

# **OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO POST- SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR KAREN REFUGEES IN LANGLEY AND SURREY, BC**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Post-secondary education is critical to the long-term resettlement and integration of Karen refugees. Post-secondary education not only provides opportunities for underprivileged families to improve their economic livelihood, but also to become healthy and contributing citizens in the local and global contexts. Nevertheless, Karen people who arrived in Canada between 2006 and 2010 as Government Assisted Refugees face many barriers to their resettlement and ultimately their ability to access post-secondary education. In particular, these youth struggle with pre-migration barriers including cultural challenges, and lack of education and English language skills. On the other hand, their post-migration barriers are equally significant and include discrimination, culture shock and mental health issues, socioeconomic issues, and lack of parental or adult guidance.

This literature review has been prepared to provide an overview of some of the barriers that may prevent Karen refugee youth in Langley and Surrey from accessing post-secondary programs at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU). The client organization, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement (CIR:CLE) has mandated this literature review to complement its own community-based research project on Karen refugee youth in Langley and Surrey. With this in mind, this report addresses the following research areas:

- Key factors that prevent refugee students from accessing post-secondary education
- The influence of pre- and post-migration experience on the success of refugee students in the secondary and post-secondary system in Canada
- Barriers that Karen refugees in particular face in accessing post-secondary education
- Strategies and initiatives that have been identified in research literature and existing programs to help vulnerable students overcome these barriers

Ultimately, this report examines literature and programs addressing strategies to help refugee students overcome barriers to post-secondary education. Furthermore, the report offers recommendations for CIR:CLE to take on an advocacy role within KPU and with its community partners to increase awareness and understanding of Karen refugees and potential strategies that can be undertaken to increase access to KPU programs.

## **Methodology**

Literature and research was gathered for this report from academic journals, reports, articles and online resources to provide a background on the educational context of refugees, and on Karen refugees in particular. Moreover, this research further extended to barriers to education for immigrant and refugee students, in addition to literature addressing strategies designed to overcome these barriers. This research provided the basis for a conceptual framework which was developed to highlight the pre- and post-migration barriers to education and their impact on refugee youth as they move through the Canadian education system. Furthermore, the results from the literature review, program review, local

program scan and jurisdictional scan were subsequently used to supplement the conceptual framework and provide possible strategies to increase access to post-secondary education for refugee youth.

## **Findings**

The literature review led to several important conclusions. First, immigrant youth face significant challenges in the Canadian education system, including language barriers, resettlement stress, isolation, social exclusion and discrimination; these barriers are further compounded for refugee youth who experience additional barriers like interrupted or poor-quality education, pre- or post-migration trauma, poverty, protracted stays in refugee camps, and family challenges or responsibilities. Nevertheless, the literature and program review also identified interventions to increase participation in post-secondary education, including targeted scholarships, bridging programs, holistic student support, mentoring, and professional development of staff and community partners.

## **Recommendations**

As a research institute, CIR:CLE's ability to increase access to education for refugee students will revolve primarily around its advocacy role. As such, several recommendations are outlined to provide background information as CIR:CLE advocates within KPU and with its community partners. These recommendations are further supplemented by several outcomes that can be evaluated using SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound):

1. Advocate for KPU to identify and train key staff members who can understand the complex needs of Karen refugee students and advise them about appropriate KPU programs and guide them through the application process.
2. Advocate for KPU to partner with community settlement workers to provide professional development about KPU programs, opportunities and admissions procedures.
3. Advocate for KPU to build collaborative partnerships with community organizations working with refugee youth.
4. Advocate within KPU and the community for scholarships and bursaries for refugee students to attend KPU.
5. Advocate for a mentoring/tutoring program for refugee students enrolled at KPU.

Ultimately, this report provides research and background information to assist CIR:CLE in its own primary research study. Furthermore, the report's recommendations will serve as a springboard to build awareness and advocacy in the community and increase access to KPU programs for Karen refugee students.

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## 1.2 Introduction

Post-secondary education, and higher education in general, represents possibilities for underprivileged families to improve their economic livelihood and to be contributing members of a healthy community and society. In this context, the term “higher education” may include post-secondary education at colleges or universities, or skills training and trades programs that are increasingly available to prepare youth and young adults for the workforce. Moreover, for refugees who come from dire situations in war-torn and impoverished homelands, higher education represents something even more important: the freedom and opportunity to achieve a level of personal human development that may not have been possible in their previous life. Furthermore, for some refugees, post-secondary education may also be an opportunity to cultivate the skills and knowledge to bring lasting change to the political problems and humanitarian crises in their homeland. Higher education “creates long-term, sustainable growth and human development that is crucial for the rebuilding, stability and recovery of states that have been weakened by conflict” (Anselme & Hands, 2010, p. 89). While many refugees will never return to their homeland, education represents an important aspect of the resettlement and integration process.

Nevertheless, systemic barriers to education as well as social and economic inclusion exist for refugee youth who arrive in Canada with limited previous education and language skills, including discrimination, socioeconomic barriers, mental health issues, and complex cultural challenges. This contradiction represents the “inherent tensions in Canada’s refugee resettlement policies that claim to be humanitarian without being grounded in social justice and equality” (Shakya, et al., 2010, p. 75). More specifically, Canada has boasted a strong humanitarian tradition in resettling refugees, claiming to be a worldwide leader in refugee resettlement (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2012). However, Canada’s resettlement system cannot be seen as truly humanitarian if refugees face systemic barriers once in Canada that prevent them from becoming successful. For a refugee resettlement program to be grounded in social justice and equality, additional resources and supports may be required to ensure that refugee youth can access education and be successfully integrated into the social and economic fabric of local communities. While many factors may pose barriers to refugee youth as they move through the secondary and post-secondary education systems, it remains important to recognize and address potential solutions to increase access and opportunity for the good of individuals and communities, but also the broader impact on development and peace-building in countries of origin that are saturated with conflict and poverty.

Around the world, refugee populations are a growing concern; the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that because of the ongoing conflict in Syria, global forced displacement is at an 18-year high (UNHCR, 2013). Likewise, global statistics for all refugee categories are growing. According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is defined as someone who:

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

habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

(UNHCR, 2010, p. 14)

The UNHCR identifies 10.5 million Convention refugees in the world that have been displaced from their country of origin and meet the above definition (UNHCR, 2013). Meanwhile, ongoing conflicts have caused the worldwide population of the UNHCR's "people of concern" to grow in recent years from 19 million in 2005 to more than 35 million in 2013 (UNHCR, 2013; The UN Refugee Agency, 2012). These "people of concern" include both Convention refugees that fit the traditional definition outlined above, in addition to stateless people, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people (IDPs) who are living in refugee-like situations but have not crossed an international border.

Refugees have endured substantial hardships, including war, trauma, displacement, separation from family, poverty, protracted stays in refugee camps and malnutrition. In addition to this, there are a growing number of "protracted" refugee situations, where refugees are "warehoused"<sup>1</sup> in camps without hope of returning to their country of origin, integrating into the country of asylum or being resettled to a third country like Canada or the United States (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; Presse & Thomson, 2008). More specifically, refugee camps have historically been designed to be places of temporary residence for populations displaced by conflict in their country of origin. Instead, refugee camps often resemble "poorly resourced villages or towns" where the average length of stay is often more than twenty years (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010, p. 3; USCRI, 2009). The problem with this extended period of displacement is substantial; not only do refugees lack adequate resources for health and well-being, they also do not have legal status in their host country, making it impossible for them to work or earn a living. Furthermore, this situation has dire consequence for education. Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010) argue that "given the uncertainty of the future for refugees, the increasingly globalized realities that most of them face, and the promise of knowledge-based economies, education – that is adaptable and portable – is critical" (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010, p. 3).

Though the phenomenon of protracted refugee situations is not going away anytime soon, the international community has limited options to deal with these challenges. While third country resettlement is an important practice, it is a solution for less than 1% of refugees – only 100,000 refugees are resettled each year to countries including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden. In fact, Canada accepts close to 10,000 refugees each year through government and private sponsorship programs (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Canada's resettlement program gives refugees an opportunity to rebuild new lives, though the challenges for integration are considerable.

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<sup>1</sup> Refugee warehousing is a term used to describe the conditions in refugee camps where residents are denied the right to "work, practice professions, run businesses, own property, move about freely, or choose their place of residence" (USCRI, 2011, p. 1). Millions of refugees worldwide are confined to "temporary" camps where they actually remain for decades with very limited rights and freedoms. This is contrary to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which allows refugees these rights while they wait for durable solutions to their displacement (USCRI, 2011).

Between 2006 and 2010, Canada resettled 3,900 Karen refugees in communities across Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Approximately 800 of these Karen refugees were resettled in the Metro Vancouver area, mostly in Langley and Surrey (ISS of BC, 2010). The Karen families selected for resettlement by the Canadian government originated from Burma (Myanmar), but have been living in remote refugee camps in Thailand for up to 20 years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). Ethnic minorities, including Karen people, have been persecuted in Burma for the past three decades. The Burmese military has sought to control ethnic minorities in the country through forced relocation and assimilation, resulting in widespread human rights abuses (ISS of BC, 2010). As a result, over 140,000 Karen people have made their way to remote refugee camps on the Thai/Burma border where poor living conditions and overcrowding have led international aid organizations to prioritize Karen refugees for resettlement in countries including Canada, the United States and Australia (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006).

In 2011 Karen youth and community service providers began meeting with representatives from Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), forming a steering committee to discuss concerns related to education and access to KPU programs. Recognizing the need for a more systemic approach to understand the needs of the community and the solutions for moving forward, the steering committee, given the name "Zipporah's Dream Committee," was the springboard to a study conducted by KPU's Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement (CIR:CLE) in the spring of 2013 (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2011). The steering committee identified many challenges for Karen refugee students in Langley and Surrey. First, like many other refugee groups the Karen students arrived in Canada with very low literacy and limited education experience (Shakya, et al., 2010; Ministry of Education, 2009; Birman, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2006). As a result, they have not been able to gain the language skills or meet curriculum requirements to graduate with their Canadian-born peers (Staddon, 2009). The steering committee reported that Karen refugee students frequently become discouraged from their slow progress and drop out of school. It was also suggested that many families are living in poverty and students feel pressure to drop out of high school to work and contribute to their family's economic survival (Shakya, et al., 2010). Furthermore, those who do not drop out have found that because they started high school so far behind their peers they do not have time to complete their graduation requirements before they become too old to attend public school (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2011; Staddon, 2009; Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011; Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 2010). At the same time, there are different age groups and cohorts of Karen refugee students with different needs. While students that arrived in Canada at an older age face the most significant challenges, younger students have had more time to gain fluency in English and have a stronger foundation in the Canadian education system. Nevertheless, these younger students also face many barriers including discrimination, socioeconomic challenges and lack of parental guidance (Crowe, 2006; Staddon, 2009).

Wider academic research shows that refugees face significant barriers to post-secondary education and employment, which can lead to long-term economic hardship in families and hinder their success in Canada (Shakya, et al., 2010; Anisef P. , 2005; Wilkinson, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2006). These barriers include lack of previous education, lack of English language skills, pre- and post- migration trauma and

socioeconomic issues (Shakya, et al., 2010; Ministry of Education, 2009). Anecdotal evidence from community workers participating in the steering committee for CIR:CLE's research study confirm that these barriers also exist for Karen refugee youth that have been resettled in Langley and Surrey. Members of CIR:CLE's steering committee further suggest that students become discouraged and drop out of high school early on because they do not have attainable goals or sufficient education to meet post-secondary program requirements. This dialogue was reflected by Karen refugee youth on the steering committee who reported difficulty in understanding and navigating the process of post-secondary education, including assessment tests, course selection, and prerequisites. These youth reported that they had lost hope of ever attending post-secondary courses because accessing programs had become very discouraging (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2011). As such, this community's needs include, but go beyond, the barriers to education that have been well documented in existing literature (language issues, family challenges, lack of previous education, etc.) and go to the consideration of factors stemming from the experience of their previous lives in Burma and in refugee camps in Thailand (Oh, 2010; MacLaren, 2010; Purkey, 2010). Thus, this document examines not only the existing literature on barriers to post-secondary education, but also barriers that are perhaps unique to Karen refugees such as protracted refugee camp experiences and specific cultural values. When considered together, this research presents a more complete picture to understand Karen refugee students and the complex barriers they face.

Though the numbers of Karen refugees in the Lower Mainland are not large, a close examination of the statistics can offer a glimpse of what is happening among refugee populations in general. Community service workers report that approximately 350 Karen people live in Langley and 350 in Surrey, which is corroborated by a 2010 report by the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS of BC, 2010; Karen Community Society of BC, 2013; Karen Initiative, 2013). In each community there are close to 60 Karen students attending local high schools (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2012). With this in mind, service providers attending steering committee meetings noted that many have dropped out of school or have left school because of their age without graduating. Steering committee members also expressed concern for a large percentage of Karen students currently enrolled in high school that are at risk of dropping out or not graduating with sufficient requirements.

This project's purpose is to explore the barriers faced by Karen refugee youth in Langley and Surrey as they access post-secondary education at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. More specifically, the client organization, Kwantlen Polytechnic University's (KPU) Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement (CIR:CLE) is a research institute specializing in community development and community based research as a partnership between KPU faculty, students, and community organizations (CIR:CLE, n.d.). As such, CIR:CLE's needs assessment of the Karen community required a literature review to inform its own primary research study on the same problem. With this in mind, this paper outlines several key areas of research related to the barriers refugee students face in accessing post-secondary education and possible strategies that could be implemented to reduce these barriers. First, an overview of Karen history and relevant cultural information is provided to give an understanding of some of the more specific challenges that Karen refugees face related to post-secondary education in Canada. Furthermore, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of

existing research related to refugee youth and post-secondary education and their unique needs and challenges. Because research on refugees and education is limited, and research on Karen refugees is particularly scarce, the scope of the research has been broadened to include refugee students in general, and where applicable, immigrant students. Subsequently, this document includes a literature review on overcoming barriers to post-secondary education; again, because the literature is scarce, this section also examines strategies to overcome barriers to education for other vulnerable populations like aboriginal students who face some of the same barriers as refugees. An additional purpose of this study is to provide an overview of programs and services in other geographical communities that are designed to help refugee students access post-secondary programs. To meet these objectives, a research review of these programs is provided, in addition to a literature review of strategies used by other North American communities and universities to increase access to programs for multi-barriered<sup>2</sup> students. Likewise, these programs and strategies are discussed to assess their efficacy in the Langley and Surrey context, and to align the results of this literature and program review to CIR:CLE's larger needs assessment of the Karen refugee community in the Lower Mainland. Furthermore, a jurisdictional scan offers insight into refugee resettlement programs and research on refugee access to post-secondary education in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The findings from this scan are applied to the Canadian context, and in particular the context of Karen refugees in Langley and Surrey. These various sections lead to final recommendations for programs and strategies to be considered by CIR:CLE, its steering committee, and community partners to increase access to and participation in KPU's post-secondary programs for Karen refugee youth in Langley and Surrey.

### 1.3 Context

The ability to access post-secondary education is critical to the long-term success of Karen students. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's indicators of well-being suggest that dropping out of high school is a life event that can hinder well-being, and that those that drop out of high school generally reduce their opportunities for employment and earnings (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRSDC], 2013). Furthermore, HRSDC suggests that "post-secondary education, life-long learning, and opportunities such as job-related training enable Canadians to acquire knowledge and skills that ultimately contribute to a high quality of life in Canada" (HRSDC, 2013, para. 2). Presently, the majority of Karen people do not have the language or educational qualifications necessary to access meaningful employment that leads to a higher quality of life.

Refugees are a vulnerable group and refugee youth, in particular, face complex challenges to successful integration in Canada. The resettlement experience and opportunities for building capacity through education are critical if individuals are to become healthy, contributing members to Canadian society. There is some interesting literature that draws a connection between uneducated youth and delinquent

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of this paper, the term multi-barriered is used to describe individuals that face significant, or multiple barriers to employment, education or overall settlement and integration. The term is not specific to refugees and could be applied to other vulnerable populations, however it is commonly used to describe refugees that in Canada with complex challenges and barriers. These barriers are described in more detail throughout this document, but may include language challenges, socioeconomic issues, compromised mental health, or other factors that may prevent refugees from successful settlement or educational outcomes.

behavior; in the international context, these youth tend to be idle and unproductive, and easily recruited into gangs or rebel movements in the refugee camps (Anselme & Hands, 2010). Likewise, in Canadian society these youth are targeted by local gangs, and more likely to become involved in criminal activity (Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010). Uneducated refugee youth appear to be at critical risk in this regard. This should be a priority for multiple sectors in the community, including law enforcement, schools, city council, businesses and others. Anselme and Hands (2010) suggest that “youth cohorts who are not given the opportunity to integrate into community and social structures are less able to acquire the skills they need for peaceful and constructive adult lives” (p. 90).

While many countries boast humanitarian resettlement programs, recent news articles and studies have shown a darker side to resettlement as refugees become targets for gang recruitment and criminal activity (Macdonald, 2007; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010; Chuang, 2009). Chuang (2009) posits that immigrant and refugee youth are more susceptible to delinquency and gang-related activities because they are hindered by both language and finances. She explains that as immigrant and refugee youth “struggle to learn a new language and may not fare well academically, their disgruntled attitudes towards school become a ‘hunting ground’ for gangs” (p. 12). Meanwhile, Chuang’s research suggests that gangs target vulnerable immigrant and refugee youth:

Preying on vulnerable [immigrant and refugee youth], gangs entice [them] by providing a “sense of belongingness” within their gang membership, and with luxuries of cell phones, other “important” materials, and money in exchange for [youth] to engage in illegal behaviours such as being a “drug runner.” Moreover, many [immigrant and refugee] families are living in poverty and youth then take on some of the financial responsibilities of the family household. With limited English and work skills, money from gangs become increasingly enticing. (Chuang, 2009, p. 12)

This reality has been observed in the Lower Mainland, and a 2010 study by the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS of BC) identifies many barriers to acculturation and integration that makes refugee youth susceptible to gang activity. Interestingly, many of these barriers are identical to those outlined in this paper as barriers to post-secondary education: limited language ability, low socioeconomic status, culture shock, and systemic institutional practices that limit youth opportunities to integrate and flourish (Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010). This direct link is further unpacked by Sersli, Salazar and Lozano (2010) who state: “Prolonged marginalization can affect young peoples’ sense of self and sense of purpose in their lives, leading to risk factors such as perceiving limited opportunities for empowerment or lack of opportunity for advancement or access to post-secondary education later in life, and becoming pessimistic about their futures” (p. 7).

The United States and Australia, two countries that along with Canada boast substantial refugee resettlement programs, have grappled with this dark side of resettlement in recent years (Macdonald, 2007; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Rogers, 2009; Kerbaj, 2006). One local newspaper in Utah observes that refugees seem to be “latching onto American gang culture. From listening to hip hop to mimicking gang dress... most seek the same things that attract members from other ethnic groups and races: a sense of acceptance from a gang “family” and the chance to make money through crime, from selling drugs to robberies or car thefts...” (Rogers, 2009, para. 7-8). A similar problem is observed in Australia, where “a

growing gangster mentality among young African men is worrying community leaders, who blame boredom, unemployment and drugs for turning young immigrants living in Melbourne's inner north towards violence and crime... Somali, Sudanese and Eritrean men, predominantly aged between 16 and 25, felt disconnected from mainstream society and were either forming or joining ethnic groups for protection and also for a sense of belonging" (Kerbaj, 2006, para. 3). While young men may be more susceptible to gang activity, the themes that stand out here are that both male and female refugee youth feel marginalized and isolated from mainstream society because of their lack of experience and language ability, and are looking for a sense of belonging (Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010).

With this in mind, a sense of accomplishment is cited as one factor in keeping youth engaged in school, something that is difficult for students that constantly feel a sense of failure because their lack of English and previous education do not contribute to success in secondary school classes (Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010; Representative for Children and Youth, 2011). Thus, a conclusion that might be immediately drawn is that refugee students must be set up for success. Langley service providers report that involvement in sports like hockey and soccer have been strong protective factors for many refugee students; while it has given the students a sense of confidence and belonging, it has nevertheless not contributed to the academic success that will open doors for employment in the long-term (Sadler & Clark, unpublished). It is therefore important to integrate refugee youth into education systems as smoothly as possible, to provide opportunities for engagement and socialization in Canadian society. In a humanitarian context, Canada is failing both the refugees and our Canadian communities by failing to provide them adequate support and opportunity to succeed in secondary and post-secondary school programs (Anselme & Hands, 2010).

Keeping in mind that education is an indicator of well-being and economic success and opportunity in Canada, there is a need to understand the barriers that refugee students face so that school districts, post-secondary institutions and communities can address challenges and improve access to education. Furthermore, the broader rationale is to ultimately equip Karen refugees to affect change in their homeland, Burma (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2011). This has led KPU's CIR:CLE institute to their research study to begin to address some of the systemic barriers facing Karen youth, to ultimately improve their access to KPU programs. Thus, this literature review will complement CIR:CLE's needs assessment which will ask "What barriers do Karen refugee students in Langley and Surrey face in accessing KPU programs?" More specifically, this literature review will answer the wider research question, "What barriers do refugee students face in accessing post-secondary education, and what can KPU and its community partners do to reduce these barriers in the Canadian context?"

## **1.4 Client Organization: Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement**

Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) serves students in the Metro Vancouver area with four campuses offering a range of programs in Surrey, Richmond, Langley and Cloverdale. These programs include traditional bachelor degrees in addition to professional certification, technical and trades programs (KPU, 2012). As a local, multidisciplinary school, KPU is a natural choice for many Langley and Surrey

students to pursue post-secondary education and an important part of preparing these youth for the workforce.

The Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement (CIR:CLE) is a KPU initiative to engage the community through dialogue, research and learning. As explained on their website: “By working within and across disciplines, CIR:CLE encourages innovation and collaboration among faculty, creates opportunities for scholarship and teaching, and prepares learners to be competitive in a rapidly changing world. Faculty working within CIR:CLE provide learning experiences that facilitate creativity, critical awareness, cultural sensitivity, social responsibility, civic engagement, and global citizenship” (CIR:CLE, n.d.).

With this in mind, KPU’s CIR:CLE institute has established a steering committee, “Zipporah’s Dream Committee,” to address concerns related to refugee resettlement. The steering committee’s name comes from a committee member, Zipporah Devadas, who is Karen and came to Canada in 2006 as a Government Assisted Refugee. Upon arrival, Zipporah had high aspirations to continue her education in Canada. However, her experience is perhaps reflective of what other refugees experience; faced with the need to earn income, her aspirations for higher education soon took a backseat to immediate survival needs (Shakya, et al., 2010). Likewise, without guidance or knowledge of post-secondary systems or programs, Zipporah did not know where to begin her education. The steering committee determined that Zipporah’s experience could be reflective of the larger Karen community, and aptly named the committee in her honour.

In addition to Zipporah, who is a Multicultural Worker at the Langley School District, the steering committee is made up of members of the Karen community, including several Karen youth that are KPU students or were trying to access KPU programs at the time of the study. Other members of the steering committee include KPU faculty and administrators, a representative from the Langley Literacy Committee, as well as service providers assisting the Karen population in Langley. These community workers include staff from the Langley School District, representatives from the PuCKS Program (Promoting Community through Kids in Sport), and others who occasionally participated in meetings.

Using an Active Community Engagement Model, CIR:CLE’s steering committee worked side by side with the Karen community to better understand the barriers to education (Dooley, Gagnon, Bhatt, & Tweed, 2012). Furthermore, this literature review was presented to the client’s steering committee for assessment and feedback in the early stages of the project. Using the results from this literature review, the steering committee created its own research questions to guide their data collection process. Later stages of the project will use this literature review, in addition to CIR:CLE’s research results to inform conclusions and determine the next steps of the project. This collaborative process has allowed the steering committee to develop a comprehensive list of practical recommendations that will support the successful transition of Karen youth from secondary to post-secondary education in the context of the Lower Mainland of BC.

