

9-2013


Zipporah's Dream: Postsecondary Access to Kwantlen Polytechnic University for the Karen and other Government Assisted Refugees in the South Fraser Region

Donald G. Reddick
Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Steve Dooley
Simon Fraser University

Lisa Sadler
Langley School District

Follow this and additional works at: <http://kora.kpu.ca/facultypub>

 Part of the [Accessibility Commons](#), [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Community Psychology Commons](#), [Growth and Development Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Original Publication Citation

Reddick, D., Dooley, S., and Sadler, L. (2013). *Zipporah's Dream: Postsecondary Access to Kwantlen Polytechnic University for the Karen and other Government Assisted Refugees in the South Fraser Region*. Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at KORA: Kwantlen Open Resource Access. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of KORA: Kwantlen Open Resource Access. For more information, please contact kora@kpu.ca.

**Zipporah's Dream - Postsecondary Access to
Kwantlen Polytechnic University for the Karen
and other Government Assisted Refugees in
the South Fraser Region**

Report by Don Reddick, Steve Dooley, and Lisa Sadler
Centre for Interdisciplinary Research: Community Learning and Engagement,
Kwantlen Polytechnic University

September, 2013

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Background on Government Assisted Refugee [GAR] Presence in the South Fraser Region	6
3. Potential Annual GAR Demand for Postsecondary Education in the South Fraser Region	9
4. Identifying Postsecondary Access Barriers for the Karen and other GARs	11
4.1 Summary of Literature Review	12
4.2 Karen Community Survey and Community Consultation Event	16
4.2.1 Community Survey Results	17
4.2.2 Community Consultation Results	23
5. Addressing Potential GAR Postsecondary Access Barriers – Recommendations for KPU	25
5.1 Assistance Principles	26
5.2 Study Recommendations	28
6. Conclusion	35
7. References	36
8. Appendix 1 - Estimating potential annual GAR postsecondary demand in the South Fraser region	39
9. Appendix 2 – Interview Questions Employed in Karen Community Survey	45
10. Appendix 3 – Summarized Responses to Karen Community Survey	49

Acknowledgements

A number of individuals and groups have supported this study and deserve acknowledgement. The study was made possible by a grant issued through Kwantlen Polytechnic University's Office of Research and Scholarship. Financial assistance was also received from the Kwantlen Student Association, who funded the community consultation event. Helpful data regarding government assisted refugee numbers in the South Fraser region was made available by Kathy Sherrell at the Immigrant Services Society of BC. Michael Leonard of Kwantlen's Department of Economics provided valuable assistance in the development of the study's overlapping cohort model.

Study oversight was supplied by the Zipporah's Dream Steering Committee, whose membership included Zipporah Devadas [Karen community member and support worker, Langley School District], Steve Dooley [KPU Departments of Sociology/Criminology], Dahda Eh [Karen community member, KPU student], Sharon Kavanagh [Karen community volunteer], Connie Klimek [KPU Department of Nursing], Margaret Kunst [Karen support worker, PUCKS Program], Helen Mendes [KPU Department of Academic and Career Advancement], Lisa Sadler [Karen support worker, Langley School District], and Don Reddick [KPU Department of Economics]. Research assistance associated with the Karen community survey was ably furnished by Lecia Desjarlais [KPU student], Sher Lawla [Karen community member], Nodia Moo [Karen community member], Bu Taw Nay [Karen community member, KPU student], and Natasha Santos [KPU student]. Finally, the Karen youth, parents, and community service workers are to be thanked for their participation in both the Karen community survey and community consultation event.

While all of the above have made important contributions, any errors or omissions associated with the study and report remain the responsibility of study principal investigator, Don Reddick.

“Young refugee women and men provide hope for the future in the most uncertain and dire of situations. For their families, they represent the chance for more sustainable economic livelihoods; and for their countries of origin, the possibility of more stable political and social leadership. Yet most are denied opportunities to pursue the kinds of education that would help them to cultivate the skills, knowledge, and critical thinking capacities to live up to these expectations.” (Dryden-Peterson, S. and Giles, W., 2012, p. 3)

The road to successful completion of postsecondary education is long and challenging. Everyone needs assistance in one form or another, be it in the form of advising, financial support, remedial help, or even simple understanding and encouragement. Those afforded assistance because of country of birth experience great privilege. Such privilege is perhaps most appreciated when considered from the perspective of those who, because of alternative circumstances, face a far more challenging education journey.

“Zipporah’s Dream” reflects this challenging journey. Zipporah Devadas is a government assisted refugee [GAR] from Myanmar who arrived in Surrey in 2006 with significant education aspirations. The challenges of resettlement combined with her lack of awareness regarding specific postsecondary pathways have left her unable to fulfill her education goals. It is Devadas’ dream that postsecondary opportunities will become available to all GARs, assisting refugee families and communities in Canada, and even impacting home countries in need of change.

1. Introduction

This report presents results from a participatory action needs assessment project designed to identify postsecondary access barriers facing the Karen community, a GAR group living in the catchment area of Kwantlen Polytechnic University [KPU]. Originally from Myanmar [Burma], the Karen are part of diverse and growing GAR community living in the South Fraser region, arising because of Canada’s international commitment to annually resettle refugees living abroad in difficult, protracted situations. Resettlement brings many challenges to GARs, but also the hope of previously unreachable opportunities. Critical to accessing these opportunities is the attainment of postsecondary education.

Given its mandate, location, and available programs, KPU is well placed to assist the Karen and other GARs in their education quest, as well as to benefit from the unique and powerful perspectives GARs can contribute because of their life experiences. Based on study findings, the report makes policy recommendations to KPU that will help GARs like the Karen overcome access barriers. Working in partnership with community service providers and the public school system, KPU can play an important part in the successful completion of harrowing refugee journeys.

The timing of this study is important. Growing numbers of resettled refugees are now reaching postsecondary age after spending significant time in the secondary school system. In addition, waves of older youth continue to arrive with insufficient education to complete secondary school and are in need of remedial assistance to access postsecondary training in trades and other vocations. There is much at stake. As noted by Sadler (2013, p.11),

“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.”

International and Canadian studies cited by Sadler indicate idle, unproductive youth are easily recruited into gangs and are more likely to become involved in criminal behavior. In this regard, refugee youth may be at significant risk.

Method

The study utilized the Active Community Engagement Model developed by Dooley and his colleagues (Dooley, S., Gagnon, N., Bhatt, G. and Tweed, R., 2012). This model is designed to foster authentic community participation in the development and delivery of research projects. The model has three specific components, all of which were used in the study. The components are:

- 1) The project is led by a community-based steering committee,¹
- 2) The project hires and trains community members to serve as research assistants, and
- 3) The project ends with a community planning day.

As part of the completion of her Master of Arts requirements at the University of Victoria, Zipporah’s Dream Steering Committee member Lisa Sadler contributed a literature review of the barriers that prevent groups like the Karen from accessing postsecondary education. Sadler also contributed a scan of existing programs that attempt to overcome such barriers, as well as perspectives on appropriate report recommendations. Reddick and Dooley undertook a Karen community survey and consultation to verify community perceptions of postsecondary access barriers and involve the Karen in policy development. Informal consultations with representatives from various KPU student service departments helped inform the KPU policy recommendations.

Report overview

The report proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents background information explaining the presence of refugee groups in KPU’s catchment area. Data regarding population numbers for various GAR communities, including the Karen, are provided. In Section 3, results are reported from an attempt to project potential annual GAR demand for postsecondary and remedial education in the South Fraser region. Section 4 summarizes the literature review of refugee postsecondary access barriers and presents results from the Karen community survey and community consultation event. Recommendations that will increase refugee postsecondary access at KPU are made in Section 5. Section 6 offers report conclusions.

¹ The Zipporah’s Dream Steering Committee was composed of KPU faculty members [Connie Klimek (Nursing) and Helen Mendes (Academic and Career Advancement)], Karen community members [Dahda Eh (KPU student) and Zipporah Devadas (Karen Support Worker, Langley School District)], and community and school system-based Karen support workers [Sharon Kavanagh (Karen community volunteer, Support Worker - BC Ministry of Families and Children), Margaret Kunst (Karen Support Worker, PUCKS Program), and Lisa Sadler (Karen Support Worker, Langley School District)].

2. Background on Government Assisted Refugee Presence in the South Fraser Region

Defining a refugee

Who are refugees? According to the 1951 United Nations [UN] Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, refugees are those who flee their country because of war, or due to persecution associated with race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (UNHCR, 2010). The number of world-wide refugees is remarkable. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees [UNHCR] estimates there were 10.5 million Convention refugees in 2011, with numbers expected to grow because of ongoing conflicts in places like Syria (UNHCR, 2013). After fleeing persecution in their home country, refugees live in exile, often within confined camps provided by aid agencies or host governments in neighboring countries. While conditions in camps can vary, limited resources and overcrowding often lead to significant challenges for inhabitants.

Protracted refugee situations

Ongoing conflicts and/or persecutions lead to what are classified as “protracted refugee situations.” UNHCR defines protracted refugee situations as those “in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social, and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile” (UNHCR, 2004). Loescher and Milner (2009) note a number of UNHCR-traced facts regarding protracted refugee situations. Two thirds of global refugees live in protracted refugee situations in 30 countries. The largest protracted situations are in the Middle East and South Asia, including Afghans, Karen, Somalis, and Iraqis. The average length of stay in major protracted situations has increased, now approaching 20 years after being less than 10 years in the early 1990s.

Life for protracted refugees is difficult. As noted by Presse and Thompson (2008):

“Densely populated refugee camps ... become the home and community of those who have been forcibly displaced for decades. ... [R]efugees languish in refugee camps, dependent on humanitarian assistance and food aid, with limited or no opportunities for self-reliance or local integration. ... As a result, a significant portion of today’s refugees have severe psychosocial and physical health concerns, limited or no labor market skills, little or no formal education, and, for children, greater development challenges.” [pp.94-95]

The Karen as examples of protracted refugees²

In 2005 the Karen, a minority ethnic group in Myanmar, were recognized by UNHCR as a group with particular protection needs. For over 3 decades the Karen have suffered human rights abuses associated with forced relocation and assimilation policies implemented by the Burmese government. In response, many Karen have fled to neighboring Thailand, where they have been confined by Thai authorities to remote jungle refugee camps. Approximately 140,000 Karen and other minority groups from Myanmar have lived in Thai refugee camps for the past 20 years, representing the largest refugee population in Southeast Asia. Conditions in the camps are

² Information here draws from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2006) along with Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia [ISSofBC] (2010).

extremely difficult – severe overcrowding exists, infrastructure is built on steep hillsides subject to landslides, and appropriate sanitation and water facilities are lacking. In light of the urgency of these circumstances, the UNHCR has referred refugees from these camps to Canada and other countries.

