

# Immigrant and Refugee Children: The Early Years



### Feature

- 11 Supporting Newcomers to Parent in a Canadian Context**  
Rajdeep Kandola

### Articles and Stories

- 4 A Warm Welcome for Newcomer Families**  
Sherry Sinclair
- 5 The Long Road to Fort St John, BC: is The Journey Worth The Trip?**  
Jane Drew
- 6 Promising Practices of Early Childhood Education for Immigrant and Refugee Children in British Columbia**  
From an AMSSA study of the same name
- 9 A Newcomer Mom's Personal Reflections**  
Dylan's Story
- 10 Solidarity for Social Reforms to Reduce Newcomer Family Poverty**  
Adrienne Montani
- 17 Digital Literacy Targets Young Families**  
Children's Section, Vancouver Public Library
- 18 The Impact of Trauma on Young Newcomer Children**  
Ana Machado

- 19 Creating a Welcoming Culture in Early Childhood Development Programs**  
Orah Chaye
- 20 RESPECT Leads to Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators**  
Gyda Chud

### In Every Issue

- 3 Message from the President**  
Jean McRae
- 8 Mindbuster Quiz**
- 15 Member Achievements**
- 22 Answers to Mindbuster Quiz**
- 23 Post Script: Recognizing and Responding to Culture Shock in Young Refugee Children**  
Excerpt from Care for Syrian Refugee Children: A Program Guide for Welcoming Young Children and Their Families by CMAS
- 24 List of AMSSA members**  
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### Our Vision

A just and equitable society in which everyone benefits from social and economic inclusion.

### Our Values

Inclusiveness • Integrity • Mutual Respect  
Equity • Diversity • Collaboration

### Our Mission

AMSSA facilitates collaborative leadership, knowledge exchange and stakeholder engagement to support member agencies that serve immigrants and build culturally inclusive communities.

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# Message from the President



*“Newcomer families with young children rely heavily on the expertise of ECE caregivers to ensure their children are getting the very best start...”*

Would you be willing to pack up your entire life here in Canada and move to a completely foreign country? What about moving with your immediate family, including kids who are under six years of age?

Just thinking about it would fill most of us with enormous anxiety! However, for many immigrant and refugee families this is not simply a rhetorical question to ponder. Moving to a foreign country, sometimes unwillingly, is their reality. And their reality is filled with both expected and unexpected challenges. This edition of Cultures West magazine is dedicated to looking at some of the challenges immigrant and refugee families experience.

On a positive note, we also showcase opportunities for these families and the agencies that support them. The stories fit into broad themes - resources, Early Childhood Education (ECE), trauma, parenting and personal reflections. Starting with the theme of resources, you'll learn about Family Resource Programs (FRPs) and how important they are in helping families to settle into their new community. Our story on digital literacy describes opportunities for newcomer families with young children to learn and grow together.

Newcomer families with young children rely heavily on the expertise of ECE caregivers to ensure their children are getting the very best start on their educational journey. ECE caregivers working in the immigrant and refugee serving sector require special skill sets.

Learn about best practices for ECE caregivers, and find out how a play on the word RESPECT can lead to ongoing professional development.

Trauma features strongly in the experiences of refugee families. Read about the impact of trauma on young children, and be inspired by an innovative program that uses a trauma informed environment to help children recover from traumatic experiences. Speaking of experiences, Cultures West readers really connect with our stories that feature personal reflections. In this edition, we asked young families and educators to share the challenges and opportunities of living in a rural setting. What we got was refreshing honesty!

There are also two stand alone topics worth highlighting. The first is a discussion on poverty in immigrant families. The second is our feature story which proposes that understanding parenting styles from around the world can help care givers better support newcomer families.

I also encourage you not to miss our regular departments which you can find interwoven with the stories highlighted above. Give your mind a workout with the Mind Buster Quiz, celebrate AMSSA's Member Achievements, and then wind down with our Post Script which follows up on the theme from our last Cultures West - the refugee experience through a Canadian lens.

Jean McRae,  
President



# A Warm Welcome for Newcomer Families

Sherry Sinclair

Raising children is hard—but those who are new to the country face extra challenges. Immigrant and refugee families may experience challenges such as language barriers and social isolation. Many do not have extended families in Canada so do not have that important source of support.

These challenges can bring stress, anxiety, and even depression. One mother described feeling “...depression on and on and on... because I got pregnant right after I came to Canada. The change in my body, just me and my husband and I had no family, no friends, no English, nothing around me.” For many, these challenges are overwhelming.

Family Resource Programs (FRPs) can help respond to these challenges. They are inclusive and open programs that support parents in raising healthy families with children 0-6 years. They support all families, but about a third of participants are new to Canada within the past 10 years.

Ruby Aulakh facilitates the Circle of Friends program run by the Langley Community Services Society. She explains that her program is designed to “help adults support and strengthen their children’s individual, social, cultural, and linguistic identities.” Her program is sensitive, inclusive, and multicultural—the majority of participants are Arabic, Iranian, South Korean, Japanese, and Chinese.

While FRPs include children and play activities, they are primarily focused on supporting parents, caregivers and families. Practitioners provide knowledge of child development and positive parenting practices.

Perhaps the most important function of an FRP is facilitating relationships between community members. At FRPs, parents form friendships with other parents. In this way, they are able to build robust support networks with others in the community; people they are able to depend on in times of need. Parents often describe feeling a greater sense of belonging, confidence and support as a result of visiting an FRP, “[I’m] feeling better, I am making friends, going out for coffee, meeting...people at the park on nice days at Family Place.”

Ultimately, this helps families settle into their community. As one new immigrant described, “When I bring my kids [to the family resource program] I feel very welcome and part of this community...Yes, that I am a part of it. I am important.”

Family Resource Programs are an important part of community settlement services. They support parents to raise healthy children while also helping families connect with their communities; they help people feel at home. As one participant put it “[Family Place] was like I was coming to my grandma’s home, it felt like family.”

