



Alliance nationale pour les enfants

National Children's Alliance

Immigrant and Refugee Children in Middle Childhood: An Overview

**Prepared for the Middle Childhood Initiative of the National
Children's Alliance**

By: Sarah Crowe

Contributors

Sara Austin, World Vision Canada

Aggie Casselman, International Social Service Canada (ISSC)

Peter Dorfman, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)

Peter Dudding, Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC)

Barbara Mitchell, National Children's Alliance (NCA)

Huma Nauman, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)

Harvey Weiner, Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF)

Wai Young, Canadian Immigrant Service Sector Alliance (CISSA)

About the Author

Sarah Crowe began her interest in issues affecting immigrant and refugee children as a volunteer researcher with International Social Service Canada (ISSC). Through this experience she had the opportunity to assist in organizing the National Roundtable on Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Canada in 2001. She has also participated in conferences abroad dealing with similar concerns such as in Romania to address the issues of separated children seeking asylum in Italy.

A graduate in political studies from Queen's University, Sarah followed her passion for human rights with the completion of her MA in the Theory and Practice of Human Rights in England. She then worked at the International Labour Organization in Geneva, Switzerland and taught English and French in northern Japan. Sarah's research interests and publications include, among others, international human rights and social justice, indigenous and tribal peoples, corporate social responsibility and immigrant and refugee children.

Sarah is currently working as the National Caucus Coordinator for the Canadian Environmental Network, based in Ottawa.

Table of Contents

Contributors	2
Glossary of acronyms	4
Introduction	5
Immigrant and refugee children in the middle years	5
Definitions and Demographics Why be concerned for these children? Economic Considerations	
What are governments doing?	8
The federal government Resettlement Assistance Program Immigration Loans Program Contributions Program The Interim Federal Health Program The National Play Program for Refugee Children The 2006 Budget	
Provincial programs and policies	9
Quebec British Columbia Ontario	
Impacts on children	10
Impacts of immigration to Canada Entering the school system ESL funding: the case of Ontario	
What do the children think?	13
Recreation How the children feel they are doing	
Conclusion	14
Recommendations	15
End Notes	16

Glossary of acronyms

BCSAP – British Columbia Settlement and Adaptation Program (BCSAP)

CCSD – Canadian Council on Social Development

CIC – Citizenship and Immigration

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

CWLC – Child Welfare League of Canada

EDS – Ethnic Diversity Study

ELD – English Literacy Development

ESL – English as a Second Language

GAR – Government Assisted Refugees

IFHP – Interim Federal Health Program

ILP – Immigration Loans Program

IRPA – Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act

ISSC – International Social Service Canada

LINC – Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada

MCFD – Ministry of Children and Family Development (British Columbia)

MICC – *Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles*

NCA – National Children's Alliance

PAIR – Refugee Reception and Installation Program (Quebec)

PSR – Privately Sponsored Refugees

RAP – Resettlement Assistance Program

SWIS – Settlement Workers in Schools

UNHCR – United Nations High Commission for Refugees

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.”

--Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3.1

Introduction

Every year, Canada opens its doors to thousands of immigrant and refugee children, and a significant number of them are in their middle years (6 to 12 years old). These children are particularly vulnerable as a result of the cultural differences and language barriers they face in their new country and, in some cases, traumatic experiences they have lived through in their home countries. Moreover, due to the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments, the system to protect these children is inconsistent across the country and inadequate to address their needs. The issues affecting immigrant and refugee children have not been extensively addressed in Canada and, as such, there is lack of information available on these children to provide us with a clear picture of their success and well-being. The objective of this paper is to present a brief overview of these issues.

Immigrant and refugee children in the middle years

Definitions and demographics

Immigrant and refugee children and youth enter Canada for various reasons. Although these children are often identified under the same group, there are important distinctions between them that may affect their life chances, health and well-being. Immigrants make the choice to come to Canada whereas refugees are forced to flee their home country and seek protection and safety beyond their borders.¹ While immigrants can return to their home country at any time, most refugees do not have that option.²

The *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), which replaced the *Immigration Act* in 2002, governs the regulations and programs affecting immigrants and refugees. Under the IRPA, Immigrants enter Canada either for economic reasons, meaning that they were selected for their skills and abilities to contribute to Canada's economy, or a Canadian citizen or permanent resident (usually a relative) sponsored their entry under the family class.³

Refugees will enter Canada either as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) or as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs). GARs are usually selected overseas and referred to Citizen and Immigration Canada (CIC) by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Often, they have come from very desperate circumstances and have lived in refugee camps for a significant length of time. The government provides financial assistance through the Resettlement Assistance Program to help refugees for their initial settlement period. The services offered include lodging assistance, food, guidance to services, legal assistance, language training and finding work. CIC also provides funding to service organizations that can help PSRs upon arrival in Canada.⁴

Increasingly, a number of children enter Canada separated from and unaccompanied by parents or guardians to act as their responsible caretakers. These children are particularly vulnerable as the legal and social infrastructures in Canada are inadequate to protect them.⁵ There is growing recognition about the issues affecting and specific needs of separated children. Nonetheless, one of the fundamental problems is the lack of information collected about these children to tell us how these issues and needs might be addressed.⁶ In 2001, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Child Welfare League of Canada and International Social Service Canada (ISSC) hosted the National Roundtable on Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Canada, the first of its kind in Canada, to consider and address some of the issues related to these separated children in Canada. The Roundtable included participants from both provincial and federal governments, child welfare authorities and civil society.⁷