CIR:CLE is an ideal partner because it supports and facilitates collaboration in the community to increase capacity and promote community development. Likewise, as a research institute within Kwantlen

Polytechnic University the organization is well-situated to advocate for the needs of refugee students within the institution and build connections that can support the recruitment, retention and success of refugee students within the university. This project will provide CIR:CLE and its community partners with a conceptual map that outlines the barriers faced by refugee students, in addition to possible supports or interventions that may improve their chances for success. Furthermore, research literature on refugees and post-secondary education is rather scarce, and CIR:CLE's community based research study will contribute to this important body of research.

## 1.5 Research Methods

Information was gathered for this literature review through several methods, including searches of online databases, searching known journals on refugee issues, and through reading and identifying bibliographical information from published studies. Databases searched included Google Scholar, J-Stor, Sage, Taylor and Francis Online, and a research database maintained by the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Services Agencies of BC (AMSSA). Refugee-related journals included *Refuge*, published by the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University, and Oxford University's *Journal for Refugee Studies*. With this in mind, the research was reviewed with the intention to answer the following research questions:

- What are the key factors that prevent refugee students from accessing post-secondary education?
- How does both the pre- and post-migration experience influence the success of refugee students in the post-secondary system in Canada?
- What barriers do Karen refugees in particular face in accessing post-secondary education in Canada?
- What strategies and initiatives are identified in research literature to help vulnerable students overcome these barriers?

Using these questions as a guide, the literature was read, evaluated for relevance and categorized based on the themes of this document. Because the literature on refugees and post-secondary education was limited, research on other groups with similar experiences was evaluated for inclusion in this review, including immigrants, aboriginal students, and other vulnerable groups that experience barriers to post-secondary education. Likewise, the literature included in this review does not exclusively address the Canadian context; valuable research has been done in other refugee-receiving countries such as Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom which is discussed in the jurisdictional scan in section 4.5. In particular, the refugee resettlement experience seems to be similar in these countries, making this research useful and relevant to this literature review. Thus, a wide variety of research sources have been consulted to answer the above research questions to give a fuller picture of refugee resettlement, integration, and education experiences and barriers in both the Canadian and global contexts.

## 1.6 Summary

This paper has been organized strategically to give the reader a broad understanding of the challenges confronting refugees with respect to acquiring education in a new country, in addition to programs and initiatives used in other geographical communities to improve access to post-secondary education. Section Two provides background information on refugees in general, as well as the unique history and context of Karen refugees in particular. This context gives the reader an understanding of the complex pre-migration experiences of refugees and the significant impact on settlement and integration success in the post-migration context.

Meanwhile, Section Three discusses research and literature addressing specific issues and themes that act as barriers to education for immigrant and refugee students. These barriers tend to be interrelated, and are divided into categories of pre-migration and post-migration. Moreover, refugee students tend to face most or all of these barriers simultaneously, including arrival in Canada as older students, lack of language ability and previous education experience, socioeconomic factors, the school environment, stigma or discrimination associated to being an English Language Learner (ELL)<sup>3</sup>, culture shock and identity issues, and lack of guidance.

While these barriers are significant, it is equally important to understand what research and literature has to say about overcoming these barriers to education. Thus, Section Four looks at literature on overcoming barriers to education, in addition to a scan of existing programs that aim to increase educational success and access to post-secondary programs. Because the literature on refugees and education is thin, this section also looks at strategies used for other vulnerable groups, including immigrant and aboriginal populations to improve access to and participation in post-secondary institutions. Next, to answer the research question, “What can KPU and its community partners do to improve access to post-secondary education for refugee students,” Section Four will also look at programs and resources in Langley and Surrey. This will allow CIR:CLE and its community partners to understand and assess any gaps in services, and also provide a foundation to plan any interventions. Moreover, this section provides a jurisdictional scan of research about refugees and post-secondary education from other countries with substantial refugee resettlement programs, which can provide insight about Canada’s own programs and education systems.

Section Five provides discussion of the literature review and program scan, bringing together the research on barriers as well as potential solutions. Furthermore, this section presents a conceptual framework to understand these areas and to provide a foundation to understand how to move forward with potential strategies to increase access to education. Finally, an important part of this document is the recommendations discussed in Section Six, and their relation to the literature and program review discussed in preceding sections. These recommendations arise from persistent themes in the literature related to the pre- and post-migration factors that refugee youth experience during their resettlement,

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<sup>3</sup> The terminology ELL (English Language Learner) and ESL (English as a Second Language) is used interchangeably in this document. Both terms refer to students learning English. In 2011 the BC Ministry of Education officially changed the terminology from ESL to ELL, however much of the literature predates this change and therefore uses older terminology.

and the impact they have on educational experiences and accessing post-secondary programs. These recommendations are categorized so that CIR:CLE can accomplish its goals through both advocacy efforts in addition to community partnerships. Likewise, the conceptual framework outlined in Section Five, in addition to Table 8, provide a foundation for these recommendations which will be presented to CIR:CLE's steering committee for evaluation and possible intervention within the Langley and Surrey context to improve access to KPU programs for Karen refugee students.

# SECTION TWO: Background of Resettled Karen Refugees

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While the background of Karen refugees is not an insurmountable barrier for students trying to access post-secondary education, it does help to understand why resettled Karen youth may struggle. The pre-migration experiences of refugees have an important impact on mental health, culture, family structures and other protective factors that can help refugee youth succeed in Canada. This section looks at these experiences and factors, including an overview of Karen history, the education experience of Karen refugees in Thailand refugee camps, as well as the impact of protracted refugee camp experiences on resettled refugees. With this in mind, an understanding of this background experience can help the community to identify leverage points to foster resilience and success as refugee youth move through the education system, from elementary to post-secondary.

## 2.1 Karen History

Recent events and an increasingly international spotlight have brought renewed attention to the situation in Burma (Myanmar).<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton first visited Burma in December 2011, and again in December 2012 with President Barack Obama (Myers, 2011; Baker, 2012). In addition to this, a number of high profile politicians have visited the country including Canada's Minister of Foreign affairs John Baird in March 2012 (National Post, 2012). These visits have brought attention to the isolated country as it takes preliminary steps towards democratic reform. Nevertheless, the country remains mired in poverty, human rights abuse, and persecution of ethnic minorities. This ongoing humanitarian crisis in Burma underlines the need for an understanding of the country's historical and present challenges. Very little is discussed in the international press about the situation of ethnic minorities living within the country as internally displaced peoples (IDPs), or to the refugees that have fled into bordering countries like Thailand, China or Bangladesh. Figure 1 shows Burma and its bordering countries in Southeast Asia, while Figure 2 shows Karen State on the country's eastern border and the predominantly Karen refugee camps in Thailand. In particular, over 150,000 Karen refugees are "warehoused" in camps on the Thai side of the border where they have lived and have been treated as "non-persons" by Thai authorities for ten to twenty years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006, para. 1). This is an existence that is both hopeless and dire, "and where restricted mobility, enforced idleness and dependency on humanitarian assistance force refugees to place their lives on indefinite hold" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006, para. 9). If caught outside of the camp, Karen refugees are subject to imprisonment or deportation into the custody of the Burmese Army. Human Rights activist and Karen national Zoya Phan recalls this experience, writing that "we would be handed back to

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<sup>4</sup> Though the country's name was changed officially in 1989 to Myanmar by the ruling junta, this name, along with the country's military dictatorship, is generally not recognized by the country's ethnic minorities nor several countries, including Canada. For this reason, I will continue to refer to the country as Burma throughout this paper.

those who had spent decades trying to wipe us off the face of the earth. And that would be a death sentence” (Phan, 2009, p. 153).

Figure 1- Map of Burma (Myanmar)



(Free Burma Rangers, n.d.)

Figure 2 - Map of Karen State, Burma and refugee camps located on Thai-Burma border



(The Border Consortium, n.d.)

In 2006 the Canadian Government took notice of this situation in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and began the process of third country resettlement,<sup>5</sup> accepting approximately 3,900 Karen refugees for resettlement across Canada between 2006 and 2009 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008). During this time, close to 800 Karen people were resettled in Langley and Surrey as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). Upon arrival in Canada, the refugees

<sup>5</sup> Third country resettlement is the term used for refugees who have fled their home country but are not able to settle in the country where they have sought protection. In these cases, third country resettlement is the only safe, viable and durable solution. Persecuted Karen refugees have sought protection in Thailand, but are not allowed to integrate into that country. Thus, the UNHCR facilitated the process of resettlement in “third countries” including Canada, the United States and Australia (UNHCR, n.d.).

were provided basic household goods and assistance with securing housing. Under Canada's Resettlement Assistance Program, GARs also receive income support for one year (equivalent to BC social assistance rates), or until they are self-sufficient, whichever comes first (ISS of BC, 2010).

These Karen refugees arrived with limited life skills and have faced many challenges integrating into the community as a result of their extended time residing in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. Furthermore, the refugees chosen for resettlement were selected based on humanitarian criteria: single mothers, victims of sexual or gender-based violence, individuals or families with serious medical or psychological conditions that could not be treated in the camp and others deemed to be particularly vulnerable (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Karen in Langley and Surrey have struggled to adapt to life in this new society.

Members of the community suggest that Karen refugees in Langley and Surrey have faced many challenges in their resettlement experience. Initially, the Karen newcomers struggled with life skills, language acquisition, and basic "survival" challenges related to health care and daily living. For example, learning to navigate health care, school, transportation, banking systems has been a steep learning curve. Even more than typical immigrants, refugees face obstacles to settlement including poor mental health, malnutrition, trauma, lack of formal education, culture shock and poverty (Ministry of Education, 2009). All of these factors are present in the Karen refugee population in Langley and Surrey, hindering their settlement and integration (Zlpporah's Dream Committee, 2011).

## **2.2 Education for Refugees in Thailand**

Equally troubling is the lack of opportunity for refugees in Thailand to improve their situation. The education system within the Karen refugee camps is organized, staffed and managed by Karen refugees also living within the camps with the help of international organizations. Education within the camps is sanctioned by Thai authorities, and as such is subject to broad and specific restrictions imposed by the Thai government, including restrictions on foreigners living within the camps. Meanwhile, Karen refugees are not permitted to access Thai public schools, and their educational opportunities are confined to those offered within the camps. Moreover, Karen refugees have no legal status outside of the camps, and are considered "illegal migrants" upon leaving (Oh, 2010).

In the refugee camps, primary and secondary education is supported by the UNCHR and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While an improvement over their native Burma, the quality of education provided in the camps is by no means satisfactory. Nevertheless, the Karen people believe in the importance of education. This value, in addition to Thai restrictions on allowing foreigners in the camps, has led to a high degree of involvement and ownership in the camp education systems (Oh, 2010, p. 5). However, many teachers have limited education, and third-country resettlement opportunities in recent years have caused somewhat of a "brain-drain" within the camps, where the youngest, brightest and most talented refugees are choosing resettlement in countries like Canada, Australia or the United States (Peterson, 2010, p. 116). As a result, there has been a high turnover of teachers, and incoming teachers have little training, experience or remuneration for providing education

(Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Oh, 2010). This has proven to be a chronic deficiency in the refugee camp education system, leading over time to a degradation of educational quality.

Another challenge is that Thai authorities do not permit the construction of permanent school buildings, nor is it permissible to expand designated areas for school buildings (Oh, 2010). School buildings are constructed from bamboo, which does not provide sufficient sound barriers between classrooms (Phan, 2009). Likewise, educational resources like science laboratories and common school furniture like tables and chairs are in short supply. Students do not have their own textbooks and have to copy what they have to learn from the blackboard. The lessons often consist of little more than this, with no explanation or discussion (Oh, 2010, p. 7). These factors directly affect the quality of education in the camps, and lead to conditions that are under-resourced and overcrowded. Zoya Phan (2009) explains her experience in the refugee camp school system in her book, *Little Daughter*:

I often had little real understanding of what I was 'learning'. We had a young Karen man teaching us English; another teaching us Burmese and Karen language; a maths teacher; a geography and science teacher, and another for history. But many were not trained teachers at all. Before fleeing to the refugee camp they had been office workers or housewives. They had volunteered to help and were trying their best. In the refugee camp it was all about making do. (p. 165)

Not surprisingly, the dropout rates from camp schools are quite high. One study suggests that close to 30% of students leave school early, most commonly because of early marriage or lack of family finances to support education. Furthermore, many refugees find schooling irrelevant due to the limited opportunities for employment or further education upon completion (Oh, 2010, p. 12). These reasons draw interesting parallels to the experience of the Karen in the Lower Mainland, where the reasons for leaving school are much the same.

The conclusion drawn from these circumstances is that Karen refugees chosen for resettlement arrive in Canada without adequate education to succeed in the Canadian educational system. While it is beyond the scope of this study to offer suggestions or recommendations to address the education system in the camps, it is nevertheless important to have an understanding of where the Karen youth are coming from, and the gaps that exist in their education upon arrival in Canada.

### **2.3 Protracted refugee camp situations: Barriers for Karen refugees**

The impact of prolonged periods of time spent in a refugee camp appears to be a subject of increasing interest to academics and nongovernmental organizations alike (USCRI, 2009; Smith, 2004; Purkey, 2010; Zeus, 2010; Presse & Thomson, 2008; Loescher & Milner, 2005). While the backgrounds of many refugees include violence, trauma or poverty, the refugee camp experience must also be considered to fully understand the barriers that refugee youth face as they access education and integrate into Canadian society. History is proving that refugee camps are not the temporary phenomena that drafters of the 1951 Refugee Convention had envisioned. Specifically, two-thirds of refugees live today in protracted refugee situations that "involve large refugee populations that are long-standing, chronic or recurring, and for which there are no immediate prospects for a solution" (Loescher & Milner, 2005, p. 23). Refugee camps are dire, hopeless places. It is not uncommon for individuals to feel a lack of

personal agency, or control over their own life or destiny. Dependency is the norm, and individuals must rely on NGOs for sustenance and safety. Thus, children and youth from protracted refugee situations face serious psychosocial and physical health issues when they come to Canada, generally arriving without labour market skills or formal education, and often significant development challenges (Presse & Thomson, 2008). Most of the Karen youth in Langley were born in the refugee camps, and have never before experienced what it means to have personal control or destiny over their future or decisions (IOM, 2006).

In her memoir, Zoya Phan, a Karen refugee, writes that “the biggest drawback of the camp was that we were trapped. As non-official refugees we were told that we had no status in Thailand. Whilst the Thais would tolerate our presence *inside* the camp, there was to be no leaving it. This sense of being imprisoned just added to the feeling that here we had no future, and that our lives had come to a dead end” (Phan, 2009, p. 152). The IOM confirms these feelings of hopelessness in their *Karen Cultural Profile* prepared for the Canadian government; life in the camps for refugees resettled in Canada was basic and tedious, and “suicide, brought on by years of forced confinement and no prospects for a better future, is not uncommon” (IOM, 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, though a few adults work in the camp’s schools and medical clinics, their opportunities and life experiences are very limited (IOM, 2006). While no previous research has been published connecting this pre-migration experience to successful integration or educational success of Karen refugees in Langley and Surrey, the UNHCR describes the impact of refugee experiences during the resettlement process, resulting in “depression, apathy, delinquent behavior or aggressive acts to situational mental disturbances, drug abuse and suicide, which in many cases, may also be a reflection of the high level of anxiety and despair with the refugee community as a whole” (UNHCR, 1994).

Furthermore, prolonged poverty, which generally continues to a lesser degree upon arrival in Canada, results in poor nutrition and health and can impact education and learning. In the refugee population, the effects of poor nutrition at early stages of development are irreversible and can impact a child throughout their education (Crowe, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2009). Specifically, malnutrition can lead to poor cognitive function and low IQ, impacting both memory and attention and lead to behavioural problems and school achievement (Lui, Raine, Venables, & Mednick, 2004). The UNHCR explains the challenge of malnutrition in refugee camp populations:

Malnutrition is a consequence of having either not enough food or the right type of food, or can be brought on by water-related and communicable diseases. While it is obvious that everybody needs a balanced diet to be healthy, refugees and displaced people are particularly prone to malnutrition. Anaemia is a serious risk to mothers during childbirth and impairs the health and labour productivity of working adults, as well as children's performance in school. (UNHCR, 2005)

In addition to this, students may have health issues that have gone untreated in the refugee camp or country of origin due to lack of medical care. These issues are relatively unexplored in the literature on refugee resettlement and education, but are nevertheless relevant in considering the complex and ongoing barriers faced by refugees in their post-migration context.

## 2.4 The Role of Karen Culture

An understanding of Karen culture is an important piece of the puzzle in understanding some of the more complex barriers that may impede their educational success. While literature shows that different immigrant and refugee groups may experience barriers to post-secondary education in various ways, there are cultural traits that are unique to Karen people that may impede or enhance their educational success in different ways. This information is important to the research question, since it may provide insight into the specific barriers that Karen students face in accessing Kwantlen Polytechnic University programs.

While many authors have commented on the strong value for education within Karen culture (Oh, 2010, Phan, 2009), there is an equally strong cultural piece that may inhibit educational success. A long history of oppression and lack of opportunity may discourage Karen youth from setting goals and pursuing their dreams. An old Karen proverb gives insight into these low educational expectations, and reinforces that “literate eat rice, illiterate eat rice” (Shakya, et al., 2010, p. 69). The meaning of this proverb shows that contrary to the deeply rooted belief among North Americans that if you work hard you will achieve success, the Karen people perceive that regardless of how hard you work, your circumstances in life will not change. Unfortunately, the situation in Canada is much different, where it is very difficult to get a good job and achieve success without education.

Equally important to consider is the psychological impact of their protracted experience in the camps and in Burma. Zoya Phan writes that many Karen children in Burma:

...shared this dream of education and a bright future. But the gulf between our situation and where we hoped to end up was so enormous. We had practically nothing in our village: no way to earn an income, a very basic education system, and all but non-existent healthcare. We had little or no appreciation of the obstacles – financial, educational, geographical and political – that lay in the way of our dreams. (Phan, 2009, p. 110)

While the Karen people have a high esteem towards education, they have nevertheless experienced barriers in Canada that have mitigated this cultural value, arriving in Canada with little capacity and few resources, and no understanding of the barriers that lie in the way of further education. As a result, culture and lived experience act against each other in this context. In the same way, given their experience and living for many years without the hope or opportunity of further education or career goals, the Karen youth do not have an appreciation of the possibilities available to them in Canada, or the opportunities that may be afforded by education in Canada.

Furthermore, there seems to be evidence that Karen people do not recognize their own talents or abilities as those with a North American worldview might. While it is common and acceptable in North America to take pride in one’s accomplishments and abilities, a Karen person may find this embarrassing or arrogant. For example, researchers found striking differences in the responses of Government Assisted Refugees in a self-assessment of their English language abilities. While close to half of the refugee youth reported that they understood English “very well,” none of the Karen refugee youth reported a similar understanding of English, despite being in Canada for similar amounts of time (Shakya, et al., 2010, p. 68). While this may reflect the cultural value of humility and not showing off, it

leaves the question of whether Karen youth actually believe their abilities are subpar and inherently lack confidence to achieve success. This cultural value could impose a barrier for many to accessing post-secondary education.

A report from the International Organization for Immigration (IOM) commissioned by the Canadian government suggests that Karen people struggle to learn language, particularly because “they were shy to use the language learned in real life situations” where it can be practiced (IOM, 2006, p. 13). This finding reflects and illustrates a unique cultural trait that makes Karen people uncomfortable about showing off, and hiding what they know (Din, 1947). Another report suggests that pro-actively taking charge of a situation is not reflective of Karen culture, and it is common for Karen refugees to be highly dependent on resettlement agencies or other supports well after their arrival in the country of resettlement (IOM, 2006, p. 14). Likewise, this value has implications for applications for university scholarships or even finding employment, since these practices are centered around sharing one’s skills, abilities and talents which is inherently uncomfortable for Karen youth. Furthermore, Karen people hold a cultural value of being quiet, unimposing and not talkative. This may include not questioning authority, voicing dissatisfaction, or even asking for help in school (Neiman, Soh, & Sutan, 2008).

The IOM provides a thorough explanation of the impact of Karen culture on their resettlement prospects, including education. While Karen people value honesty, patience, humility, obedience, helping each other, these values may not be advantageous for success in education and employment. The report explains:

The picture drawn is of passive, though obedient workers who are willing to suffer. The terms “pro-active, problem-solver, forward thinker, ambitious, leader,” and so forth, were not words they used to describe themselves. In mock job interviews, almost all participants performed very poorly; their body language displayed passivity and the ‘humble spirit’ and their answers to all questions reflected people who were helpless and in need, rather than confident and able to get the job done. (IOM, 2006, p. 15)

Likewise, this may transfer to difficulty in advocating for oneself, or challenging school authorities to get into desired courses or pursue opportunities in post-secondary education. This cultural value may impede success in the Canadian education system and impact possible employment opportunities. While it is difficult to change deeply rooted cultural practices and worldviews, being aware of the differences can help students, teachers, counselors and administrators reconcile the discrepancy between Karen and Canadian culture.

With this in mind, the pre-migration experiences and background of Karen refugees are critical to develop an understanding of the barriers they face in integration and ultimately accessing post-secondary education. This history and experience separates the Karen refugee youth from other immigrant students, and is important to consider as recommendations for programs and interventions are developed and evaluated. The following section provides an overview of literature related to refugee and immigrant students, and the impact of a number of factors on accessing post-secondary education. Many of these factors are compounded by the historical, cultural and pre-migration experiences of Karen refugees. On the other hand, some of these historical and cultural factors, such as the high value many Karen people place on education, may act as factors that provide strength or

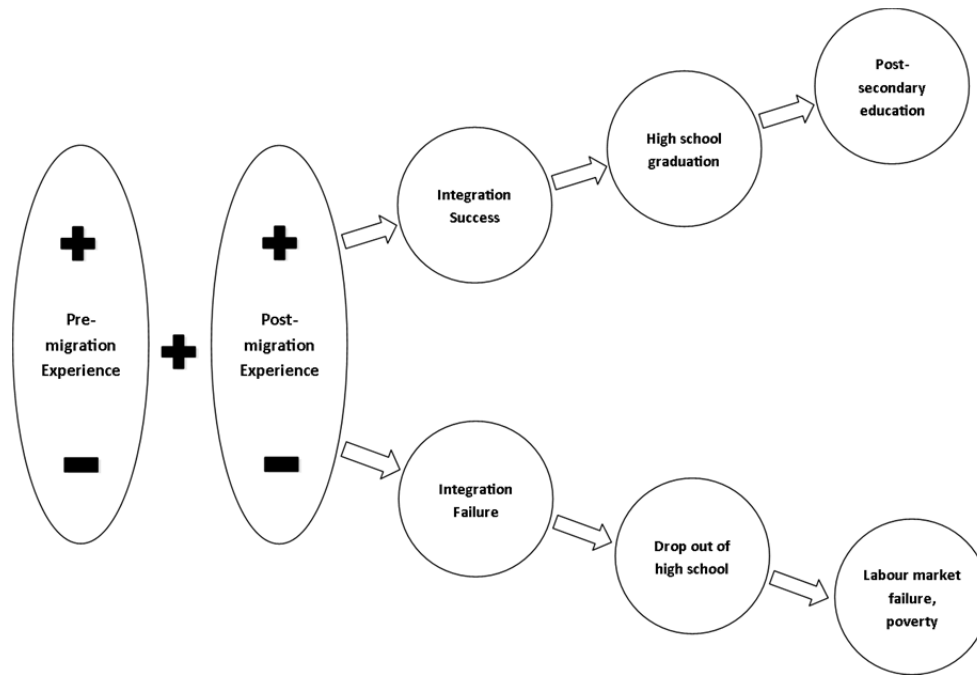
resiliency, and could act as a platform or lever for positive intervention. Meanwhile, this literature review underlines both systemic and individual barriers in the secondary and post-secondary school system that affect not only refugee youth, but the immigrant population in general. Likewise, it is important to note that these barriers can be both complex and interrelated. Thus, the proposed solutions must be equally multifaceted and holistic, addressing a variety of psychological, social, physical or financial barriers.