*Sherry Sinclair is the Executive Director of the BC Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP-BC). The FRP-BC is a not-for-profit provincial organization dedicated to raising the awareness of the importance of community-based Family Resource Programs. To find a family resource program in your community, visit [frpbc.ca/dir](http://frpbc.ca/dir).*

# The Long Road to Fort St John, BC: Is The Journey Worth The Trip?

Jane Drew

Over the years I have been asked, “Why would immigrants and refugees WANT to settle in Fort St John, BC?” It is a small city surrounded by a rural community in northern Canada. I asked myself essentially the same question 20 years ago when I relocated my family from Ontario to Fort St John. Simply, we settled here for employment opportunities, community and a sense of belonging. I have had the distinct pleasure of working in the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Program since its inception in 2008 and have found that sense of belonging in such a welcoming and inclusive community. I am very proud to call Fort St John my home.

Fort St John... it’s cold, it’s northern, it’s rural and often there is more winter than summer and spring combined. That is a fact. It is also a fact that it is a vibrant and blossoming community! The people are warm and the community is a hidden gem of opportunity. The immigrant population is growing at a rapid pace and most of these courageous people are searching for opportunities of an economic nature and see Fort St John as a viable location. But what about the children?

Settling young immigrant and refugee children into a new country/city/community is a challenge that requires several tiers of support in many different aspects. Our goals in the SWIS program, and to me personally, are to foster those support systems and nurture the children in an established and safe environment. We initiate key roles in creating support teams that include SWIS workers, teachers, administrators and counselors, in schools and in the community. This support team helps all family members. Parents are included in their child’s activities, to help integrate them into the child’s learning framework. This practice fosters inclusion for the entire family in and out of the school culture.

We know that success looks different for everyone. It is unique to each individual, and goals can be very diverse. School District 60 and SWIS implement best practices to guide quietly as opposed to using a more “authoritarian” approach. We begin by respectfully identifying each person’s personal needs and establish a trusting relationship to build on that foundation. This can be a delicate practice as we navigate our way through personal and cultural differences. The process of support is not quick and it is not easy. We incorporate the practice of actively engaging in support through various methods of social awareness, cultural competencies and emotional nurturing. I am honoured to be part of this community and school district in the most humbling way.

*Jane Drew is a Settlement Program Coordinator with School District 60 - Peace River North.*



# Promising Practices of Early Childhood Education for Immigrant and Refugee Children in British Columbia

From an AMSSA study of the same name

*Since 2007, there has been a general increase of service models for British Columbia's rapidly rising immigrant and refugee child population and, in particular, an increase of Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs. These programs are, in part, a response to the nuanced issues faced by immigrant and refugee children and their families. Research in the field of Early Childhood Education and community reports that highlight the challenges facing immigrant and refugee children, provide a rich context for better understanding the different ways that service models address the needs of this population.*

While there is a range of innovative approaches and models of ECE programs, they are largely unaccounted for within existing reviews of ECE programming. To fill this gap, AMSSA, The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, partnered with the University of British Columbia on a research study to capture the 'Promising Practices' of ECE programs for immigrant and refugee children.

Specifically, this study explores the unique approaches that managers, coordinators and educators working with immigrant and refugee children and their families take, to successfully achieve their programmatic goals. The study involved a detailed look at the curricular frameworks, academic models, successes and challenges within individual programs, and staff and client relationships. The findings from this report are based on interviews with individuals working in 15 diverse ECE programs from across British Columbia. Below is a summary of the principles for establishing a supportive environment, and for working with immigrant and refugee families.

## **Promising Practices of ECE front-line work with immigrant and refugee children and their families**

### **I: ESTABLISHING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR STAFF**

- An organized and effective work environment
- Staff feel valued for their expertise
- Staff have the capacity to deal with issues as they arise
- Staff feel emotionally supported in their day-to-day work
- Staff have increased capacity to support immigrant and refugee children and their families according to their specific needs

### **II: ESTABLISHING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

- Children and their families feel emotionally supported
- Children and their families feel that the program is applicable to their lives
- Children and their families develop knowledge and skills to thrive in their new context
- Increase opportunities for children and their families' learning
- Staff develop flexibility and resilience to deal with issues as they arise

## **Promising Practices of ECE front-line work with immigrant and refugee children and their families**

### **I: PRACTICING ECE PRINCIPLES WITH IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

- Foster parental involvement in immigrant and refugee child's life
- Be willing to let learning be a two-way activity
- Be patient with the curricular process and unexpected turns along the way
- Be curious, humble, sensitive, flexible, and patient

### **II: BEING AN ALLY TO IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

- Be curious about their culture, family, community, and methods of child rearing
- Respect families' value-driven approaches to child rearing
- Be aware of the issues that are most central to the lives of the families you work with
- Establish trust and create opportunities for children and their caregivers to approach you



### III: UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

- Know the historical, political, and social context from which immigrant and refugee children and their families have arrived and how that may impact their current conditions.
- Develop curricular models that are sensitive to the vulnerabilities of immigrant and refugee children and their families
- Understand the cultural contexts in which immigrant and refugee children and their families feel most supported
- Have consistent measures in place to assess immigrant and refugee children and their families' progress

#### **Future Directions**

The recommendations from the report are most useful for achieving broad programmatic successes for ECE staff working with immigrant and refugee children and their families. They also provide a useful starting point for exploring broader interventions that can enhance ECE for immigrant and refugee populations. Based on direct input from research participants in this study as well as an analysis of the underpinning message conveyed by research participants, we compiled a set of guidelines that professionals – from various sectors – invested in ECE for immigrant and refugee children and their families may wish to consider. These guidelines can be used as a launching pad to help strengthen ECE programs across British Columbia for ECE staff and for immigrant and refugee children and their families that participate in ECE programs.

#### **Training**

Develop and conduct regular specialized training/professional development programs for ECE practitioners (such as initiated by the Immigrant and Integration Branch for staff in Welcome BC Child-minding Programs) that reflect the key themes regarding immigrant and refugee children, as identified in this document and based on input from ECE workers. Create Professional Development opportunities for ECE workers on the non-professional aspects of job (self-care, burn out, conflict resolution, etc.).