In 2004, about 51,000 immigrants were children under 15 years of age. Of those, 66% entered as economic immigrants, 19% entered as family class immigrants and slightly more than 14% (about 5,200) were refugees. The Canadian Council of Social Development (CCSD) Progress Report for 2006 predicts that by the year 2016, immigrant children will represent 25% of the population of Canadian Children. More and more, these children come from countries where English or French are not the official or first language spoken. In 2002, approximately 74% of all immigrant children younger than 15 years of age could not speak either official language in Canada.⁸

Why be concerned for these children?

The middle years for children are a particularly important stage in the developmental process, it is "that period in life when the child leaves the security of his or her family and independently enters the external world."⁹ Immigrant and refugee children are especially vulnerable during this period as they not only struggle with the usual tensions associated with growing up but also struggle with coming to a new country that can be significantly different from their own. Their families are often poor, have little or no knowledge of English or French especially in the case of refugees, and are often ill prepared for living in Canadian society. Some of these children are illiterate in their own language and have little or no experience of formal schooling. Immigrant children may feel the effects of culture shock and refugees may suffer from trauma related ailments

such as posttraumatic disorders due to their experience of living in war torn countries.¹⁰ As this report will explore, although governments in Canada support immigrant settlement in a number of ways, the mental health conditions associated with moving to new environments are inadequately supported.

Economic considerations

In general, one of the fundamental impacts upon a child's well-being is their family's income. The family income directly influence's a child's "living conditions, their opportunities to participate in school and community activities, and [...] their sense of well-being."¹¹ Increasingly, in Canada the gap between the affluent and the poor is growing. This is further affecting the marginalisation of children in low-income families, which can have serious consequences for their chances of success in life as well as their health and well-being.¹² Although economic security is not exclusively problematic for immigrant and refugee families, research demonstrates that recent immigrant and visible minority families are among the lowest income group in Canada.¹³ In 2001, Immigrant children under the age of 15 lived in poverty at a rate of 42% compared to 17% of Canadian born children.¹⁴ Furthermore, it appears that the poverty of recently immigrated families is worsening. For example, 49% of children under 15 years of age who immigrated between 1996 and 2001 were considered poor, compared to 31% between 1991 and 1995 and 25% between 1986 and 1990.¹⁵

What are governments doing?

In Canada, other than in Quebec, the federal government is predominantly responsible for immigration and citizenship while the provinces and territories are responsible for family and child social services, health and education. The *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) allows federal and provincial governments to enter into agreements, memoranda of understanding and letters of intent to share immigration responsibilities. The most significant of these is the *Canada-Quebec Accord* signed in 1991. It provides Quebec with the power to select immigrants and manage its own settlement services while the federal government remains responsible for setting the definitions, categories and levels of enforcement. Other provinces that have entered into such agreements include, The Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. These agreements range from providing financial assistance and increasing responsibilities to provinces for settlement services to allocating greater influence in planning, particularly to attract business immigrants. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have also signed Provincial Nominees Agreements which allow them to select a small number of immigrants to fulfil their labour market requirements. In addition, federal and provincial governments frequently meet to discuss a variety of issues related to immigration.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the division of jurisdictional responsibility between federal and provincial/territorial governments can have serious effects on the security and well-being of immigrant and refugee children. Furthermore, provincial programs and services are inconsistent and varied from province to province. The next few sections will examine both the programs and services that governments are providing– or not providing – for immigrant and refugee children in the middle years. It will also consider the impact of immigration to Canada on this group of children.

The federal government

There are a number of departments in the federal government that service immigrant and refugee children in a variety of ways. However, many of these target adults and the assumption is that these programs and services will “trickle down” from parents to the children. Furthermore, the trend of government programs and policies to support newcomers in Canada are, to a significant degree, meant to facilitate immigrants and refugees to enter the job market and help the Canadian economy prosper.¹⁷ A wealth of information about services and providers can be found on numerous government and non-profit or community organization websites. This section will provide an overview of government programs and services to present a picture of the immigration process in Canada. Overall, there is a significant gap in services addressing the special needs (especially mental health needs) of immigrant and refugee children.