# SECTION THREE: Literature Review of Barriers to Education for Refugee Students

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This section of the report considers some of the barriers identified in published research relating to accessing post-secondary education for immigrant and refugee students. Some of the key themes identified include pre-migration factors such as lack of previous education, cultural factors, and language ability. Furthermore, post-migration factors have an equally significant impact on a refugee student's ability to adjust and integrate into mainstream society and be successful in post-secondary education. These factors include socioeconomic status, the school environment, stigma attached to being an ELL student, culture shock, identity loss, and lack of guidance. At the same time, many of these factors are interrelated and linked to the resettlement and integration experience in general, making possible solutions difficult and complex. This research also shows that while the pre-migration experience acts as a significant barrier, the post-migration experience is equally significant, and thus the host society plays an important role in the successful integration and resettlement of refugee youth. Moreover, Figure 3 illustrates how the current literature explains the resettlement process for refugee youth, with both pre- and post-migration experiences either negatively or positively impacting the resettlement and integration process and thereby preventing or influencing refugee youth from accessing post-secondary education. For example, language ability, previous education and other pre-migration factors can significantly impact the socioeconomic status of refugees, making it difficult to find adequate employment impacting other resettlement issues. Likewise, socioeconomic status can have broad implications, including determining the neighbourhood of resettlement, housing conditions and the school environment, all barriers to education that will be explored further in this section. On the other hand, the literature shows the importance of the post-migration experience; many immigrants arrive without negative pre-migration experiences, and yet because of systemic barriers or discrimination in the community or school environment may fail to integrate successfully.

Figure 3 - The impact of pre- and post-migration experiences on refugee resettlement



All of these factors can be compounded by the student’s age upon arrival in Canada. Studies show that the age at time of immigration has a large impact on the educational outcomes of children (Anisef P. , Brown, Phythian, Sweet, & Walters, 2008; Corak, 2011; Wilkinson, 2002). More specifically, research has shown a distinct pattern in high school dropout rates for youth who immigrated to Canada after the age of 9, with the likelihood of dropping out increasing as the age at immigration increases. This study suggests that 15% of boys and 11% of girls who immigrated before the age of 9 are likely to drop out, numbers that increase by 1% for every year past this age. The dropout rates for children who arrive in Canada at the age of 13 are 20% to 25%, which is substantial. Moreover, these statistics cover immigrants from diverse backgrounds and English language abilities; it is suggested that dropout rates for refugees are far more profound (Corak, 2011). Thus, it is clear that the resettlement process is critical for refugee youth who face many barriers simultaneously.

While much of the literature addresses the educational success of immigrants, it is important to recognize the difference between the experiences of immigrants and that of refugees. In particular, the resettlement process for refugees is significantly more challenging. Specifically, immigrants generally have time to prepare for the transition to the new country, often applying to immigrate years in advance, allowing them time to learn about the new country and culture. Likewise, immigrants make a conscious choice to leave their homeland, and can return by their own will while refugees may be forced to flee their home country suddenly, and the transition to Canada can be marked with difficulty, confusion and uncertainty. Meanwhile, refugees often have unfinished business in their home country, loved ones in danger, and are not permitted to return once granted refugee status in Canada (Ministry of Education, 2009). Further differences include education background and experience, socioeconomic status, previous trauma, or health issues attributed to prolonged time spent in a refugee camp (Staddon, 2009). As the literature on immigrants is considered, these factors must also be kept in mind since in

most cases a barrier to education faced by immigrant youth will be compounded for refugee youth who face a number of additional psychological, physical and socioeconomic challenges.

Furthermore, there are important individual considerations for refugee youth, including how long they've been in Canada and their own unique experiences. In particular, refugee youth who have been in Canada since childhood are more likely to have higher levels of education and less likely to suffer from pre-migration barriers. Nevertheless, other barriers like poverty or lack of parental guidance are equally relevant to all refugee cohorts regardless of their age of entry in Canada.

The following sections addresses both pre- and post-migration experiences and factors that act as barriers to refugee youth as they resettle in Canada and seek to access post-secondary education. Likewise, many of these experiences may lead youth to drop out of secondary school early, thereby limiting their employment prospects and socioeconomic status which can impact future generations and further prevent them from accessing post-secondary programs. Thus, an understanding of barriers to education will lead to possible interventions to increase educational success and access to post-secondary programs.

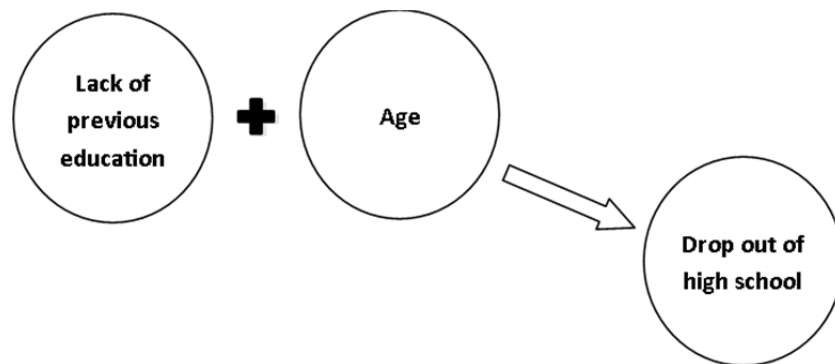
### **3.1 Pre-migration barriers to education**

Pre-migration barriers to education are complex and difficult to pinpoint, but nevertheless permeate the lives of refugee students and influence their resettlement process. These barriers may include trauma, in addition to the results of protracted refugee camp experiences like poor education or low language skills. Nevertheless, these pre-migration experiences are closely intertwined to education outcomes, and thus an understanding of these barriers provides a foundation to better understand the complex barriers faced by refugee students upon arrival in Canada.

#### *3.1.1 Lack of previous education and the age of arrival*

Refugee youth who arrive in Canada as older students do not have time to learn English and obtain the academic requirements to graduate with their peers. As previously cited, Corak's (2011) study clearly shows that immigrant and refugee youth who arrive in Canada after the age of nine are far more likely to drop out of school than their Canadian-born peers. Figure 4 shows how the age of arrival, when combined with other factors such as educational experience or language ability can negatively affect refugee students, causing them to leave school early. This is especially a challenge for refugee youth who may enter the Canadian schools system without not only the language ability to be successful, but without a framework for foundational concepts in literacy and numeracy that Canadian and other immigrant students have been taught early on in their schooling (Staddon, 2009). Woods (2009) further suggests that there are serious consequences for refugee youth attempting to learn English and finish high school in a short amount of time without foundations in either English or in their first-language; often, the focus in English language classes is language acquisition rather than literacy competence, which does not provide the basic foundation for success in other school subjects. This lack of basic literacy and numeracy in addition to unfamiliarity with the school system, generally, poses a large barrier to refugee students.

Figure 4 - Age and education barriers lead to early school leaving



### *Language ability*

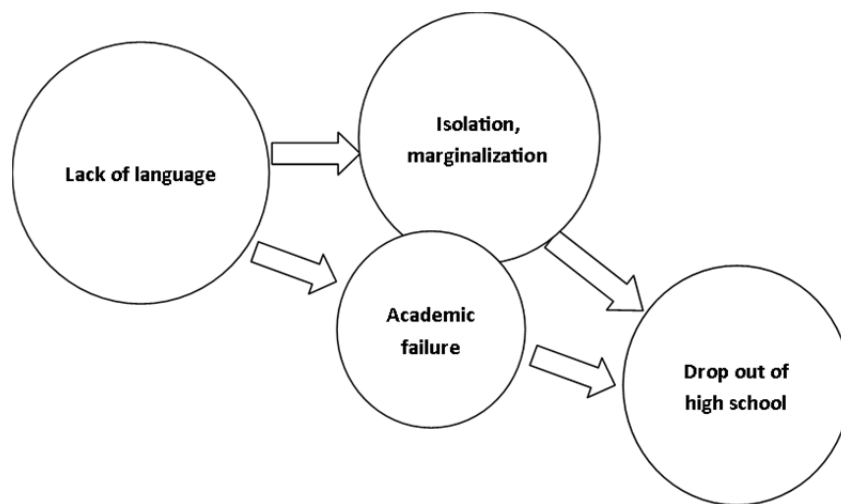
Language ability appears to play a big role in educational attainment, and can have devastating consequences for refugees who arrive in Canada without sufficient English. More specifically, Gunderson’s (2007) longitudinal study shows that 60% of immigrant students disappeared from academic classes between grade 8 and grade 12, including English, Science, Math and Social Studies. While Gunderson’s study groups refugee and immigrant students together, he further breaks down his results to show that immigrant sub-groups, such as refugees, drop out at much higher rates than other immigrant categories. Moreover, while the study did not measure the dropout rate, the disappearance of students from academic classes is significant because those classes are needed for entry into post-secondary school. Initially, a random sample of 5000 immigrant students was selected, however this number “decreased rapidly as they moved from one grade to the next” (Gunderson, 2007, p. 124). In other words, Gunderson’s study found that immigrant students increasingly dropped out of academic classes as they moved through the secondary school system, and that their achievement in those classes also progressively decreased, a correlation that Gunderson ties to decreasing ESL support as the student moves through the education system. These studies reveal that ESL immigrant students, and particularly refugees are at high risk for dropping out of school which can have serious implications for their ability to access post-secondary education and also for their successful integration into the labour market later in life.

Research conducted in Vancouver by Gunderson suggests that while most students can achieve basic communication skills after just 2-3 years of English instruction, non-English speaking students need at least 5 to 7 years of English-language learning to become academically proficient to understand the level of English used in most text books and lectures (Gunderson, 2000; 2007). More specifically, students can learn conversational English quite quickly, but it takes significantly longer to acquire the English skills needed to be successful academically and to adequately prepare for admission to university (Gunderson, 2007). As discussed in the previous section, this is even more problematic for refugee students who arrive without foundational literacy and numeracy in their own language. It will take far

longer for these students to not only acquire functional literacy, but also learn language and concepts to become academically functional. However, both immigrant and refugee students in British Columbia receive only five years of funded ELL support through the public education system, which is arguably not enough for many students (Ministry of Education, 2009; Gunderson, 2007). Gunderson’s research shows that the resettlement and integration process is much longer than many imagine and expect, imposing challenges to refugee students as they prepare for post-secondary education.

Immigrant youth have also reported that poor English language skills can lead to feelings of withdrawal, fear, confusion, guilt, depression, isolation and marginalization, which is illustrated in Figure 5 (Anisef P. , Brown, Phythian, Sweet, & Walters, 2008). Moreover, youth who cannot communicate in English cannot properly express their feelings, nor understand lessons being taught in school (Anisef, 2005). Likewise, their lack of language proficiency may lead them to feel uncomfortable asking their teacher for help or building friendships with fellow students. This problem is exacerbated in the more generalized process of culture shock, further underlining the complex connections between many of the barriers discussed in this literature review; lack of language ability causes feelings of isolation and marginalization, which is itself a significant barrier to education discussed in subsequent sections. Nonetheless, the barriers posed by lack of language ability are fundamental to the settlement and integration experience, and their implications are far reaching. Figure 5 shows how lack of language proficiency can lead to both academic failure and marginalization, two significant factors that may lead students to drop out of high school. Ultimately, lack of proficiency in the English language not only impacts educational opportunities and success, but also future employment prospects, socioeconomic status, and social integration.

Figure 5 – Lack of language skills leading to educational failure



As previously discussed, the Karen youth arrived in Canada with large gaps in their education, which is a wider problem seen in the general refugee population. Educators have recognized that prolonged time periods spent in refugee camps have resulted in innumeracy and illiteracy, often in multiple generations within a family structure (Woods, 2009; Staddon, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2009). This results in a further barrier to post-secondary education, whereby students’ courses are chosen based on their

abilities or aspirations. This practice prevents students with lower abilities from taking the academic prerequisites needed to enter university programs. With this in mind, it is equally important to recognize that the pre-migration barriers discussed here have a significant impact on the post-migration barriers experienced by refugee youth, and compound many of the challenges faced throughout the resettlement process.

### *3.1.2 Ethnic Capital*

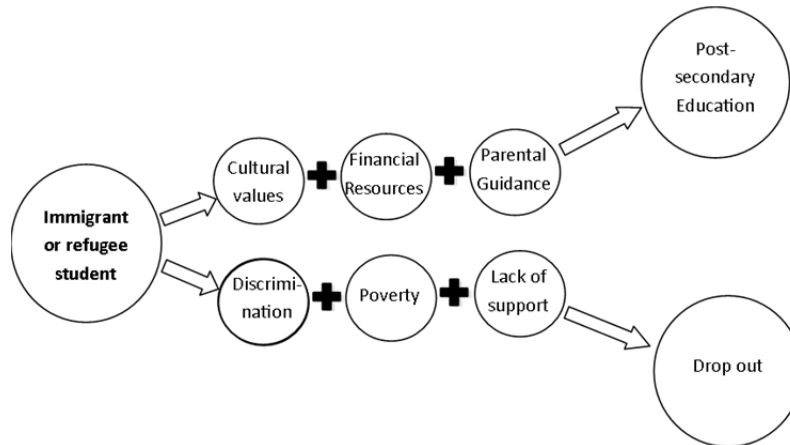
Researchers have shown a difference in educational attainment among immigrant groups in Canada (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2009; Gunderson, 2007; Wilkinson, 2002). In particular, certain Asian ethnic groups, including Chinese, Japanese and Korean students, attain higher academic achievements than many Canadian-born and immigrant youth from other ethnic backgrounds (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2009). While it would appear that certain ethnic groups may be more successful than others, it is more likely that a number of factors influence these results, and a closer examination is necessary. The notion of ethnic capital may also underline the conclusion that while considered immigrants in the broader sense in many studies, refugees are a distinct subgroup that experience challenges in resettlement more acutely than other immigrant groups who are more likely to experience educational success.

Nonetheless, taken together, this observation has been explained by the term “ethnic capital” which posits that certain pre- and post-migration and cultural factors can explain how certain ethnic groups are more successful than others in educational attainment. The term assumes that certain characteristics are more prevalent in certain ethnic groups. Furthermore, the idea of ethnic capital is significant because it shows the influence of culture and experience on academic achievement, and can also show why refugee students may experience barriers to post-secondary education that other immigrant students do not. For example, Wilkinson’s (2002) research showed that Yugoslavian refugees experienced more educational success than refugee youth from mostly African backgrounds; she posits that this could be attributed to a number of factors, including familiarity with a Western school system model, or less discrimination because of their European heritage. Meanwhile, Gunderson (2007) also found that some linguistic groups were more likely than others to “disappear” from secondary school, and Spanish-speaking immigrants were the most-likely to disappear from Vancouver-area schools. On the other hand, Abada, Hou and Ram (2009) found that Filipinos and individuals of African descent lag behind other ethnic groups.

While there are clearly differences in educational attainment among ethnic groups, there are many explanations offered to expound these disparities. Gunderson (2007) attributes disparities that exist among ethnic groups to lower socioeconomic status and educational opportunity, which affects some ethnic groups more than others. This reasoning is significant, since refugee students tend to experience poverty more acutely than other immigrants, revealing that the ethnic capital of refugee students may be on the lower end of the spectrum. On the other hand, Abada, Hou and Ram (2009) cite other variables in the educational attainment of immigrants, including the educational attainment of parents, whether the country of origin was a developed or developing country, reception and integration experiences (or discrimination), socioeconomic status, and the cultural belief in the importance of education. These factors are shown in Figure 6, which illustrates how a number of factors taken together

can lead to “ethnic capital,” or lack thereof, leading to success or failure in post-secondary education. Furthermore, these factors may also impact the ethnic capital of refugee students from protracted situations, since the educational attainment of parents will also be low, and the pre-migration experience would probably reflect that of a developing country. Likewise, it can be assumed that pre- and post-migration trauma could significantly impact the ethnic capital of refugee students negatively.

Figure 6 - The role of ethnic capital in post-secondary participation

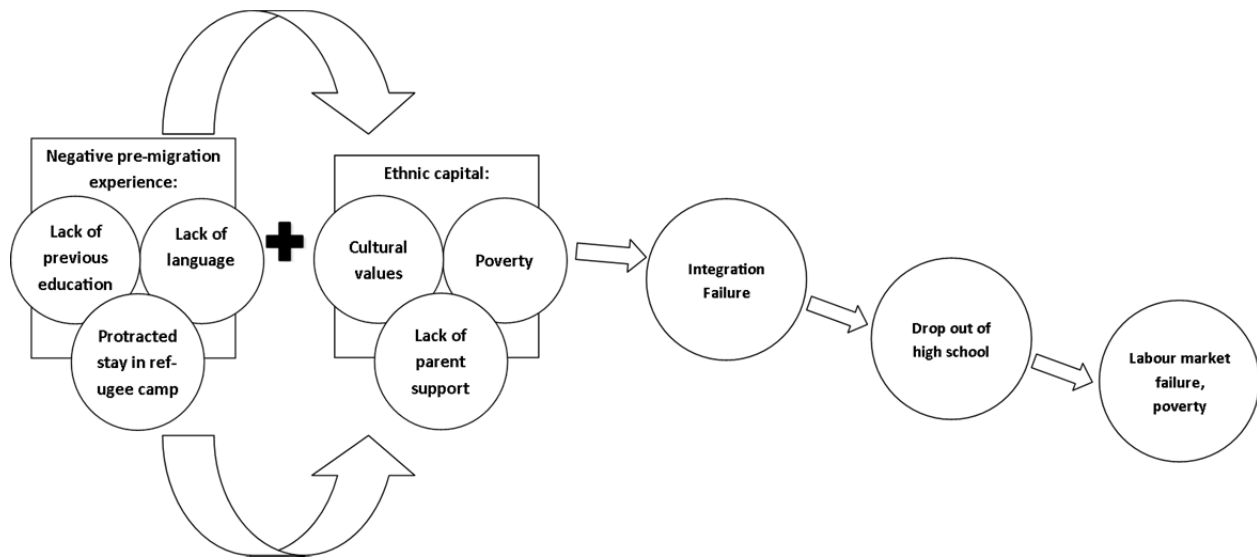


Refugee youth are unique, and do not have the social or ethnic capital that other groups may have. However, refugee youth tend to be resilient and possess many attributes that can mitigate more negative experiences. For example, Wilkinson (2002) suggests that immigrants and refugees arrive in Canada with a strong drive to succeed in school which can mitigate the negative impact of the refugee camps. While the refugee youth participating in Wilkinson’s study were not necessarily from protracted refugee camp situations, the finding is similar to that of Abada, Hou and Ram (2009) who suggest that parents may hold specific educational and career aspirations for their children because of their own experienced racism and limited occupational opportunities.

### 3.1.3 Summary of pre-migration barriers

Pre-migration barriers are challenging since they vary widely across different refugee groups and individual experiences. Furthermore, negative pre-migration experiences underlie all post-migration barriers, making refugees particularly vulnerable to educational failure. Figure 7 summarizes these barriers, including protracted refugee camp experiences and lack of previous education and language ability. These experiences are related to the concept of ethnic capital, whereby researchers have found that certain ethnic groups seem to achieve high rates of educational success while others face significantly lower rates of educational attainment. Nevertheless, it is precisely these pre-migration experiences, including other factors like socioeconomic status and cultural values that contribute to the wide disparity in educational attainment between ethnic groups.

Figure 7 – Summary of pre-migration barriers to education



### 3.2 Post-migration barriers to education

While negative pre-migration experiences shape and influence refugee youth before their arrival in Canada, they may interact with or lead to negative post-migration experiences in complex and profound ways. While this paper considers each barrier separately, they are inextricably linked and must also be considered holistically. On the other hand, it is the post-migration barriers that offer most opportunity for intervention, since programs and strategies can be used to mitigate barriers to education upon arrival in Canada.

#### 3.2.1 *The impact of the school environment on successful resettlement and integration of refugee students*

The importance of the school environment cannot be stressed enough; studies have repeatedly shown that adolescents are more likely to avoid at-risk behaviours when they experience a strong connection to their school (Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere, 2004; Anisef P. , Brown, Phythian, Sweet, & Walters, 2008). Moreover, in this context a positive school environment refers to a safe, welcoming atmosphere that engages refugee students both academically and socially. Students that feel positively engaged in school are less likely to experience or participate in violent behaviour, substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviour, and other health risks. While school connectedness is a vague concept that can vary widely across school systems, it would appear that schools that foster an atmosphere where students feel fairly treated, close to others, and part of the school are the most important protective factors for students to feel connected and engaged (Blum & Rinehart, 1997). However, many immigrant and refugee youth in the Vancouver area reported a strong desire to make friends and get involved in school activities, but they also reported “feeling isolated, ostracized and socially rejected” (RCY, 2011, p. 6). These feelings underline the lack of belonging and inclusion within the school system, which can be caused by factors like segregated ESL classes, lack of language ability, feelings of discrimination or racism, identity issues, difficulty making friends, or other factors that make the school environment feel unsafe or

unwelcoming. With some intentional strategizing, it would be possible for local schools to create this environment for refugee students.

Meanwhile, studies reveal that a refugee's experiences in secondary school have a significant impact on eligibility for post-secondary programs (Anisef P. , 2005). There are several factors related to the school environment that may lead refugee youth to not meet expectations for school performance or delinquent behaviour, including: discrimination from teachers and fellow students, school policies, socioeconomic environment or location, or the organizational structure within the school. At the same time, students may face lower expectations from teachers leading to lower motivation and self-esteem (Anisef & Bunch, 1994; Anisef P. , 2005). The following environmental factors have come up repeatedly in studies addressing barriers faced by immigrant and refugee students in the Canadian schools system.

### *Integration and discrimination*

In general, the learning and social environment of secondary schools can be very challenging for both immigrant and refugee English Language Learners. Gunderson (2000) suggests that little empathy or support is given for new immigrant students in mainstream classes who are not yet proficient in the English language, a troubling outcome given the high numbers of immigrants in many Lower Mainland schools. Gunderson's research supports his conclusion that disproportionately high numbers of immigrant students drop out of school early and fail to achieve results on par with their Canadian-born peers (Gunderson, 2000; 2012).

Likewise, discrimination against immigrant and refugee youth has been widely reported in multiple studies (Shakya, et al., 2010; RCY, 2011; Yau, 1996; Cubie, 2006). Shakya, et al., (2010) reported findings that discrimination, including racial stereotyping and exclusionary policies that prevent refugees from taking mainstream classes in the school system led to feelings of alienation and feeling unsafe at school, and negatively impacted identity and well-being while at the same time discouraging refugee youth from pursuing their dreams or goals. This finding is further reinforced by anecdotal evidence from refugee and immigrant youth in the Metro Vancouver area who self-reported feelings of discrimination and isolation; explaining their personal experiences, the youth shared that "when you say you're a refugee or immigrant, people treat you like you're somehow damaged. . . . People are shunned just because they don't speak English, or because they have an accent" (RCY, 2011, p. 6). The same report quotes the personal reflection of a refugee youth that spoke of "crying and crying and crying – all the time alone and crying" (RCY, 2011, p. 6). Clearly, feelings of discrimination jeopardize the mental health of refugees, a finding supported by Beiser (2009) who, citing multiple authors, explains that "discrimination assaults the psyche directly: for example, the perception of discrimination can damage self-esteem and diminish feelings of efficacy, thereby creating elevated risk for physical and mental health problems" (p. 558). With this in mind, discrimination and isolation can make refugee students particularly vulnerable. Because schools are a primary venue for acculturation, it is critical that the school environment be a place of support for refugee students.