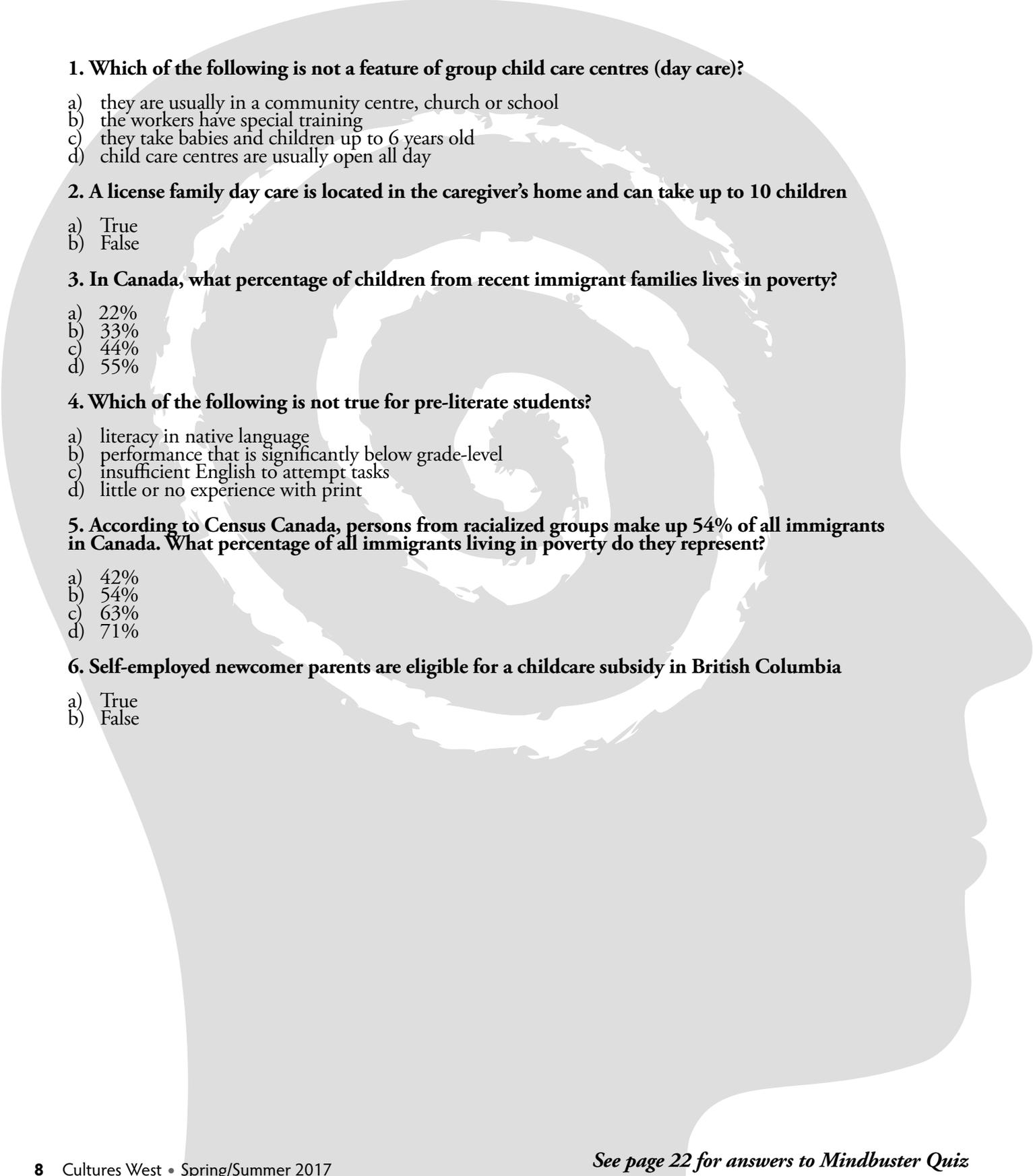
#### **Resources**

Develop a 'how to' guide on the Promising Practices highlighted in this study that reflect the needs of diverse immigrant and refugee children and their families; the guide will build on the central ideas presented to offer recommendations on educational approaches. Develop series of short documents that go into greater depth into the key themes arising from this report to compliment on-the-job training.

#### **Research**

Conduct in-depth exploration on the topics covered in this document as they affect immigrant and refugee children and their families and in collaboration with sectors dealing with overlapping issues as within ECE; these can include international adoption, school districts, and across academic disciplines such as psychology, education, migration studies.

# Mindbuster Quiz



**1. Which of the following is not a feature of group child care centres (day care)?**

- a) they are usually in a community centre, church or school
- b) the workers have special training
- c) they take babies and children up to 6 years old
- d) child care centres are usually open all day

**2. A license family day care is located in the caregiver's home and can take up to 10 children**

- a) True
- b) False

**3. In Canada, what percentage of children from recent immigrant families lives in poverty?**

- a) 22%
- b) 33%
- c) 44%
- d) 55%

**4. Which of the following is not true for pre-literate students?**

- a) literacy in native language
- b) performance that is significantly below grade-level
- c) insufficient English to attempt tasks
- d) little or no experience with print

**5. According to Census Canada, persons from racialized groups make up 54% of all immigrants in Canada. What percentage of all immigrants living in poverty do they represent?**

- a) 42%
- b) 54%
- c) 63%
- d) 71%

**6. Self-employed newcomer parents are eligible for a childcare subsidy in British Columbia**

- a) True
- b) False

# A Newcomer Mom's Personal Reflections

## Dylan's Story

I first came to Canada three and a half years ago to visit my husband's family in Campbell River. We spent one month with them and then moved to Dawson Creek. My first challenge living in Canada was the language. I spoke very little English and I felt isolated, frustrated and trapped by my circumstances. In addition to the challenges presented by the language, the weather was very difficult. When we left Bolivia it was summer and it was winter here in Dawson Creek. It was my first time seeing snow. My daughter was one and half when we moved, and our first house was 15 minutes out of the city. My daughter and I stayed home while my husband went to work, as I didn't have my driver's license. For the first few weeks it was very lonely, and we did not go out to any activities.