*A shift in Canadian refugee resettlement policy*³

Changing refugee realities such as the growing significance of large-scale protracted situations have led Canada and the international community to revise their refugee resettlement policies. Historically, resettlement policy in Canada and elsewhere was criticized for stringent qualification criteria that effectively only allowed the “best and brightest” refugees to emigrate. In response to this criticism, and to the growing prominence of protracted refugee situations, Canada in 2002 implemented a new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act [IRPA]. The IRPA softened selection criteria used to assess refugees’ integration potential, and put increased emphasis on those in greatest need of protection. As noted by Presse and Thomson (2008):

“[The IRPA] ... put “protection” first and foremost and “ability to establish” second. Persons found to be in urgent need of protection and those found to be more vulnerable in relation to the general population in which they live were exempt from the need to demonstrate any integration potential. ... Further, in the context of group processing, public policies have been instituted within the framework of IRPA such that the entire group being considered for resettlement is deemed vulnerable and therefore everyone within the group is exempt from the ability to establish requirement.” [p.50]

Application of IRPA has resulted in greater Canadian resettlement efforts associated with protracted refugee situations. Canada is now actively involved with some of the major protracted situations identified by the UNHCR, such as the Karen from Myanmar.

Avenues for refugee relocation

Refugees typically find their way to safe countries through one of three means. Government assisted refugees [GARs] are selected from abroad by governments for resettlement. The Karen represented in this study are GARs selected by Canada in conjunction with the UNHCR initiative. Privately sponsored refugees [PSRs] reach their destination through private sponsors who agree to provide financial and other support for up to one year.⁴ Refugees landed-in-country [RLCs] make their own way to host countries, applying for refugee protection upon arrival. In Canada, GARs and PARs hold permanent resident status, as do RLCs approved by the federal Immigration and Refugee Board.

National and local refugee settlement numbers

Data on total numbers of refugees living in Canada is incomplete. However, information gathered from a variety of sources indicates a growing refugee population both nationally and regionally.

³ This section mainly draws from Presse and Thomson (2008).

⁴ As noted by the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies (2013), nearly all PSR applications are filed for family reunification purposes.

Total refugee settlement in Canada has averaged over 20,000 for the last four years.⁵ In 2012, 23,056 refugees settled in Canada with their families.⁶ Of this number, 9,624 were selected from abroad [5,412 GARs and 4,212 PSRs], while 13,432 were RCs.⁷ BC received 711 GARs from 20 countries in 2012.⁸ The top source countries for GARs in BC were Iran [26%], Afghanistan [26%], Somalia [14%], Iraq [14%], and Bhutan [4%]. BC has on average received seven percent of the national total of refugees over the last 10 years.⁹

Focusing on GAR data provided by the Immigrant Services Society of BC,¹⁰ approximately 7,500 GARs are now targeted to arrive in Canada annually, with 800-900 individuals destined for BC. Over 90 percent generally settle in Metro Vancouver, making it one of the largest GAR receiving cities in Canada.

Of the 4,026 GARs arriving in BC between 2005 and 2009, 3,743 established themselves in Metro Vancouver. During this time period, the majority settled in Surrey [1,218, or 33%], followed by Burnaby [22%] and Vancouver [16%]. Langley received 7% of the GAR total between 2005 and 2009, largely due to a significant placement of Karen GARs. While specific data was not obtained for other municipalities in the South Fraser region over this period [i.e. Richmond and Delta], the numbers are most likely small.¹¹

Top five source countries for GAR settlement in Surrey over the 2005 – 2009 period are presented in Table 1.¹²

Myanmar	387
Somalia	145
Iraq	113
Sudan	74
Afghanistan	71

Between 2010 and 2012, an additional 2221 GARS settled in BC, with 1956 choosing Metro Vancouver. Table 2 shows GAR settlement during the period in the municipalities making up the South Fraser region.¹³ Surrey dominates settlement patterns, receiving approximately 90 percent of the GARs within the region.

⁵ Source: Referenced in AMSSA (2013). AMSSA data sourced from Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC] Preliminary tables – Permanent and temporary residents 2012, Feb. 27, 2013, at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2012-preliminary/01.asp>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ ISSofBC (2013).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ISSofBC (2010).

¹¹ Aside from Surrey, Burnaby, Vancouver, Coquitlam, Langley, and New Westminster, GAR arrivals in all other Metro Vancouver municipalities represent 6 percent of the Metro Vancouver total.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Unpublished data provided through personal communication with ISSofBC, Aug. 1, 2013.

	Surrey	Langley	Richmond	Delta	Total Per Year
2010	212	17	<10 ¹⁴	<10	230<N<248
2011	163	10	36	0	209
2012	223	<10	<10	0	224<N<242
Total Per City	598	27<N<37	38<N<54	<10	663<N<699

Top five source countries for GAR settlement in Surrey over the 2010 – 2012 period are presented in Table 3.¹⁵

Iraq	153
Somalia	138
Afghanistan	60
Myanmar	55
Ethiopia	52

While the current total population of refugees in Surrey [GARs, PSRs, and RCs] is not known, the current GAR population, based on past trends, can be estimated to be close to 2000.¹⁶ If present trends continue, the population of GARs in the South Fraser region will conservatively double by 2023. In sum, successive waves of GARs will continue to arrive in the region over time, resulting in a continuously rising GAR population.

Karen refugee settlement numbers.

In terms of Karen GARs from Myanmar, 3,900 were resettled in Canada between 2006 and 2010.¹⁷ Approximately 800 were placed in the Metro Vancouver area, mostly in Langley and Surrey.¹⁸ With a more recent shift in UNHCR placement priority, Karen GAR flows have been reduced. Increased BC flows are now expected from Iraq, Somalia, Iran, and a variety of African countries.¹⁹

3. Potential Annual GAR Demand for Postsecondary Education in the South Fraser Region

The importance of postsecondary access

The importance of providing refugees access to postsecondary education is highlighted in a special 2012 issue of the journal *Refuge* devoted to the topic of higher education and refugees.²⁰ Ferede (2012) argues there that Canada’s humanitarian commitment to refugees should extend beyond the

¹⁴ To protect the identity of specific GARs, numbers less than 10 are simply reported as “<10”.

¹⁵ Unpublished data provided through personal communication with ISSofBC, Aug. 1, 2013.

¹⁶ As reported above, 1,218 GARs arrived in Surrey between 2005 and 2009., and an additional 598 arrived between 2010 and 2012. If one assumes the 8 year average of 227 arrivals in 2013, a total of over 2000 GARs is obtained.

¹⁷ CIC (2012)

¹⁸ ISSofBC (2010).

¹⁹ ISSofBC GAR Bulletins, 2011-2013.

²⁰ *Refuge* Volume 27, Number 2, 2012.

basics of housing assistance, employment guidance and language instruction. In a knowledge-based economy, access to postsecondary education, be it through colleges, universities, or private sector skills training, is important for sustainable economic livelihoods. Since refugees can be amongst the least educated of all immigrants, they are in the greatest need of postsecondary access assistance. Participation in postsecondary education also enhances the social integration of refugees. In this regard, Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2012) refer to Zeus (2012), who states, “Only with higher education can refugees be expected to adapt themselves to their new surroundings, to integrate into their host society and to become self-reliant” As also noted by Dryden-Peterson and Giles, post secondary access holds emancipatory potential for refugees and their countries of origin. Through further development of critical thinking skills, refugees gain greater capacity to become their own agents. This is especially significant as many refugees aspire to address the political and social challenges that forced them to leave their original homes. Peterson (2012) notes benefits postsecondary access can bring to host institutions. Commenting on his experience with the Student Refugee Program of the World University Service of Canada, Peterson argues the involvement of refugees in university programs leads to transformative learning²¹ for Canadian students, faculty, and staff.

Perhaps most profoundly, enhanced opportunity for postsecondary access narrows the gap between aspirations and hope fulfillment for people who have travelled on a long, harrowing path. Arriving from camps where postsecondary education was largely unavailable, refugees see advanced education as the key to a better life. Now tantalizingly close to postsecondary access in their new home countries, refugees need the promise of access to maintain the effort necessary to successfully complete their journeys.

Estimating potential annual postsecondary demand from GARs in the South Fraser region

What is the *potential* demand for postsecondary access amongst refugees living in the South Fraser region? How will the specifics of this demand change over time as the relative proportion of refugees with Canadian school system experience increase? Postsecondary demand is here construed to broadly include annual registration in trades and academic programs similar to those offered by KPU. While these questions are complex and involve numerous considerations, answers are important from the perspective of institution preparation for refugee students.

An overlapping cohort model of potential annual GAR postsecondary demand is developed in Appendix 1. The model is based on demographic data associated with GAR arrivals in the South Fraser region since 2005, and presents upper bounds estimates. In light of specified assumptions, the model projects the potential for the following outcomes by 2023:

- 69 annual 18-year-old refugee secondary graduates in the South Fraser region
- 38 postsecondary-qualified refugees annually seeking postsecondary enrollment
- 70 refugees aged 18 years annually in need of remedial education in order to qualify for postsecondary studies , and
- 38 refugees aged 18 years annually seeking remedial postsecondary support.

²¹ Peterson [p.111] defines “transformative” as processes that involve an expansion of consciousness and/or an altering of perspective.

The model also illustrates anticipated trends, summarized by the following points:

- The annual number of GAR youth of postsecondary age will grow over time, eventually leveling off. The group will initially be dominated by youth lacking significant secondary experience, but this group will eventually be surpassed by youth with significant experience.
- Annual GAR non-graduates will initially dominate, but eventually be matched in proportion by GAR graduates.
- Annual GAR demand for remedial education will dominate to start, but eventually be matched by GAR demand for mainstream postsecondary programs.

4. Identifying Postsecondary Access Barriers for GARs

The numbers predicted by the overlapping cohort model represent the aspirations and efforts of the Karen and other refugees to advance their lives. If upper bounds of potential postsecondary access are to be achieved, barriers that stand in the way of access must be addressed. A primary goal of the study is to identify these barriers, and recommend policy approaches to overcome them.

A two-fold approach has been taken to identify barriers. First, as part of the completion of her Master's studies, Steering Committee member Lisa Sadler contributed a companion literature review that focuses on access barriers recognized by existing studies.²² The identification of documented barriers accomplishes several purposes. First, it provides broad scale evidence that refugee access barriers exist and that there is desire to see them addressed. Second, barrier identification guides attention when considering the local conditions faced by the Karen and other refugee groups. An overview of key literature review results is provided here; for more detail including specific citations, interested readers are encouraged to see Sadler (2013).

The second approach to identifying postsecondary access barriers was to conduct a survey of the Karen community in the Langley and Surrey areas, following up with a community consultation event. The survey and community consultation were important for several reasons. The survey helped ascertain whether barriers identified in the literature review were experienced by the Karen in the South Fraser region. It also allowed for the possible detection of circumstances not represented in other studies of refugee postsecondary access barriers. The consultation event enabled community verification of survey results and prioritization of barrier significance from the community's perspective. Equally important, the survey and consultation facilitated community engagement. The significance of engagement goes beyond the need to gather information – obtaining a voice is important for former protracted situation refugees like the Karen. Coming from camps characterized by enforced passivity and dependency, refugee groups can gain new perspectives and skills when they play an active role in processes that shape their circumstances.

²² See Sadler (2013).