Refugee students may experience discrimination in the school system in many ways, both overtly and through more subtle exclusionary policies that may inhibit student success. Critics argue that many North American pedagogical approaches to education act as barriers to students from other cultures, including immigrant and aboriginal students and are therefore subversively discriminatory (R.A. Malatest and Associates, Ltd. , 2004; Gunderson, 2000). For example, unlike the Western education system where critical thinking and discourse are encouraged, most immigrants come from an education system where *value* is placed on alternative processes of learning such as rote memorization; Gunderson (2000) argues that “Immigrant students generally viewed learning as a task consisting of a large number of discrete skills to be learned in order, through rote memorization. Those who acquire the most skills and can faithfully remember and reproduce them are the ones who are rewarded with the best grades and rankings” (p. 695). This discrepancy is a challenge for refugee students in their acculturation process, and they must not only learn the class material, but also *learn how to learn* in the context of the Western education system. Other researchers suggest educators must adapt their pedagogical approaches to teaching to meet the learning needs of a growing population of vulnerable students, including refugees (Woods, 2009).

While most refugee students are enrolled in ELL/ESL classes upon arrival in Canada, many have experienced isolation and marginalization in the school system (RCY, 2011; Shakya, et al., 2010; Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010). Again, lack of English language, segregation from mainstream academic classes, difficulty making friends, discrimination, and other factors compound these feelings of loneliness and exclusion and discourage students from feeling connected or a sense of belonging to their school. Likewise, this affects the students’ opportunity and ability to become proficient in the English language. Though the students surveyed in Gunderson’s research understood the importance of English language learning and its role in graduating high school, accessing post-secondary education and obtaining employment, the “ironic cruelty” is that there is usually little opportunity to learn or practice English when the policy in mainstream classrooms is English-only instruction (Gunderson, 2000). Likewise, immigrant and refugee students often find themselves in ethnic enclaves, with limited opportunities for interaction with English-speaking students (Krauth, 2008). Multiple studies show that immigrant students have identified that interacting with native English speakers as the primary way to improve their English, learn Canadian culture, and integrate into Canadian society (Gunderson, 2000). A recent report confirms the disillusionment with school that was reported by Gunderson (2000): Vancouver area immigrant and refugee youth reported that “ESL classes felt like a form of segregation” and that it would be beneficial for schools to provide more opportunities for ESL students to “increase their time spent with native English speakers” (RCY, 2011, p. 8). Thus, the socialization and integration of refugee and immigrant newcomers appears to be important not only for their academic success, but also for their general mental health and well-being.

### *ESL Stigma*

Similarly, there seems to be a stigma attached to ESL classes for many students, which is often accompanied by a sense of isolation. Immigrant students have reported that ESL or special education classes contribute to their feelings of isolation from the mainstream student body, and Gunderson (2000) further found that ESL student generally felt the classes were a place for “second-class students,

those that had little chance to go on to university” (p. 699). At the same time, Gunderson’s work equally recognizes the importance of ESL classes for students to achieve English proficiency, suggesting that it takes at least 5-7 years to do so. Thus, a disconnect exists between the need for English language learning and the needs of youth to feel acceptance, accomplishment and opportunity. While there is no easy solution to this dilemma, Gunderson calls on teachers and schools to value students’ backgrounds and try “to incorporate their voices into a cultural mosaic rather than watch them disappear as they dissolve into a cultural slurry” (Gunderson, 2000, p. 705). This is particularly harmful for students who feel they must abandon their first culture and language to find belonging in Canada and succeed in mainstream academic classes. Cultural sensitivity and awareness of the competing values of the Canadian education system and barriers faced by English language learners is an important step towards reconciling these challenges.

#### *Educational streaming: barriers to academic classes in high school*

While much of the literature identifies “streaming” or “tracking”— a practice where students are placed on academic trajectories for general studies, trades, or university preparation – as a barrier to education, there is equal recognition that the lack of previous education does not prepare students to succeed in secondary school with their peers. The practice is common in many Canadian provinces and very controversial, since disadvantaged students and racial minorities are disproportionately channeled into lower-ability courses. Unfortunately, while tracking has a positive effect on the academic achievement of higher-ability students, it has the opposite effect on already disadvantaged students (Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, & Phythian, 2010). Generally, because of their lack of language ability and previous education, refugees are placed in to lower-level programs and do not leave high school with adequate courses to enroll in post-secondary programs (Wilkinson, 2002, p. 176). In addition, many refugee students do not have the prerequisites or academic requirements to succeed in school district trades programs, which require students to be proficient in English, complete grade 10 courses plus Communications or English 11, and be in a position to graduate through the regular secondary graduation program (Langley School District, 2013).

Thus, the practice of streaming acts as a barrier for students to access mainstream academic courses. The inherent challenge is that refugee students do not have the language to succeed in secondary school courses and must instead enroll in ELL or non-academic classes. The result is students who feel isolated from the main student body, do not graduate, do not have the requirements for university or post-secondary programs, and frequently drop-out of school early. The problem is systemic, and without an easy solution; it is also corroborated by a report by Anisef and Kilbride (2000) who found the practice creates frustration and disillusionment among students (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011).

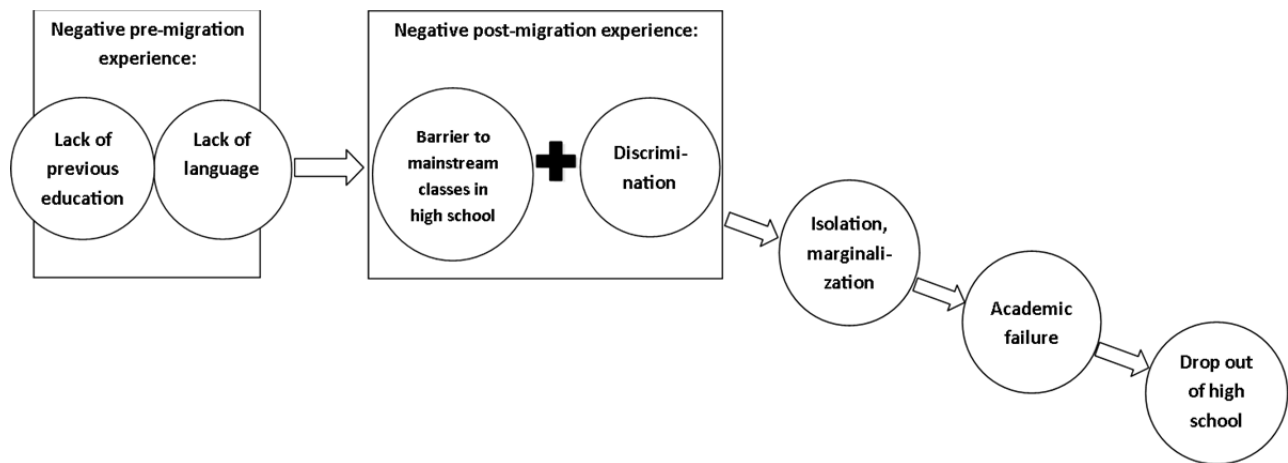
Furthermore, many refugee students from the Metro Vancouver area reported being placed in classes that did not meet their educational needs (Representative for Children and Youth [RCY], 2011). While some youth reported being placed in classes or grade levels below their abilities, others reported that their previous education was not recognized and that they had to start over. On the other hand, another study reported that refugee students from protracted refugee camp situations usually lack basic literacy and numeracy skills:

Many of these refugee and immigrant youth learners will reach school leaving age (19) without having had the opportunity to learn more than rudimentary English and mathematics, and only a few will have developed basic work related skill sets. This is a growing concern to school officials, immigrant serving agencies, and other community service agencies.

(Staddon, 2009)

These differing reports suggest that there is immense diversity within the immigrant and refugee youth population, and highlights a need for individualized assessments and programming. Likewise, this literature shows that there is an educational gap that exists for refugee youth, who because of their lack of language proficiency and previous education are unable to access academic courses within the secondary school system, and subsequently the post-secondary education system. Figure 8 below shows how this educational gap poses a barrier to post-secondary education. In particular, it shows that pre-migration experiences including lack of previous education leads to barriers in the mainstream school system where refugee youth are unable to take the academic courses they need to gain entry into post-secondary education. When these exclusionary practices are combined with negative school experiences including discrimination, students feel isolated and marginalized which leads to educational failure.

Figure 8 – Discriminatory school experiences leads to educational failure



### 3.2.2 Vulnerability due to the loss of identity and self-esteem

Identity is a broad term used to describe the formation of one’s sense of self, their worldview, beliefs or self-esteem. It is a critical process during adolescence, when young people begin to explore who they are and where they fit in. It is especially difficult for young people who may feel different because of culture, ethnicity, gender, or other identities. While younger children tend to be more resilient and adaptable to new identities, immigrant youth who arrive in Canada during a critical stage in their development may be more vulnerable, affecting their integration and success at school and ability to access post-secondary programs. Furthermore, refugees who arrive as older children or youth experience significant challenges to their identity since they are at a very critical stage in their development process when they begin to become more independent and discover their sense of self

(Crowe, 2006). For example, refugee youth may struggle to find security in their first culture, since they may not fully understand or relate to those cultural values post-migration. However, because of their lack of English language proficiency or difficulty integrating into the school environment, refugee youth also struggle to identify with Canadian culture. As a result, the usual tensions associated with adolescence are exacerbated by resettlement stress and acculturation, making refugee youth particularly vulnerable.

Immigrant students are at risk of losing not only their first language, but also their identity within their first culture. This problem makes refugee youth particularly vulnerable, and may lead students to drop out of high school or lead them to search for identity and belonging with criminal influences and gangs (Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010). Fantino and Colak (2001) argue that identity formation is an important consideration in the successful integration of refugee children and youth who must navigate two cultures simultaneously while experiencing a number of other challenges like racism or culture shock. They suggest that “the uprooting, disruption, and insecurity inherent in migration affect psychological and social development, making the process of identity formation a more difficult balancing act between two or more sets of cultural notions and values” (Fantino & Colak, 2001, p. 591).

In a newspaper article, Dr. Sylvia Helmer, manager of the Vancouver School Board’s District Reception and Placement Centre that has received hundreds of refugees in recent years, explains that refugees come to Canada “very often as teenagers with all that identity crisis going on, plus they’re suddenly catapulted into a new language and some of them don’t even know [how to hold a pencil].” In the article, Helmer further explains her experience with refugee students who arrive “with all kinds of baggage. . . . They have a world of knowledge and lived experiences we can’t begin to contemplate, [along with] all of that baggage they’re carrying with them. And then they’re being asked to pretend they’re two and let’s start over again” (O’Connor, 2008).

The youth experience multiple identities: as children of parents with strong memories and ties to their homeland and culture but without their own; as displaced refugees without a homeland in a “temporary” camp environment; and as migrants adjusting to a new land and new culture in a third country, Canada. While educational institutions perform an important role in orientating refugee students to the mainstream culture, youth are equally at risk of losing their connection and identity to the culture they are leaving behind, and are left straddling the divide of two cultures, neither of which they can fully identify with (Wilkinson, 2002). When combined with other challenges like culture shock, language struggles, and socioeconomic factors, this loss of identity can impact the mental health of youth and make refugee students particularly vulnerable. In particular, these students are more at risk for dropping out of school.

### *3.2.3 The Impact of Mental Health and Culture Shock on the Resettlement Process*

While all immigrants experience a period of adjustment upon arrival in Canada, refugees experience resettlement stress and culture shock in much more profound ways because of their traumatic background (Ministry of Education, 2009). In particular, resettlement stress can have a significant impact

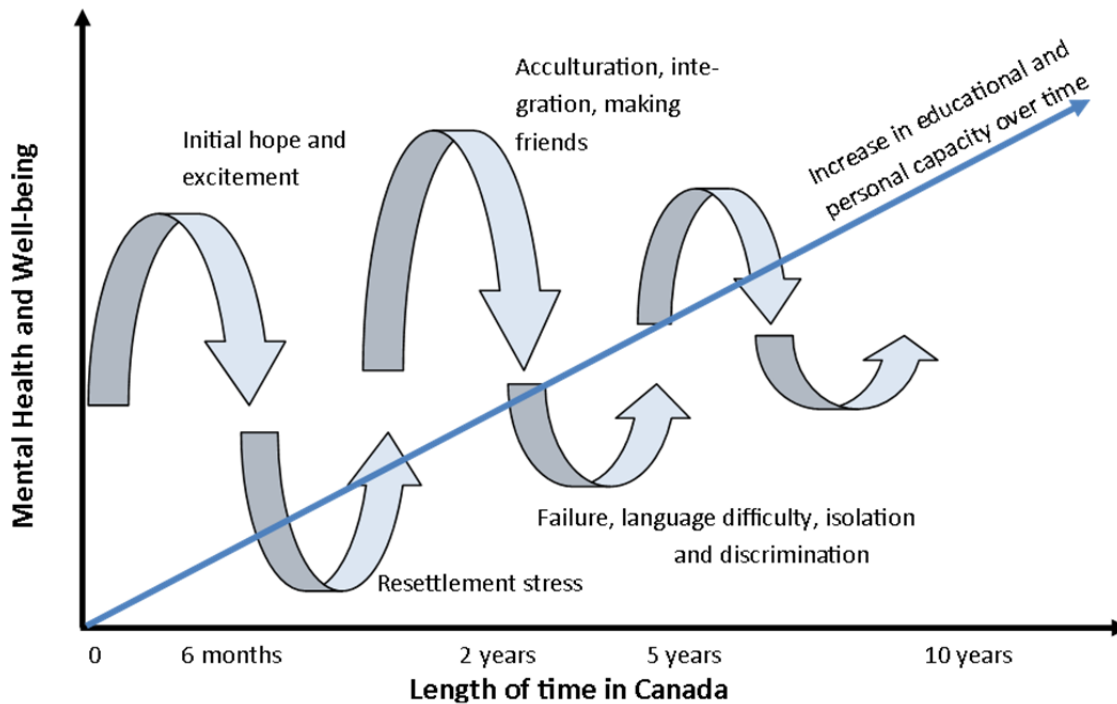
not only on mental health, but also on learning, school belonging, integration and social activities which can negatively affect the school success of refugee students. This prolonged cycle can become a downward spiral, where mental health impacts school adjustment, and negative school adjustment has a further negative impact on mental health of refugee youth. Likewise, “a sense of dislocation, or the trauma that new arrivals sometimes experience upon leaving their homeland, can cause them to appear withdrawn, fatigued, or uninterested” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 13). Meanwhile, Rousseau (2008) suggests that while refugee youth experience high levels of adversity in their pre- and post-migration experiences, the group as a whole underutilizes mental health services. With this in mind, Rousseau goes on to suggest that schools play a central role “both as mediators in helping children and youths adapt to their host country and as the main access point to prevention and treatment services for mental health problems” (p. 533).

The term “culture shock” can be reflective of the challenging resettlement process in general and can also be compounded by financial stress, previous trauma, discrimination, difficulty learning English, or a number of other factors. While culture shock in and of itself is a normal process for anyone adjusting to a new society, an understanding of the process and associated stress is important, since it can impede the capacity of refugee youth “to make good decisions and manage the pressures of transition” (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011). This, compounded by the practical demands of resettlement is possibly one of the largest barriers to refugee students in accessing post-secondary education. Depending on where a refugee student is in their resettlement process and corresponding time of cultural adjustment, other barriers to post-secondary education may be magnified. Generally, culture shock is described as a process that is experienced in four stages, illustrated in Figure 9:

1. An initial period of excitement often referred to as the “honeymoon” stage
2. A period “hostility” characterized by grief, anger, isolation or depression
3. A time of adjustment as language is acquired and students experience more academic success and build social connections
4. Finally a stage of relative integration, where refugee youth have adequately adjusted and can access post-secondary goals more easily

(Ministry of Education, 2009; Birman, 2005)

Figure 9 - Culture shock and resettlement stress over time

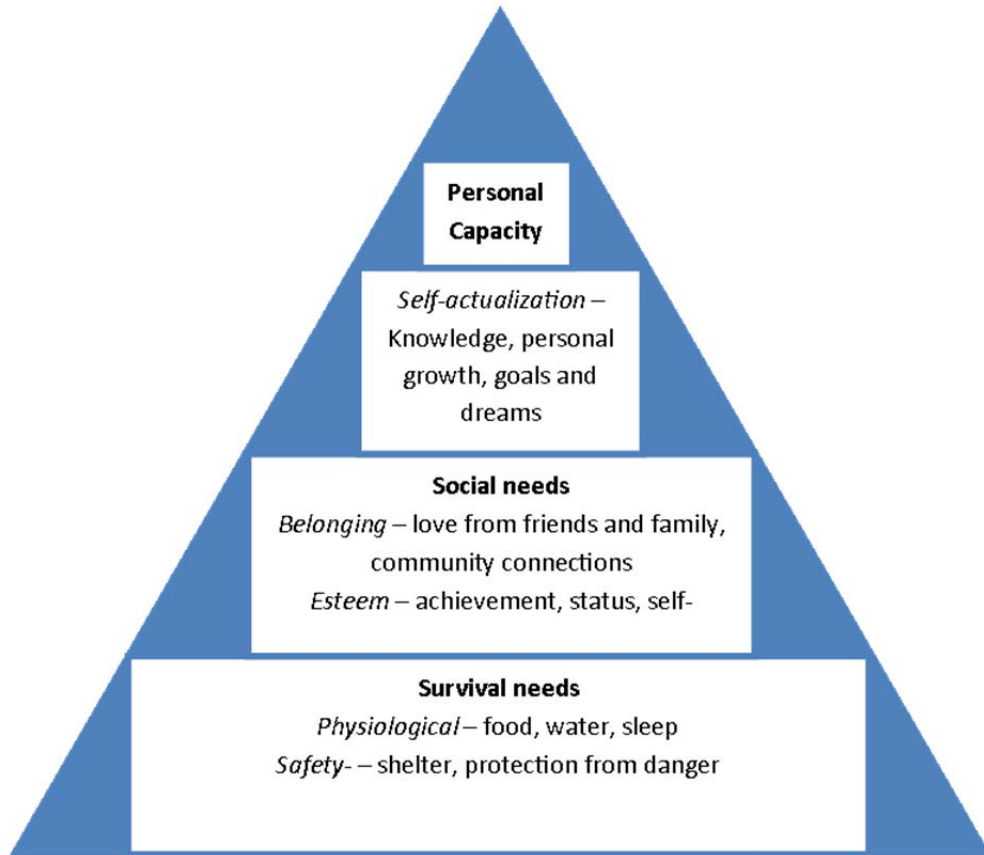


Maslow's (1968) Hierarchy of Needs provides an important framework for understanding these stages of culture shock and the resettlement process for refugee youth. According to Maslow's theory outlined in Figure 10, the most fundamental human needs are those required for survival: air, food, clothing, shelter. When these needs are met, an individual can move towards higher levels of growth and development which include: safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1968; Freitas & Leonard, 2011). When compared against theories of culture adaption, it would appear that refugees must first meet basic survival needs, followed in time by concerns for advancement (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, p. 411). This would help explain why refugee youth experience culture shock so acutely, and may feel inclined to drop out of school to take a low-paying job to the detriment of their long term success and well-being.

An understanding of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs may shed some light on barriers to education for refugees. In particular, more immediate survival needs during the process of resettlement seem to overshadow educational goals. Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) recognize that when "immigrants and refugees first arrive in Canada, much of their energy is spent satisfying these survival needs" (p. 411). The prospect of dropping out of school to take a job, regardless of the low pay or limited future opportunities, may be more appealing to refugee youth who feel pressure to support their families. Research has underlined this observation, and a recent study on the educational aspirations of refugee youth found that "the immediate needs overshadow the long-term goals and widen the gap between aspirations and accomplishment, while simultaneously intensifying the youths' aspirations as they see higher education as the way to improve their situation" (Shakya, et al., 2010, p. 70). Meanwhile, Maslow's theory outlines needs for belonging and esteem, which authors have connected to the

marginalization and vulnerability of refugee youth who may be susceptible to seek acceptance in gangs or criminal activity (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Staddon, 2009; Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010).

Figure 10 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



With this framework in mind, it is helpful to explore the stages of culture shock and the resettlement process in more detail. These stages are important to understand because not only do they impact mental health of youth, but also their readiness for post-secondary education.

Initially, many refugee youth experience an initial “honeymoon stage” that is characterized by excitement, hope for the future, and extreme happiness about being out of immediate danger. This period is critical for refugees, since the optimism and elation experienced can act as protective factors in helping the refugee cope with initial resettlement stress. However, the honeymoon stage can also pose a challenge for refugees, since they may be underestimating the challenges of the resettlement process, and have unrealistic expectations for their lives in Canada that could set them up for failure and disappointment in later stages (Birman, 2005).

Following the excitement of initial resettlement, the reality and difficulties of life in Canada tend to set in, including challenges with language, culture, employment, and other adjustments. Using Maslow’s theory, refugees in this stage of adjustment are addressing their basic *survival* needs – both

physiological needs for food and water, and safety needs for shelter and protection from danger (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). This stage is often characterized by frustration, stress, demoralization, regret, withdrawal or depression (Ministry of Education, 2009). For refugees, past trauma can also compound this time, and lead to a period of culture shock that is more prolonged than for typical immigrants. For many of the Karen refugee youth in Langley and Surrey, the barriers faced in education and employment can compound the process of culture shock and demoralization (Birman, 2005). At the same time, there is also a question of whether the process of culture shock and stress associated with resettlement and education can increase the barriers faced by refugees in accessing post-secondary education. Students going through periods of withdrawal or depression will not be able to perform optimally in their learning environment, and become quickly discouraged at their lack of progress in English or in other subjects. Many of these students may give up and drop out of high school, which is a trend observed by many of those working with Karen refugee students in Langley and Surrey (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2011).

For most of those in this process of cultural adaption, the phase of culture shock and hostility is usually followed by a period of adjustment and acceptance of the new culture and lifestyle. Some individuals may move to this stage rather quickly, while for many it could take several years to enter into this stage of adjustment (Birman, 2005). Refugees in particular have difficulty reaching this stage, confirming that an individual's pre-migration experience has a significant impact on their settlement and integration outcomes once in Canada. The refugee experience has been compared to that of a tree that has been cut off from its roots, including family members, homes, livelihoods, culture, and other supports that provide nourishment and life to an individual on an emotional and practical level. Because of war or political factors beyond their control, refugees often have little choice in their resettlement, which in itself can be traumatizing or disempowering. Likewise, once "replanted" in Canada, the refugee does not have the extensive root system to rely up for emotional or practical sustenance. To expand this metaphor further, a tree is reliant upon its root system for survival. While typical immigrants may have the time to care for their root system and replant themselves more successfully in Canada, refugees cannot integrate successfully without first creating a root system that will provide a foundation for success in education, employment and community life (Bastin, 2010). Thus, refugee youth who have moved out of the *survival* stage of resettlement, or the *hostility* phase of culture shock may have more capacity to access post-secondary education. This is true of refugee youth who have been in Canada longer, or those that arrived at a younger age.

The final phase of cultural adjustment is *Integration*, referring to the period of time when an individual feels comfortable within the new society, and able to function and be a part of the community through employment, relationships, hobbies, and other marks of successful settlement. From a mental health perspective, this stage will signal a healthy psychological adjustment and a sense of satisfaction with life. In general, most literature points to the five-year marker of time spent in a new country to reach this stage of cultural adjustment, though it may happen sooner (Birman, 2005).

According to Maslow's framework, before individuals can fulfill their dreams and reach their full human potential, they must first satisfy more basic human needs (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Refugee youth may not be ready to think about post-secondary education until they are well into their resettlement

process, when they will be able to address *cognitive* needs such as knowledge and self-awareness, and *self-actualization needs* including personal growth and self-fulfillment (Maslow, 1968). Thus, to adequately address barriers to post-secondary education, an intervention must first address culture shock and resettlement stress while at the same time encouraging refugee youth to set goals and build their capacity for personal development. At the same time, an understanding of the process of culture shock serves as a reminder of the very individualized needs of refugee students. While many generalizations can be made to explain the barriers faced by refugee populations, each person's experience is unique. Likewise, depending on their length of time in Canada, different cohorts of refugees have different experiences and thus face different barriers to education.