Resettlement Assistance Program

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) is one of CIC programs to assist refugees (especially GARs) with financial support. For example it may help to pay for their travel to Canada, meet the refugee at the port of entry, provide temporary accommodation, help obtain basic household items, provide financial orientation, and help with income support for up to one year or until the refugee is self-sufficient.¹⁸

Immigration Loans Program

The Immigration Loans Program (ILP) is a program initiated to provide loans to government assisted or privately sponsored refugees and members of the humanitarian designated classes. These loans, once approved, may assist with payment for costs associated with medical examinations abroad, travel documents, transportation to Canada, the Right of Permanent Residence Fee, as well as expenses such as housing, telephone deposits or work tools, upon demonstrated need. Interest on these loans is charged at the rate designated by the Treasury Board of Canada. However, Convention Refugees and members of the Humanitarian-Protected Persons Abroad Classes may be offered a grace period of up to three years interest free.¹⁹

Contributions Program

The Contributions program refers to joint resources and cooperation with provincial governments and non-profit organisations that can offer special programs or services to

refugees with special needs, for example, women at risk.²⁰ These services are provided on an individual basis where urgent need is demonstrated or when a refugee family requires longer-term support for their settlement in Canada. The CIC also provides programs for language training (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)) and for matching volunteers with immigrant families (HOST) to help them settle in their new community.²¹

The Interim Federal Health Program

The Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP), based on humanitarian grounds, provides temporary health coverage for specific immigrants (mostly refugees) during their settlement period until they qualify for provincial coverage. This program, however, is available only for emergency and essential health services where financial need is demonstrable meaning that it is not as extensive as provincial care.²² It is generally available for a period of 12 months. The IFHP covers the following health services:

- “Only essential and emergency health services for the treatment and prevention of serious medical conditions and the treatment of emergency dental conditions;
- Contraception, prenatal and obstetrical care;
- Essential prescription medications; and
- Costs related to the Immigration Medical Examination by a Designated Medical Practitioner.”²³

Services not provided by the IFHP include, among others, high cost medications, allergy testing and desensitization, routine medical examinations as well as general assessments, counseling, psychotherapy by general practitioners, more than one psychiatric consultation (although some exceptions may apply).²⁴

The National Play Program for At-Risk Refugee Children

As mentioned above, many refugee children suffer from trauma related to their experiences in war torn countries. The only specific federal program discovered that addressed the mental health needs of these vulnerable children is the National Play Program for At-Risk Refugee Children.²⁵ The project was designed to develop a national training manual as well as implement a program to assist national YWCA staff working with young refugee children and their mothers. The objective was to reduce emotional barriers related to their settlement into Canadian society. The project was successful for the 354 children who went through it. Many of the children demonstrated improvements in symptoms associated with trauma. For example, decreases in urinary incontinence, improved concentration, better sleeping patterns and an improvement in interpersonal relationships. At present, only the manual, entitled “Playing with Rainbows: A National Play Program for At-Risk Refugee Children”, available on the YWCA Canada website,²⁶ exists. The program has been discontinued due to a lack of funding. Nonetheless, it has left a useful manual for professionals who work with refugee children. It offers training to understand the impacts of war and migration as well as using play and other activities in counseling.

2006 Budget

After the election of the Conservative government in January 2006, it is difficult to predict what the impact will be on immigrant and refugee children. There are two programs worth noting in the budget announcement of 2006. The government introduced "Helping Immigrants Get Started" which reduces the Right of Permanent Residence Fee from \$975 to \$490. The 2006 budget also states that over the next two years the government will provide \$307 million "to enhance immigration settlement program and services, and take steps to create a Canadian agency for assessment and recognition of foreign credentials."²⁷ The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has also recently announced that the government will be sponsoring the asylum process of 800 Burmese refugees in the next year. However, it appears that the supports developed to assist these refugees will resemble those described above.²⁸ As such, it might be assumed that these Burmese refugees would not be provided with mental health services to support the trauma they have suffered as a result of their experiences in refugee camps and the war situation of their country.

In terms of funding for children and families, the government initiated the Universal Child Care Benefit that provides families with a monthly amount of \$100. However, this initiative will not benefit immigrant and refugee children in their middle childhood because it targets children under 6 years of age.

Provincial programs and policies

In Canada, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec are the three provinces who receive the greatest number of immigrants and refugees. In 2004, British Columbia received 37,018 (15.7%) of permanent residents, compared to 44,239 (18.8%) in Quebec and 125,110 (53.1%) in Ontario.²⁹ As such, this section will examine the programs and policies developed by these provinces.

Quebec

As mentioned above, Quebec is the only province having complete authority to select their own immigrants. In Quebec, through the *Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles* (MICC) a number of services are provided. For example, the Government of Quebec welcomes those who wish to settle permanently or temporarily in Quebec through the Airport Reception Service. This guides newcomer families or individuals to information of available services. For example, family allowances, childcare services, social services for children as well as health and schooling. Other services provided at the first point of entry include, a refugee reception and settling program (PAIR) which has as its aim to provide refugees selected abroad with support and financial aid for their initial settlement (such as transportation, temporary

accommodation, clothing, search for accommodation etc).³⁰ The MICC also provides French language services, as well as support for entering the job market.³¹

British Columbia

The government of British Columbia and the federal government entered into a partnership defined in the “Agreement for Canada – BC Cooperation on Immigration” in April 2004.³² Its objective is to support the development of the Canadian economy through the benefits of immigration and to strengthen Canada’s multicultural society. Included in this partnership is a commitment to make efforts to consider the health care needs and particular issues affecting immigrants and refugees seeking settlement in British Columbia.³³ As a part of this partnership, the two parties also commit to facilitate family reunification.³⁴ Financed in part by this partnership; the Government of B.C. welcomes many of its new immigrants and refugees through the British Columbia Settlement and Adaptation Program (BCSAP). Many of the services offered, however, are adult centred as they support new immigrants’ transition to the labour market, language acquisition and information on services.³⁵ As distinct from the other provinces, the Government of B.C. promotes the understanding of issues related to racism and cross-cultural relations. For example, it educates the public as well as develops effective response mechanisms to address racism and discrimination.³⁶ Moreover, in 2006, the British Columbia Multiculturalism Division and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) announced a New Child Care Subsidy Initiative that will act as an outreach pilot project for non-English Speaking Residents. MCFD recognises that immigrant families and the families where English is the second language face language barriers in accessing programs and subsidies for children.³⁷