4.1 Summary of Literature review

Sadler's literature review identifies a number of potential barriers for refugees considering postsecondary education. Though the barriers are interrelated and in many cases complex, they are usefully categorized as arising from pre-migration and post-migration conditions. Before presenting these barriers, a number of points should be kept in mind.

First, it is beyond KPU's mandate and/or ability to address all access barriers noted in the review. However, awareness of these barriers and the conditions generating them is important for appreciating the hurdles faced by former protracted situation refugees like the Karen. Such awareness can inform policy responses for those barriers KPU can mitigate. Second, much of the existing literature on postsecondary access barriers focuses more generally on immigrants; the literature on postsecondary access barriers specific to refugees is relatively thin. Challenges faced by refugees are expected to be more significant given their more trying pre- and post-migration experiences. Finally, a distinction should be made between the barriers faced by newly arriving youth and adults [i.e. 13 years old plus] versus younger arrivals [children aged 0 to 12 years old]. Because younger arrivals are afforded more time to acclimatize and spend greater time in the Canadian school system, they experience less challenges in some ways, while other challenges remain [e.g. poverty, lack of guidance]. Given their potential, as well as the weight of greater expectations for success within the refugee community, challenges anticipated for younger arrivals should be part of the policy focus.²³

Barriers arising from pre-migration conditions

Pre-arrival education

Protracted situation refugees often have less primary or secondary education relative to Canadian students.²⁴ English is not their first language, and available English language training in the camps is limited. Even within their own language, literacy and numeracy skills are inadequate when compared to Canadian standards.²⁵ The resulting challenges for older refugees upon arrival in Canada are apparent – it is difficult for them to understand what is being taught, let alone apply it. Especially when joining the education system at the secondary level, refugee students are hard pressed to meet grade level expectations while at the same time making up for education deficiencies. This leads to drop out from the high school system, hampering the possibility of postsecondary access.²⁶ Language deficiencies lead to additional hurdles, such as the ability to integrate socially within the school system. This also contributes to drop-out.

²³ As noted by Sadler [p.28], the distinction between intergenerational barriers is not a sharp one – intergenerational barriers are linked. For example, lack of educational attainment by older arrivals influences their employment prospects and socio-economic status, which in turn affects barriers experienced by their dependents.

²⁴ Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2012, p.4) cite evidence that 2009 Global Enrollment Ratio (GER) for refugees at the secondary level was 36 percent.

²⁵ Sadler [p.29] references a number of post-arrival education system studies that note the literacy and numeracy deficiencies of protracted situation refugees.

²⁶ As evidence, Sadler [p.29] refers to studies relating immigrant status and language ability to educational attainment.

Another pre-education hurdle concerns education pedagogy. In refugee camps education is often based on rote memorization. Upon arrival in Canada, students must adapt to Western methods that emphasize information gathering and sorting combined with critical thinking and problem solving skills. Mastery of the latter skills is of particular importance for postsecondary success, leaving older refugee youth at a disadvantage.²⁷

Health factors

Protracted situation refugees have experienced trauma and restrictions that can lead to post-traumatic stress and depression.²⁸ Further, they can suffer from limited access to health care and exist with inadequate nutrition. Such factors influence mental and physical health upon arrival, and can adversely affect successful completion of education requirements.²⁹

Pre-migratory assets

Protracted situation refugees have few if any significant financial or physical assets upon arrival in destination countries.³⁰ This is often due to general poverty within their countries of origin combined with long periods of limited or non-existent work opportunity within camps. In Canada, net-migratory assets are further reduced by the need to recoup costs of medical exams and transportation expenses incurred by refugees during the resettlement process.³¹ Limited assets upon arrival contribute to the challenging socio-economic conditions that resettled refugees must contend with, affecting their capacity to afford postsecondary access.

Unique cultural factors

Sadler [p.23] notes refugee cultural traits can impede or enhance education success in a variety of ways, and uses Karen culture as an example. She identifies authors who argue Karen culture places significant value on education. At the same time, others are cited who take the position that oppression and lack of opportunity have discouraged Karen youth from setting and following through on goals. Sadler [p.24] refers to additional studies which note the value Karen cultural places on humility and a willingness to be quiet, unimposing, and non-talkative. These cultural attributes may explain an observed unwillingness to question authority, voice dissatisfaction, or ask for help. In sum, cultural factors could influence refugee self advocacy and willingness to pursue opportunities, thereby impacting successful negotiation of postsecondary pathways.

²⁷ Sadler [p.35] notes several studies that make this point. The studies call for Canadian educators to recognize pedagogical differences when attempting to assist refugee students.

²⁸ Sadler [p.22] cites sources that characterize the conditions of protracted camp life for groups like the Karen, as well as the associated negative mental and physical health outcomes.

²⁹ Sadler [p.22] notes the particular impact of these factors on education success has yet to be identified by researchers.

³⁰ Sadler [p.45] refers to several studies which show most refugees arrive in Canada with few or no assets and usually in considerable debt.

³¹ Sadler [p.45] indicates government loans for such purposes can reach \$10,000. She notes several studies which argue that repayment requirements cause families to pursue employment over education.

Barriers arising from post-migration conditions

Upon arrival, refugees generally have high aspirations for education. However, Sadler's literature review indicates refugees experience multiple obstacles throughout the resettlement process that affect the possibility of postsecondary access. These obstacles are the outcome of pre-migration circumstances combined with post-migration realities. As noted by Sadler [p.39], appreciation of post-migration barriers is important; these barriers offer the most direct opportunity for intervention by those seeking to provide education assistance.

Challenges associated with secondary school experience

Postsecondary education forms part of an educational continuum where education requirements are expected to be completed within specific time intervals. Failure to meet mandated time lines leaves students with fewer options and opportunities. Because refugees from protracted camp situations typically lack language ability and age-specific education requirements, they are out of step within the continuum compared to their Canadian-born peers. Refugees must therefore play catch-up. Young arrivals typically succeed in catch-up because they have time to learn the language and gain a strong education foundation within the Canadian school system. Older refugees, however, face a greater catch-up challenge. Limited language ability and previous education combined with the requirement to graduate by age 19 leave older youth hard-pressed to succeed in the academic courses necessary for high school graduation.

Secondary school administrators and teachers face challenges when trying to accommodate refugee students in age-appropriate academic classes. Within the constraint of limited resources, schools typically respond by creating special courses and lower-level programs that meet unique refugee needs. The result is education "tracking" or "streaming."³²

Sadler cites multiple sources that discuss the adverse consequences of secondary school streaming for immigrants and refugees. Stream members often leave high school without adequate courses to enroll in post-secondary programs, or even the prerequisites or academic requirements to succeed in school district trades programs. Segregation from the rest of the student body affects the emotional well-being of stream members. As noted in the literature, schools perform an important role in orientating immigrants and refugees to mainstream culture. When members are prevented from taking mainstream classes, alienation sets in. In the end, the unintended results of refugee streaming can be students who feel isolated from the main student body, do not have the requirements for university or post-secondary programs, and who frequently drop-out of school early [Sadler, p. 36].

Culture shock, identity, and mental health in the resettlement process

Sadler relates the literature on refugee culture shock to potential preparedness for postsecondary education. Like all immigrants, refugees who arrive as older children or youth experience

³² Sadler defines "streaming" or "tracking" as "a practice where students are placed on academic trajectories ... [p. 36]."

significant challenges to their identity.³³ However, their often traumatic backgrounds cause them to experience resettlement stress and culture shock in even more profound ways. When combined with the other tensions of adolescence, resettlement stress can have a significant impact on refugee mental health, and as result, learning and the possibility of school success. As argued by Sadler [p.43], refugee youth need time to sort through these mental and emotional challenges. To be ready to think about post-secondary education, they need time to gather themselves within the resettlement process.

Guidance concerning secondary, postsecondary pathways

A common theme within literature addressing barriers to post-secondary education is a lack of guidance. Refugee youth need help when navigating the secondary and post-secondary school system. Guidance is limited from refugee parents who lack literacy and have little knowledge of Canadian education systems. As such, arrivals rely on the guidance of settlement workers from community agencies or schools.

While there are few studies on the effectiveness of education guidance from settlement workers, Sadler [p.43] cites a report by Australian researchers that indicated 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.”³⁴ She also notes a more recent Lower Mainland study that reported refugee and immigrant youth felt ill-advised about graduation requirements in the BC education system.

The need within the refugee community for ongoing guidance regarding secondary and postsecondary pathways is evident. As noted by Sadler [p.44], the absence of such advice leaves refugee youth at a loss to navigate secondary and post-secondary systems, and ultimately vulnerable to dropping out or not achieving post-secondary access.³⁵

Socio-economic factors

Arriving in Canada with limited financial assets, low language abilities, and few marketable skills, many refugees experience low socioeconomic status upon resettlement. Sadler [p.45] cites studies indicating it is not uncommon for refugee parents to work long hours simply to make ends meet. Income need is exacerbated by relatively large refugee family sizes.

Limited income creates financial barriers for postsecondary access. Potential refugee students see postsecondary participation as unlikely. Sadler [p.45] quotes from a recent study of refugee youth in Toronto, where a female Karen participant confirms how low monthly social assistance payments create a financial barrier: “We have three siblings attending high school and we get only \$800 which

³³ As noted by Sadler [p.38], it is difficult for refugees to find security in their first culture when cultural values are not consistent with post-migration society. On the other hand, lack of English language proficiency and difficulty with school integration make it hard to identify with Canadian culture.

³⁴ Hannah, (1999) p.159.

³⁵ Sadler notes similar concerns pertain to guidance in vocational training.

is not enough. We have decided to quit school and search for jobs”³⁶. Other studies confirm refugee youth from low-income households feel pressure to drop out of school to support their families and contribute to household income.

Socio-economic considerations can impact on postsecondary access in other, less direct ways. Sadler presents research suggesting refugees settle close to one another not only for cultural security, but also because of the concentrated availability of low-income accommodation.³⁷ Concentrated resettlement reduces the possibility for social integration and its resulting contribution to education success. Other studies noted by Sadler draw a tie between socio-economic status and the home environment, arguing low income correlates with the consumption of less nutritious foods, limited private space for doing homework, lack of computer ownership, and unavailable parental support.

4.2 Karen community survey and consultation event

To gain more specific understanding of postsecondary access barriers faced by Karen GARs in the South Fraser region, a participatory action needs assessment approach was employed. Based on the Active Community Engagement Model [ACEM], a community survey was undertaken of Karen living in Surrey and Langley areas, along with Karen community support-service workers. The survey was followed up with a community consultation event.

Employment of ACEM for assessment purposes helped achieve a number of objectives. From the standpoint of information gained, the survey and consultation provided first-hand feedback regarding [a] community member goals, [b] experienced education barriers, [c] efforts to overcome barriers, [d] areas where additional support is needed, and [e] prioritization of support areas. The survey also enabled comparisons with the more general literature review. Furthermore, the use of ACEM enabled former protracted situation refugees to regain a sense capacity to direct the circumstances that surround their lives. The methodology also facilitated a bridge of good will and dialogue between KPU and the Karen. Finally, employment of ACEM started the formation of partnerships between KPU and the community-based service groups seeking to advance the education interests of the Karen and other GARs.