### *3.2.4 Navigating the secondary and post-secondary school system and the lack of guidance*

A common theme within literature addressing barriers to post-secondary education is a lack of guidance from adults to help refugee youth navigate the secondary and post-secondary school system (Yau, 1996; Shakya, et al., 2010; Representative for Children and Youth, 2011). This is especially true for refugee parents who may be illiterate themselves and may not have the knowledge to guide their children when they arrive in Canada. In particular, Karen refugees arrive in Canada without knowledge of our education system or education pathways. In many ways, they rely on schools and teachers to provide opportunities that will help them meet their educational goals. While many schools have developed innovative programs and strategies for refugee youth, these are usually dependent on the leadership and initiative of individual teachers or principals (Crowe, 2006, p. 13). Furthermore, in many cases school administrators do not understand the unique needs and challenges of refugee students, and may not place them appropriately in courses or be able to provide programs or support that will meet their unique needs (Ministry of Education, 2009; Staddon, 2009). At the same time, immigrant serving organizations suggest that career expectations and educational pathways are critical issues for older refugee students that arrive in Canada without adequate time to adjust to the school system or learn English to a satisfactory level. While children who arrive at a younger age have more time to catch up to their peers, older refugee youth generally miss this opportunity and have limited options and educational opportunities (O'Sullivan, 2006).

It is common for recently arrived refugees to rely on the guidance of settlement workers from community agencies or from schools to provide information, guidance and support for matters related to higher education. In BC, the Settlement Workers in Schools program is relatively new, having been implemented in a limited number of schools for the first time in 2007 and then province-wide in 2008 (WelcomeBC). As a result, there is limited research on the role that settlement workers have played in the guidance of refugee youth. With this in mind, Australian researchers found that settlement workers "felt ill-equipped to provide comprehensive advice, and believed that refugees were disadvantaged by the absence of an appropriate source of information and guidance which was general and impartial. In interviews with individual refugees, this absence was repeatedly stated" (Hannah, 1999, p. 159). This finding is corroborated by a more recent report showing that refugee and immigrant youth became so discouraged by the help and support offered that they stopped seeking help (RCY, 2011). Furthermore, the same report suggested that "Youth need to be told about things like volunteering and community

participation so that they can gain experience and do things like apply for scholarships” (RCY, 2011, p. 6). Furthermore, there seems to be evidence that many refugees have been poorly advised, which has resulted in taking inappropriate courses or failing to access desired programs. This may be true in the Karen community in the Lower Mainland, where many settlement workers are also newcomers and do not have the Canadian experience necessary to understand the post-secondary education system. Likewise, many refugee and immigrant students in the Vancouver area reported feeling ill-advised about graduation requirements in the BC education system, including not being told that ELL courses often do not count as credit courses (RCY, 2011). Thus, without ongoing guidance and support, immigrant and refugee youth will fail to adequately navigate the BC secondary and post-secondary systems and will be vulnerable to dropping out or not being able to access post-secondary programs.

Furthermore, immigrant youth lack information about the labour market in Canada, and likewise about the vocational training requirements for occupations in the trades and technology sectors. This lack of vocational guidance has been found to contribute to confusion and indecision about vocation, and delay entry to post-secondary education among immigrants (Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, & Phythian, 2010). In the context of this study, vocational programs are equally considered with more traditional bachelor degree programs, especially since skilled workers experience labour market integration, satisfaction, stability and high levels of remuneration in the work force (Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, & Phythian, 2010). At the same time, the barriers to these programs appear to be equal to those of traditional university programs for refugee students who lack information and direction in their career path.

### *3.2.5 Socioeconomic factors*

While language ability is an important determining factor in predicting high school completion rates, there are disheartening disparities that prevent some immigrant groups more than others from completing the educational requirements that are necessary to achieve success in the labour market and society in general. In this context, socioeconomic status is a broad term that can include many complex and interrelated factors that stem from a person’s income, social position, education, occupation or neighbourhood. It is an important consideration, since many refugees experience low socioeconomic status, including poverty. Furthermore, refugees often face discrimination in the workplace and lack social networks in Canada, which can limit further opportunities for education, employment and advancement (Cubie, 2006; Sherrell, 2009; Kilbride & Anisef, 2001). Thus, barriers related to low socioeconomic status pose significant integration and resettlement challenges for refugees upon arrival in Canada.

Moreover, lack of educational opportunity and socioeconomic status, rather than innate intelligence or aptitudes, are seen as the greatest barriers to university education (Gunderson, 2007; Anisef, Brown, & Sweet, 2011). In particular, it is difficult to look at immigrant status in general as a determining factor in university attendance. As previously discussed, university attendance for some groups, such as Mandarin-speaking immigrants, is actually higher than the Canadian average and can lead to the conclusion that immigrants as a whole are not at-risk (Gunderson, 2007; Anisef, Brown, & Sweet, 2011). Rather, a further examination of socioeconomic status would reveal that the success of

immigrant students is directly correlated to financial security (Anisef, Brown, & Sweet, 2011; Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, & Pythian, 2010). Furthermore, there seems to be a direct association between ethno-linguistic groups and socio-economic status, where “terms such as Spanish and Vietnamese not only signified inclusion in particular linguistic groups, they were also related coincidentally to socio-economic status; unfortunately, socio-economic status is a strong predictor of academic success” (Gunderson, 2007, p. 126).

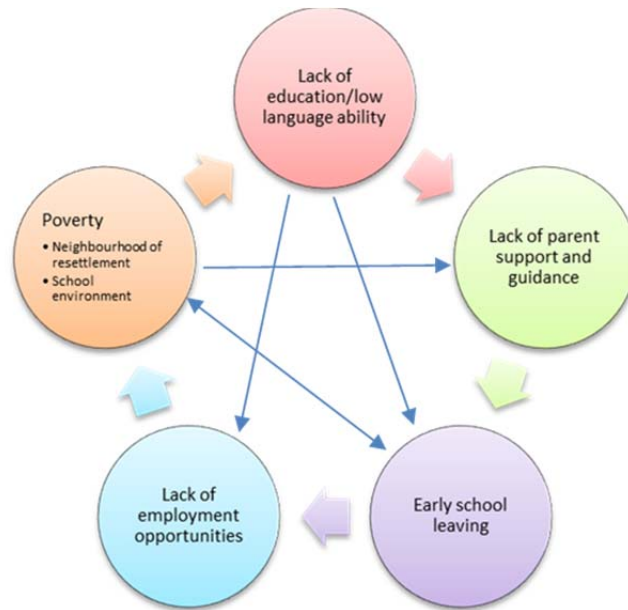
Refugee students, in particular, face significant socioeconomic barriers that prevent them from completing their secondary education and accessing post-secondary programs. In a 2010 study of refugee youth resettled in Toronto, a female Karen participant confirmed this financial barrier to education, explaining how the low monthly social assistance payment does not adequately cover living expenses: “We have three siblings attending high school and we get only \$800 which is not enough. We have decided to quit school and search for jobs” (Shakya, et al., 2010, p. 72). Further studies confirm that students from low-income households feel pressure to drop out of school to support their families and contribute to household income (Anisef, 2005).

Unlike typical immigrant families who have to show proof of assets as part of the immigration process, most refugees arrive in Canada with few or no assets and usually in considerable debt (Johnson, 2010; Canadian Council for Refugees, 2008). In a controversial program that recoups the costs of medical exams and transportation expenses incurred by refugees during the resettlement process, the Canadian government requires refugees to repay loans that can reach up to \$10,000 (Canadian Council for Refugees, n.d.). As a result, most refugee families carry a significant financial burden and feel pressure to begin paying off their loans. The impact of these loans on refugee youth is significant; the Canadian Council for Refugees (2008) explains that because of the debt, youth often struggle in school as they balance work with their studies. In many cases, refugee students dropped out of school to help their families pay off these loans, or for those who arrived after the age of 18, to pay off their own loan (Canadian Council for Refugees, n.d.). Furthermore, refugees often postpone skills upgrading or job training and sacrifice post-secondary education to work at low-paying jobs to make ends meet (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2008). The loans also have an impact on family life, causing parents to work multiple jobs and disabling them from supporting their children in their education.

Likewise, the economic situation of refugees typically leads to a number of different factors that can impact education, including resettlement in a low-income neighbourhood, lack of parental support, and increased family responsibilities. Generally, refugee parents arrive in Canada with low language abilities and few marketable skills, frequently finding themselves in jobs that are low-paying and lack any job security. As a result, it is not uncommon for refugee parents to work long hours simply to make ends meet (Shakya, et al., 2010; Cubie, 2006). There is an additional challenge in the Lower Mainland where much has been made of the high cost of living and the impact of high rents on families that are generally living below the poverty line (Cubie, 2006; Yau, 1996). While socioeconomic factors play a large role in preventing parental support in education, the problem is far more complex for refugees, where parents are also dealing with a myriad of psychological factors in their own resettlement that may make them emotionally unavailable to provide the parental support that acts as a strong protective factor for youth. Figure 11 illustrates some of the complex challenges faced by refugee youth and their families, and the

interrelated cause and effect relationships that are common for families struggling with socioeconomic barriers.

Figure 11 - The impact of socioeconomic factors on refugee settlement and early school leaving



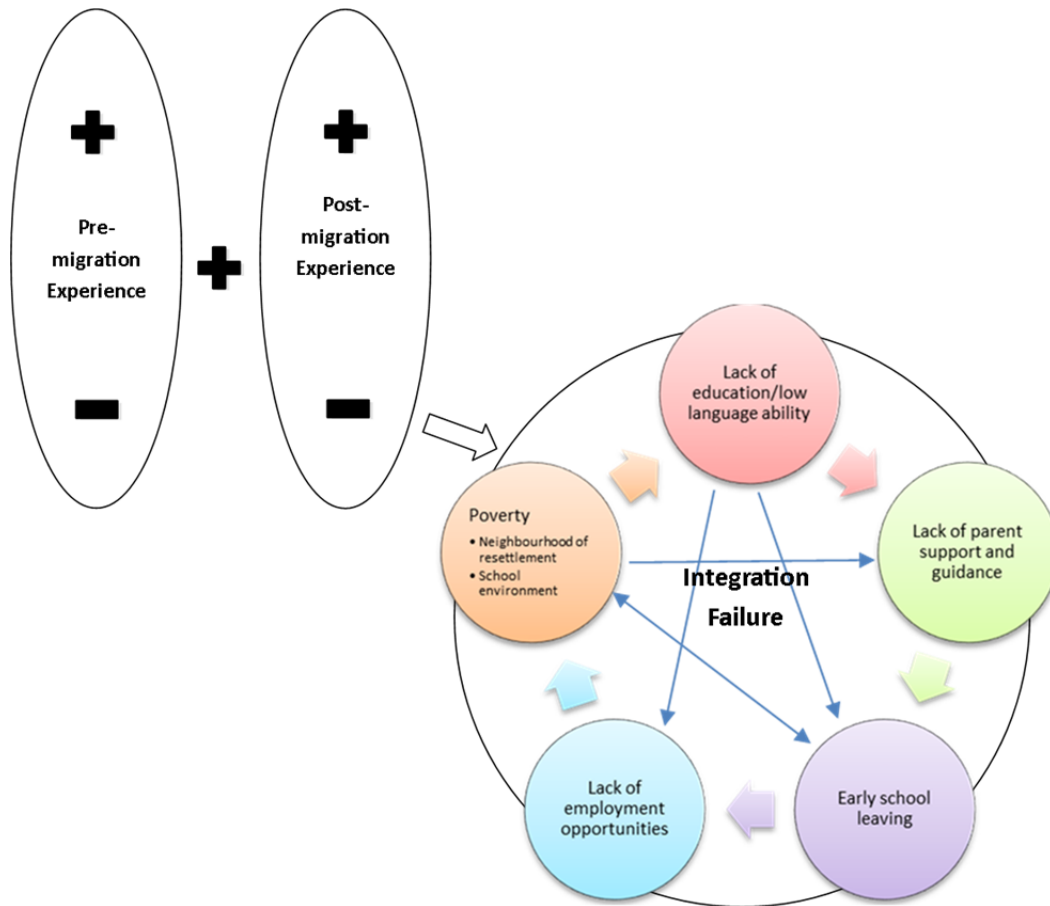
Anisef (2005) recognizes the strong correlation between socioeconomic status and academic performance, noting that low-income households “are unable to provide an environment that is conducive to learning” (p. 17). These environmental factors can include consuming less nutritious foods, limited private space for doing homework, lack of computer ownership, and uneducated parents (Anisef, 2005). On the other hand, families with higher incomes are likely spend more money on books and educational resources for their children, spend more time reading together or going to museums, locate in neighbourhoods with better schools, and are generally able to participate in their child’s education more proactively from an early age. These factors may lead to better school performance on standardized tests which may lead to a greater likelihood of attending university in the future. With this in mind, neighbourhoods of resettlement are important factors to consider when examining the education experience of refugees; while these neighbourhoods are influenced by socioeconomic factors they can also be and adverse environment without the positive influences and social support that may exist in a higher-income area.

Beiser (2009) suggests that while refugee settlement in close proximity with other members of the same ethnic group may at first act as a protective factor for their mental health, over time this may mitigate a refugee’s integration and ability to participate in the larger society (p. 562). This may be the case in the Lower Mainland, where settlement patterns reveal that refugees tend to be clustered in enclaves, partially due to the availability of low-income housing (Francis, 2009; ISS of BC, 2010; Sherrell, 2009).

With this in mind, Figure 12 shows how these socioeconomic barriers ultimately lead to integration failure with the conceptual framework. Because of their pre- and post-migration experiences, refugee families may find themselves in a cycle of poverty, both resulting from and causing barriers to

education. At the same time, this figure highlights some of the challenging dynamics related to these barriers, and the need for holistic interventions that address multiple barriers simultaneously.

Figure 12 – Socioeconomic cycle leading to integration failure



### 3.3 Discussion of pre- and post-migration barriers

The previous sections present a clear picture of the complex and interrelated barriers to education faced by refugee students. As shown in Figures 3 and 4 at the beginning of Section Three, the broader category of immigrants are influenced by a number of experiences that impact their resettlement process, and ultimately their ability to successfully access post-secondary education. On the other hand, the immigration sub-category of refugees tend to face more challenges in their resettlement as a result of previous experiences, including lack of education and language ability and extended time spent in protracted refugee camp situations. As a result, refugee students experience multiple barriers to successful integration and subsequently difficulty accessing post-secondary education. All of these factors are further compounded by the student’s age upon arrival in Canada. While younger refugee children have more time to learn the language and gain a strong educational foundation, older refugee youth arrive behind their Canadian –born peers and simply do not have the time to catch up before they become too old to attend high school. With this in mind, Table 1 provides a summary of these identified barriers and their impact on educational outcomes.

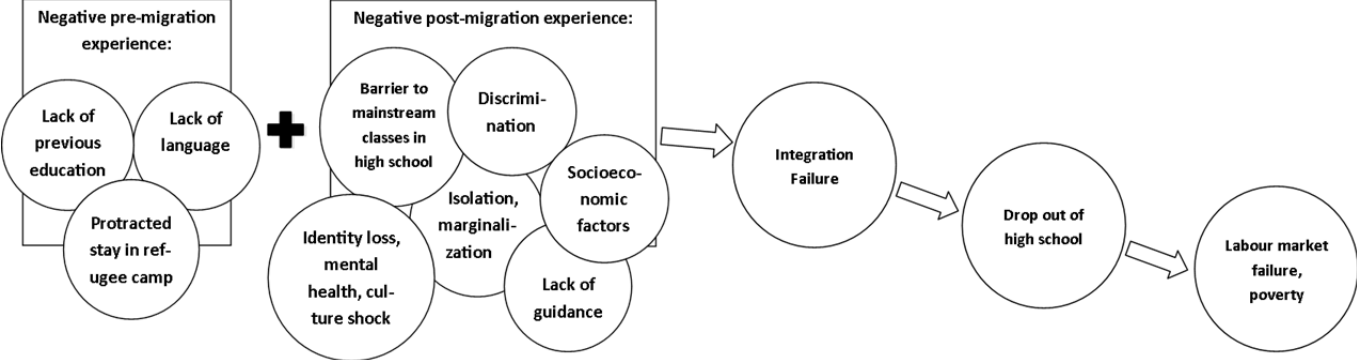
Table 1 - Barriers and their impact on access to post-secondary education

Barrier	Impact
<b>Age of arrival</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students drop out of high school</li> <li>• Students do not have time to obtain sufficient graduation program requirements</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of previous education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unable to catch up to peers academically</li> <li>• Missing foundational concepts in literacy and numeracy</li> <li>• Students are not able to participate in academic classes</li> </ul>
<b>Language ability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students face large challenges in academic courses</li> <li>• Students are isolated from peers and socialization</li> </ul>
<b>Unique Karen cultural influences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worldview that “literate eat rice, illiterate eat rice”</li> <li>• Negative self-assessment of abilities</li> <li>• Discomfort with showing off, asking questions</li> </ul>
<b>School environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streaming into non-academic courses</li> <li>• Discrimination</li> <li>• Integration challenges</li> <li>• Students feel isolated and marginalized</li> </ul>
<b>Identity loss</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges of adolescence and resettlement exacerbated, making refugee youth more vulnerable</li> <li>• Search for identity can lead to youth looking for acceptance in gangs</li> </ul>
<b>Culture Shock</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health issues</li> <li>• Depression, isolation</li> <li>• Poor academic performance</li> </ul>
<b>Post-traumatic stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal, lack of concentration, nightmares, depression</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Guidance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion, lack of understanding of education system</li> </ul>
<b>Socio economic status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient funds to pay for education</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Neighbourhood of settlement</li> </ul>

Clearly, refugee students experience a number of barriers that impact their resettlement which can lead to marginalization, isolation, mental health challenges, academic failure, and subsequently pose an immense barrier to educational success. While pre-migration experiences such as protracted stays in refugee camps, lack of previous education and lack of English language skills compound many challenges faced during the resettlement process, negative post-migration experiences like discrimination and feelings of marginalization act as equally significant barriers. With this in mind, the barriers discussed

here provide a background to the conceptual framework expanded upon throughout this section. Figure 13 below illustrates in more detail how pre- and post-migration barriers come together and pose a challenge for refugee students who may arrive with high aspirations for education, but experience multiple obstacles throughout the resettlement process.

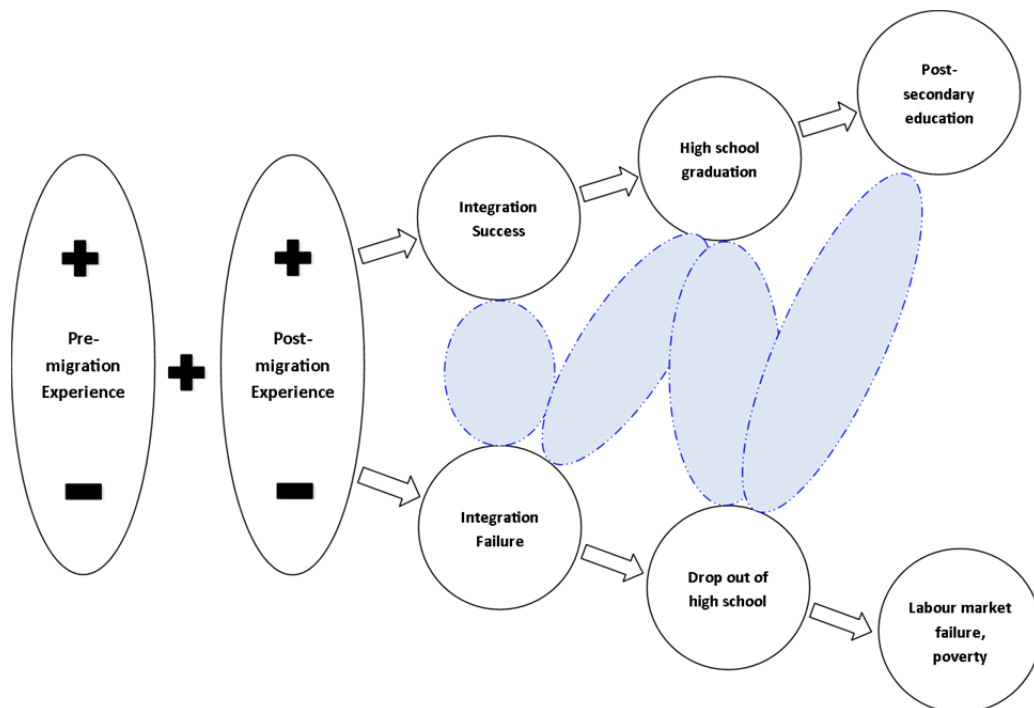
Figure 13 - Pre- and post-migration barriers to education



Though the barriers to education faced by refugee students are daunting, it is equally important to examine potential solutions in both literature and in existing programs. This section builds upon the barriers to education outlined previously and provides strategies to increase access to post-secondary school. While both pre- and post-migration factors may act as barriers for refugee students to post-secondary education, it is the post-migration barriers that offer the most opportunity for intervention or improvement.

With this in mind, Figure 14 illustrates the gap for vulnerable students between secondary and post-secondary school, represented by blue circles. Moreover, the blue circles represent opportunities to mitigate some of the barriers. For example, finances are a common barrier to post-secondary education for many students, and scholarships or bursaries may increase access to post-secondary education. While the barriers to post-secondary education are much more complex for refugee students, there are nevertheless programs and services that can lead to successful integration and positive educational experiences.

Figure 14 - Possible interventions to increase access to post-secondary education for vulnerable students



Thus, sections 4.1 and 4.2 identify programs in other communities that have contributed to the integration and educational success of refugee students, keeping them in school longer and bridging the gap to post-secondary education more effectively. Because the literature on increasing access to post-

secondary education for refugees is quite thin, this section also looks to the literature on other vulnerable groups, including immigrant and aboriginal populations, who have historically had low participation rates in post-secondary education. Meanwhile, the program scan in section 4.2 looks at existing programs to support the integration and educational success of refugee youth.

#### **4.1 Literature review of overcoming barriers to education**

The education system is seen as a primary location for the integration and socialization of refugee students in both the short and long term. Likewise, integration is a process that can take many years for refugee students especially. While publicly funded programs such as ELL classes, reception classes, settlement workers or translation services may assist integration in the short-term, there are few programs that assist youth to develop the connections, experiences and relationships to be successful in the long-term. Meanwhile, a variety of programs can foster a different form of integration and belonging, such as heritage or international language programs. At the secondary or post-secondary school level, administrators need to recognize the importance of diversity, including “the rich exchange of ideas, cultural norms, and pluralistic perspectives that take place within the spaces of public schools” (Basu, 2011). In an increasingly multicultural country, this social, cultural and linguistic capital can provide both immigrants and Canadian-born students with experiences and opportunities that not only aid long-term integration, but provide an important form of experiential education. Dubbed “bridging capital,” this form of integration “goes beyond economic, social, and political integration to include a multitude of otherness as a cohesive opportunity of citizenry” (Basu, 2011, p. 1313).

Integration is a two-way process, where both the newcomer and the host society must take steps to adapt to a new, shared society. By recasting the integration experience, Basu (2011) argues that schools become primary sites for the process of social relations, and immigrants become active participants in the shared process of community building, both contributing to and receiving from the host community. However, this process “requires incentives be initiated by schools in its capacity as a public institution, but instead of integration being a one-way path to joining the mainstream, or an act of reciprocity between newcomer and native-born, it is a multifarious form of integration that explores the cosmopolitan cultural capital of other newcomer groups” (Hyndman, 2011, p. 26).

Shakya, et al. (2010) argues that refugee youth have an awareness of the potential and necessity of post-secondary education to improve their circumstances and overcome their “marginalization,” however, are met with “compounding systemic barriers and discriminations” (p. 74). To address these barriers, various researchers recommend solutions that address both policy and practice. Shakya, et al. (2010) recommends increases in funding for English or French language classes in addition to professional interpretation services. Furthermore, guidance counselors and teachers must become “more sensitive and responsive to the needs of refugee students” (p. 75). This sentiment is confirmed by Gunderson (2000), who advocates for educators to value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of immigrant and refugee students. Meanwhile, Woods (2009) argues that schools serve not only educational purposes, but also play a role in promoting citizenship and social integration, as well as a primary place to care for the welfare of students and alleviate resettlement stress. Likewise, educators

can mitigate some of the barriers faced by refugees through curriculum design and pedagogical approaches that address educational disruptions and trauma faced by many refugee students (Shakya, et al., 2010; Woods, 2009).