Ontario

More than half of Canadian immigrants and refugees settle in Ontario. The Government of Ontario has introduced the Newcomer Settlement Program that offers grants to immigrant settlement and community organisations to provide services such as settlement, orientation and assistance in finding employment.³⁸ Its main goals are to help immigrants during their transition period when settling in Ontario and guide them through the services that are available to them. Similar to British Columbia, the government of Ontario has entered into an agreement with the federal government in November 2005.³⁹ Whereas the agreement between British Columbia and the federal government includes provisions to support the family classes of immigrants as well as health related issues, the agreement in Ontario is specifically targeted to assist immigrants in entering the labour market.⁴⁰ The Ministry of Education is also involved in issues related to English language training for children that will be discussed in more depth below.

Both the provincial governments and the federal governments have increased funding for immigration settlement programs in recent years. In general, the immigration policies implemented are targeted to adult immigrants with the objective of improving the Canadian economy. Although immigrant and refugees, after establishing

permanent residency, have access to provincial services such as health care and child benefit programs, there are no special programs, such as mental health care, targeted toward immigrant and especially refugee children who need special attention as a result of their vulnerable positions.

Impacts on children

Impacts of immigration to Canada

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) states that the best interest of the child shall be of primary consideration in all actions concerning children.⁴¹ The *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) does consider the best interest of the child during certain aspects of the immigration process. However, it does not specify that the best interest of the child be of primary concern for *all* activities concerning children. Nonetheless, the IRPA is flexible in order to allow families to be reunited in Canada as quickly as possible. However, there are a number of concerns for the protection of families and children that have not been addressed in the IRPA. For example, in some cases children will be accepted in Canada whereas their parents are not or are deported, causing the separation of families. Furthermore, the loans and financial subsidy programs mentioned above may cause delays in family reunification because parents are indebted to Canada. In addition, as a result the barriers caused by provincial and federal division of powers, there are also cases in which immigrant and refugee children would not be allowed access to free education (though the law requires them to have access) or do not receive adequate care.⁴²

In 2005, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights conducted an extensive study of the shortcomings of the Canadian system of protection for the rights of children. Some of the concerns raised for immigrant and refugee children are as follows:

- “Concern about the lack of data, and the resulting knowledge gap with respect to vulnerable children, including visible minorities.
- The varying caliber and provision of health care and other services provided to minority communities.
- Some minority groups have access to specialized education, while others are denied such rights.”⁴³

The inadequacies of the Canadian system to protect refugee children in particular, were also emphasized in the Committee’s report:

- “Migrant children face a number of obstacles to settlement and integration into their new homeland, too often slipping through cracks in service provision and education.
- Separated children – those arriving unaccompanied at the border – need to be identified as children in need of protection. Unfortunately, the age until

- which children can be treated as children in need of protection varies in each province. These variances have meant that service providers must apply different standards of protection to children arriving at different places in Canada.[Note: provinces where the age of protection excludes 16 and 17 year olds are in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child].
- Canada and its media are becoming increasingly aware of the problem of trafficking in children, both in Canada and around the world. Through the Immigration and Protection Act, as well as the federal government's proposed amendments to the Criminal Code to deal with trafficking in persons, the government is beginning to underscore the extent of the problem and the need to deal with it effectively.
 - Particular sensitivity is needed in the case of refugee children arriving in Canada, either with or without their families. Immigration officials are often unable to deal with the particular sensitivities of such children and the refugee protection criteria that may be used to facilitate their entry.
 - Immigration officials are often untrained in how to assess the best interests of the child, including the consideration of legal, psychological, emotional and other factors at play in the lives of children arriving either alone or accompanied at the border."⁴⁴

Entering the school system

For most immigrant and refugee children in their middle years, schools are the first point of contact with their new world. The transition to new schools for immigrant and refugee children can be overwhelming and challenging. Many face different learning styles and systems of rules than those they are used to. Some children come from monocultural communities and must cope with coming to classrooms full of children from a diversity of cultures and backgrounds. In addition, many children have little or no knowledge of either official language in Canada. For refugee children this transition can be made more difficult as they may have little or no experience of formal school.⁴⁵ Many school boards across the country have identified the challenges they face particularly in dealing with the growing number of refugees who come from war-torn countries and who have spent most of their lives in refugee camp circumstances with little experience of school "Schools and teachers have to be ready to not only to deal with English language acquisition but also a lack of literacy in the first language, an unfamiliarity with the routines and norms of school, social and emotional issues caused by traumatic events in the country of origin and huge challenges in engaging with parents."⁴⁶ In some situations, the settlement into the school system is a smooth and welcoming one. However, this is dependent on the innovation and leadership of individual schools and their principals and teachers rather than systematic policies throughout school boards or governments.⁴⁷ Schools and school boards have identified a need for further resources such as federally-funded Settlement Workers in Schools who can provide assistance to both families and schools by guiding parents through the education system during their settlement period.⁴⁸