I soon started English classes when a friend offered to drive me to town. It was hard because sometimes I didn't have a ride back home, so I spent many snowy afternoons walking around the city, pushing my daughter in her stroller. There was no public transit that went outside the city, so I would have to wait until my husband finished work.

I was on a visitor's visa and pregnant with my second son. We couldn't afford to pay for extra fun activities, like the swimming pool, because we knew we had to pay for my c-section. The first few months were very hard, and accessing services for my daughter was very difficult due to lack of public transit, my low English skills, and the winter weather.



About one year after we moved up north things got much easier, because our English class offered childcare and we moved to town so I could take my kids to many different parks by bus. We were also able to take the bus to StrongStart and I made new friends as my English skills improved. I began to progress in my English, and we paid for the birth of my son, so we could spend a bit more money on things like going to the swimming pool.

One year ago I got my permanent residence and the government reimbursed us for the healthcare costs associated with my c-section. I felt so relieved and began studying hard for my driver's license. Three months ago I got my license, and my husband bought me a car, so now I can drive my children to so many activities!

We have accessed the JumpStart program and have our oldest kids in gymnastics. We also applied for a local arts grant and my children got to attend art classes over the winter. We go to the children's programs at the local library and still attend StrongStart and my English classes. I am so much happier now that I can take my kids to the programs that are offered in our community. It took me many years to get here, but my kids and I are now much happier and get to participate in many more activities.

# Solidarity for Social Reforms to Reduce Newcomer Family Poverty

Adrienne Montani

Most people are probably aware that immigrant and refugee families are over-represented in poverty statistics. 2011 data from the National Household Survey shows immigrants with less than five years in Canada have a one in three chance of being poor, much higher than the overall poverty rate.

The stories we hear about poverty among newcomer families often focus on the struggles and disappointments of parents being underemployed in low-paid and insecure jobs as they try to earn enough to support their children. The parents who come forward publicly to tell their stories of hard work and struggle are brave and generous. They help to bust myths and stereotypes held by the uninformed and let other immigrant families know that they are not alone in their difficulties.

Their stories also help illustrate that the systemic issues that trap them in poverty are affecting non-immigrants too, and are the shared responsibility of all of us to change. Issues such as BC's low minimum wage, a tattered social safety net (e.g. inadequate social assistance and unemployment insurance programs), the lack of affordable, good quality child care, weak employment standards enforcement and weak support for trade union rights, all contribute to working poverty and unemployment among newcomers and others. Discrimination in employment and housing adds another layer of hardship for immigrants that we all can work to change.

The impacts on parents and their children of living in poverty for years are far-reaching. First and foremost, their mental and physical health suffers from the stress of chronic financial insufficiency, overwork and social isolation. Parents working two or three jobs have little time to spend with their children at home, let alone take them out for enriching experiences. Nutrition suffers, with consequences for both parent and child. No parent is at their best in these circumstances, yet parents make heroic efforts to provide the best care they can.

Well-meaning suggestions to volunteer and take post-secondary courses to improve employability are restricted by time available for the working poor, high course fees and waiting lists for free classes. Pressure to pay off refugee transportation loans push parents and older youth into any work, even at the expense of furthering their education.

Children of all ages feel their parents' stress and feel helpless about making things better, especially when they are very young. They have their own stresses as they become aware of their poverty and resulting social exclusion when they are school age, but may try to protect their parents from further anxiety by keeping it to themselves. These strains may show up in their behavior at school or at home, leaving parents feeling helpless too.

Poverty is not an issue for every newcomer family, and poor immigrant and refugee families in our wealthy society live with the daily evidence of their position in the income hierarchy. Some feel this as a personal failure during their early settlement years. While they may receive the charity of Canadians in these years, what they really need is our solidarity to remove the public policy and other systemic barriers, and the discrimination that are keeping so many resilient and capable families and their children from reaching their potential in their new home.

*Adrienne Montani is the Provincial Coordinator for First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition and has been advocating in support of children's rights since the early 1990s. She worked directly in the immigrant and refugee settlement field for over a decade.*





# Supporting Newcomers to Parent in a Canadian Context

## Rajdeep Kandola

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Rock. Paper. Scissors. As a five year old, I remember using these three powerful words and the associated hand gestures to make important playground decisions in the most efficient and diplomatic manner. However, I also recall my frustration at trying to explain the concept to my immigrant parents in an attempt to develop decision making power within the household. It worked for my friend Victoria who was able to use the technique to choose her own snacks and hairstyle. It hardly seemed fair that I was not awarded the same luxury.



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**As I grew older, I learned to separate my life at home as an Indian girl and my life at school as a Canadian student. Living in a diverse neighbourhood with children from many cultures with the same challenges regarding our immigrant parents, we convinced each other that our parents “don’t know any better.” We also agreed that it was okay to hide some things from our families as they would not understand the right way of doing things in Canada.**

Over the years, I have had the privilege of working with immigrant and refugee children and supporting them through their journey of developing their identity within two cultures. But what about the parents? A newcomer parent might wish for a step-by-step instructional manual on how to raise children within a Canadian context while maintaining their cultural roots. Thankfully, such a manual does not exist as every culture and every family is unique. It’s the nuances within each culture which makes Canada a wonderful mosaic rather than a melting pot of cultures.

Although there is no such thing as one right way of parenting within Canada, it is important for service providers to create tools and resources to help families find the balance between their two identities. In order to do so, we must first work to understand the parenting philosophies our immigrant families bring with them in order to create policies that are nurturing for both children and parents. This story provides some insight into parenting perspectives from around the world. I hope to shed some light on the challenges that immigrant and refugee families face when trying to determine how to parent a “3<sup>rd</sup> culture child” within a WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) society.