Assessment methodology

The assessment was initiated by the creation of Steering Committee with representation from the Langley School District, 4 KPU faculty members, and 2 former Karen refugees. The Committee’s role was to oversee all aspects of the assessment. In consultation with the Steering Committee, Reddick and Dooley developed survey questions to be used in interviews with individuals associated with the Karen community.³⁸ Interviews were semi-structured and involved 30 participants based on the following distribution: 15 interviews with Karen youth (16 to 19 years old) – 7 from Surrey, 8 from Langley; 9 interviews with parents – 5 from Surrey, 4 from Langley; 6 interviews with service providers – 3 from Surrey, 3 from Langley. Interviewed service workers included a secondary school

³⁶ Shakya, et al. (2010), p.72.

³⁷ Sadler [p.46] specifically notes studies of refugee settlement patterns in the Lower Mainland that reflect the pattern of concentrated resettlement.

³⁸ See Appendix 1 for the specific survey questions.

teacher familiar with Karen students, two secondary school-based Karen support workers, two community-based support workers, and a Karen pastor.

A convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit interview participants. Steering Committee members with Karen community ties developed a pool of participants for the youth, parent, and service provider categories. Interviews were conducted by student research assistant (RA) pairings, each pair consisting of a senior KPU student and a young adult from the Karen community. RAs were identified by Reddick and Dooley in consultation with the Steering Committee, and received follow-up training regarding research protocol and interview methods. During interviews, predetermined questions were asked by the Karen community RA, with the KPU student RA recording responses in written form. RA pairings conducted a debriefing meeting after each interview to review responses and record any additional information. All interviews were completed in March, 2013.

Aggregate interview data was analyzed by Reddick and Dooley and presented in summarized form to the Steering Committee, as well as to a larger gathering at the community consultation event in April, 2013.

The consultation event was attended by 40 individuals – 21 Karen youth and young adults, 8 Karen parents, 4 community-based Karen support workers, 4 KPU representatives, 2 RAs, and a former Karen community volunteer. Following a catered dinner and presentation of survey results, attendees engaged in a series of prioritization exercises with follow-up discussion. Described below, the exercises were designed to identify the relative priority Karen youth, parents, and others in attendance attached to categories of postsecondary access barriers revealed in the Karen community survey results.

4.2.1 Survey results

Summarized responses to all questions in the Karen community survey are found in Appendix 2. Key themes are reported here for youth, parents, and service providers.

Goals

Youth perspectives

“Education takes care of everything”

As part of the survey, Karen youth were asked about their goals both before and after arrival in Canada. Prior to arrival, 8 of 15 youth dreamed of expanded opportunities, specifically the possibility of education enabling access to a better life. As one youth responded, “Education takes care of everything.” All 8 imagined education leading to careers in “caring” professions – nursing, doctors, dental assistants, firemen, etc. This propensity toward caring professions may be the result of youth familiarity with the work of care-related professionals in the camps. Five of 15 had no dream at all. Canada seemed foreign, and as one youth said, “It is hard to change your life from what it was in the camp.” This may reflect the stultifying impact of protracted camp life.

Subsequent to arrival in Canada, 9 youth indicated setting specific career goals in caring professions [nursing, firefighting, international aid, health care reception] or trades [plumbing]. Several had general goals [“get a good, stable job”]. One still did not have any specific goals, other than a wish to return and help people in Myanmar.

Youth were asked about their parents’ perceptions of appropriate youth goals. Most youth responded that parents were largely unaware of specific job opportunities for youth, but that parents recognized the need for education. Parents support the pursuit of education, so long as youth are working as soon as possible to provide for the family.

Parent perspectives

“I want to work, my children to study”

Parents were asked about their own dreams before arrival, as well as after resettlement. While some thought it would be exciting in Canada [e.g. “life in a big city”, “access technology”], many came dreaming of fundamental opportunities for themselves and their children. As one parent responded, “I wanted to work, my children to study. These freedoms do not exist in Burma.” Education is seen as critical for accessing opportunities. It is also seen as a path that steers youth away from negative alternatives, such as drugs. As one parent commented, “What will happen if they are not in school? I am worried about bad influences”

Upon resettlement, parents’ goals are tempered by the realities they face with limited language ability and little education. They report working in low skilled jobs [e.g. greenhouse, recycling, and sewing]. The work is not stimulating; what matters are the relationships with co-workers and overseers. Lack of language skills can be a problem. As one parent noted, “You get blamed for mistakes, and can’t defend yourself” Lack of options leaves parents subject to various employer pressures.³⁹ As a result, parents want much more for their children. They recognize accessing worthwhile careers is difficult, but the answer is education, particularly postsecondary [university or trade school]. High school education is perceived to be not enough. When asked whether they hoped their children would work or attend postsecondary upon high school completion, all six interviewees indicated a preference for further education over immediate work. However, a key parental requirement is that education pathways be well defined and bring a relatively quick payoff. As stated by one interviewee, “My children will be in postsecondary school. But they ... can’t just take courses that lead nowhere and end up not getting a job.”

Service worker perspectives

“Take a step at a time”

Service workers were asked to identify appropriate goals for Karen youth. In general, they believe practical, immediate goals are best. As one service worker advised, “Take a step at a time. Finish high school, and gain skills that provide jobs.” Several perceived that Karen youth desire skills that can be used to reinvest in their people in Thai camps, or use to bring about change in Myanmar. Service workers reported a key challenge to goal setting is lack of youth awareness regarding the

³⁹ “You cannot speak, you have to work even when not healthy.”

necessary steps to achieve objectives. As one service-worker commented, “They [Karen youth] have career goals, but no actual sense of the details of that career, the requirements, the necessary steps.” Another stated, “They have such an empty frame of reference. Setting lofty goals is not productive. They need to learn how to research and gain information when forming dreams.”

Barriers

Youth perspectives

“Everything is so new, everything is stopping me”

Youth were asked to comment about barriers that stand between them and postsecondary access. They were also asked whether they felt these barriers were different than those faced by other immigrants.

Youth identified a number of barriers cited in the literature review. English language skills were acknowledged to be an important hurdle. Lack of English fluency was said to reduce willingness to integrate with English speakers; limited comprehension skills impacted school performance. In regard to comprehension, one youth indicated, “Most Karen students do not understand what teachers are saying.” Another youth was concerned her comprehension skills would bar postsecondary access to nursing programs. Finances were also identified as a barrier. Parents were largely viewed as unable to provide financial support. In addition, the need to work in order to provide income support for parents was expressed, especially given parents’ limited job skills and health challenges. Some youth indicated they felt overwhelmed by the need to deal with cultural acclimatization on top of school work.⁴⁰ Others felt blocked by a lack of awareness of postsecondary pathways and where assistance could be found.

Youth recognized the barriers they face are not always typical of barriers generally experienced by immigrants. They recognized themselves as having poorer education preparation, English language training, and financial means because of protracted refugee camp experience. The youth perceived that Canadian-born residents did not appreciate these differences, mistakenly assuming all immigrants were the same. As one youth responded, “People are not aware of your unique background – they assume you are, for example, Korean, and therefore have inappropriate expectations of you.”

Parent perspectives

“As parents we cannot help them with anything involving school”

Parents indicated English language comprehension was a significant barrier for older youth.⁴¹ Parents also acknowledged their limited financial means to support postsecondary education. Transportation challenges were noted, as well as concerns about youth motivation to try hard. All parents strongly indicated an inability to help their children with education matters. For example, a typical interview response was, “As parents we cannot help them with anything involving school. They must try hard to help themselves.” One parent even seemed at a loss to comprehend

⁴⁰ “Everything is so new; everything is stopping me.”

⁴¹ “They [youth] have a hard time understanding homework.”

postsecondary access barriers, stating, “I don’t know what the barriers are. But I know my children must ask for help.” The inability to provide guidance raises significant concern in parents. One parent expressed concern that youth would not experience empathic responses when seeking help from others – “[Youth] want someone who cares about them to help, not someone who may judge.”

Service-worker responses

“People are a barrier – people who do not understand that a refugee needs a bit more time”

Of the three groups interviewed, service workers provided the most extensive feedback regarding postsecondary access barriers faced by Karen youth. Like youth and parents, service workers acknowledged language skills⁴², lack of previous education⁴³, financial challenges⁴⁴, family dependency⁴⁵, lack of parental guidance⁴⁶, limited awareness of education pathways⁴⁷, and reduced motivation given numerous hurdles⁴⁸. Similar to the observation of parents, one service worker cited “lack of understanding by those providing support” as a barrier. As indicated during an interview, “People [are a barrier]. People who do not understand that a refugee needs a bit more time. Talk slower. Be more patient.”

Support workers perceived additional barriers. Culture was viewed to be a factor. Compared with other immigrants, the Karen were viewed as less willing to initiate inter-personal interactions. As noted by one service worker, “Outside of their group, Karen people are not vocal. They wait until other people approach them to communicate, not the other way around.” The effects of trauma and camp life were also noted as barriers, with observed anxiety and depression noted in some youth. Finally, the problem of “multi-stop” education was noted as a barrier. Because current Karen youth often graduate from high school without full credit, they are required to take additional steps to gain the credits needed for postsecondary access [e.g. adult high school]. Additional steps mean more time, expense, and travel, all things that refugees can ill afford.

Perspectives on efforts to overcome barriers, and available support

Youth

“I need to stay focused on the goal and ignore what is bothering me”

Youth were asked about their efforts to overcome barriers. Responses mainly indicate a ‘pull up your boot straps’ approach to dealing with barriers. Youth said they were trying to “work hard, save money, study hard – especially English.” Their approach was to “remain positive, stay focused on

⁴² “English barriers are more complex in high school – you are dealing with counselors about more complex issues.”

⁴³ “It is a challenge when you are always trying to catch up.”

⁴⁴ “Parents came with nothing. They lack the skills to earn significant income.”

⁴⁵ “Some [youth] have the ability to attend postsecondary, but they feel the pressure to contribute so as to help the family.”

⁴⁶ “Parents cannot provide sufficient support – income, homework, knowledge of systems, time availability due to the need to work. They become disconnected from their children’s experiences and lives.”

⁴⁷ “Karen youth lack awareness of systems, pathways, steps. They lack context.”

⁴⁸ “Youth get frustrated and lose motivation. This is especially true for boys. The result is poor choices – going for fast money through drugs.”

the goal.” Several youth commented it was important to “avoid being lazy.” Regarding school and personal struggles, one youth said it was best to “ignore what is bothering me.” A number of youth indicated the need to make helpful connections for the sake of guidance. Youth indicated they were trying to “ask lots of questions,” and “make more Canadian friends to improve English.” Support was viewed to be available through teachers, counselors, and immigrant service workers.

Parents

“I tell them to go to the library and read lots of books”

Parents were asked to identify support available to youth. Some parents indicated awareness of assistance through settlement workers, school-based support workers⁴⁹, teachers, and a community-based homework-assistance program⁵⁰. Responses indicate the existence of a “communication chain,” where teachers connect with service workers about school issues and student performance, and service workers in turn contact parents. Some parents were unaware of available support; this could be traceable to communication problems with children and/or support workers, or may indicate parents are struggling with mental health problems. Besides providing food, shelter, transportation, and encouragement, parents felt unable to directly assist their children. Parents traced inability to provide further support to inadequate language skills, education, and experience. However, parents did indicate they encouraged their children to connect with others⁵¹.

