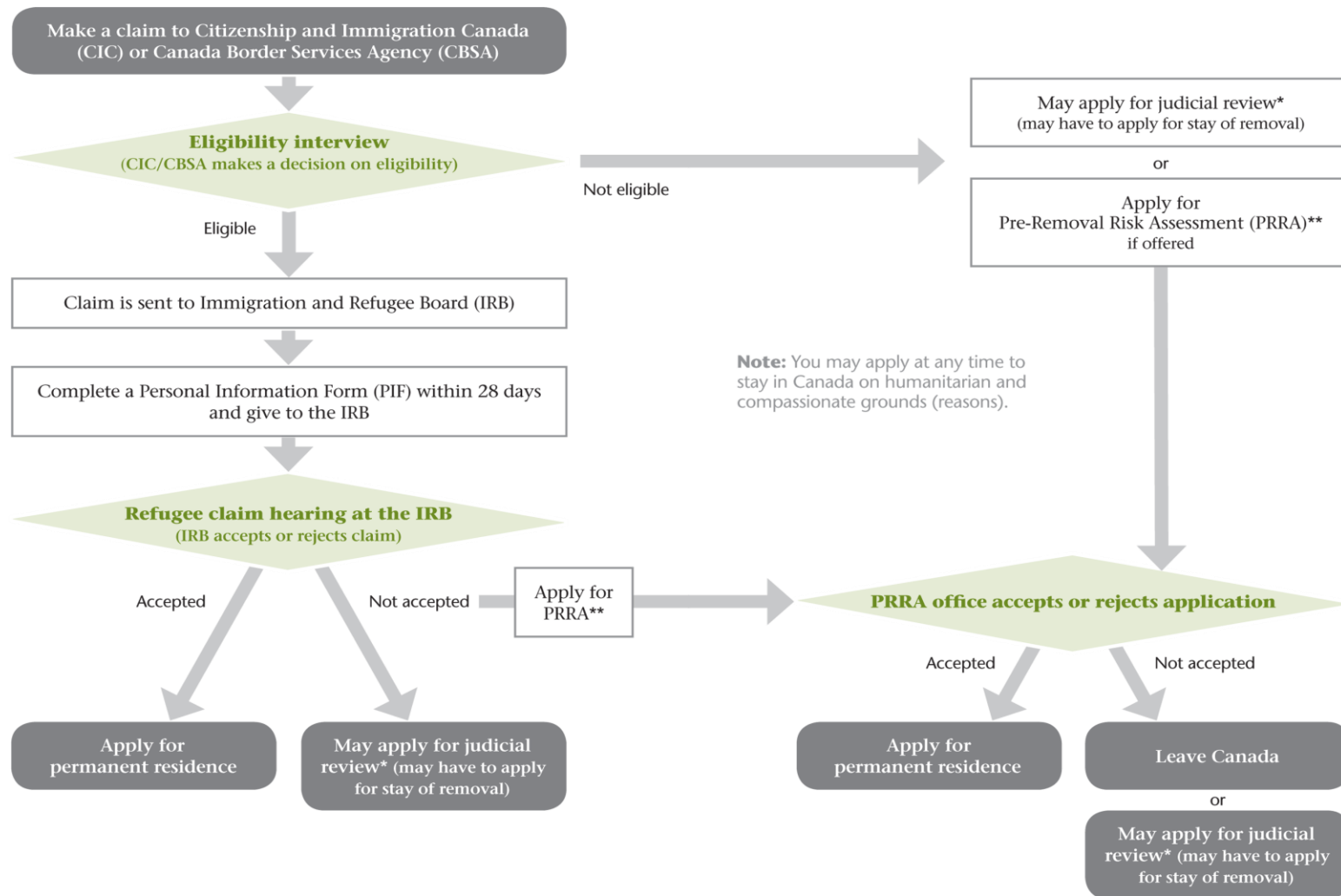
The Government of Canada directly assists some refugees in becoming residents of Canada. Government provides resettlement assistance to individuals who enter Canada as Government-Assisted Refugees to help them start a new life in Canada.

Under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), Government Assisted Refugees are provided financial assistance including loans for their transportation to Canada, a start-up allowance, monthly support allowance, and a bus pass allowance. They are also provided with a basic household goods package. Financial assistance is repayable after one year, or when they become self-sufficient.¹

The Resettlement Assistance Program process is illustrated in Appendix C

Source: "Faces of Refugees," Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, 2007.