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### **Language and the identity crisis**

It is no surprise that the mastery of the dominant language in any given country is vital for smooth integration. When families arrive, the first course of action for parents may be to enrol in ESL or conversation classes to learn the language and ensure their success. Teaching English to their children however, adds a layer of complexity that reaches far beyond the simple mastery of a language. Raising children who are bilingual is great for their social and cognitive development as it can increase adaptability and resiliency. However, language is the key to culture and parents often fear that if they focus on learning English, they will lose their traditional roots at home as the children will not master their mother tongue. We hear stories of families whose young children learn English quickly through television and school. The temptation for the parents to practice their own English skills outweighs the need to teach the children their mother language. Emphasizing the use of the English language within the home can lead to an increase in western influences which in turn create an identity crisis within the children. This leaves newcomer parents with a choice to make: Do they continue to teach the child their traditional language to ensure they identify with their roots, or do they teach them English to ensure success in their new environment?



### **The role of adults**

In western societies, the responsibility is largely on parents to raise their own children according to their individual philosophies on parenting. Parents often seek advice from professionals (parenting books, doctors, etc.) to determine their parenting philosophy. Those who support the parents in their caregiver roles – babysitters, grandparents, other family members – are expected to follow the techniques the parents establish. Children know who the adults are in their lives and are discouraged from engaging with strangers without parental supervision. The parent/caregiver’s role is to raise children who are independent and resilient.

In many eastern cultures, children are raised within homes with large numbers of extended family. Parents rely heavily on elders for guidance on their parenting techniques. Although parenting styles may differ, children are expected to respect the authority of all adults in their lives regardless if the direction is different than that given by the parent. In many countries, children often call non-related adults (neighbours, shop keepers, strangers) auntie or uncle. Immigrant and refugee families commonly instil this practice within their children post immigration to a western country since calling an adult by their first name is considered disrespectful. In eastern cultures, the role of the parent is to raise children who are respectful and interdependent of the family. The notion of “helicopter” parenting is encouraged as the mother’s role is to monitor every aspect of the child’s life until the child is old enough to take care of himself or herself.

### **The role of the child within society**

The role and perceived capability of children varies vastly from culture to culture. In western communities, we create environments for children that are separate from adults. We closely monitor what children are exposed to and we consider the impact of each exposure. In many other cultures, children participate in the same day to day activity as their parents, whether at work or leisure. These cultures believe the best way to ensure positive outcomes in adolescence and adulthood is by allowing children to observe as active participants. A simple example of creating separate environments for children and adults is the use of the television. In western cultures we heavily monitor what children watch and ensure it is developmentally appropriate (that is if a parent allows any screen time at all). In many other cultures, it is perfectly acceptable for children to watch the same television programs that adults watch and to use similar adult language.

Although western children are raised to be independent, children from some cultures regularly participate in tasks that would shock a western parent in the western world. In the Japanese culture for instance, it is not uncommon for a child as young as four years old to help with serving guests, take care of younger children, or go to the market alone to run an errand.

### **Conflicting practices and norms**

Every culture, every society has its own definition of what is considered “normal” activities in childhood. The activities and beliefs may be very different from place to place but the overarching goal of each activity is to support children in becoming competent members of their respective communities within their own context. However, some of these activities and practices can cause judgment and further isolate newcomer families if they are misunderstood within the Canadian context. The following examples highlight various parenting practices from around the world that can cause conflict and confusion for newcomers.

Western cultures value independence and resilience within children. Parents will often let a young child sleep in a separate room and self-soothe during the sleep training process. This practice of not co-sleeping and allowing a child to “cry it out” may be unimaginable to newcomer parents and they may view this as neglect. Co-sleeping until much later is a very common practice around the world.

Diet and Nutrition – Many cultures allow children to eat the same foods as adults (you won’t find a “kids menu” at most ethnic restaurants!). A parent’s choice for a child’s lunch at preschool may spark some curiosity from fellow classmates and some questions about nutritional content from teachers.

Lack of routine – Western cultures believe that children thrive on routine and maintaining meal and sleep schedules is important for healthy development. In Spain, for example, it is common for children to stay up past 10pm to participate in family life, while

parents in Netherlands tuck children in by 6:30pm. Having a child stay up until past 10pm is thought to be neglectful. Affection and appreciation are displayed differently around the world. Parents in many cultures may not openly say affectionate phrases such as “I love you” to their child but they will demonstrate their love with exceptional care giving and self-sacrifice. The degree to which mothers in western cultures openly and publicly declare love for their children may feel awkward for a newcomer mom.

Children are not taught to say thank you as casually and routinely in eastern cultures as we do in Canada. A child will typically decline a gift at first offering and will often wait for a parent to give permission to take the gift before they accept. This practice can cause confusion for both child and teacher within a classroom or activity.

The emphasis on formal education varies from culture to culture. Some feel that children learn best from participating in daily activity and observing adults rather than formal schooling. Some believe that play is the job of child and many life skills can be developed through play. Others believe that good education should be the family’s primary goal and recreation activities can compromise the child’s ability to focus on education.

In many eastern cultures, teachers are highly respected and children do not talk in class. In Canada, children are encouraged to participate in classroom discussions alongside their teachers. Children from eastern cultures speak less in public and may seem shy or slow to understand.

Gender norms also vary vastly from culture to culture and can be very tricky for the newcomer parent and service provider to navigate. Mutual respect and open communication is vital from all parties to find activities that are appropriate for both cultures.

## **Conclusion**

I could excuse my parents not knowing Rock Paper Scissors, but the fact that they didn’t know about Santa Claus was unfathomable. Once I explained the magical man, they recognized him from television and told me (innocently) that the man is not real and that he is a made up cartoon much like Mickey Mouse. I didn’t dare tell my friend Victoria what my parents had said as she had proof of his existence - he brought her gifts every year. I carried on for the next few years believing that I didn’t see him because my house didn’t have a chimney. I guess that was the resilient Canadian in me! Having lived and worked within a multicultural community and growing up as a “3<sup>rd</sup> culture kid” myself, my experience has taught me that all parenting styles and perspectives are valid and come from a loving framework. As much as newcomers are responsible for learning and adapting to their new surroundings, it is also our responsibility as Canadians to welcome these families by celebrating the unique perspectives and traditions that they bring with them.