Service workers

“I try to keep them positive, to point to the possibilities.”

Service workers were asked how they provided youth assistance that would overcome postsecondary access barriers. The majority provided direct assistance either in language training, through a homework club, or through youth programs where Karen could share experiences with one another. Several service workers indicated the need for specialized youth assistance. As one service worker stated, “On the one hand, high school students need help with technical work like calculus. On the other, we are starting to spot potential learning disabilities, which require specialized assistance.” All indicated efforts to link youth with others who can help, but noted an absence of available programs tailored to unique Karen needs. Service workers also try to encourage Karen youth. A typical comment was, “I try to keep them positive, to point to the possibilities.” However, encouragement must ultimately come from “wins” [successes that can be pointed to].

When asked about types of support available to assist Karen youth in overcoming postsecondary barriers, service workers referred to general settlement programs, ESL programs, and school-based assistance. While English programs were noted to exist for older youth, service workers felt the

⁴⁹ Diversity, a Surrey schools initiative for immigrants, was specifically mentioned.

⁵⁰ Langley parents noted the help of the Homework Club, an afterschool program offered by the PUCKS Society.

⁵¹ “I direct them to teachers, service workers.” “I tell them to go to the library and read lots of books.”

programs were not tailored to youth needs.⁵² Sport programs in schools were seen as an effective means of establishing inter-cultural connections and confidence building.

Perspectives regarding the need for additional support

Youth

“I want someone to share their experience of school or life goals; how did these people get there, what were the challenges?”

Youth were asked about the kind of support that would best help them overcome access barriers. While the need for scholarships, transportation assistance [driver training], and internet access were mentioned, youth responses often tended toward people who could meet targeted needs or provide specific help; for example, assistance with English language skills, help with program planning and course selection, tutoring for more challenging courses. Several youth indicated the simple need for family and friends to “encourage me so I can stay positive.” Another need concerned assistance for the families of youth. As one youth responded, “I need someone to help my family with employment, so I can be freed up.” Finally, a need for mentoring was expressed. One youth commented, “I want someone to share their experience of school or life goals; how did these people get there, what were the challenges?”

Parents

“They will be helped if I am better connected with their teachers, if I can understand how they are doing”

The need for language assistance, homework assistance⁵³, and financial assistance were all expressed, as were the needs for general guidance regarding postsecondary pathways, and specific support along the way.⁵⁴ Interestingly, one parent responded that she needed help to be more actively involved in the education path of her youth – “They will be helped if I am better connected with their teachers, if I can understand how they are doing, their grades, their strengths and weaknesses.”

Service workers

“Provide youth with immersion experiences. These will answer questions, bring clarity, and possibly generate more dreams”

Like the other groups, service workers indicated more financial support is needed to assist youth with postsecondary access. Service workers also stated greater one-on-one, individualized help is necessary to deal with specific remedial needs. As one service worker said, “We can only do the

⁵² For example, courses are either not offered in evenings [Karen youth must work], not for credit, or taught at levels not associated with Karen needs.

⁵³ “My children need extra assistance outside of school; there are not enough volunteers or opportunities like Homework Club.”

⁵⁴ Regarding specific support, one parent said, “We need someone to help fill out funding forms.”

best we can in a group setting.” More skilled tutors are needed for older youth [“ ... not just well intentioned but under-equipped volunteers”]. Support needs to be tailored to specific Karen needs [e.g. dual language speakers should be involved in language training, not just English speakers; flexible school options are desired (e.g. after-work classes)]. It would be best if youth could help youth. Karen youth were viewed as responding better to younger people, because young people “do not seem intimidating.” Service workers feel youth need more awareness-building or immersion experiences like job shadowing, campus tours, class test drives. Finally, efforts must be made to integrate the Karen into university life to break down the language and cultural barriers of separation that can exist between the Karen and others.

4.2.2 Community consultation event results

At the community consultation event postsecondary access barriers were classified as falling within 3 main categories – [1] skill/ability preparation for postsecondary [e.g. language skills, literacy, numeracy, study skills], [2] support services available when undertaking postsecondary [e.g. registration, tutoring, mentoring, financial assistance], and [3] awareness of postsecondary options and pathways [e.g. program selection/advising]. Event participants were first asked to identify which category represented the most important postsecondary challenge facing the Karen. To start, individuals were instructed to indicate their selection on a response sheet without consulting others. They were then asked to move to a response station in the meeting room that was consistent with their selection. Facilitated follow-up discussions occurred at each response station.

Most significant postsecondary barrier

Overall, 46% of attendees [18 out of 39] identified available support services as the most significant postsecondary barrier. Skill/ability preparation for postsecondary came in next at 31% [12 of 39], followed by awareness of postsecondary options and pathways at 23% [9 of 39]. Priority varied between response groups. Of the 8 participating Karen parents, 6 [75%] identified support services as most significant barrier [skill/ability preparation and awareness of options/pathways were identified as the most significant barrier only by 1 parent each [13% each]]. Karen youth/young adults also identified support services as the most significant barrier [57%, 12 of 21], followed by awareness of postsecondary options/pathways [29%, 6 of 21], and skill/ability preparation [14%, 3 of 21]. However, service providers and KPU representatives strongly identified skill/ability preparation as the most significant barrier [80%, 8 of 10], followed by awareness of pathways/options [20%, 2 of 10]. No one in this response group identified support services as the most significant barrier. Karen parents and youth/young adults thus see support services as the key need, but this view is not shared by service providers and KPU representatives. They overwhelmingly hold skill/ability preparation as the key, yet parents and youth/young adults see this as the least important.

Groups at each response station discussed the rationale behind their selection. Support services were viewed by station discussants as most significant because they provide assurance there will be assistance at each step along the postsecondary path. Assurance is important because it increases student confidence and motivation. Skill and ability preparation were seen by station discussants as most significant because qualifications are essential for progress. Station discussants who selected

awareness of pathways/options as most important argued informed postsecondary decisions cannot be made without awareness.

Least significant postsecondary barrier

Next, a reverse question was posed, with participants asked to identify the category representing the least important postsecondary challenge facing the Karen. Individuals again indicated their selection on a response sheet without consulting others, then moved to a matching response station. As before, facilitated follow-up discussions occurred at each response station.

Overall, 58% of attendees identified awareness of pathways/options as the least significant postsecondary barrier. Skill/ability preparation for postsecondary came in next at 28%, followed by support services at 14%. Awareness of options/pathways was thus strongly viewed as the least important overall, consistent with the results found in the previous exercise regarding relative importance. As a result, the relative ranking of the three barriers remained consistent in the reverse question exercise.

Of the participating Karen parents, 71% viewed awareness as least significant, followed by 29% selecting skill/ability preparation. No parents selected support services as least important. Karen youth/young adults demonstrated the same relative ranking as parents [48% for awareness, 33% for skill/ability preparation, 19% for support]. Like parents and youth/young adults, a majority of service providers and KPU representatives saw awareness of pathways/options as least important [75%], with 13% each identifying support services and skill/ability as least important. Parents and service providers thus strongly see awareness of options/pathways as least important. Results for youth/young adults are less pronounced, though they too see awareness as least significant.

Follow-up discussion provided the following response rationale. The relative few [14% of all participants] who viewed support services as least important took the position that support services already exist to some degree, and are made redundant when strong awareness and ability exist. The 28% of respondents who saw skill/ability as least important felt that strong support services can help overcome limited initial skills/ability. The 58% who perceived awareness as least important argued that documentation exists through the internet regarding options and pathways.

The community consultation thus revealed that Karen parents and youth place great significance on support services. Why is this so? A possible explanation comes from an analogy shared by a Karen youth at the consultation event. The challenge of postsecondary access was viewed to be similar to a “big stone that needs to be broken down.” Without the support of others, the challenge of tackling the big stone is overwhelming, and a person can quickly lose hope and give up. But if a person knows that others will help to break down the stone, that person is more apt to take on the challenge. This analogy reveals that Karen youth and parents view the challenge of postsecondary education as daunting.

An additional explanation for the importance attached to support services may come from the pre-migratory experiences of the Karen. Protracted camp existence enforces dependency on the assistance of others. Therefore, previous dependence on support may have conditioned the response of Karen participants.

Service workers and KPU representatives gave greatest priority to the skill/ability preparation challenge faced by Karen youth. This may be explained by the group's perception that, relative to Canadian-born students, the preparation gap faced by the recent Karen arrivals appears to be great.

5. Addressing Potential GAR Postsecondary Access Barriers – Recommendations for KPU

Section 4 has presented numerous potential postsecondary access barriers faced by the Karen and other GARs living in the South Fraser region. These challenges include lack of language skills, insufficient previous education, limited income in light of socioeconomic status, insufficient awareness of postsecondary pathways and programs, and dependence on guidance and on-going support to navigate education experiences. Karen respondents at the community consultation event attached greatest importance to financial and support service challenges, followed by academic preparation and then awareness. Service workers and KPU participants gave greatest priority to academic preparation, followed by support services, and then awareness.

The motivation for a KPU response to these barriers is several-fold. From a humanitarian perspective, GARs are a group deserving of special consideration because of past trauma and deprivation. Resettled in a foreign land requiring unfamiliar skills and abilities for success, refugees need educational support. Beyond the transfer of skills, access to postsecondary can provide an important means of integration and socialization for refugees. Yet assistance enables more than just a one-way exchange benefiting the lives of refugees; it also generates significant learning opportunities within a postsecondary institution. The active involvement of Karen and other GARs in KPU programs and student activities can introduce a powerful element of diversity. Sadler [p.55] notes Basu (2011) in this regard, emphasizing the potential for a "rich exchange of ideas, cultural norms, and pluralistic perspectives." The result is an "important form of experiential education," something that may hold tangible value in programs dependent upon intercultural understanding.

The strong alignment of overarching study objectives with KPU's mandate and geographical placement must be emphasized. KPU's mandate is to serve diverse learners. Due to their pre- and post-migration experiences, refugees particularly fall within this category and are not well suited to traditional postsecondary pathways available at other postsecondary institutions. KPU's mission is to provide international learning opportunities for its students, and to make a global impact. Providing education access to refugees arguably opens up such possibilities both through intercultural exchange and through knowledge and skill transfer that enables refugees to ultimately make an impact within their home countries. As a recently established polytechnic university, KPU is seeking to distinguish itself within the Metro Vancouver region as an innovative, community-based educational organization. With a significant percentage of Metro Vancouver GARs choosing to settle in the South Fraser region, addressing refugee education access needs can represent a signature move by KPU, and provide leadership both nationally and internationally for other universities wishing to meet similar needs.

5.1 Assistance principles

To address the multiple and complex access challenges faced by the Karen and other GARs, overarching principles are suggested to help meet the transition needs. Results from the literature review, community survey, and community consultation event have informed the development of these principles. In addition, insight was gained from a review of support programs for refugee youth conducted by Sadler as part of her contribution to this study. The following presents the assistance principles as a precursor to study policy recommendations.