Appendix B – Overview of the Refugee Claim Process



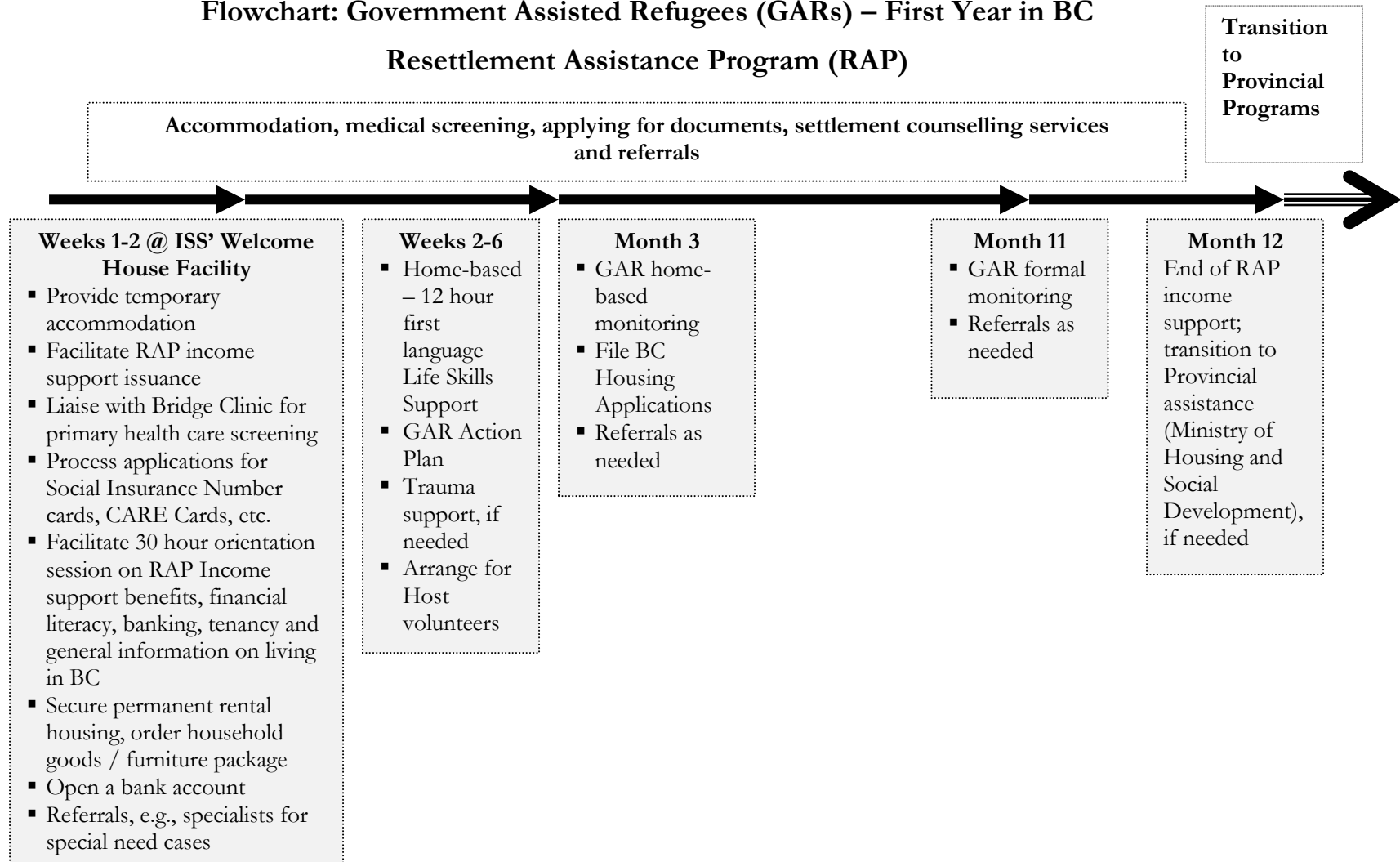
* Must apply to Federal Court of Canada within 15 days of receiving written decision.

** Must apply within 15 days of receiving PRRA application form.

Source: Used with permission from Legal Services Society of British Columbia.

Appendix C – Resettlement Assistance Program

Flowchart: Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) – First Year in BC Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)



Source: Used with permission from Immigrant Services Society (ISS) of BC.

Appendix D – Learning Environment Readiness Checklist

Student – Social and School Adjustment

- assessment/program assignment/placement
- introduction to classroom teacher and students
- introduction to layout of the school and classroom
- assignment of mentor or buddy
- language assistance if needed (Ref: ELL Planning Tool)
- consistent routine or schedule
- access to a quiet area or place of refuge
- accommodation for religion-related requirements (prayer)

Student – Physical Needs

- school supplies
- textbooks/resource materials
- lunch/snack
- orientation to bell schedule
- access to a quiet area or place of refuge
- religion-related requirements
- assessment of any medical needs, e.g., hearing and vision

Classroom Teacher – Readiness

- become familiar with refugee background
- be aware of adjustments of children and youth
- speak slowly
- pay attention to non-verbal cues
- become aware of the cultural background
- be aware of cultural differences in mannerisms and responses, e.g., eye contact
- consider different cultural norms associated with gender
- contact settlement worker for support

Instruction – Starting Points

- assess educational background – essential for placement
- determine need for pre-literacy and pre-numeracy instruction
- assess need for language assistance
- determine any learning disabilities/special needs
- access age-appropriate resources
- use direct, explicit instruction
- offer a variety of activities to start
- use visual aids
- use repetition, or find opportunities for multiple exposures to information, if needed

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