*Rajdeep Kandola is the Coordinator of a South Asian Early Childhood Development Task Force. She also works as a Middle Years Coordinator with the City of Surrey and has experience working in the non-profit sector.*



# MEMBER ACHIEVEMENTS

## Support for Refugee Women and Children

Pacific Immigration Resources Society (PIRS)

In late 2015, Pacific Immigration Resources Society (PIRS) saw a need to support the newly arrived refugee women and their young children. Some of the barriers we observed included lack of childcare space, challenges with attendance expectations and assessment practices, lack of understanding about the impact of trauma on learning, and not feeling ready for the Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) program to Canada.

We set out to fill a gap and respond to the needs of these women. In the spring of 2015, we piloted a language class for refugee women who had experienced trauma and were not quite ready to attend a LINC program. Our pilot was full and had a waitlist and, with the help of donations, we were able to offer two more classes this year, both in Burnaby.

Our program and curriculum are different from most language programs. We wanted to be more flexible, responsive and use a trauma informed framework to address the needs of the participants. Women in the pilot class brought their babies and we were able to provide childcare for the older children. Many of the women had experienced violence and trauma and some have never been in an educational setting before. Being comfortable and feeling safe was the primary goal of the instructor. The program was profiled on CBC in March 2017.

*Pacific Immigration Resources Society, a non-profit organization that has provided services for immigrant women and young children since 1975. If you would like more information on this innovative program please visit [www.pirs.bc.ca](http://www.pirs.bc.ca)*

## Immigrant Employment Council of BC Launches Online Tool to Connect Refugees to BC Employers

IEC-BC

**BC Refugees JobConnect** is a new online tool that IEC-BC recently launched to connect refugees to BC employers. This free, easy-to-use, web-based platform is an excellent opportunity for refugee clients to promote their work experience, skills and abilities to BC employers who are looking to hire. The tool is designed for all refugees living in BC, who arrived in Canada in 2011 or later, and are currently seeking employment.

To register, clients need their Unique Client Identifying Number (UCI) or their Permanent Residence (PR) number, along with an email address. They can then upload a CV/resume and supporting documents onto the tool, which can be updated as new credentials or other information become available. Client information is secure, and will not be shared without their express permission.

As of April 3, 2017, 246 refugee clients had registered, along with 99 employers. The top sectors, in which BC employers are seeking candidates, are Construction, Manufacturing, Retail and Food Services.

*Find out more about BC Refugees JobConnect at <http://iecbc.ca/our-work/programs/bc-refugees/>*



## New Canadians in a Citizenship Ceremony to Remember

ISSofBC

It's an occasion that 30 new Canadians will likely never forget when they took their oath of citizenship with two federal cabinet ministers in attendance.

ISSofBC Welcome Centre hosted the ceremony for the citizenship candidates – most of them former refugees from 16 countries – who later received greetings from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Minister Ahmed Hussen and Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan.

“Today's ceremony is special as you will mark a personal milestone,” said Min. Hussen who administered the Oath of citizenship, “but today is also about celebrating a milestone for all of us.” The ceremony was organized as part of Canada's celebration of its 150th anniversary this year.

Also present at the ceremony were Deputy Immigration Minister Marta Morgan, Elder Gail Sparrow of the Musqueam Band, Order of Canada Dr. Ross Paul, RCMP Constable James Bennett, and Clerk of the Ceremony Margaux Kaczor. Children from ISSofBC's LINC preschool led the audience in a stirring rendition of “O Canada,” easily stealing the show!

## Options Newcomer Literacy Choir

Options Community Services

We are beginning to recognize the powerful role of music in language acquisition. Considering spoken language as a special type of music, it follows that singing in a choir can be a fun way for newcomers to practice English and connect with other newcomers to facilitate their integration.

In January, Options Newcomer Literacy Program piloted its Newcomer Literacy Choir led by two classically trained volunteer musicians. Using songs and singing as a class activity was so well received that our Options Newcomer Literacy Coordinator began to explore the idea of incorporating it into our Activity Based Literacy Curriculum.



*“One thing that binds us together is we're all Canadians,” said Min. Sajjan, who drew attention to the fact that both his cabinet colleague and himself came to Canada as youngsters – Sajjan as a five-year-old from Punjab, India, and Hussen from Mogadishu, Somalia as a teenager of 16.*

Our Newcomer Literacy Choir has successfully demonstrated that singing helps build fluency and intonation accuracy in language acquisition. An unexpected additional benefit of singing is that it improved participants' emotional health. Many singers expressed how singing helped them cope with the loneliness of being away from their families and all the challenges they face settling in their new community. Music helped them bond with each other in a special way.

# Digital Literacy Targets Young Families

Children's Section, Vancouver Public Library

The Vancouver Public Library has always been a strong supporter of literacy, and provides several opportunities for families with young children to learn and grow together. Their opportunities range from story time and parent workshops to an extensive collection of picture books and other materials. To help families develop strong digital literacy skills, the library is incorporating digital technology into its free, accessible programs and services. We've provided a few examples here, but for more information, families can visit our website at [www.vpl.ca](http://www.vpl.ca), and visit our events calendar at [www.vpl.ca/events](http://www.vpl.ca/events).

**1. Tablet Tales** These interactive story times blend songs, rhymes and stories with digital technology, and include time for families to play with and experience iPads together. *Tablet Tales* is a great introduction to technology for children and their caregivers, and is suitable for young children of all stages and language abilities. iPads are available for families to use. The program is free, and no registration is required.

**2. In-Branch iPads** At the downtown Central library, families can explore iPads that have been loaded with fun, educational, kid-friendly apps. Library staff can also recommend great apps for different language levels and age groups. The iPads are free to use, and are available on a first-come first-served basis during regular branch hours.

**3. Tumblebook Library** Families can check out free digital "talking picture books" that include music, text, images, animation and narration. These exciting digital books are available in English, French and Spanish, and are a great way for families to build digital and language skills together. Families need a Vancouver Public Library card to access Tumblebook Library, and they can sign up for a card at any library branch.

**4. VPL To Go – eReading Room for Kids** Families can access digital books for children from the comfort of their own home with their Vancouver Public Library card. eBooks can be read on a computer or mobile device, and families can search for books by reading level, subject or grade.