Assistance that is multi-faceted.

As emphasized above, GARs face numerous barriers that limit access to postsecondary education. Dealing with any one barrier while leaving others unaddressed may leave GARs unable to gain access and education success. As an example, the availability of remedial education avenues for ensuring adequate academic preparation must be matched by funding assistance that overcomes family financial challenges. The need for a multi-faceted approach points to the importance of partnerships, a point addressed below.

Assistance adaptable to specific needs

GARs have unique needs because of their pre-migratory and resettlement experiences. To be effective, assistance should adapt to these needs. In this regard, Sadler references an evaluation of the *FreeRunning* Program, a demonstration project offered by a nonprofit settlement service agency [Mosaic] assisting vulnerable refugee populations in Metro Vancouver. The program was designed to facilitate the settlement and integration process for youth aged 15 to 25, in particular preparing them for education, training and employment. Sadler [p.55] highlights the need for adaptable assistance as indicated in a program review of *FreeRunning* by Khadka, et al. (2011):

“... 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.”

Assistance that is sustainable in the long term

Sustainability is important on several grounds. First, because GAR resettlement is anticipated to continue in the South Fraser region, postsecondary access needs will grow and persist into the future. Second, as Sadler [p.55] notes when referring to Kahdka et al.’s appraisal of *FreeRunning*, it takes time to “...build trust relationships, adapt program offerings to ... unique needs, and provide ongoing follow-up for long-term goals. Furthermore, because of the range of skills, interests and education levels of [refugee youth] ... [developed] goals and action plans ... [can] take up to five years to fulfill” [terms in brackets added].

Assistance built on partnerships

The path to postsecondary access is a long one for GARs. While postsecondary access promises successful social and labor market integration, much is dependent on previous successes in areas such as basic resettlement and secondary schooling. Though these areas lie beyond the direct reach and mandate of universities like KPU, postsecondary institutions can inform and thereby facilitate the work done by resettlement agencies, school boards, and government in the build up to postsecondary entry. Partnerships are essential for information sharing and understanding, and can leverage the effectiveness of all who provide support to refugees. Sadler [pp.56-57] identifies several community-based programs [*Bridge-2-Success Refugee Youth Development Program* – San Francisco Bay area, *Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees* [PAIR] – Houston, Texas] relying on collaboration between community service providers, secondary schools, and postsecondary institutions.

Assistance that reflects priorities established by the community

At the heart of participatory action needs assessment approach adopted in this study is the notion that community members are strongly placed to assess their specific needs and identify priorities. Community members are also more likely to be informed of and receptive toward assistance when they have had a voice in its determination. The Karen community survey and community consultation event have highlighted a number of important forms of support desired by the community. These include [a] guidance in light of cultural understanding, [b] the need for financial assistance, [c] ensured access to education in trades programs and caring professions [e.g. nursing] upon successful completion of qualification requirements, [d] the availability of “test-drive” experiences that enhance understanding of general university expectations as well as program specifics, and [e] on-going support in the form of mentoring relationships.

Assistance that anticipates changing demographic influences

As highlighted in Section 3 and Appendix 1, the postsecondary access needs of GARs are influenced by demographics. While demand for remedial education services will persist because of the anticipated continuance of GAR resettlement, guidance and mentoring needs associated with youth having significant experience in the public school system, as well as their need for financial support, will eventually become equally important. As noted in the literature review and Karen community survey, these needs are driven by the inability of refugee parents to provide guidance in career planning and navigation of the post-secondary education system, or to provide significant financial assistance.⁵⁵

Assistance that leverages available resources

Resources limitations are presently significant within the British Columbia postsecondary system. As such, hopes for new initiative funding from government must be tempered. The degree to which funding could become available from government sources will most likely depend on the ability to evidence initial program successes. It is therefore crucial that assistance for refugee access to

⁵⁵ As noted by Sadler [p.57], the Houston-based PAIR program is specifically designed to help overcome the guidance deficit in refugee families.

postsecondary education derive as much as possible from the application and adaptation of existing resources, as well as from the employment of untapped but available resources. Opportunities associated with the former resourcing strategy can emerge, for example, from synergy-seeking consultations with groups representing KPU's established student service systems and remedial education programs. They can also arise from consultations with KPU representatives of newly-funded parallel initiatives [e.g. synergies within recent mentoring programs put in place for international students]. Opportunities for the employment of untapped resources may exist in the form of mutually-beneficial volunteerism. Because the education cause for GARs is compelling, and given the potential benefits from cross-cultural exchange, the ability to engage volunteers [e.g. students and faculty] in initiatives such as mentoring is likely. This is evidenced by the present involvement of student and faculty volunteers in the Student Refugee Program of the World University Service of Canada [WUSC], a charitable organization providing relocation, scholarship, and university mentoring opportunities to refugees selected from foreign countries.⁵⁶

Assistance that is measurable

Wherever possible, assistance outcomes should be identified and recorded. Such measurement will enable assistance evaluation with an eye toward improvement. In addition, the existence of measurable outcomes provides potential support for funding applications to government and other organizations. An example in this regard would be the tracking of refugee students through the KPU registration system. Much like in the case of aboriginal students at KPU, refugee students who agree to voluntarily self-identify could be followed up with information regarding specific forms of available services and resources, and surveyed in terms of their student experiences.

Support in multiple forms is no doubt needed and valued by resettled refugees seeking postsecondary access. However, attention to providing support must be balanced with the awareness that ultimate success for GARs requires a transition from a place of dependency to self-advocacy and support. In addition, GARs need viable avenues for contribution as part of their postsecondary experience. Assistance success will thus ultimately be measured by documented outcomes such as active participation by refugee students in postsecondary life, successful program completion, and subsequent refugee contributions both to their community and society at large.

5.2 Study recommendations

General areas for strengthening refugee access support are made clear in the literature review, community survey and community consultation. They include collaboration with community partners, awareness initiatives for KPU student service workers, program and pathway awareness efforts for refugee community members, effective preparatory bridging, and various specific forms of on-going student support. As noted by Sadler [p.64], the need for attention in these spheres is affirmed by a study of refugee postsecondary experiences in Australia by Joyce et al. (2010).

Before addressing each support area and providing specific recommendations for KPU, the envisioned means of operationalizing assistance proposals will be noted. This study was initiated within KPU's CIR:CLE with the intent of advocating for the educational needs of the Karen and other

⁵⁶ A detailed discussion of WUSC's Student Refugee Program is found in Peterson (2012).

GARs in the South Fraser region. The study Steering Committee represents a core group of committed KPU faculty and community service workers who are willing to consult, inform, and act within their means to see study objectives achieved. Steering Committee members believe that consultation with the various University divisions and community service groups identified below will make clear the potential gains for all involved, and stimulate willingness to enter into voluntary partnerships. Such partnerships will be strengthened by the identification of specific individuals within partnering groups who are willing to become on-going champions for the refugee educational cause. To the degree significant success is realized, formal arrangements involving government funding may become viable.

Recommended forms of assistance

Strengthen ties with community partners

There are many agencies and associations working with refugee communities in Metro Vancouver [e.g. ISSofBC, Mosaic, AMSSA, DiverseCity]. School districts and government ministries [e.g. the BC Ministry of Family and Child Development] are also seeking to address refugee needs. By strengthening postsecondary access for refugees, KPU can become a valuable partner with these groups, providing an essential linkage in a critical phase of the resettlement and integration process – the acquisition of higher-level skills and abilities for long-term success. Similarly, community partners have much to offer KPU, including strong connections with refugee communities, awareness of community needs and aspirations, and the ability to offer feedback regarding the helpfulness of specific education initiatives. As noted above, support for refugee students must be multi-faceted and is dependent upon partnerships. Working with partners, KPU can more effectively play its part in assisting the development of refugee students and their communities.

***Recommendation:* The Zipporah’s Dream Steering Committee continue to identify strategic community partnerships, inviting service groups to participate in the further development of KPU initiatives regarding refugee student access and requesting support in the transfer of access information to refugee communities.**

Increase awareness of KPU student services staff and faculty

Refugees come from unique cultural groups and have experienced unique challenges. They are often unfamiliar with postsecondary education systems and expectations, and are particularly concerned about university acceptance and their ability to succeed. University student service staff and faculty need to be made aware of these factors in order to provide appropriate and effective student service. As referenced in the Karen community survey, refugees require “a little more time, patience, and understanding” when compared to other immigrant and Canadian-born students. In light of these considerations, refugee awareness initiatives are appropriate to help inform KPU student services workers and faculty, such as admissions staff, counselors, and faculty providing support in academic upgrading.

***Recommendation:* Steering Committee representatives consult with KPU Admissions, Counseling, Student Services, and Academic and Career Advancement divisions to determine appropriate avenues for presentation of refugee characteristics and needs, the intent being to strengthen**

awareness and enhance student service. Avenues for presentation could include professional development sessions, Faculty-wide gatherings, and/or specific department presentations. Presentations can be led by Steering Committee members along with representatives from community partners.⁵⁷ Following such presentations, volunteer refugee “champions” be identified within each division who can act as contact persons for the Steering Committee, community service groups, and individual refugees, providing assistance regarding refugee-related concerns.

Increase refugee and community partner awareness of KPU pathways and programs

The community consultation indicated increased awareness of KPU pathways and programs was a lower priority for refugees, primarily because they perceived information could be gained through existing channels such as the KPU website or University counseling staff. Despite this perspective, increased awareness initiatives may be valuable on a number of grounds.

First, Sadler [p.79] has argued that awareness timing is important. When refugees first arrive they have little awareness of postsecondary possibilities. Though the initial period of resettlement can be overwhelming, accessible information regarding career and postsecondary pathways is helpful and bolsters hope as refugees begin to set goals for their new lives in Canada. The Karen community survey indicates refugee parents are in particular need of information regarding postsecondary pathways and programs as they seek to provide guidance to their children and youth. Because parents may be less likely to access internet-based resources, a more personal presentation of postsecondary access information may be valuable. Collaboration between KPU advising staff and community service providers who work closely with refugees will enable the identification of appropriate initial opportunities for presentations to refugee parents.

Postsecondary pathway awareness is also important as refugee youth begin to move through the secondary school system. Since course choices made in grades 10 through 12 have a significant bearing on postsecondary access, annual information and advising sessions at secondary schools by KPU staff in partnership with secondary school counselors will prove helpful. The fact that refugee communities tend to live within concentrated geographic areas means that such sessions can achieve maximum community coverage through relatively few schools.

Second, internet-based information regarding KPU pathways and programs relevant for refugees should be developed and made effective through specific online referencing and the use of “pathway scenarios.” Refugees should be able to quickly identify relevant postsecondary access information online through specified links on the KPU website. Accessed information can be made more helpful when presented in pathway scenario form. Pathway scenarios should present various possible education entry and destination points for refugees. For example, if a refugee youth in secondary school aspires to a job in the trades, levels of required English, math and possibly other sciences available in secondary school should be identified, along with the appropriate progression. Alternatively, if an older youth aspires to work in the trades but has aged-out of the high school

⁵⁷ ISSofBC has extended an invitation to provide assistance in this regard.

system, a similar pathway should be identified online that lays out necessary courses and progressions through adult basic education [ABE] at KPU. Such scenario-based information will go a long way toward facilitating refugee community awareness.