A Canadian School Boards Association Draft Consultation Paper on Second Language Learning identified the following needs in order to appropriately address the needs of immigrant and refugee children in their middle years:

- “Federal-provincial recognition of and support for the role of schools in the settlement process for immigrant children and youth
- Provincial funding support for second language learning that recognizes the time span required to achieve academic language competency
- Federal-provincial-community partnerships to provide the range of essential supports that fall outside the traditional picture of classroom instruction but are acutely needed by immigrant children in school
- Adjustments to teacher education programs to prepare teachers for the diversity of language proficiency and learning styles in Canada’s classrooms in the twenty-first century
- Development of programs and supports to assist immigrant youth (16-22 years old) to find success in the school system and bridge to post-secondary education
- Cross-Canada collaboration on the development of assessment tools and language proficiency benchmarks
- Specific intensive supports for refugee students to fill substantial formal education gaps and to deal with social-emotional-developmental needs arising from early experience of trauma.”⁴⁹

ESL funding: The case of Ontario

Since 2000, approximately 12,000 immigrant and refugee children with little or no knowledge of English enter the school system in Ontario every year.⁵⁰ As such, Ontario provides a good case example to give a picture of the situation facing both immigrant and refugee children as well as the education professionals who work with them.

The People for Education Annual Report states that the government has increased funding for English as a Second Language by \$60 million in the last 2 years. However, as a result of ongoing funding issues that these schools and school boards face, this funding is spent in other areas to cover overall costs. As such, the funding is not reaching the students who need the most support.⁵¹

The Ministry of Education in Ontario provides funding for both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD). The Ministry of Education defines ESL students as “those who enter Ontario schools with little or no previous knowledge of English but who have received schooling in their home countries and have age appropriate literacy skills in their first language.”⁵² ELD refers to students “who not only have little knowledge of English but also enter Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education because they have had only limited access to schooling in their home countries.”⁵³ Although Ministry of Education funding has nearly doubled in the last five years, as indicated by the Auditor general, the Ministry does not “require them [school boards] to actually spend the grants on delivering ESL/ELD services.”⁵⁴ Overall, the Auditor General’s report demonstrated a lack of information and inadequate means of gathering information not only to provide shared experiences,

lessons learned between school boards and teachers but also to measure the performance and monitor the progress of children that would benefit from programs related to ESL and ELD. The Auditor General emphasized the necessity for adequate professional training to meet the needs of ESL and ELD immigrant and refugee children.

There is some evidence suggesting that immigrant and refugee children's academic success is below the level of Canadian-born children. As an example, the Auditor General's report cited a study in Alberta examining the dropout rate of ESL students who entered grade 9 between 1989 and 1997. The study found that students entering grade 9 with beginner ESL training had a drop out rate of 90% and the average rate for ESL students (including all three categories: beginner, intermediate and advanced) was 74% (advanced stage students' dropout rate was reported at 50%). In Ontario, it was acknowledged that the dropout rate for ESL students would be higher than for students whose first language was English.⁵⁵

What do the children think?

Recreation

As demonstrated in numerous studies, children's well-being, social development and chances for success in society is much influenced by their ability to participate in recreational activities.⁵⁶ Immigrant and refugee children are often disadvantaged in their ability to access and participate in recreational activities. One of the main barriers is their economic circumstances. According to the CCSD report, "poor children continue to lack access to recreational opportunities. Regardless of the type of activity, children in lower-income families participate less than those in higher-income families."⁵⁷

Cultural and structural barriers may also deter an immigrant or refugee child's comfort level in joining recreational activities. For example, one of the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) that was interviewed mentioned how some girls reported feeling uncomfortable swimming in a public pool with boys and changing in front of other children in the change rooms.

The SWIS worker also stated that libraries are excellent recreational resources for immigrant and refugee families as the programs are generally free and often can enhance the language learning and acquisition of both the parents and the children.

How the children feel they are doing

The Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS) examined the level at which different groups feel comfortable or out of place in Canada based on their ethnicity, culture, race, skin colour, language, accent or religion. According to their findings, 24% of all visible minorities feel uncomfortable or out of place all or almost all the time. This number seems to also

have increased after 2001 where 29% of new immigrants arriving between 1991 and 2001 said they felt uncomfortable or out of place some, most or all the time.⁵⁸

New Moves, a video prepared by Settlement.Org, highlights the experiences reported by a number of newcomer students in Ontario.⁵⁹ Many of the students from a variety of backgrounds described feelings of confusion as well as happiness and fear preceding their move to their new country. Some of the comments are as follows:

- The experience of coming to Canada was very different than expected
- Coming to a community where everyone is culturally diverse was overwhelming
- Having to think about food, not just school was challenging
- Feeling that their cultural differences were not always recognised “no one understands my feelings of loneliness”
- As a result of the delay in schooling due to language acquisition, they were older than the other children
- Overall difficulty in school as a result of not understanding English
- Different learning methods and rules caused confusion
- Different ways of relating to adults, the other gender and to other children than what they were used to
- Afraid to ask for help

The children offered advice and emphasised the importance of asking for help to succeed in the settlement process. They also mentioned that informing yourself about the system is the most effective way of surviving. In addition, a number of these children stated that participating in extracurricular activities such as sports, arts etc. even just in the school environment, is helpful to integrate oneself, to boost one’s self-esteem, to understand the culture and to improve one’s English. They all mentioned that the most important aspect to success – and the greatest barrier in settlement – is language.