These strategic initiatives are confirmed by Rossiter and Rossiter (2009), who recommend comprehensive strategies that address settlement, mental health, and multicultural challenges faced by refugee youth and promote the successful integration and inclusion of newcomers in host communities, ensuring their socioeconomic well-being and success. They confirm the need for school-based settlement programs, including improved education and understanding of teachers and school staff around the unique challenges faced by refugee students. Shakya, et al. (2010) also acknowledges that discrimination in educational institutions is an ongoing concern, and recommends comprehensive anti-oppression training at all levels.

The role of mentoring is recognized by several researchers as a promising practice in increasing overall well-being of refugee students, and particularly in giving guidance to youth as they navigate the education system (Roland, 2008; Mentor, 2009; Shakya, et al., 2010; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Roland (2008) reports that mentoring can motivate marginalized students, allowing them to develop a sense of community and a network of contacts and supports throughout the educational institution. At the same time, Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) recognize the importance of positive peer relationships at school and recommend peer ambassador programs that match newcomers with other students. Mentored students indicated “greater knowledge of the culture and system of the institution, as well as positive results relating to the construct of self-confidence; self-identity being a critical element of student empowerment and self-confidence” (Roland, 2008, p. 60). Furthermore, close relationships with peers and adults can help foster feelings of safety, inclusion and belonging for refugee youth, and can help youth “negotiate the process of acculturation” and be successful at school (Mentor, 2009, p. 11). At the same time, mentoring programs can be multifaceted and designed to address a number of barriers, including emotional support, academic support and tutoring, providing opportunities for peer interaction and social support, or providing guidance to students as they transition to post-secondary education (Mentor, 2009, p. 23).

These approaches should be combined with supports that address financial barriers, including targeted scholarships or bursaries. With this in mind, Shakya, et al. (2010) recommends the creation of bridging and preparation programs and scholarships that target refugees in addition to other “innovative and equity based strategies that can promote high educational aspirations among refugee youth and meet these aspirations” (p. 75). Likewise, goal setting and career counseling are also seen as solutions to challenges that refugee students face in understanding and navigating the post-secondary education system (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Thus, a bridging program should be holistic, addressing multiple needs and barriers, providing guidance, financial assistance, academic support, counseling, settlement support, and opportunities for social integration.

While literature on refugees and post-secondary education is thin, there is more research on other vulnerable populations that face many of the same barriers to education. For example, researchers have

acknowledged that aboriginal people in Canada are underrepresented in post-secondary institutions, and have identified many barriers: many aboriginal people living on reserves lack quality elementary and secondary education and are more likely to drop out; poverty and socioeconomic barriers including high costs of housing and day care; post-secondary institutions have little awareness or understanding of unique cultural values or learning needs of aboriginal students; systemic barriers including discrimination, school environment isolation; and personal issues including family struggles and lack of guidance or role models (R.A. Malatest and Associates, Ltd. , 2004; Usher, 2009). At the same time, reports offer many possible solutions to improve access to post-secondary education for aboriginal people including government funding of aboriginal education, targeted grants and scholarships and bursaries, college and university programs designed to promote and support aboriginal students in post-secondary education (such as active recruitment, transition or preparation courses, and ongoing guidance and support), and other initiatives designed to address the unique geographic, cultural and learning needs of aboriginal people (Usher, 2009). While this research points to a number of potential solutions to increase the participation of aboriginal students in post-secondary education, there is less information showing if these measures are actually effective. Likewise, such measures are often chronically underfunded. Nevertheless, any strategy will take continued time and effort to show significant results.

Thus, overcoming the barriers to post-secondary education will involve a mix of programs, policies, partnerships and strategies. The conceptual framework presented in Section Five explores some of these possibilities, while the following section examines programs developed in other communities to increase access to post-secondary education for refugees. Though the body of literature on increasing access to education is limited, aboriginal programs in addition to other programs that increase refugee youths’ sense of integration and belonging offer important insight into possibilities for KPU and Karen refugees in Langley and Surrey. A summary of some of the recommendations outlined above is given in Table 2. These strategies address a number of the barriers identified previously in Table 1, and provide a foundation for potential programs that could support Karen refugee students locally.

**Table 2 - Summary of recommendations in the literature**

Barrier	Strategy identified in the literature
Lack of previous education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridging programs to support students in post-secondary education               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Active recruitment</li> <li>○ Transition or preparation courses</li> <li>○ Ongoing guidance and support</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Academic preparation courses</li> <li>• On campus-tutoring</li> </ul>
Lack of language ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased ELL/ESL funding for refugee youth</li> <li>• English preparation courses</li> </ul>
School Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive cross-cultural and anti-oppression training               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Need for teachers to value the cultural and linguistic</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>background of refugee students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cross-cultural bridging programs</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Mentoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Role models</li> <li>○ Social support, navigating school system</li> <li>○ Peer ambassadors to support integration and inclusion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Mental health and culture shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Counseling, recreation programs, support services</li> </ul>
Lack of guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Guidance counseling that is sensitive to the unique needs of refugees</li> </ul>
Socioeconomic barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Targeted grants and bursaries for refugee students</li> <li>● Programs that address multiple needs simultaneously: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mental health</li> <li>○ Settlement needs</li> <li>○ Family responsibility</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The literature provides an important framework to review programs that are already in place in other communities. The following sub-section provides a closer examination of such programs; in fact, many reflect themes and recommendations found in the literature, including mentoring and programs that promote social inclusion. Likewise, these programs lead to more practical recommendations that Kwantlen Polytechnic University can implement with the help of its community partners.

## 4.2 Review of Support Programs for Refugee Youth

Recognizing the vulnerable nature of refugee populations and the similar barriers that exist in other communities across North America and around the world, it is helpful to examine a number of actual, effectively performing programs that have been implemented to address these barriers. These programs present a number of opportunities for learning as KPU considers specific, practice-informed strategies to reduce barriers for refugee students and Karen students in particular. While not all of the programs specifically target refugees, they seek to increase the capacity of “at-risk” youth and provide opportunities and pathways for integration into mainstream programs.

These programs were chosen based on a number of criteria. First, they were selected to represent a cross-section of services that aim to increase access to education not only for refugee students, but for other vulnerable populations as well. This broad range of programs covers a variety of strategies but generally take a holistic approach, including mentoring, community bridging, academic support, and financial support. Since the academic literature on overcoming barriers to education for refugee youth is quite thin, these programs provide insight into possible strategies to increase access to education. Further, the programs discussed represent a diverse array of programs in different contexts and geographical regions. The programs reviewed have been selected for relevance to the Langley and Surrey context as potential “best practice” models that could be duplicated or explored further by KPU and its community partners.

### *FreeRunning Program– Vancouver, BC*

FreeRunning is a demonstration project designed and delivered by Mosaic, a nonprofit settlement service agency operating in Metro Vancouver. This program was selected for review because it is both local and because it targets vulnerable refugee populations that have similar educational experiences to Karen youth in Langley and Surrey. Targeting the needs of multi-barriered refugee youth, the program was designed to facilitate the settlement and integration process for youth aged fifteen to twenty-five, and in particular prepare them for education, training and employment. To accomplish this, program staff work with youth to develop individualistic and holistic goals and programs, develop career plans and assess barriers that may lie in the way (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011; Mosaic, n.d.).

As a program operating in the Lower Mainland, FreeRunning is of particular interest for this study and its evaluation offers a number of insights about what might be feasible in the Langley and Surrey context. The findings of a Metropolis BC study in 2011 highlights several challenges in implementing such a program, in addition to several factors necessary for success. First, the study underlines the need for programs to be flexible and adaptable. Khadka, et al. (2011) reinforce the finding that refugee youth face a number of diverse and distinct challenges that will vary between and within ethnic groups, length of time in Canada, and previous and current settlement challenges experienced. Furthermore, because of socioeconomic, family, and other challenges, refugee youth “face life conditions [that] were constantly changing, dynamic, and fluid,” leading program administrators to “adopt flexible programming strategies while adhering to the key programming principles” (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011, p. 10). For example, youth may change locations because of housing requirements or take temporary jobs that may temporarily impede their participation in the program.

Furthermore, Khadka, et al. (2011) suggest that programs must address multiple needs and be simultaneously individualistic, holistic, collaborative, and culturally sensitive. The needs of refugee youth are broad and diverse, requiring support from translators, settlement workers, counselors, teachers and others in the community. Furthermore, an approach that is both individualistic and holistic is necessary to understand the barriers and immediate needs unique to individual students, while also addressing the more systemic challenges. Finally, programs must take into consideration the often complex cultural forces at work among refugee youth, and be particularly sensitive to these often “invisible” barriers (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011).

Meanwhile, the Khadka, et al. (2011) study underlines the need for programs that are long-term, since the settlement process can take more than five years. Unfortunately, funding structures and sources often change with governments and are subject to prevailing economic conditions. Likewise, pilot and demonstration projects may not have renewable sources of funding. This often leads to youth programs that are “various shades of patchwork, sidelining, and marginalization of immigrant youth in the social services and education arenas” (as quoted in Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011, p. 19). An assessment of the FreeRunning program found that it took time to find clients, build trust relationships, adapt program offerings to their unique needs, and provide ongoing follow-up for long-term goals. Furthermore, because of the range of skills, interests and education levels of clients, many staff assisted in developing goals and action plans that could take up to five years to fulfill (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, &

Aube, 2011). This, combined with the “fluid” and “dynamic” resettlement and integration process, necessitates a program that will be permanent and provide support over the long-term.

Finally, Khadka, et al.’s (2011) evaluation of the Free Running program found that because of the complex needs of refugee youth, programs targeting this population are most successful when they integrate job experience/apprenticeships, mentorship/guidance, and education simultaneously. Furthermore, they recognize the importance of mentoring in youth identity formation. Mentoring can provide a link to Canadian experience in the job market, including internships or volunteer opportunities. Ultimately, mentoring is seen as a way to facilitate a positive approach to youth development, helping youth achieve their goals and realize their potential through encouraging relationships (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011). Meanwhile, program participants recognized the need for practical Canadian work experience to improve their labour market outcomes. This was identified as an equal and often competing interest with furthering education and English language development (Khadka, Yan, McGaw, & Aube, 2011). With this in mind, programs with an integrated approach may be the most successful.

#### *HYPE (Helping Youth Pursue Education) – Centennial College, Scarborough*

HYPE is a six week summer program offered at Centennial College in Scarborough for at-risk students. Since its inception in 2007, it has seen over 400 students graduate from diverse career programs, including courses in auto body and mechanics, computers, office administration, human development and hairstyling. Furthermore, the program acts as a bridging opportunity to other programs at the college, such as business management (Brown, 2010).

Similar to the FreeRunning program, the HYPE program addresses multiple needs and barriers. Though the program does not exclusively target refugee students, it recognizes the unique and individual barriers that many youth face. While preparing students for rigorous academic expectations, the program also teaches students about financial literacy and helps them navigate the process of applying for bursaries and student loans. A school administrator explains this approach: “In six weeks on campus we try to reduce as many potential barriers as we can, including giving them free breakfast and lunch and free transportation to school and giving them a taste of the academic expectations at the college level” (Brown, 2010). Meanwhile, similar to Khadka, et al.’s (2011) suggestion that programs are often overly dependent on short-term grants and funding sources, the HYPE program has responded by developing a more collaborative approach to funding. Initially funded through a United Way grant, the program is now funded by the college as a more permanent source of funding.

#### *Bridge-2-Success Refugee Youth Development Program – San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, California*

Bridge-2-Success is a program run through Refugee Transitions organization that provides settlement services and supports to refugee youth in the San Francisco Bay area. The program is designed to help refugee youth “succeed academically, develop career-readiness skills, and develop supportive relationships with adults and peers” primarily through home-based mentoring and tutoring (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services [BRYCS], n.d.). Whether through community partnerships or bridging gaps between home and school, the focus of the program can be summarized as having a

primary focus on relationship-building. Furthermore, one of the primary activities of Bridge-2-Success is mentoring. As such, the program recognizes the unique and complex barriers faced by refugee youth, and provides intensive training, development and ongoing support to volunteers, who are thoroughly screened and then matched with youth participants. Furthermore, program staff maintain contact with volunteers and youth participants, and provide ongoing support to ensure both receive adequate help (BRYCS, n.d.; Refugee Transitions, 2004).

The Bridge-2-Success program also recognizes the need for collaboration to address the complex and interrelated barriers of refugee youth, and seek to maintain collaborative partnerships between program staff, volunteers, teachers, counselors, and other school staff. Furthermore, program staff and volunteers act as a link between the home and school environments, often accompanying parents to parent-teacher interviews or guidance counselor appointments to get updates on the student's progress and how they can best serve the student they are working with. Program staff also maintain relationships with community partners.

Meanwhile, the program seeks to support refugee youth both individually and holistically, and individual services are supplemented with community supports. While volunteers provide strategic tutoring and work with the youth on employment readiness or other skills, they also spend time going to parks or participating in sports or other non-academic activities. They may also provide assistance with applying for financial aid for recreational activities or even one-on-one support to navigate post-secondary options or employment opportunities (Refugee Transitions, 2004). In addition to matching refugee youth with volunteer mentors/tutors, Refugee Transitions also organizes weekly meetings with program staff to help students find jobs and provide classes to help students study for their high school equivalent diploma (Refugee Transitions, 2004). There are also programs like summer camps and a Refugee Youth Leadership Corp that complement the mentoring services and provide youth with specific skills related to leadership and community service (Refugee Transitions, 2012).

#### *PAIR Global Leaders Program – Houston, Texas*

Recognizing the challenge that refugee youth face in navigating the secondary and post-secondary systems, the Global Leaders program aims to provide guidance and support that refugee parents may be unable to provide to help their children prepare for university. Several research sources cite the inability of refugee parents to provide guidance for students in their career plans and navigating the post-secondary education system (Yau, 1996; Shakya, et al., 2010). Pairing students with a mentor to focus specifically on college and career options can give students the confidence and guidance they need to explore opportunities and understand barriers and pre-requisites to programs.

With this in mind, Global Leaders is a weekly program for refugee youth operated by the Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees [PAIR] that facilitates pairing mentors with students to “explore topics including careers, post-high school education and training options, academic planning, SAT preparation, college essay writing, participating in extracurricular activities, job interview skills, and writing a résumé.” Through these activities, “students develop personal goals and educational plans, participate in community service projects, and cultivate leadership skills” (Partnership for the

Advancement and Immersion of Refugees [PAIR], n.d., para. 5). This program also includes a college orientation day, where program staff accompany a group of refugee youth to the local college campus.

Moreover, the program also emphasizes the value of higher education. Refugee youth face a conflict of working to provide for basic needs, and pursuing higher education and language training to improve their circumstances in the long-run (Shakya, et al., 2010). Visiting a college campus to hear about “the benefits of higher education” and being partnered with mentors that are also university students can help students who are generally from lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods have role models that can positively influence refugee students (PAIR, n.d., para. 5).

#### *Student Refugee Program - World University Service of Canada*

World University Service of Canada (WUSC) is a charitable organization that privately sponsors single refugees to come to Canada and provides scholarships to attend university through its Student Refugee Program (SRP). With this in mind, the program varies widely between participating universities across the country, with varying levels of financial support and integration assistance. Through WUSC’s work in refugee camps providing basic education, promising young refugee students are chosen for scholarships and private sponsorship in Canada. Sponsoring university committees must meet the minimum requirements for sponsorship under Canada’s private refugee sponsorship guidelines, but while some students may receive a full scholarship to attend university for four years, other universities may only provide a scholarship for one year. Meanwhile, the intensive university preparation provided to the youth offers a number of considerations for preparing youth already resettled in Canada for success in post-secondary education (World University Service of Canada [WUSC], n.d.).

Recognizing that students chosen for WUSC sponsorship may not have sufficient education to succeed at a Canadian university, they are provided a year-long program of intensive ESL training and academic preparation prior to their departure for Canada. Furthermore, refugee students are supported by a local campus committee of peers and staff. The sponsoring committee not only raises funds for the sponsorship and scholarship, but also provides integration support, guidance and friendship for the student as they adjust to life in Canada and on campus (WUSC, n.d.). The SRP has been heralded for expanding the consciousness and altering perspectives of not only refugee students, but also Canadian students, faculty and staff. Peterson (2011) suggests that the Student Refugee Program “facilitates transformative learning, not just for the refugee students themselves, whose lives are changed in very direct and tangible ways by their participation in the program, but often also for the Canadian students, faculty and staff who are involved” (p. 111).

### **4.3 Discussion of support programs for refugee youth**

These programs offer insight into possible strategies used in other communities to increase the educational success of refugee students. There are several key themes that emerge, including the need for holistic programs that identify the complex needs of these youth and address multiple barriers simultaneously. Several of the programs use mentors to address these complex needs, and provide student services including guidance, educational, and social support to help students find a sense of

belonging in their school and community and decrease feelings of isolation and marginalization. Table 3 provides an overview of some of the strategies used in these programs, as well as the identified barrier that they help address.

Table 3 - Program Overview

Barrier Addressed	Strategy	Free Running	HYPE	Bridge-2-Success	PAIR	SRP – WUSC
<b>Multiple barriers</b>	Community collaboration	✓		✓	✓	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridging</li> <li>• Service partnerships</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Lack of previous education, language ability, age of arrival</b>	Intensive academic preparation		✓			✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutors</li> <li>• Pre-departure ESL courses</li> </ul>			✓	✓	✓
<b>Isolation, marginalization, culture shock/mental health, identity loss, language ability, lack of guidance</b>	Mentoring	✓		✓	✓	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-on-one</li> <li>• Campus support group</li> </ul>		✓			✓
<b>Lack of parental guidance/involvement</b> <b>Lack of information/awareness about school system</b>	Guidance counseling	✓			✓	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career planning</li> <li>• Education planning</li> </ul>	✓		✓	✓	
		✓	✓		✓	
<b>Socioeconomic barriers</b>	Employment training	✓				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family responsibility</li> <li>• Lack of previous education/skills</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Health</li> </ul>						
<b>Financial barriers</b>	Financial literacy		✓		✓	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying for bursaries/loans</li> </ul>					

Ultimately, the diverse selection of programs reviewed here shows that there are multiple strategies that can address the complex barriers faced by refugee students as they pursue post-secondary education. Likewise, Table 3 also shows that each program focuses on different barriers; it is difficult to ascertain that any single program can address all barriers to post-secondary education simultaneously, further highlighting the need for collaboration and community partnerships. Moreover, while gaps remain in these programs, they provide best-practice models that can be used as examples for this study. Nevertheless, there are also programs and resources that exist in both Langley and Surrey. While the background and purpose of this project shows that existing resources are not sufficient to meet the unique needs of refugee youth, they nevertheless offer a foundation for any strategy that will take aim at addressing some of the barriers.

## 4.4 Local Program Scan

To provide recommendations to the client, CIR:CLE, about possible responses to increase access to post-secondary programs for Karen refugee youth, it is important to have an overview of programs existing in Langley and Surrey to help bridge the transition between secondary and post-secondary education for refugee students. These programs include adult education, specialized reception classes for refugee youth, adult English language classes, and other programs designed for students that have been unable to complete their secondary education. It is important to note that there does seem to be a disparity in programs between Langley and Surrey. The latter has many opportunities for youth to re-enter the school system, including foundational language classes and leadership training programs designed to empower refugee youth. One possible reason for this disparity is that Surrey receives far more refugee students each year than Langley, and is far richer in diversity. On the other hand, Langley received a large influx of Karen refugees between 2007-2010, but very few prior to or after that time (ISS of BC, 2010). Nevertheless, data collected by CIR:CLE seems to show that Karen youth from both Langley and Surrey experience barriers post-secondary programs in similar ways.

### *4.4.1 An overview of existing adult education and transition programs in Langley*

There are several adult education and transition programs in Langley for students to finish graduation requirements, including the Langley Education Centre. However, courses start at the grade 10 level and many refugee students do not yet have the English ability or pre-requisite courses to enroll. This underlines a large educational gap in Langley; programs do not meet the unique educational needs of refugees, and can be challenging to access. Nevertheless, the Langley Education Centre is part of the Langley School District and funded through the Ministry of Education. As such, its courses are free and flexible for students who may be working or over the age of 19 and unable to attend a traditional secondary school (Langley School District, n.d.).

It is also important to consider KPU's existing programs and their suitability for refugee students. Similar to the Langley Education Centre, KPU's Adult Basic Education (ABE) program allows students to work towards requirements for their high school diploma equivalent or to access other KPU programs. This program is self-paced, and not geared towards students who are at lower levels of English language learning (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, n.d.). However, for refugee students who have made good

progress in the secondary school system, the ABE program can be useful in preparing students for the rigorous academic standards of university and improving their English to levels required to be successful in KPU courses.

Classes for English language instruction are limited in Langley for adult students. While there is the government-funded English Language Studies for Adults (ELSA) program, its primary purpose is to provide students with language for work and life, rather than academic, contexts. A promising development to this program is that it now offers higher levels of language instruction, whereas it previously provided English instruction to an intermediate level (Langley Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Committee, 2012). At the same time, a new stream of government funding has made English as a Second Language Courses accessible to Permanent Residents at no charge (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012). While this is a relatively new development, it may provide additional options to refugee students with higher English abilities to study English at a higher academic level.

With these programs in mind, there remains a large gap in Langley for refugee students with lower English abilities and limited previous education. There are many barriers and challenges for these youth to gain the language and education needed to access post-secondary programs and improve their access to meaningful employment in the labour market. It is in the best interests of both the community, in addition to the humanitarian interests of resettled refugees, to provide opportunities to these marginalized individuals to contribute to society in a positive way.

#### *4.4.2 An overview of existing adult education and transition programs in Surrey*

Surrey is a much larger, more diverse city than Langley. Furthermore, Surrey received on average 33% of the Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) destined for BC between 2005 and 2009, more than any other city in British Columbia (ISS of BC, 2010). By necessity, it would make sense that Surrey's educational offerings would meet the needs of the large and very diverse immigrant and refugee population.

One of the primary adult education programs in Surrey is Invergarry Adult Learning Centre, run through the Surrey School District. This learning centre offers academic courses to meet traditional adult graduation program requirements in addition to foundational literacy courses in math, English, social studies, computers, or other subjects for students that may not have the educational background to be successful completing the higher level courses (Surrey School District, 2011). This program is publicly funded and available to all students free of charge.

Like Langley, there are also many English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) programs throughout Surrey. Service providers in Surrey include DiverseCity, Douglas College and S.U.C.C.E.S.S., and class locations vary widely. While ELSA programs provide English language instruction up to Canadian

Language Benchmark (CBL) 7<sup>6</sup>, the focus of the classes is more conversational and workplace English, rather than academic English (Langley Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Committee, 2012).

Surrey also has unique programs designed to empower and develop the leadership potential of immigrant and refugee youth, which can lead to feelings of belonging and connection and increase the overall capacity and ability of refugee youth to pursue post-secondary programs. One of these leadership programs is the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia's (ISS of BC) Multicultural Youth Circle (MY Circle) program which aims to help youth decrease their isolation, learn life skills, make friends and learn about community services and resources. The goal of MY Circle is "to increase the active participation and positive integration of young newcomers by providing them with a safe, supportive and comfortable place where they can gain validation and understanding around the complex issues of integration and adjustment" (ISS of BC, 2010). The program provides leadership and training to immigrant and refugee youth to become Peer Support Group Facilitators, who then return to their communities to deliver peer support groups for other immigrants and refugees that are experiencing similar challenges in adjustment and integration (ISS of BC, 2010).