The issue of pathway specification raises the question of whether viable bridging arrangements exist for refugees who wish to access postsecondary at KPU, in particular refugees who have entered the secondary school system too late to graduate with appropriate postsecondary qualifications. Sadler [p.62] has noted that the Langley school system does offer high school completion programs through an ABE center, but that there are no educational programs for refugee youth who may arrive with low literacy or numeracy, and are aging out of the public school system. In addition, while there are many adult ESL classes, there are no programs to prepare older students for rigorous academic courses at the university level. Surrey surpasses Langley in bridging capacity, as it offers foundational literacy and numeracy courses through an ABE center. However, language training is limited to non-academic levels.

KPU fortunately offers appropriate bridging arrangements through its ACA programs. For refugees arriving as older youth or adults, bridging will begin with strengthened English language and literacy skills. Students can improve their English language and literacy skills to University access levels through ACA's English Language Studies Program [ELST], which ladders well from English Second Language [ESL] courses offered by community-based providers. In addition, KPU now offers ELST courses tuition free to permanent residents, easing funding concerns for the Karen and other GARs who are provided this status upon resettlement. Students needing improved numeracy skills can acquire them at KPU from foundation to specific university program access levels through ACA's ABE Program. ABE courses are also available tuition free to permanent residents.⁵⁸

Key issues for refugees regarding bridging arrangements will be KPU's capacity within the ACA program to offer desired courses in a sufficient and timely manner. In terms of the latter, the Karen community survey has revealed that many young adults have significant family support responsibilities and will need the flexible course availability during non-working hours.

Finally, increased postsecondary access awareness initiatives should include refugee opportunities for test-drive and immersion experiences. The importance of such experiences was noted by both service providers and Karen youth in the Karen community survey. The refugee community should be regularly alerted to on-going open house opportunities made available by KPU to all students at general and program specific levels. To the degree government funding can be secured, more tailored immersion experiences could be offered to refugee youth.⁵⁹

***Recommendation:* In collaboration with KPU academic advising and community service workers such as secondary school counselors, Steering committee members initiate development of documentation regarding KPU postsecondary pathway scenarios for the refugee community.**

⁵⁸ Numeracy skills specific to trades programs are also available through ACA. These courses are not tuition free. Math courses offered through ACA presume English language proficiency, so GARs need to first strengthen their language skills to ensure greater success.

⁵⁹ More tailored initiatives could be modeled along the lines of the SPARKS program offered by KPU to at-risk youth in specific secondary schools between 2004 and 2007. However, such programs suffer from the challenge of maintaining long-term funding.

These scenarios will include pathways through the secondary school system as well as through KPU's ACA programs.

Following consultation with KPU Admissions, pathway scenario documentation be made available online to refugee communities through a designated refugee link on the KPU website. A refugee champion within KPU Admissions online management staff be identified who will keep the refugee link updated with relevant information such as upcoming University and program-specific open houses and immersion opportunities.

In consultation with community service providers, Steering Committee members identify appropriate initial opportunities for KPU postsecondary access presentations to recently-arrived refugee parents. Upon development of pathway scenario documentation, Steering Committee members and/or KPU advising staff conduct presentations for parents on a semi-annual basis. Additional opportunities for presentations to grade 9 refugee students in secondary schools also be identified in partnership with secondary school counselors.

Steering Committee members consult with KPU's ACA division regarding availability of bridging courses for refugee students, with the intent of ensuring offerings are accessible in the later afternoon and evening, or on weekends.

Other forms of on-going assistance – financial support, mentoring, and reserved program seating

Financial support

The literature review, Karen community survey, and community consultation event all underline the need for financial support for postsecondary refugee students. The availability of tuition free courses within KPU's ACA programs helps in this regard from an academic bridging standpoint, but assistance is also necessary for the costs of KPU certificate, diploma, and degree programs. In the latter cases, support can be accessed through existing forms of financial aid and student awards available via KPU's Student Awards and Financial Assistance division, as well as from newly created, refugee-specific scholarships and bursaries developed in consultation with KPU's Foundation division. In the case of existing forms of financial support, a review should be done on behalf of refugees to determine specific financial avenues and opportunities. In terms of the development of new refugee-specific scholarships and bursaries, discussions will be necessary with KPU's Foundation division, with associated funding generated through subsequent campaigns involving the Steering Committee and refugee community-service partners. The refugee community should be informed of all financial support avenues through online links and in all community-based information sessions.

Financial support recommendation: The Steering Committee consult with KPU's Student Awards and Financial Assistance division to identify existing forms of financial assistance available to refugee students. New assistance in the form of refugee-specific scholarships and bursaries be developed by the Committee in consultation with KPU's Foundation division, with fundraising undertaken in collaboration with community service partners. The refugee community shall be notified of all forms of financial assistance through online links and in all community-based information sessions.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a key form of support requested by youth as part of the Karen community survey. Potential benefits from mentoring are multi-faceted. As noted by Sadler [p.52], mentoring can provide guidance as well as emotional, academic, and social support. At a deeper level, it can generate a critical element of self-confidence and empowerment, helping refugee students achieve the highest levels of social integration. Mentoring has been recognized by several researchers as a promising practice for refugee students, and is being successfully employed in a number of Canadian and US education support programs for refugees [e.g. *FreeRunning*, *CWUS*, *Bridge-2-Success*, and *PAIR*].

Peer mentoring initiatives for international students are currently underway at KPU through a pilot project sponsored by the Office of International Students and Scholars [OISS] and the KPU Learning Centres. The project matches trained peer “coaches” with academically at-risk students, and could serve as a model for a refugee-centred mentoring program. Refugees should be alerted to the availability of peer academic tutoring offered through KPU’s Learning Centres.⁶⁰

Mentoring recommendation: Steering Committee members consult with OISS and representatives of KPU Learning Centres regarding the success and viability of peer mentoring for international students, with the objective of establishing a similar program for refugee students. In the interim, refugees should be alerted – both online and at information sessions – to the availability of academic tutoring through KPU Learning Centres.

Reserved program seating

Postsecondary programs establish entry qualifications that are necessary for student success. In some cases, capacity limitations combined with high demand for program access by qualified students yield a need to ration program spaces or “seats.” Rationing criteria can take a variety of forms, including relative academic standing prior to program entry [i.e. competitive entry]. Due to a desire for increased diversity of student perspectives within a program, merit may also exist for reserved seat assignment based on cultural background or life experience. This approach is commonly used in postsecondary institutions such as law schools, and exists at KPU in the case of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, where one seat is reserved for a self-identified aboriginal student with the highest cumulative grade percentage.⁶¹

Refugee students who meet program entry qualifications may fail to gain access if seat rationing is based solely on pre-entry academic standing. To the degree specific high-demand KPU programs value the cultural and life experience perspectives represented by program-qualified refugee students, consideration by program representatives of appropriate reserved seating criteria is

⁶⁰ Less formal mentoring relationships could eventually arise by encouraging refugee students to form their own student clubs on campus. However, such clubs may not provide sufficient inter-cultural integration, a desired outcome indicated in the Karen community survey.

⁶¹ KPU 2012-2013 Academic Calendar, Nursing: Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Selection of Qualified Applicants. Accessed Aug. 22, 2013, at <http://www.kwantlen.ca/calendar/2012-13/health/nursing-deg.html>.

warranted. Such consideration for refugees may be particularly relevant in the high-demand, “caring profession” programs identified to be of interest by youth in the Karen community survey; for example, nursing.

***Reserved program seating recommendation:* In consultation with refugee community groups, the Steering Committee identify high-demand KPU programs of particular interest to refugees. Designated Committee members consult with directors of identified programs to determine whether merit would be attached to limited reserve seating for qualified refugees.**

Tracing refugee student outcomes

Measurement of refugee student outcomes is important for evaluating the effectiveness of education assistance efforts. From KPU’s perspective, measurement requires identification of annual numbers of refugee secondary school graduates within the South Fraser region, annual numbers selecting postsecondary at KPU relative to other postsecondary institutions, and retention and graduation rates at KPU [ideally relative to other postsecondary institutions offering comparable programs]. Similarly, measurement of the annual number of refugees selecting remedial education within KPU’s ACA division would be helpful, along with subsequent retention and graduation rates. Furthermore, the ability to identify specific refugee students will enable the conducting of feedback surveys regarding refugee student experiences at KPU.

Identification of refugees requires willingness on their part to self-identify. For system wide tracking and comparisons, collaboration between secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and the provincial government will be needed.

KPU can begin the process of information collection by tracking refugee students through its registration system. As with aboriginal students at KPU, refugee students can be asked to voluntarily self-identify as part of their registration. Applicants can be informed that self-identification will enable them to receive information regarding KPU services and resources available to refugees, along with the opportunity to provide feedback on their student experiences.

***Recommendation:* The Steering Committee consult with KPU’s Office of the Registrar to determine the feasibility of tracking KPU refugee students through voluntary self-identification. The Steering Committee, in consultation with KPU’s Registrar, explore the feasibility of wider information collection and sharing regarding refugees in the secondary and postsecondary system.**

Facilitating refugee contribution to the university and beyond

Having experienced injustice and lengthy periods of enforced dependency, resettled refugees desire to make a contribution. This desire was expressed in the Karen community survey when a number of youth indicated a strong preference to pursue caring professions, and to return to the camps in Thailand or even Myanmar to provide assistance to their people and support efforts toward social justice. Much can be learned from refugees in light of their difficult experiences – their perspectives

regarding perseverance, gratitude, priorities, freedom, and the need to pursue justice can be both refreshing and enlightening to those living in a privileged but perhaps insulated society.⁶²

As such, efforts should be made within KPU to encourage refugee contribution through presentation of their perspectives. This can be facilitated in a number of ways. For example, in collaboration with the Kwantlen Student Association [KSA], special invitation can be extended to KPU refugee students to participate and provide perspectives in student-led social justice forums and clubs. KPU Faculties that focus on issues like social justice, economic development, international relations, non-government organizations, nutrition and health care, etc. can extend an invitation for presentations by refugee students in their classes or as part of seminars or symposiums. The perspectives of refugees who become KPU graduates can be profiled in the community, along with their career successes and community contributions.

To strengthen the involvement and self-advocacy of refugee students, a refugee student sub-group of the Steering Committee should be formed and tasked with a number of roles. For example, the sub-group can facilitate refugee student participation in forums, presentations, seminars or symposiums. It can also provide feedback on the effectiveness of efforts to improve refugee access to KPU, as well as alert KPU to the successes of refugee graduates.

Even when in need, refugees contribute to others. The presence of refugees at KPU and in the community provides KPU students opportunity to serve as university mentors or as tutors in secondary school homework clubs. These activities give outlet to a spirit of good will and volunteerism, qualities to developed, encouraged, and celebrated within the student body.