Conclusion

More and more, immigrant and refugee children in their middle years are coming to Canada in great numbers and will continue to do so steadily. Increasingly these children are coming from countries where neither French nor English are official or native languages. Furthermore, these children often find themselves in levels of poverty higher than those of Canadian-born children. As such, there is a growing concern that new arrivals to Canada become trapped in a cycle of poverty impacting on children and families. As the middle years is a particularly important time in the development cycle of children, immigrant and refugee children are especially vulnerable due to the confusing, overwhelming and often traumatising effects of moving to a new country. Particular attention needs to be given to refugee children who suffer from the psychological effects of living in refugee camps and in war-torn countries as well as the trauma related to fleeing one’s country.

The CRC emphasizes the necessity of considering the best interest of the child in all areas affecting children. However, in Canada, there are significant discrepancies on a number of levels whereby the best interest of children is not of primary consideration and in some cases, not considered at all. Settlement services and intergovernmental cooperation for immigration is improving. However, these services are adult oriented and focus on encouraging immigrants to enter the labour market and are not designed to be child centered and child focused. Furthermore, as a result of differences between provincial/territorial governments and differing jurisdictional powers between federal and provincial governments, there is considerable variation in the level of services and response to the needs of immigrant and refugee children across Canada. Moreover, services for children such as health, education and social services are fragmented and not well co-ordinated. For example, although governments are increasingly funding ESL programs, as a result of the realities faced by schools and school boards the funding is not reaching those most in need. Moreover, there is a shortage of services related to addressing the psycho-social adjustment that children face in both immigrating and in immersing themselves in a new society and community. More importantly, services are needed to support refugee children who are faced with the trauma involved in spending long periods of time in refugee camps and situations of war. Finally, in nearly all aspects of issues and services affecting immigrant and refugee children, there is a lack of data collection and research about the adjustment factors and outcomes for these populations.

In the final analysis, we know very little about the issues touching the lives of immigrant and refugee children, particularly those in the middle years. As a result of governments targeting programs seeking to improve the economy (by integrating adults in the labour market, for example) the needs of children seem to be forgotten in the process. This thereby renders a serious need to listen to these children and consider their best interest in all matters affecting them.

Recommendations

General recommendations to address the needs of immigrant and refugee children in their middle years are as follows:

1. Greater focus on child centred services and resources (with child and youth participation).
2. Additional data collection and research about the quantitative and qualitative issues concerning immigrant and refugee children and families.
3. Inclusion of child and youth centred services into federal/provincial agreements concerning immigrants and refugees.
4. Greater consistency in service provisions for immigrant and refugee children across the country.
5. Additional resources to support adjustment and integration services for children including psycho social, mental health, language and recreation programs.

6. Greater emphasis on inter-provincial co-ordination, knowledge and resource sharing regarding immigrant and refugee children.
7. Follow-up of the progress of children in the school system (i.e. those involved in ESL programs)
8. Greater focus on training for teachers and other professionals who work with immigrant and refugee children, in particular to understand the needs of these children and the issues they face.
9. More emphasis on ESL and ELD programs to ensure that the funds reach the children most in need.
10. Greater development and accessibility of recreation programs that target immigrant and refugee children.
11. Systematically including settlement workers in schools such as SWIS, across the country.
12. Sharing of lessons learned and success stories between professionals working with immigrant and refugee children (i.e. teachers and principals in schools).

End notes

¹ The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) defines refugees as persons “...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 as a result of such events , is unable or, owing to such fear , is unwilling to return to it.” (UN Refugee Convention, Article A(2)) http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm.

² Hanvey, Louise. “Middle Childhood: Building on the Early Years: A Discussion Paper.” Ottawa, National Children’s Alliance: June 2002 [Hereinafter: Hanvey, Louise: June 2002]. This is an excellent paper providing an overview of psycho-social and developmental issues affecting children between the ages of 12 to 6. Though it does not specifically address immigrant and refugee children, it address the main issues affecting them.

³ *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)*, 2002. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/irpa/index.html>.

⁴ See the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) website: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/>

⁵ Ayotte, Wendy. “Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Canada: a discussion paper adapted from an original report researched and written by Wendy Ayotte.” Ottawa, UNHCR; July 2001. Wendy Ayotte examines in depth the issues affecting separated children seeking asylum in Canada. This document is very thorough and provides an excellent understanding of the issues. <http://www.web.ca/ccr/separated.PDF>

⁶ Wouk, Judith; Yu, Soojin; Roach, Lisa; Thomson, Jessie; and Harris, AnMarie. 2006: “Unaccompanied/Separated Minors and Refugee Protection in Canada: Filling Information Gaps.” In *Refuge* Vol. 23, no. 2, Spring 2006. This paper provides keen insight into the research methods used by CIC and the gaps in information related to separated children in Canada.