**5. Coding Buddies** School-aged children can explore computer programming with a teen volunteer mentor in this fun coding program for kids. Programs are held at different branches at different times throughout the year, and registration is required. Families can visit their local library branch for more information.

Trained, enthusiastic staff are available at every library location to support families and to provide mentorship and advice. Families are encouraged to visit their local library to find out more about the different programs and resources available to residents free of charge. Developing digital literacy skills is vitally important, but it can also be a lot of fun for kids and their caregivers!



# The Impact of Trauma on Young Newcomer Children

Ana Machado

Young Syrian children are growing up exposed to traumatic events (war, uncertainty, family and community loss, displacement, violence and trauma) and have been facing prolonged stress since 2011.

In addition to the trauma they face before arriving in Canada, these children experience the added stress of settlement challenges including adjusting to a new environment, different systems and culture and learning a new language.

Early trauma has a profound impact because it takes place during the most critical period of brain development. It can mean children develop an overly reactive stress response, and live in a persistent state of fear. This trauma can have lifetime consequences for them. Alexandra Chen, a child Protection and Mental Health specialist working with the United Nations, says trauma can “affect their physical and mental health, disrupt the development of the brain, and increase the risk of mental health disorders in adulthood - substance abuse, depression, dissociation, extreme anxiety.”

From my years of experience working with refugee families and their young children, I observed that refugee children display the same behaviors that we see in mainstream children. They are enthusiastic, curious, willing to learn, and love physical activity.

They may however have difficulty following instructions or remaining calm. They may show occasional aggressive or destructive behavior. They may demonstrate sudden shifts in behavior and emotions, and some may even withdraw completely. These behaviors in the eye of someone who does not have a trauma informed lens are often misinterpreted and labeled as “misbehavior,” “rebellious,” “unmotivated,” “antisocial” or other even diagnosed as “ADHD”.

In order to heal and develop self-regulation capabilities, refugee children need a safe, predictable environment, consistent routines, firm boundaries, clear rules that provide a sense of control as well as attuned and responsive caregivers (parents, educators, social workers, members of the community) who consistently provide emotional responses - acceptance, understanding, compassion and empathy, gentle and attempts to connect with adults and peers.

Refugee children are resilient, they want to make friends, connect with others, belong and have a community that they can be a part of in Canada.



Early learning environments that are trauma-informed, avoid judgement, adjust expectations, stop labelling, show compassion, and use a strength based approach that facilitates the processing of emotions through physical, sensorial and artistic activities.

Early mental health interventions that address trauma and are culturally appropriate, need to be available. The more we are aware of the impact of trauma in children, the more compassionate we will be in our interactions with them.

*Ana Machado is a Registered Psychologist with 30 years of experience working with families and children in Peru and Canada. She currently coordinates early childhood development programs at Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS).*



# RESPECT Leads to Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators

**Gya Chud**

*As we all know, continuing education is critical in every career and profession as new circumstances, philosophies, theories and recommended best practices come to light. This commitment is all the more compelling in our Early Childhood sector as we meet a number of newcomer and refugee families and children in our various settings and programs.*

*For me, deconstructing the word RESPECT provides an opportunity to consider just some of the areas in which early childhood educators need to pursue professional development. While I could have focused on any number of key words in this story, the themes I chose are central to providing the best quality programs we can. Early childhood educators deserve lifelong learning through, colleagues, mentors and facilitators and the written word.*



**Relationships** While these areas are all important, we know that our relationships with children and their relationships with each other, are critical to the way they learn in every domain. It requires a lot of thought, a focus on body language and appropriate touching to establish relationships when we do not share a common language.

**Reflection** involves our constant attention to reviewing and looking inward. What can we do better, differently, less or more of to ensure each child's maximum growth and development?

**Restorative Practice** is foundational to our profession and focuses on lifting children upwards in terms of their self concept and self esteem. For refugee children, in particular, this is a central pillar in their current and future worlds.



**Empathy** is an important concept when interacting with children. How do we best extend empathy to every child? How do we best promote it within a group of children? How do we ensure that it serves as the core of our programs?



**Strength** is a huge part of our work from a physical, cognitive and socio-emotional perspective. A very wise person once said "Early Childhood is not rocket science, it's much harder!" Our work with newcomer children includes many challenges and complexities and self care remains crucial.



How can we best integrate our **Personal, Professional, Public and Political** worlds? We must remain strong advocates and activists as we work with our children, their families, community resources and systems that are not all that easy to navigate.



E

**English Language Learner (ELL)** is an overriding element in our daily work in early childhood programs. While I appreciate that the term ESL was well intentioned, the fact is many of the children and parents we meet speak a variety of languages. In this regard, ESL seems both an arrogant and presumptuous term and we should work to replace it with ELL or English as an Additional Language (EAL). We should also value the capacity for fluency in several languages, promote use of first or mother language in our settings and therefore avoid what is known as “subtractive bilingualism.” This happens when children easily lose their own language because they don’t use it.

C

**Culture** is such an all embracing concept that shapes behaviour, social interactions, beliefs, values and child rearing practices. Therefore, it is essential that we immerse ourselves in better understanding the cultures of those we serve, work to reserve judgemental approaches, and validate these cultures on our walls, tables, libraries and music shelves. Just as the children learn to express common courtesies such as hello, please and thank you, we too should learn these words in their languages.

T

**Trauma Informed Care** is a vital part of our professional development as there has been some very recent research and recommendations to help children who have experienced trauma. Learning about the importance of sensory activities and open ended art, helps us see that, indeed, art can serve a container for pain and wounds. Art also enables children to release, relax, soothe and calm themselves.