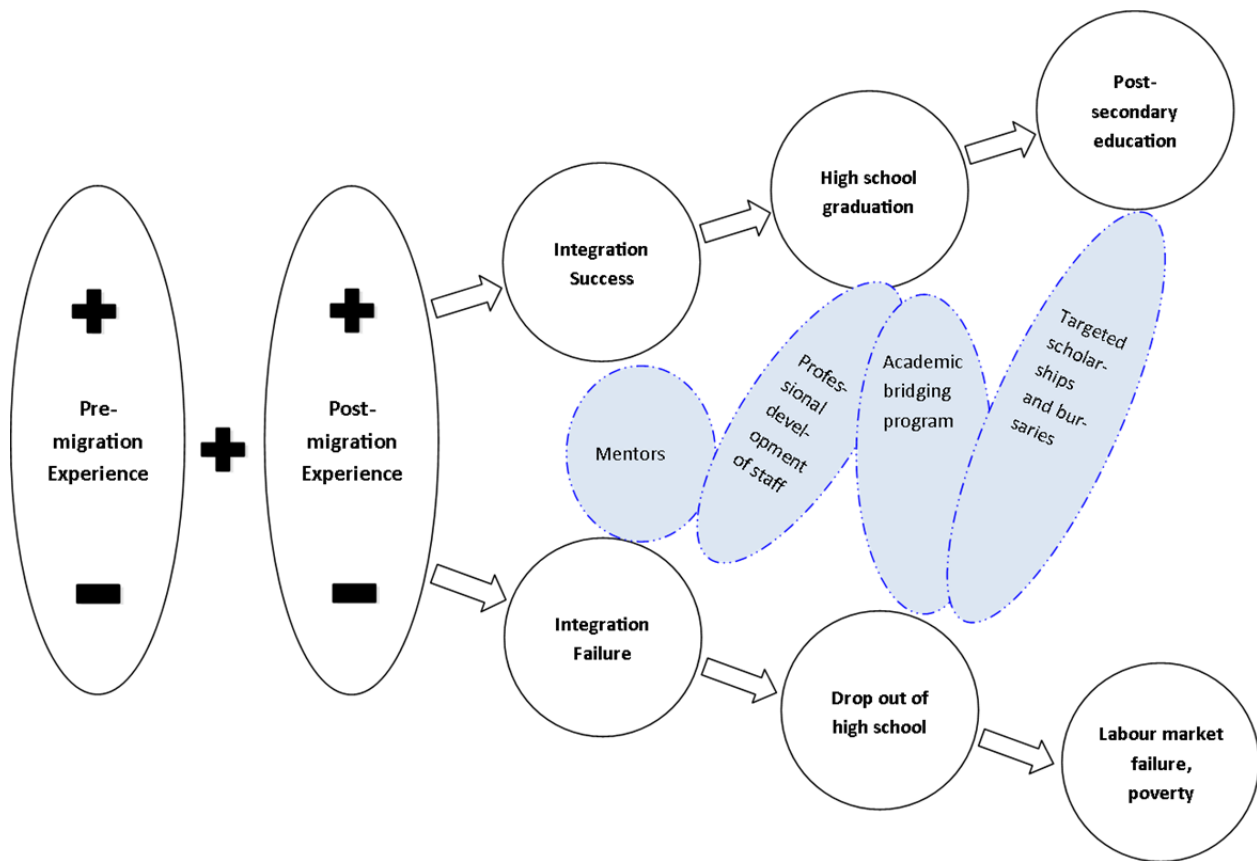
#### *4.4.3 Discussion of local program scan*

While a variety of programs exist in Langley and Surrey that could potentially benefit Karen refugee students, there remain significant gaps. Moreover, the lack of participation of refugee students in post-secondary programs is further evidence that more can be done to increase access to KPU programs. For example, in Langley there are no educational programs for refugee youth who may arrive with low literacy or numeracy, but are aging out of the public school system. Likewise, while there are many adult ESL classes, there are no programs to prepare older students for rigorous academic courses at the university level. Thus, this local program scan builds on Figure 14 at the beginning of this section showing the gaps in services for refugee students illustrated with blue circles. Moreover, Figure 15 below outlines some possible strategies discussed in the literature and program review to fill these gaps. While existing programs in Langley and Surrey do begin to fill these circles, they are nevertheless insufficient to bridge the gap between secondary school and university, or between integration failure and educational success. With this in mind, the next section looks to other countries with significant resettlement programs for further information on refugees and post-secondary education.

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<sup>6</sup> The Canadian Language Benchmark is the standard assessment of listening, speaking, reading and writing proficiency. It is widely used by educational, training, community and workplace service providers to describe, measure and recognize language proficiency. For example, CBL level 4 is required to apply for Canadian Citizenship, while CLB level 7 is considered moderately proficient (WelcomeBC, n.d.).

Figure 15 – Possible interventions to increase access to post-secondary education for refugee youth



## 4.5 Jurisdictional Scan

This section provides an overview of resettlement programs and research on refugee access to post-secondary education in other jurisdictions. The focus here is on countries that like Canada, offer significant refugee resettlement programs, including Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). More specifically, the countries examined in this section have been chosen because like Canada, they accept the majority of the world's refugees destined for third-country resettlement. However, similar to the research in Canada addressing refugee access to post-secondary education, the literature in other jurisdictions is equally thin.

There are immense differences between these countries' resettlement programs, and thus the support and integration assistance provided to refugees during their resettlement. This can impact the successful integration of refugee youth, and subsequently influence the barriers experienced as refugee youth seek to access post-secondary education. At the same time, each of these countries approaches post-secondary education differently. While the UK previously boasted a strong tradition of free post-secondary education, the country now faces a challenge of keeping post-secondary education accessible while charging fees that may be unaffordable to low-income groups like refugees. On the other hand,

post-secondary education in the United States has traditionally been expensive, even in state-funded local colleges.

Overall, the available literature seems to point to similar themes discussed in this literature review: education is seen as an important tool for the socialization and integration success of refugee youth, however, these youth face immense barriers in achieving educational success and ultimately accessing post-secondary programs. Likewise, the literature presents a common theme that specialized policies and strategic programs must be implemented to meet the unique and complex needs of refugee students.

#### *4.5.1 Australia*

Australia's refugee resettlement program is similar to Canada's in size and scope. Nevertheless, the approach to education in Australia is unique; for example, like other ESL newcomers, refugee students with low-literacy backgrounds receive up to one year of intensive English language training at separate schools before they enter mainstream high schools. However, upon entering mainstream classes, older students experience many of the same challenges reported by refugee students and school staff in other jurisdictions including levels in reading and writing that are more on par with elementary-school aged students (Windle & Miller, 2012).

Meanwhile, Joyce, et al. (2009), found similar limitations in the existing research about the experience of refugee students and post-secondary education, and conducted their own study of refugee students enrolled in university in Australia to contribute to the literature void. Many of Joyce, et al.'s (2009) findings reflect other research of refugees in secondary school: feelings of isolation, financial burdens, language challenges, and other barriers were all identified in their research. Likewise, Joyce, et al. (2009) writes:

...for many students the university is a culturally alienating place; programmes may need to be developed that enable students to become active members of a learning community and have a sense of belonging to this culture. Students who are under-prepared (that is, they do not have an understanding of how the university operates and how to succeed within the culture), require a more specific tailored induction into the university and its knowledge communities so that they are strategically positioned and equipped to meet its challenges.

(Joyce, Earnest, De Morri, & Silvagni, 2010)

Furthermore, Joyce, et al. (2009) recommends preparatory bridging classes to ensure that refugee students have the language and academic skills and have a better understanding of the discipline and requirements of post-secondary education, similar to programs that many universities offer to international students. The authors recommend further action on behalf of universities to increase awareness about courses and programs, and support students in their enrollment procedures, since there is a lack of information among refugee communities about programs and how to access them. Likewise, a community development approach is seen as a critical framework to support the success and retention of refugee students, where collaboration between the refugee student, mentors, community partners, university staff and others is ongoing (Joyce, Earnest, De Morri, & Silvagni, 2010).

Overall, the agenda for research on refugee access to education and approach to resettlement in Australia is parallel to findings from Canada. While the findings from Australian researchers corroborate findings from this literature review, they nevertheless offer insight into educational paradigms existing in other resettlement countries.

#### 4.5.2 *United Kingdom*

Like other refugee receiving countries, the United Kingdom does not have targeted education funding or programs for youth from protracted refugee situations (Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Stevenson and Willott's (2007) study corroborates research highlighted in this literature review: certain ethnic groups in the UK show lower educational achievement, largely attributed to socioeconomic factors, isolation and social exclusion, discrimination or racism, or language barriers. With this in mind, there seems to be a movement in the UK towards educational policies that will target vulnerable minority groups including refugees and implement strategies that will increase achievement.

Prior to 2004 when British Parliament implemented its *Higher Education Act*, post-secondary education was free to residents in the UK. Subsequently, new fees were introduced which were widely criticized for reducing access to post-secondary education for lower-income students. In response, the government established the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) to ensure that new tuition fees would not impact participation in higher education. More specifically, the "OFFA requires all higher education institutions (HEIs) in England to support improvements in participation rates in higher education from under-represented groups, including those from under-represented ME [minority ethnic] backgrounds, and to safeguard and promote fair access" (Stevenson & Willott, 2007, p. 672). Furthermore, the OFFA explains on their website that their "overarching aim in developing the strategy is to ensure that everyone with the potential to benefit from higher education has an equal opportunity to do so, regardless of background, age, ethnicity, disability or gender. The strategy will also help get the greatest possible impact from the effort and investment put into widening participation, access and student success... (Office for Fair Access [OFFA], 2013, para. 2). However, Stevenson and Willott (2007) argue that despite these strategies, refugees are not among "targeted" groups and are instead linked with other ethnic minorities that do not have the same challenges experienced by refugees. Likewise, they argue that refugee youth must be considered as a distinct cohort to increase access to higher education, not only for reasons of social justice and inclusion, but also because "evidence shows how students from other cultures tremendously enrich the learning experience of home students" (Stevenson & Willott, 2007, p. 684).

While Stevenson and Willott (2007) found that refugee youth arrive in the UK with high education aspirations, they face barriers that reflect those of other resettlement countries including Canada. Nevertheless, the presence in the UK of the Office for Fair Access reflects a promising practice to widen the participation of marginalized groups and ensure that values of social justice and inclusion are practiced in the higher education system. This organization appears to be unique among countries with high refugee resettlement priorities, including Canada, the United States and Australia.

#### 4.5.3 *United States*

While the United States accepts the most refugees per year of resettling countries, their post-migration settlement and integration policies are not equal to those offered by Canada. More specifically, the Department of State’s Reception and Placement program provides services to refugees for only the first three months after arrival, contracting all services to non-government resettlement agencies (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Likewise, most refugee support services in schools are privatized and vary greatly across the country. Nevertheless, many local organizations have developed strategies to support refugee youth in their resettlement and ultimately increase access to post-secondary education, which have been highlighted in Section 4 of the literature review.

McBrien’s (2005) study is one of few looking at the unique educational needs and barriers of refugee students in the United States. Her literature review corroborates many common themes, such as the substantial differences that separate refugees from the larger immigrant population, including previous trauma, lack of parental guidance or involvement and poverty. Furthermore, McBrien (2005) recognizes the importance of the school environment, suggesting that “the school can be viewed as a major source of security for students when teachers are willing and well-trained to detect refugee students’ needs” (McBrien, 2005, p. 354). Meanwhile, her proposed solution to help refugee students overcome their barriers to success is to “provide social services to facilitate refugee children’s adjustment, provide language instruction for students and their parents, and combat discrimination” (McBrien, 2005, p. 353). Overall, she calls for increased teacher training and sensitivity towards the unique and complex challenges facing refugee youth, and strategies that will help the population become well-functioning, contributing, successful members of society.

Ultimately, social structures and educational policies in the United States vary immensely from those in Canada. As a result, the literature on refugee access to post-secondary education is almost non-existent. While local resettlement organizations have developed strategies to help refugees integrate into mainstream society, it is presumed that much like Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, refugee youth in the United States face significant barriers in accessing post-secondary education.

**Table 4- Summary of strategies from Australia, the UK and the US**

Barrier	Proposed strategy
<b>Lack of education (gaps in numeracy and literacy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[Australia] Preparatory bridging classes similar to those offered for international students</li> </ul>
<b>Language challenges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Insufficient time for ESL instruction before entering mainstream academic courses</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[Australia &amp; US] Increased funding for ESL instruction</li> </ul>
<b>Isolation/marginalization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Social exclusion</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[UK &amp; US] Increased sensitivity training for school staff and teachers</li> </ul>
<b>Resettlement stress/mental health/culture shock</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[Australia] Community development approach to increase collaboration among</li> </ul>

	service providers
<b>Lack of guidance/awareness about education system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Australia] Outreach to increase awareness of programs</li> <li>• Support for enrollment process</li> </ul>
<b>Socioeconomic challenges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Financial burden</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [UK] Office For Fair Access requires post-secondary institutions to increase participation among under-represented groups through tuition supports</li> </ul>

This jurisdictional scan of countries with resettlement programs on par with Canada’s is not surprising; in fact, it is a reflection of much of the literature on refugee youth and education. First, several of the authors identify that the literature is thin and that more research is needed. Meanwhile, all of the authors identify the complex barriers faced by refugee youth and the need for culturally sensitive, targeted programs to increase access to post-secondary education. Furthermore, this jurisdictional scan corroborates the conceptual framework illustrated in Figures 13 and 14, where a number of strategies are suggested to increase settlement, integration and education outcomes for refugee students who aspire to post-secondary education in Canada. With these diverse strategies in mind, the next section offers further discussion around the literature and program review, and subsequently recommendations for Kwantlen Polytechnic University to implement for refugee youth in Langley and Surrey.

# SECTION FIVE: Discussion of the Literature and Program Review

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Research on refugee youth and post-secondary education is scarce. Wilkinson's (2002) study on the academic success of refugee youth was one of the first studies to connect pre- and post-migration experiences to successful integration and school performance. Research by Shakya, et al. (2010) is a more recent example of a study looking at the barriers that refugee youth face in accessing post-secondary education. While more literature is available addressing the academic trajectories of immigrant youth, one of the biggest challenges related to this research is that it tends to present a picture that as a general group, immigrant students tend to achieve educational success on par with Canadian-born students. However, further studies highlighted in this literature review show that there is far more variation with immigration categories, revealing a need for understanding the factors that lead to student success and failure. With this deficit in relevant and recent research on refugee youth in mind, this literature review has drawn on several other distinct literatures; these include research on immigrant youth, research showing the distinct and unique needs of refugee students and research on barriers to post-secondary education for other vulnerable populations. These literatures lead us to several documented conclusions:

1. Immigrants experience unique challenges in the school system, including language barriers, resettlement stress, isolation, social exclusion and discrimination, and other barriers (Anisef P. , Brown, Phythian, Sweet, & Walters, 2008).
2. These barriers are compounded for refugee youth who are experiencing additional barriers like interrupted education, pre- or post-migration trauma, poverty, protracted experience in a refugee camp, or lack of parental guidance (Shakya, et al., 2010; Wilkinson, 2002).
3. Other vulnerable groups, including aboriginal populations, have been underrepresented in post-secondary education in Canada. Many interventions have been utilized to increase their participation, with varying degrees of success, including targeted grants and scholarships, designated spaces in post-secondary education programs, and bridging programs and student supports to provide preparation and guidance to students throughout the education system (Usher, 2009).

By triangulating these distinct bodies of literature, a clearer picture emerges to help us understand the barriers faced by refugee youth and possible interventions to bridge their transition to post-secondary education.

Wilkinson's (2002) study is cited by multiple authors (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2009; Shakya, et al., 2010; Plasterer, 2010; Ferede, 2010), and is one of the first studies in Canada looking at the educational success of refugee youth. While Wilkinson acknowledges specific characteristics can impact the educational success of refugee youth, her conclusions show that refugee youth are mostly performing well in school. Some of these characteristics include ethnicity, gender, refugee camp background,

previous experience with a 'western' school system model, parental health, neighbourhood of residence, grade placement upon arrival, and other considerations (Wilkinson, 2002). Despite indicating several areas where refugee youth may require additional resources, Wilkinson's findings were overall positive, showing that at least one-half of refugee youth were succeeding in the Canadian school system and in their integration into Canadian society, and in academic classes that lead to post-secondary education (Wilkinson, 2002, 190). This finding is at odds with Gunderson's (2000; 2007; 2012) research, which makes more effort to break down differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other important influences on the success of refugee students.

With this in mind, there are several problems with applying Wilkinson's research to our current study on Karen refugee youth, which is a reflection of research involving refugees in general. First, the study examines refugees that arrived in Canada pre-IRPA.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, refugees who arrived in the decade following Wilkinson's study have arrived in Canada with higher medical and settlement needs, including lower life and language skills and higher rates of post-traumatic stress (Presse & Thomson, 2008). Furthermore, Presse and Thomson (2008) suggest that Canada's post-IRPA resettlement policies shifted "from one primarily consisting of European-based political dissidents to one that is largely African, Middle Eastern, and Asian based. Given that some of these groups come from entirely different political, economic, and social contexts, many refugees now have different settlement needs that include special requirements arising from years of trauma or torture followed by years in camps" (p. 96). Meanwhile, as Wilkinson points out, there are broad variations in the category of "refugee," and policy and programs must reflect these variations to provide better services to refugee youth (p. 189). This is especially true in the post-IRPA period, giving rise to more specific requirements for programs and support services to help refugees successfully settle and establish themselves in Canada.

Furthermore, while Wilkinson (2002) acknowledges that literature that shows that refugee camp experience is detrimental to future educational performance, her analysis showed that "refugee camp experience has no direct effect on the educational status of refugee youth" (p. 189). However, Wilkinson's study compares refugees from the former Yugoslavia who arrived in Canada between 1992 and 1997 with other refugee groups of mostly African descent. Notably, the refugee camp experience of refugees from Yugoslavia may not be "protracted" as has been the case for Karen refugees, who have lived in camps for extended periods. This is problematic because other research shows that protracted refugee experience profoundly impacts the health, education and settlement outcomes of refugees (Loescher & Milner, 2005; Presse & Thomson, 2008; USCRI, 2009). On the other hand, Wilkinson attributes this discrepancy to the "immigrant drive effect" where "refugee parents may strongly encourage their children to succeed in school, which may mitigate any negative influences of having experienced life in a refugee camps"(p. 188). This also would not appear to be the case for Karen

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<sup>7</sup> The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) came into effect in Canada on June 28, 2002. Prior to IRPA, refugees chosen for resettlement to Canada were selected primarily for reasons related to their skills, language and ability to integrate. Following IRPA, refugees have been selected primarily for humanitarian reasons. As a result, many refugees that have come to Canada in the post-IRPA period have had higher needs, larger families, lower language skills and previous education, single mothers, complex health issues, and lower integration abilities (Presse & Thomson, 2008).

refugees, who may be illiterate or uneducated themselves and unable to provide support and understand the school system sufficiently to guide their children (IOM, 2006).

On the other hand, this research leads one to believe that the refugee camp background alone does not pose an insurmountable barrier for Karen refugees. For example, Shakya, et al. (2010), argues that refugee youth arrive in Canada with high aspirations for education, but are overwhelmed by negative experiences and multiple barriers as they pursue their educational goals (Shakya, et al., 2010). With this in mind, we must also look to the post-migration experience of Karen refugees, and if the experience of migration at a critical stage of development has adversely affected the educational outcomes of these refugee youth. This is important, since is the post-migration experience that will help to identify any potential solutions to increase access to post-secondary education for refugee youth.

Nevertheless, Shakya, et al.'s (2010) study is important for several reasons. First, the data collected represents refugee youth that have protracted refugee experiences and arrived in Canada in the post-IRPA period, including Karen refugee youth from backgrounds similar to the Karen youth in Langley and Surrey. This is significant, since literature on the educational and resettlement experiences of Karen refugees is scarce. Shakya, et al.'s (2010) study underlines the harsh reality for resettled refugee youth; while they aspire to and recognize the need for high educational goals for success in Canada, they nevertheless experience multiple challenges. This dichotomy is further reflected in the profound challenges inherent in the resettlement process:

Resettlement is a deeply transformative and political process for refugees and for the nations that resettle refugees. For refugees, it is usually an acutely conflicting process that can bring safety, security, freedom, legal rights, hope, and empowerment while at the same time accentuate their sense of loss, separation, tragedy, displacement, and marginalization. In resettlement nations, like Canada, an influx of refugees may be perceived as a collective humanitarian exercise while at the same time shunned for weakening national security, increasing public health concerns, and wasting taxpayer dollars. (Shakya, et al., 2010, p. 73)

Likewise, Shakya, et al.'s (2010) study calls attention to the importance of education for the successful integration and resettlement of refugees into Canadian society, and concludes with a call for refugee policies that are reflective of "transformative humanitarianism" which will "recognize, and not ignore, the deeply political experiences of forced migration, trauma, and multiple vulnerabilities that refugees have undergone and be inspired and supportive of educational and other aspirations that refugees have in spite of these hardships" (Shakya, et al., 2010, p. 74). Thus, Shakya, et al.'s (2010) study offers insight into the systemic barriers facing refugee youth, and a critical argument for the importance of policies that support refugee education. However, it is beyond the scope of their study to go into depth about practical interventions to increase access to post-secondary education, which is where other aspects of this literature review have been necessary to answer the research question and increase understanding about overcoming barriers to education.

It is clear that refugee resettlement is a complex and challenging, though worthwhile, process. Likewise, post-secondary education for refugees is a difficult, though achievable, goal. The previous sections have presented a number of examples where barriers to education are mitigated through targeted programs and strategies. Moreover, Table 5 below summarizes these findings and provides a background for the

conceptual framework presented in the following section. While barriers to education are daunting, there are many possible opportunities for KPU and its community partners to increase access to its programs for refugee youth.