⁷ For more information on this roundtable, see “National Roundtable on Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Canada: Summary Report.” Ottawa, October 15-16, 2001. The National Roundtable addressed issues affecting separated minors in Canada giving a broad understanding of the issues (i.e. trafficking of children) and in particular, focused on the federal/provincial gaps and inconsistencies across the country having serious consequences and impacts on these children. It was noted at the Roundtable that greater participation of the children affected was needed.

⁸ Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), “The Progress of Canada’s Children and Youth, 2006.” Ottawa, 2006. This report provides an overview of issues affecting children and youth in Canada using quantitative and qualitative research. It is a good resource to gain a picture of the status of children and youth in 2006. [Hereinafter: CCSD Progress Report 2006].

⁹ Hanvey, Louise: June 2002, *supra* note 2.

¹⁰ Cook, Susan. “Canadian School Boards Association on Meeting the Language Learning and Settlement Needs of Immigrant Children and Youth in Canada’s School Systems: CSBA Consultation Paper on Second Language Learning”, prepared by Alberta School Boards Association, British Columbia Trustees Association, Ontario Public School Boards’ Association forthcoming Fall 2006, Draft: May 2006. [Hereinafter: Cook, Susan: 2006]: <http://www.cdnsba.org/newsflash/releases/CSBA%20Draft%20Consultation%20Paper%20Immigrant%20Children%20and%20Youth%20-%20May%202006%203.pdf> .

Please note: This is an excellent document discussing the needs, gaps and issues affecting an increasing number of immigrant and refugee children and youth entering Canada each year.

¹¹ CCSD Progress Report, *supra* note 8.

¹² *Ibid*, *supra* note 8.

¹³ *Ibid*, *supra* note 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, *supra* note 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, *supra* note 8.

¹⁶ Citizenship and Immigration Canada. “Federal-Provincial/Territorial Agreements.” <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/policy/fedprov.html>.

¹⁷ Citizenship and Immigration Canada. “Making it Work: Immigration and Working in Canada.” <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/ilm/index.html>.

¹⁸ Citizenship and Immigration Canada: “First Steps: An Orientation Package for Newcomers” sponsored by Settlement Directorate, Ontario Region, Citizenship and Immigration Canada., http://www.settlement.org/downloads/First_Steps_English.pdf.

¹⁹ Settlement.Org: Welcome to Ontario. “What assistance can refugees get in Canada?” http://www.settlement.org/sys/faqs_detail.asp?faq_id=4000348.

- ²⁰ See for example Women at Risk (AWR) or Urgent Protection Program (UPP). CIC website, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/resettle-gov.html#upp>
- ²¹ For more information see, CIC website: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomer/menu-programs.html>
- ²² Citizenship and Immigration Canada. “Interim Federal Health Program: Information Handbook for Health Care Providers.” Edmonton: FAS Bennett Administration Ltd: 2001, http://www.fasadmin.com/images/pdf/ifh_information_handbook.pdf. [Hereinafter: IFHP].
- ²³ IFHP, *supra* note 22.
- ²⁴ “IFH Program Benefit Lists.” <http://www.fasadmin.com/english/part3.html>.
- ²⁵ “National Play Program for At-Risk Refugee Children”. Evaluation of the Social Development Partnerships Program – November 2002. Social Development Canada. <http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/sp/sdc/evaluation/sp-ah202e/page08.shtml>
- ²⁶ Playing with Rainbows: A National Play Program for At-Risk Refugee Children. 1997. Available online only at http://www.ywcanada.ca/public_eng/online_catalog/index.cfm?Heading1_link=publications&Heading2_link=publications_anti_violence&Heading3_link=publications_anti_violence&Heading4_link=publications_anti_violence&Hlinks=3.
- The manual “outlines a 12 session group involving play, designed to facilitate healing in children who have been traumatized by the experiences of war and migration.” Although the manual was designed for the use of the program itself, it is a useful resource for professionals working with refugee children coming from war torn countries to help understand the context of war and migration as well as using play in counselling and other activities.
- ²⁷ Department of Finance Canada, Budget 2006: “Focusing on Priorities: Overview”. May 2, 2006. <http://www.fin.gc.ca/budget06/pamph/paover.htm>.
- ²⁸ Citizenship and Immigration Canada. News Release: “Canada’s New Government Welcomes New Burmese Refugees.” Ottawa, June 2006. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/press/06/0604-e.html>
- ²⁹ Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance. Facts and Figures 2004: Immigration Overview: Permanent Residents: Canada-Permanent Resident by Province or Territory: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/facts2004/permanent/11.html>.
- ³⁰ In Quebec, the *Service d’aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants du Montréal métropolitain* (SARIMM) is responsible for receiving and providing social service support to a great number of refugees. However, SARIMM is not a child welfare authority. As such, children, particularly separated children, that fall under their care are provided with services, however are not protected wards of the state.
- ³¹ Guide to Government Programs and Services for families and Children: “13. Support to Immigrant Families.” URL: <http://www.mfacf.gouv.qc.ca/services-en-ligne/guide-programmes-services/fiches/13.asp?lang=en&chapitre=13&fiche=0>
- ³² Citizenship and Immigration Canada: Policy and Regulations: Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Co-Operation on Immigration – 2004, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/policy/fed-prov/bc-2004-agree.html>
- ³³ Citizenship and Immigration Canada: Policy and Regulations. “Agreement for Canada – British Columbia Co-Operation on Immigration – 2004: Annex H: Immigration Health. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/policy/fed-prov/bc-2004-annex-h.html>
- ³⁴ Citizenship and Immigration Canada: Policy and Regulations. “Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Co-Operation on Immigration – 2004: Annex E: Sponsorship of Family Classes.” <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/policy/fed-prov/bc-2004-annex-e.html>.
- ³⁵ Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Attorney General, Settlement and Multiculturalism: “Settlement and Multiculturalism Division: B.C. Settlement and Adaptation Program,” <http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/sam/bcsap/index.htm>
- ³⁶ Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Attorney General, Settlement and Multiculturalism: “Settlement and Multiculturalism Division: B.C. Anti-racism and Multiculturalism Program,” <http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/sam/bcamp/index.htm>
- ³⁷ British Columbia Multiculturalism Division / Multiculturalism and Immigration Branch (Ministry of the Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism. “Settlement and Multiculturalism Division Update”, Spring 2006. www.ag.gov.bc.ca/sam/publications/pdf/Division_update_Spring06.pdf
- ³⁸ Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Government of Ontario. “Newcomer Settlement Program: Funding Guidelines.” <http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/citdiv/immigrat/newcomer.htm>.
- ³⁹ Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Government of Ontario. “Immigration and Settlement,” <http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/citdiv/immigrat/index.html>