*Gyda Chud has had a long professional career in Early Childhood Education, having served as Faculty, Program Coordinator, and Dean of Continuing Studies at Vancouver Community College. She also has extensive experience in the non-profit, community sector both locally and nationally, and is the Chair of the PIRS Board of Directors.*

1. Which of the following is not a feature of group child care centres (day care)?  
**d. They take babies and children up to 6 years old**
2. A licensed family day care is located in the caregiver's home and can take up to 10 children.  
**b. False (licensed daycares are located in the caregiver's home and only can take up to 7 children)**
3. In Canada, what percentage of children from recent immigrant families lives in poverty?  
**a. 33%**
4. Which of the following is not true for pre-literate students?  
**c. Literacy in native language**
5. According to Census Canada, persons from racialized groups make up 54% of all immigrants in Canada. What percentage of all immigrants living in poverty do they represent?  
**a. 71%**
6. Self-employed newcomer parents are eligible for a childcare subsidy in British Columbia.  
**c. True**

## STIBC Society of Translators and Interpreters of BC



### Do you need a translator or interpreter?

For a complete list of STIBC translators and interpreters, certified in over 80 language combinations please visit [www.stibc.org](http://www.stibc.org) and see our directory or call us at: **604-684-2940**

### Are you a professional translator or interpreter?

Joining STIBC gives you the opportunity to become certified and benefit from belonging to BC's professional Society.

Visit [www.stibc.org](http://www.stibc.org) for details or call us at: **604-684-2940**

# POST SCRIPT:

## Recognizing and Responding to Culture Shock in Young Refugee Children

**Excerpt from *Care for Syrian Refugee Children: A Program Guide for Welcoming Young Children and Their Families* by CMAS**

*When young refugee children experience culture shock, by learning to recognize the signs and respond appropriately, you can help build their resiliency, thereby assisting them in coping with life's challenges today and into the future.*

### Possible Signs of Culture Shock

### Response

PHYSICAL SIGNS:

- Becomes ill easily (e.g. upper-respiratory infections, low-grade infections or weight loss)
- Tires easily/Has difficulty sleeping/ Needs frequent sleep
- Is listless, lacks energy or is unable to sit still/ Has increased nervous habits (e.g. nail biting)

- Encourage family to keep the child home if they begin coughing or showing signs of a cold
- Encourage family to practice cold and flu prevention (e.g. dressing their child for the weather, washing hands, frequently, having a balanced diet and getting lots of sleep)
- Allow the child to sleep more often and for longer periods
- Encourage families to provide outlets for active play
- Ensure you make time for active play in your program

EMOTIONAL SIGNS:

- Extreme anxiety on separation
- Loss of emotional control
- Emotional display is more volatile or more passive
- Regressive behaviors (e.g. wetting pants, sucking thumb)
- Withdrawn or apathetic
- Unable to engage in play
- Remains in one area of the room
- Waits for instructions from caregiver

- Ensure a gradual separation and assign one consistent caregiver for the child and family
- Move in more rapidly if the child seems aggressive
- Provide outlets for emotional expression
- If the child is staying in one area, bring toys to them or guide them to another area
- Create a “safe haven” where children can retreat to when they are not ready to engage in play
- Encourage the child to join in activities but do not require it

SOCIAL SIGNS:

- Dependent on one caregiver
- Prefers to play alone – fearful of others or unaware of them
- Remains rigid when picked up
- Aggressive OR very passive in their play with others
- Has difficulty forming relationships with others. May avoid eye contact
- Observes others for long periods of time

- Allow time to observe others. Model language and play strategies
- As the child grows more confident, encourage broader interactions
- Help build friendships by engaging two children in play and then gradually retreating
- Provide the words needed for social play
- Do not use complex phrases
- Use playful ways to engage the child
- Reduce expectations and pressure in play/learning
- Encourage the family to use their first language at home
- Encourage all parents/caregivers that speak the child's language to use it

*NOTE: The possible symptoms listed in this tip sheet can have causes other than culture shock. Also, the strategies suggested are meant to help programs that support refugee families experiencing culture shock, but are not exclusive.*

## Provincial

Association of BC TEAL  
 BC Teachers Federation – Social Justice Program (BCTF - SJP)  
 Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) - BC Division  
 Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC)  
 Legal Services Society of BC (LSS)  
 Mennonite Central Committee British Columbia (MCC BC)  
 SCOUTS Canada  
 Society of Translators and Interpreters of BC (STIBC)  
 Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre (TRAC)

## North

Fort St. John Literacy Society  
 Hecate Strait Employment Development Society  
 Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society (IMSS)  
 Multicultural Heritage Society of Prince George  
 North Coast Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society (NCIMSS)  
 Skeena Diversity Society  
 Terrace & District Multicultural Association (TDMA)

## Vancouver Island

Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS)  
 Cowichan Intercultural Society (CIS)  
 Dialogue and Resolution Services Society  
 Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA)  
 Multicultural & Immigrant Services Association of North Vancouver Island (MISA)  
 Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)

## Fraser Valley

Abbotsford Community Services (ACS)  
 Chilliwack Community Services (CCS)  
 DIVERSE*city* Community Resources Society (DCRS)  
 Family Education and Support Centre  
 Langley Community Services Society (LCSS)  
 Mission Community Services Society (MCSS)  
 Muslim Food Bank & Community Services  
 Options Community Services Society  
 Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS)  
 Umoja Operation Compassion Society

## Interior

Kamloops Cariboo Regional Immigrant Society (KIS)  
 Kamloops Multicultural Society  
 Kelowna Community Resources Society (KCRS)  
 Shuswap Settlement Services Society  
 South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS)  
 Vernon & District Immigrant & Community Services Society (VDICSS)

## Lower Mainland

Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC (ANH)  
 Burnaby Family Life  
 CHIMO Community Services  
 Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH)  
 Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV)  
 Family Services of the North Shore (FSNS)  
 ISS*of*BC

## Lower Mainland continued

Jewish Family Service Agency (JFSA)  
 Kinbrace Community Society  
 Kiwassa Neighbourhood Services Association  
 Little Mountain Neighbourhood House Society (LMNHS)  
 Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities (MOSAIC)  
 Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH)  
 Multicultural Helping House Society (MHHS)  
 Multifaith Action Society of BC

## North

Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS)  
 Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS)  
 REACH Multicultural Family Centre  
 Richmond Multicultural Community Services (RMCS)  
 Richmond Youth Service Agency  
 Settlement Orientation Services (SOS)  
 South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH)  
 S.U.C.C.E.S.S.  
 Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society (VLMFSS)  
 Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre  
 Westcoast Family Centres Society (WFC)  
 YMCA of Greater Vancouver  
 YWCA