**Table 5 - Barriers and possible interventions to increase access to post-secondary education**

Barrier	Impact	Possible intervention from program review	Result
<b>Age of arrival</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students drop out of high school</li> <li>• Students do not have time to obtain sufficient graduation program requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-secondary education bridging program</li> <li>• Skill training, employment programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students can gain university experience and preparation with peers</li> <li>• Refugee students are more prepared to enter the workforce</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of previous education and language ability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are not able to participate in academic classes</li> <li>• Students are isolated from peers and socialization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Functional literacy/bridging programs</li> <li>• Ongoing ELL classes</li> <li>• After school homework clubs</li> <li>• Peer mentoring</li> <li>• University preparation programs</li> <li>• Reserved/designated spots in high-demand post-secondary programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugee students gain foundational literacy and numeracy concepts that may be missing</li> <li>• Students are supported in course required for post-secondary education</li> <li>• Students can practice English one-on-one and gain social support</li> </ul>
<b>Unique Karen cultural influences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worldview that “literate eat rice, illiterate eat rice”</li> <li>• Negative self-assessment of abilities</li> <li>• Discomfort with showing off, asking questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing discussion and introduction to post-secondary education</li> <li>• Programs that emphasize the importance of education</li> <li>• Setting small, achievable goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural bridging – helping youth gradually understand cultural differences</li> </ul>
<b>School environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streaming into non-academic courses</li> <li>• Discrimination</li> <li>• Integration challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer mentoring</li> <li>• Staff professional development and training</li> <li>• Social and community supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased interaction with native English speakers and increased social networks</li> <li>• Increased feelings of</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutors and academic support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• belonging</li> <li>• School staff more understanding and accommodating to the unique needs of refugee students</li> <li>• A more welcoming environment</li> <li>• Reduced mental health issues</li> </ul>
<b>Identity loss</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges of adolescence and resettlement exacerbated, making refugee youth more vulnerable</li> <li>• Search for identity can lead to youth looking for acceptance in gangs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to build school social networks</li> <li>• Peer and adult mentoring</li> <li>• Strong family relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthened bi-cultural identity</li> <li>• Increased cultural understanding in the community</li> </ul>
<b>Culture Shock</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health issues</li> <li>• Depression, isolation</li> <li>• Poor academic performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patience, time, understanding</li> <li>• Counseling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased adjustment</li> <li>• Confidence to try new things, access post-secondary education</li> </ul>
<b>Post-traumatic stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal, lack of concentration, nightmares, depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counseling</li> <li>• Involvement with school and community activities</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased adjustment</li> <li>• Increased coping capacity</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of guidance from parents or adults</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion, lack of understanding of education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult mentors</li> <li>• Assigned Post-secondary Guidance counselors</li> <li>• Peer mentors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students understand school system and how to access programs</li> <li>• Students feel confident to access post-secondary programs</li> </ul>
<b>Socio economic status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient funds to pay for education</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Neighbourhood of settlement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants, scholarships and bursaries</li> <li>• Living allowances</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students can afford post-secondary education without being a financial burden to their family</li> </ul>

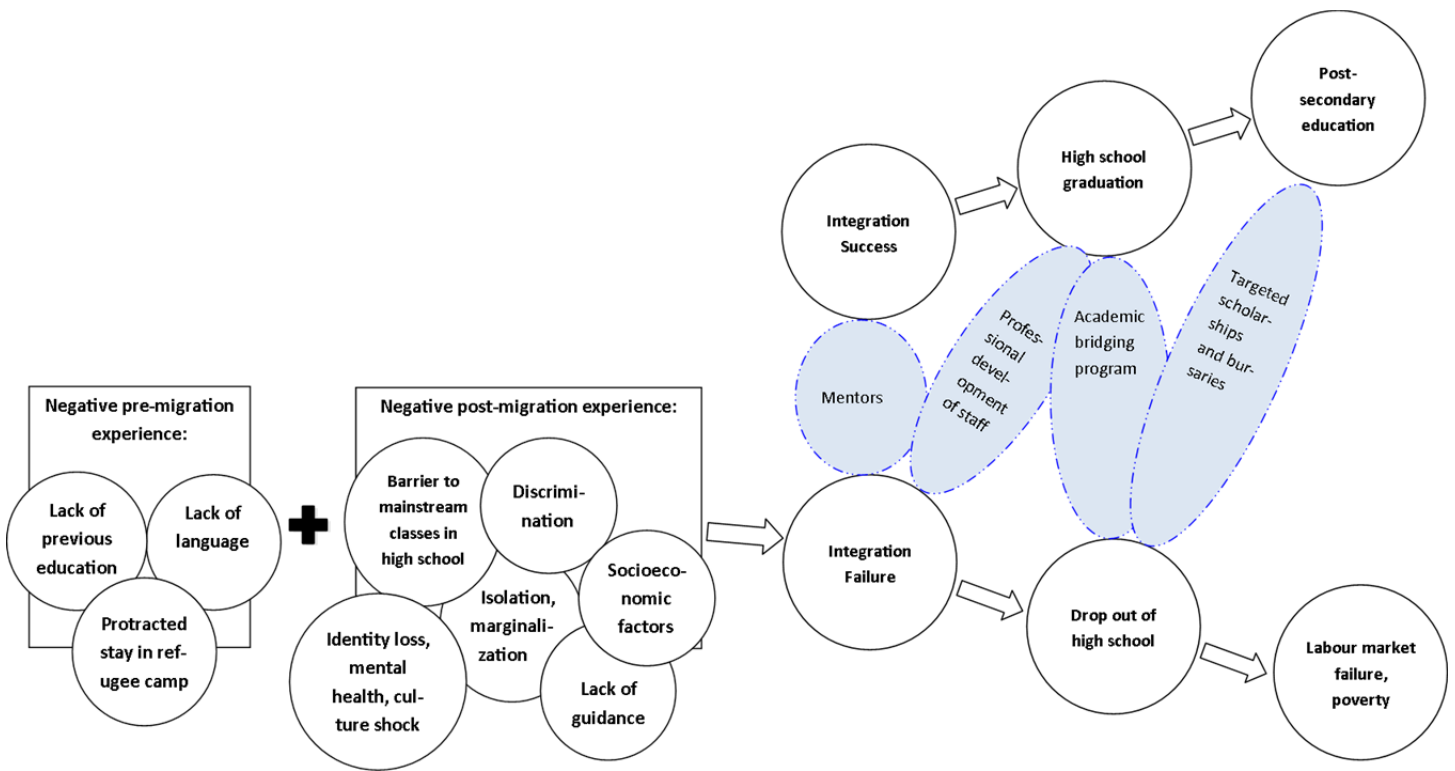
## 5.1 Conceptual Framework

Using the literature review as a guide, a framework has been developed to help illustrate and guide the discussion around improving access for Karen refugee youth to Kwantlen Polytechnic University Programs. From early on in this literature review, it has been clear that negative pre-migration factors in addition to negative post-migration factors act as significant barriers that lead refugee youth to drop out of school. Furthermore, an exploration of the literature showed that there is a gap between the language proficiency and previous educational experiences of refugees and the academic courses offered in the secondary and post-secondary education systems. While the conceptual framework in Figure 15 considers the pre-migration and post-migration factors that affect refugee youth, it is the post-migration factors that offer opportunities for strategic intervention by service providers, including KPU and its community partners. For example, scholarships could be made available for students with socioeconomic barriers while academic bridging programs could be established to prepare students for university academically and offer guidance to help them navigate the post-secondary system.

Using the initial framework outlined in Figures 3, this illustration shows how negative pre- and post-migration experiences result in integration failure, causing many refugee youth to drop out of high school. Meanwhile, the blue circles represent possible interventions throughout the resettlement process that can lead to more successful integration and education experiences that will help refugee youth graduate from secondary school and subsequently be more prepared for post-secondary education. These strategies have been outlined in the literature and program reviews, as well as in Tables 2 and 3. As previously discussed, any successful program will need to address the complex needs of refugee youth simultaneously; the practice of offering holistic support and guidance in the education system can help refugee youth throughout their resettlement process and improve their settlement and integration outcomes substantially.

Thus, Figure 16 illustrates how the pre-migration experience of refugee students underlies and leads to many other barriers. At the same time, many refugee youth arrive in Canada with high educational aspirations and have a high cultural value towards education (Shakya, et al., 2010). However, post-migration settlement stress and a number of other systemic barriers have prevented youth from achieving educational success (Anisef P. , Brown, Phythian, Sweet, & Walters, 2008; Gunderson, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2009; Staddon, 2009; Yau, 1996). Likewise, this literature review showed that a number of factors can compound this negative pre-migration experience and cause further challenges for refugee students. Nevertheless, the review of literature on increasing access to post-secondary education as well as the review of existing programs shows that there are many opportunities to help students settle and integrate more successfully. For example, many programs include a mentoring component to help guide refugee students and support them in areas of relationship building, identity formation, guidance, and gaining Canadian experience. Meanwhile, other programs have prepared vulnerable students for post-secondary education by offering bridging programs that both support the students through the application process and prepare them with academic programs.

Figure 16 - Conceptual Framework



This conceptual framework provides a foundation to understand not only the pre- and post-migration barriers to education for refugee students, but also potential opportunities to mitigate some of these barriers. As the blue circles illustrate, there are many potential strategies discussed in the literature that could be used to increase the resettlement and integration success of refugee students. Moreover, the review of programs provides further examples of practical activities that other communities have employed to address education barriers. Ultimately, this framework leads to recommendations which are discussed in the next section within the context of CIR:CLE and its goal to reduce barriers to post-secondary education for Karen refugees. These recommendations are based on the preceding tables, and are broken down into two practical ways that CIR:CLE can accomplish its goals: through advocacy and through community partnerships.

# SECTION SIX: Program Recommendations for CIR:CLE and Kwantlen Polytechnic University

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The client organization, KPU's CIR:CLE institute, has conducted a research study and needs assessment of the Karen community in Langley and Surrey to coincide with this literature review. The preliminary findings of this needs assessment reflect the findings of this literature review; Karen students have difficulty accessing KPU programs because of their lack of language and previous education experience in addition to socioeconomic barriers. Participants in the study also identified a need for support to navigate not only the application and admission process, but also ongoing support and guidance (CIR:CLE, 2013). Meanwhile, the results of this literature and program review were presented to the steering committee for review and feedback on an ongoing basis. This feedback provided important guidance to the overall project and gave legitimacy to specific findings and the application of the research to recommendations from the perspective of steering committee members who are also from the Karen community. Subsequently, this project will be combined with findings from CIR:CLE's needs assessment and presented to both CIR:CLE's steering committee and the Karen community for evaluation, planning and recommendations.

From the research presented in this literature review, it is clear that Karen refugee youth in Langley and Surrey face many barriers in accessing KPU programs. With this mind, the intention of CIR:CLE's needs assessment of the Karen community was to "lead to a more formal process for assisting youth from the Karen community to transition to post-secondary education at Kwantlen" (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2012). While this has not yet been confirmed by CIR:CLE's research specific to the Langley and Surrey context, there are a number of considerations for policies or programs that can be implemented together with KPU's community partners to reduce barriers for refugee students to access KPU's programs. Subsequently, it is CIR:CLE's intention to use the data collected to inform decision makers, and for the professional development of staff and service providers to better understand the unique needs of refugee students and provide information about programs, resources and services that are in place to help them navigate the secondary and post-secondary education systems.

As a research centre, CIR:CLE's role in implementing these recommendations is limited. As such, CIR:CLE's ability to accomplish any of the strategies outlined in the literature and program review will require significant advocacy within KPU and with community partners. This advocacy could take several forms. First, CIR:CLE can advocate for refugee youth by raising awareness within KPU. Second, CIR:CLE can be a community advocate to educate and build awareness in the community about the unique educational needs of refugee youth. Finally, CIR:CLE can advocate for community partnerships to address the holistic needs of refugee youth and provide support where KPU staff may not be able to. The following sections explore the assumptions and conclusions that would underpin advocacy efforts,

as well as practical ways that CIR:CLE can partner with internal and external groups to increase access to KPU programs.

## **6.1 Recommendations for Advocacy and Awareness within KPU**

From the outset of this project, CIR:CLE's primary goal has been to increase access to KPU programs for Karen refugee students. Many strategies have been discussed in the literature and program review, however, there is also a need for advocacy towards inclusive policies that will recognize the challenges faced by refugee youth throughout the resettlement process and subsequently increase educational success and access to post-secondary programs.

Underpinning these advocacy efforts are several important conclusions. First, KPU and the community at large must recognize the importance of post-secondary education for refugee youth. Post-secondary education will provide opportunities and agency for refugees to meaningfully contribute to life in Canada, and perhaps equally important, will provide opportunity and intellectual capital for Karen people to impact Burma as it moves forward with a new vision and increasing international ties (Anselme & Hands, 2010). With this in mind, as a resettlement country, Canada has a humanitarian obligation to the global refugee community to prioritize and value education as a means to improve the dignity of a marginalized population. Moreover, as contributors to the economic, social and cultural fabric of Canadian communities, universities are primary places for the integration and education of refugee youth. As is the case in the United Kingdom, universities in Canada should ensure that post-secondary education is accessible to vulnerable and marginalized populations, and widen participation among these groups. Thus, advocacy could be directed towards reserving spaces in vocational programs for refugees, or to build capacity within programs to ensure student success. Likewise, institutions can recognize the talent and potential of young refugees through alternative admission processes and providing the right infrastructure for success.

While in the past post-secondary education has been considered a luxury, there is an increasing discourse calling for the recognition of post-secondary education as a right for those in protracted refugee situations specifically because it can "have wide ramifications for individual refugees, the refugee community, and the general common good" (MacLaren, 2010, p. 109). Adding to this, Dryden-Peterson (2011) posits that "Higher education for refugees is not a luxury. It is important both for individuals and for society in terms of rebuilding lives and fostering leadership in both protracted settings and post-conflict reconstruction."

Furthermore, another important barrier for CIR:CLE to address is the isolation and marginalization of refugee youth. Thus, advocacy is needed for secondary and post-secondary institutions to adopt policies and create opportunities for refugee youth to integrate into mainstream networks. Meanwhile, the presence of refugee students in post-secondary programs should be seen as mutually beneficial in order for refugee youth to feel accepted and welcomed. Specifically, the presence of refugee youth in post-secondary institutions will enrich the learning process for both Canadian and refugee students. In an increasingly global and multicultural society, this kind of learning is both beneficial and necessary. Gunderson further suggests that:

...the notion of multicultural has come to mean “nonwhite” and that Canadian-born students, those who appear most in need of learning about multicultural issues, are convinced that the term does not include them. It is clear that school personnel must develop programs that allow and encourage immigrant students to meet, communicate with, and interact with native English speakers. It is equally true that native English speakers are in need of such programs. (Gunderson, 2000, p. 705)

While refugee students are often seen as a burden to an already stretched education system, in order for them to be successful, there is a two-way integration process whereby refugee students must become a welcome and valued part of the university community. Thus, students and staff must recognize that refugees have experiences and perspectives that will enhance the learning experience and global perspective of all students.

At the same time, advocacy is needed to address socioeconomic barriers of refugee students, first recognizing that refugees are usually part of impoverished families, and face systemic economic barriers to access education. Thus, to make post-secondary education a reality, institutions must “broaden boundaries of “individual learner support” to include measures that assist in income generation for their families” (Anselme & Hands, 2010, p. 93). This kind of policy initiative would have to come from the government to provide more sustainable assistance for refugee families on Income Assistance. At the same time, increasing scholarships to include “full-ride” scholarships that will cover education-related expenses like accommodation, transportation, books, etc. for low-income refugee students would also suffice.

Table 7 below summarizes the areas presented here where advocacy is needed. At the same time, these advocacy efforts will lead to wider community participation, both within KPU and with community partners. Thus, these advocacy recommendations naturally lead to collaborative partnerships to increase the participation of Karen refugee youth in KPU programs and ultimately accomplish CIR:CLE’s goals for this project.

**Table 6 - Advocacy recommendations**

<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Possible Activities:</b>	<b>Barrier Addressed:</b>
Advocate for the prioritization of education for refugees locally and globally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build awareness about refugees within KPU with both students and staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of previous education, lack of literacy and numeracy</li> </ul>
Advocate for KPU to adopt policies that will increase the participation of refugees in post-secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build staff awareness</li> <li>• Work with admissions staff to increase understanding of refugee needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of guidance navigating the school system</li> </ul>

Advocate for scholarships or bursaries for students from refugee backgrounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with financial aid department</li> <li>• Build awareness among possible community donors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socioeconomic barriers</li> </ul>
Advocate for KPU to adopt policies that will promote acceptance and understanding of refugee youth and decrease feelings of discrimination and marginalization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development training for staff</li> <li>• Train peer ambassadors to act as mentors to refugee youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination, isolation</li> </ul>

## 6.2 Recommendations for Advocacy for Community Partnerships

KPU is well situated in Metro Vancouver with its four campuses located in close proximity to neighbourhoods receiving the majority of the province’s refugees. These facts put KPU in a unique position to provide education to this rapidly growing population. While post-secondary programs are an important component to the resettlement success and labour market integration of refugees, the needs of refugees are complex and go beyond what local universities can offer. For this reason, collaborative partnerships are necessary to ensure that these diverse needs are met. Through partnerships with school boards, services providers, and government, KPU can ensure that refugee populations are successfully integrated into the Canadian workforce and into the social fabric of these communities.

As shown in the conceptual framework in Section Five, an integrated, multifaceted approach is needed to help refugee youth access post-secondary education. This approach must be holistic, and address academic needs, in addition to financial, social, settlement, family and mental health needs. For this reason, a collaborative approach including community partnerships is crucial. At the same time, these various components can be encompassed in a bridging program that could include components like outreach to increase enrollment and understanding of available programs and program requirements, mentoring, guidance counseling, academic tutoring, social support, and other services that could be modeled after programs available at universities to many international students as well as aboriginal students. Recognizing the mismatches between age, experience and education in refugees, Australian organizations are increasingly developing programs that address both educational pathways and integrate support to help youth deal with trauma, separation, grief and loss (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008).

Equally important to consider are bridging programs for students who have already dropped out of secondary school and entered the work force in low-paying, insecure jobs. CIR:CLE could advocate for partnerships with local employers or business associations to provide skills upgrading or training to reintegrate this sizable group back into the education system. Approximately 26 youth in Langley have

dropped out of high school or have become too old to attend high school before achieving sufficient requirements to graduate. For female students, it is common to leave school after becoming pregnant, usually followed by marriage. It is more common for male students to engage in behaviour like substance abuse or drop-out of school to work (Karen Initiative, 2007). Overall, older students of both sexes were generally disengaged, and struggled to learn in the secondary school environment (Zipporah's Dream Committee, 2011). In Langley, statistics show that the majority of Karen youth have failed to graduate from high school to date. There is recognition of this trend among refugees in the literature, and at the same time a call for programs that will engage youth that have already left school to enter the work force, and are typically employed in low-paying, contingent jobs (Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, & Phythian, 2010, p. 49).

Furthermore, to enhance the two-way integration process and create understanding and empathy towards refugee students, professional development opportunities can be provided to KPU staff and the community at large about the unique and complex needs of refugee students. This training should include admissions counselors, but could also be extended to students, faculty, or other staff. At the same time, settlement workers are likely to “find themselves unable to maintain the specialist knowledge necessary to advise clients fully about opportunities for post-compulsory education” (Hannah, 1999, p. 159). KPU can work with Settlement Workers employed by school districts and settlement agencies to provide information about programs, requirements and processes so that these frontline workers can better assist and inform their clients. Likewise, settlement workers can advise KPU staff about the unique needs and challenges facing refugee students as they try to access post-secondary programs.

As shown in the literature review, there is a substantial gap in information and guidance experienced by refugee students trying to navigate the secondary and post-secondary systems. This information gap could be rectified by vocational counseling and career planning provided in the initial months of refugee resettlement. While an overwhelming time for refugees, it will give them specific information and purpose as they plan and set goals for their new life in Canada before they experience the frustration related to lack of guidance and planning. For example, if a youth aspires to a job in the trades, it is important for them to understand the level of English needed, pre-requisites like math or science, and the specific courses they should take or work towards in secondary school. Thus, CIR:CLE could advocate for and facilitate collaborative partnerships between KPU career and admissions counselors and local community service providers, settlement workers or high school teachers to bridge this gap in guidance and ensure that refugee youth have the required information to make informed decisions about their education path. Meanwhile, refugee students could be assigned an academic advisor who is specially trained to address the unique needs of refugee students, and help them navigate the requirements of their post-secondary degree. Likewise, student mentors can provide social or academic support to refugee students, or could be trained to provide guidance counseling or other services. Student mentors could also be used for outreach to increase understanding of KPU programs and enrollment procedures, and to increase refugee enrollment. These recommendations are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7 - Recommendations for partnerships

Recommendation:	Possible Activities:	Barrier Addressed:
Advocate for on campus groups, community organizations, and others to provide ongoing and long-term mentoring opportunities for refugee students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train peer mentors for social activities, guidance, or academic tutoring.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolation, identity loss, mental health, guidance, language ability</li> </ul>
Advocate for partnerships between KPU and local service providers to build awareness and understanding of KPU programs and pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate, train and collaborate with community settlement workers, youth workers, high school teachers, and others working with refugee youth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of guidance</li> </ul>
Advocate for KPU to partner with local services providers to re-engage youth that have failed to succeed in the Canadian secondary and post-secondary school systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with the Karen community and service providers to build opportunities and pathways towards education.</li> <li>• Explore alternative pathways to post-secondary education, including adult education or skills training and employment programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of previous education, age at arrival</li> <li>• Socioeconomic barriers</li> </ul>
Advocate for KPU to partner with community organizations to develop integrated support services and guidance for refugee students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build collaborative networks between KPU staff and community service providers to ensure that refugee students are supported in areas of mental health, academic support, and socioeconomic related areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health/culture shock, isolation, socioeconomic barriers</li> </ul>

### 6.3 Measurable Outcomes

In undertaking its needs assessment of the Karen community, CIR:CLE would like to measure its success in increasing access to its post-secondary programs. As such, Table 8 outlines measurable outcomes based on the recommendations discussed in preceding sections. While the recommendations outlined in Tables 6 and 7 contain more lofty goals, the goals outline in Table 8 have been selected using SMART criteria to ensure that these outcomes are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound (Brown & Hannis, 2008).

Table 8 – Measurable Outcomes

<b>Desired Outcome</b>	<b>Action Required</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<b>KPU admissions staff that are trained and knowledgeable about Karen refugees and their complex needs and can guide and assist them appropriately</b>	CIR:CLE will work with KPU departments to identify and train key staff people.	Immediately – training could commence in Fall 2013
<b>Professional development of community settlement workers about KPU programs and admissions procedures</b>	CIR:CLE will advocate for a KPU staff person to provide professional development training to community settlement workers about KPU programs.	Immediately – training could commence in Fall 2013
<b>Ongoing collaboration between KPU and community partners</b>	CIR:CLE will advocate for partnership between KPU staff person(s) and community refugee service providers.	Ongoing – an increase in collaboration/community meetings involving KPU staff and service providers should be seen by April 2014.
<b>Scholarships or bursaries targeting refugee students</b>	CIR:CLE will advocate for KPU or community partners/businesses to provide increased funding for scholarships and bursaries for refugee students.	Immediately and ongoing. The success of this outcome can be evaluated by the presence of bursaries for refugee students beginning KPU studies in September 2014.
<b>Student mentoring program</b>	CIR:CLE will advocate for existing student groups or faculty to provide one-on-one mentoring to refugee students for the purpose of friendship and guidance. This should include training for mentors.	Immediately and ongoing. Success will be evaluated by the availability of mentors in Fall 2013 and Spring/Fall 2014.
<b>Tutoring program</b>	CIR:CLE will advocate for student groups/faculty to offer tutoring for students struggling with academic classes. This should	Immediately and ongoing. Success will be evaluated by the availability of tutors in Fall 2013 and Spring/Fall 2014.

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coincide with training for tutors about the complex needs of refugee students, in addition to guidelines and strategies for effective tutoring.

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Overall, these recommendations encompass a collaborative community development approach that requires multiple partnerships and support services to ensure the success of refugee students. If Canada's refugee resettlement program is truly humanitarian in nature, Canada must ensure that refugees have the opportunities, information and resources to successfully integrate into its education system, labour market and society in general. An understanding of the barriers faced by refugee students in accessing post-secondary education should therefore lead to a number of policy and program implications in Canadian communities. Moreover, collaboration and support must be ongoing between staff, community service providers, students, mentors, and others supporters of the refugee student. Meanwhile, this approach must coincide with a fundamental shift in policy and practice towards welcoming and inclusion of refugee students at post-secondary education institutions. Ensuring access for refugee students should not only be a fundamental priority for humanitarian reasons to increase the integration and successful resettlement and labour market outcomes of refugee youth into Canadian society, but also for the mutual benefit and learning opportunities that inclusion offers to Canadian post-secondary students.

# SECTION SEVEN: Conclusion

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This literature and program review has discussed a number of factors for consideration that may act as barriers to post-secondary education for Karen refugee youth as they settle and integrate into Canadian communities. These factors are complex and interrelated, and it is difficult to isolate any one factor as a lever for achieving systematic change. Rather, the factors must be considered in a broad, multilevelled context that rejects both simplistic causes and solutions. For this reason, it is important to consider the history and past experience of the refugee population; pre-migration trauma, culture, and lack of education have played a major role in the resettlement experience of the Karen people and continue to pose barriers to the successful integration of the youth. In addition to this, challenges such as language, low-socioeconomic status, lack of guidance, struggles with culture shock and identity formation, and other challenges create barriers for refugee youth that put them at-risk for more negative behaviour and ultimately failure in the secondary and post-secondary education systems. Recognizing the unique needs of vulnerable refugee youth populations, many communities have implemented programs to help them achieve success in school and integration. These programs and strategies provide valuable insight for CIR:CLE and its community partners to design strategies and activities that will increase access to KPU programs for Karen refugees in Langley and Surrey, BC. As the CIR:CLE's steering committee moves forward, it may wish to consider some specific learning outcomes drawn from these programs to advocate for change within KPU and for further collaboration with its community partners.

## SECTION EIGHT: References

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