⁴⁰ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Policy and Regulations: “The Canada – Ontario Immigration Agreement.” (Original signed November 21, 2005), <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/policy/fed-prov/ont-2005-agree.html>

⁴¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>
Article 3.1 states that: “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.”

⁴² Canadian Council for Refugees. “Impacts on children of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*”, November 2004, <http://www.web.ca/ccr/children.pdf>.

⁴³ The Honourable Raynell Andreychuk (Chair) and The Honourable Landon Pearson (Deputy Chair). “Who’s in Charge Here? Effective Implementation of Canada’s International Obligations with Respect to the rights of Children.” Interim Report: Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights. November 2005 [Hereinafter: “Who’s in Charge Here?”]. This is an excellent report covering all areas affecting children with a particular focus on the human rights of children. The report includes appendices with international conventions as well as detailed interviews with key informants conducted by the Committee.

⁴⁴ “Who’s in Charge Here?”, *supra* note 43.

⁴⁵ Key informant interviews (Peter Dorfman and Huma Nauman, SWIS, June 2006).

⁴⁶ Cook, Susan: 2006, *supra* note 10.

⁴⁷ Key informant interviews (Peter Dorfman and Huma Nauman, SWIS, June 2006).

⁴⁸ Cook, Susan: 2006, *supra* note 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, *supra* note 10.

⁵⁰ Ministry of Education. *2005 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario*. “English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development: Chapter 3 Section 3.07” [Hereinafter: Ministry of Education: 2005]. This report is very detailed and covers all matters related to education and education funding in Ontario. It is revealing of the funding inadequacies in ESL and ELD funding and follow-up of students in these programs. This is an excellent resource.

⁵¹ People for Education: 2006. “The Annual Report on Ontario’s Public Schools: 2006.” Ontario; People for Education. <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/OPSReports/annual06.pdf>.

This report evaluates and offers recommendations for the performance of schools and school boards in Ontario in areas such as student performance, arts, libraries, resources, physical education and English learning for newcomers in Ontario in relation to the Ministry of Education in Ontario. It is a useful, concise and clear report summarizing the issues.

⁵² Ministry of Education: 2005, *supra* note 50.

⁵³ *Ibid*, *supra* note 50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, *supra* note 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, *supra* note 50.

⁵⁶ See Brownrigg, Michelle. “Recreation in Middle Childhood: An Overview.” Ottawa, National Children’s Alliance; June 2006. This report is an overview of the issues involved in recreation including developmental theories and recommendations.

See also: Jackson, Andrew; Roberts, Paul and Harman, Shelley. “Learning Through Recreation (Data Analysis and Review) A Report to the Laidlaw Foundation.” Ottawa, CCSD: May 2001. This paper provides an analysis of the issues involved in children’s development and learning through recreation.

⁵⁷ CCSD Progress Report 2006, *supra* note 8.

⁵⁸ Ethnic Diversity Survey 2002: Portrait of a Multicultural Society. Statistics Canada, Ministry of Industry, September 2003, Ottawa. See website at: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-593-XIE/89-593-XIE2003001.pdf>

⁵⁹ “New Moves: An Orientation Video for Newcomer Students.” Settlement.Org, Frameline Productions: 2005 (funded by CIC). This video provides insight into the experiences of new comer children to Ontario. It provides an understanding of the challenges they face and the difficulties involved in moving to a new country and immersing oneself in a new society and community.