***Recommendation:* The Steering Committee alert the KSA as well as KPU Faculties to future opportunities for refugee student participation and presentations in classes, forums, seminars and symposiums. The Committee form an on-going sub-group composed of at least three current KPU refugee students. The sub-group be tasked with [a] identifying opportunities for the presentation of refugee perspectives within the University, [b] providing feedback on the effectiveness of efforts to improve refugee access to KPU, and [c] alerting KPU to the successes of refugee graduates.**

6. Conclusion

GARs have experienced difficult life journeys. Arrival and resettlement in Canada creates renewed potential for life success. Along with its community partners, KPU is presented with the opportunity to help fulfill this potential. By working with the Zipporah's Dream Steering Committee to act upon the recommendations found in this report, KPU can bring about improvements to refugee postsecondary access that enhance both the lives of refugees and their families as well as KPU members with whom refugee students interact. The result could have a demonstration effect impacting other institutions in the region and nation, and ultimately give impetus to positive change in the countries at the heart of protracted refugee situations.

⁶² In this regard, consider the views expressed by *Stuart Rees [Chair of the Sydney Peace Foundation and Professor Emeritus at the University of Sydney]* found at <http://sydneypeacefoundation.org.au/what-we-can-learn-from-refugees-this-election/>.

7. References

- Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies [AMSSA]. (2013). *Info Sheet #8, May 17, 2013*. Retrieved on June 28, 2013 from AMSSA: http://www.amssa.org/files/Info_Sheet/AMSSA%20Info%20Sheet%20Issue%208%20-%20Final.pdf.
- Banjaree, R. and Verma, A. (2009). *Determinants and Effects of Post-migration Education among New Immigrants in Canada*. Canadian Labor Market and Skills Researcher Network Working Paper No. 11, Retrieved July 24, 2013: <http://www.clsrn.econ.ubc.ca/workingpapers/CLSRN%20Working%20Paper%20no.%2011%20-%20Banerjee%20&%20Verma.pdf>.
- Basu, R. (2011). Multiculturalism Through Multilingualism in Schools: Emerging Places of "Integration" in Toronto. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 1307-1330.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2006). *Backgrounder: Group resettlement to Canada: Karen refugees in Mae La Oon Camp, Thailand*. Retrieved July 19, 2013 from Citizenship and Immigration Canada: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/departement/media/backgrounders/2006/2006-06-20.asp>.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2012). *The refuge system in Canada*. Retrieved July 19, 2013 from Citizenship and Immigration Canada: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/canada.asp>.
- Dooley, S., Gagnon, N., Bhatt, G. and Tweed, R. (2012). The Active Community Engagement Model: Fostering active participation in evaluation projects among diverse community stakeholders. *Training workshop submitted to the Canadian Evaluation Society Conference (May, 2012)*. Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- Dryden-Peterson, S. and Giles, W. (2012). Introduction: Higher education for refugees. *Refuge, Vol. 27, No. 2*, 3-9.
- Ferede, M. (2012). Structural factors associated with higher education access for first-generation refugees in Canada: An agenda for research. *Refuge, Vol. 27, No. 2*, 79-88.
- Hannah, J. (1999). Refugee Students at College and University: Improving access and support. *International Review of Education*, 153-158.
- Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia. (2010). *Changing faces, changing neighborhoods: Government assisted refugee settlement patterns in Metro Vancouver, January 2005 - December 2009*.
- Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia. (2013). *Government Assisted Refugee Bulletin - 2012 Calendar Year*.

- Joyce, A., Earnest, J., De Morri, G., and Silvagni, G. (2010). The Experiences of Students from Refugee Backgrounds at Universities in Australia: Reflections on the Social, Emotional and Practical Challenges. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 82-97.
- Kaprielian-Churchill, S. and Churchill, I. (1994). *The Pulse of the World: Refugees in Our Schools*. Toronto: OISE Press.
- Khadka, R., Yan, M.C., McGaw, T., and Aube, L. (2011). *Towards a new model of working with older immigrant youth: Lessons learned from a demonstration project*. Vancouver: Metropolis British Columbia.
- Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning. (2012). *High School Student Transitions*.
- Loescher, G. and Milner, J. (2009). Understanding the Challenge. *Forced Migration Review*, No. 33, 9-11.
- Peterson, G. (2012). Education changes the world: The World University Service of Canada's Student Refugee Program. *Refuge*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 111-121.
- Presse, D., and Thomson, J. (2008). The resettlement challenge: Integration of refugees from protracted refugee situations. *Refuge* Vol. 25, No. 1, 94-99.
- Sadler, L. (2013). *Overcoming barriers to postsecondary education for Karen refugees living in Langley and Surrey, BC*. Project completed for the requirement of Master of Arts in Community Development, University of Victoria, June 2013.
- Shakya, Y.B., Guruge, S., Hynie, M., Akbari, A., Malik, M., and Htto, S. (2010). Aspirations for Higher Education among Newcomer Refugee Youth in Toronto: Expectations, Challenges, and Strategies. *Refuge*, 65-78.
- Stermac, L. E. (2010). Educational Experiences and Achievements of War-Zone Immigrant Students in Canada. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, Vol. 5, 97-107.
- UNHCR. (2004). 'Protracted Refugee Situations', Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Standing Committee, 30th Meeting. UN Document EC/54/SC/CRP.14, p.2.
- UNHCR. (2007). *The State of the World's Refugees 2006, Chapter 5: Protracted refugee situations - the search for practical solutions*. Retrieved July 19, 2013 from UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=46822e022&query=palestine%20largest>.
- UNHCR. (2010). *Convention and Protocol Related to the Status of Refugees*. Retrieved July 18, 2013 from United Nations High Commission for Refugees: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.
- UNHCR. (2013). *Displacement: The New 21st Century Challenge*. Retrieved July 18, 2013, from UNHCR: from UNHCR: http://unhcr.org/globaltrends/june2013/UNHCR%20GLOBAL%20TRENDS%202012_V05.pdf.
- UNHCR. (2013). USA for UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency: What is a refugee? Retrieved July 18, 2013 from UNHCR: <http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOWFqG/b.4950731/>.

Wilkinson, L. (2002). Factors influencing the academic success of refugee youth in Canada. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 173.

Zeus., B. (2012). Exploring barriers to higher education in protracted refugee situations: The case of Burmese refugees in Thailand. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 256-276.

Appendix 1

Estimating potential annual postsecondary demand from GARs in the South Fraser region

An overlapping cohort model of potential annual GAR postsecondary demand

Estimating potential GAR postsecondary demand in the South Fraser region begins with annual projected GAR arrivals in the South Fraser region. Based on data available since 2005, average arrivals in the South Fraser region have been approximately 267.⁶³ As noted in Section 2.6, these numbers are projected to continue into the foreseeable future.

Annual postsecondary demand is influenced by age demographics of arrivals. The age of high school completion is 17 years and therefore earliest age of postsecondary entry is presumed to be 18. A refugee arriving at the age of 6 therefore potentially graduates from high school 12 years later. As such, data on the average ages of GAR arrivals is needed for estimating annual demand over time. Table 4 provides data for Surrey – far and away the most significant recipient of GAR arrivals in the South Fraser region – between 2010 and 2012.⁶⁴ For estimation purposes, an equal distribution of total persons within specific age categories is assumed.⁶⁵

Table 4: Percentage of Surrey GAR arrivals in various age categories, 2010 - 2012				
Age Breakdown	2010 % in age category	2011 % in age category	2012 % in age category	3 Year Average % in age category
Under 6 years	14	16	22	17
6 - 12	20	20	18	19
13 - 18	15	18	14	16
19 - 64	48	45	46	46
65 and above	1	1	1	1
Total % ⁶⁶	98	100	101	99

Annually arriving refugees aged 13 years and up are assumed unable to access the postsecondary system 5 years later. This assumption is based on the view, substantiated in Section 4 of the report, that late entry to the education continuum combined with the challenges of resettlement

⁶³ As previously reported, total arrivals for Surrey and Langley between 2005 and 2009 were [1218 + 257 =] 1475. Total arrivals in Surrey, Langley, Richmond and Delta between 2010 and 2012 were at least 663. Therefore, total arrivals over the 8 year period between 2005 and 2012 were 2138, yielding an annual average of 267.

⁶⁴ Unpublished data provided via personal communication with ISSofBC on Aug. 1, 2013.

⁶⁵ For example, if there are 30 arrivals in a given year between the age of 0 and 5, it is assumed there are 6 one year olds, 6 two year olds, 6 three year olds, 6 four year olds, and 6 five year olds.

⁶⁶ Totals do not always equal 100% due to rounding.

and cultural adaption leave older refugee youth and adults unprepared for postsecondary. These individuals represent demand for remedial education services, such as English language training and adult basic education offered at institutions like KPU.

Finally, annually arriving refugees aged 0 to 5 years and 6 to 13 years are assumed to access the education continuum at points which enable potential graduation from secondary school at the age of 18. Upon reaching 18 years old, individuals in this category who successfully graduate represent potential demand for postsecondary education.

Estimating annual numbers of 18 year olds with and without 5 years of Canadian experience

In the first stage of estimation, annual numbers of 18 year old GARs are determined based on waves of GAR cohorts that begin in the year 2005. Each cohort is composed of 267 individuals with the demographic distribution presented in column 5 of Table 4. Based on the demographic proportions presented in column 5, the model assumes 45 individuals aged 0 to 5 in every arriving cohort, 51 individuals aged 6 to 12, 43 individuals aged 13 to 18, and 126 individuals over 19, resulting in 267 individuals in total.

Assuming an equal distribution of individuals within each age category, there will be approximately 6 individuals from the first cohort that are specifically 18 years old in 2005. In 2006, 17 year olds from the first cohort become 18, replacing the 6 postsecondary-aged individuals from the previous year who now become 19. At the same time, a second wave of refugees arrives. Having the same characteristics as the first wave, the second cohort also contributes 6 individuals with an age of 18, implying 12 individuals in total aged 18 years in 2006. This process continues over time, with the number of annual 18 year olds building till a steady state number is achieved in a future year.

Annual numbers of 18 year olds building up to the steady state value and year can be determined using a Microsoft Excel model. Results are presented in Figure 1. The steady state value of 139 annual 18 year olds takes 18 years to achieve [i.e. 2023]. This value is influenced by factors such as the size of annual refugee arrivals [in this case, 267] and the number of individuals found in each age category [i.e. the demographic proportions represented in Table 4].⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The model does not account for possible additions to cohort size through births subsequent to cohort arrival, nor for the possibility of premature deaths [i.e. between ages 0 to 18] within cohorts.

Figure 1: Overlapping Cohort Model of Annual Potential GAR Postsecondary Demand, South Fraser Region

Year	Age																			18 with 6+	18 with <6	18 with 6+ Secondary graduates	18 with 6+ not graduates	18 with remedial need	Potential annual postsecondary enrollment	Potential annual remedial enrollment													
	<1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18								19+												
2004	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0											
2005	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	0	7	0	0	0	7	0	4											
2006	8	15	15	15	15	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	0	14	0	0	14	0	8	8											
2007	8	15	23	23	23	22	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	0	21	0	0	21	0	12	12											
2008	8	15	23	30	30	30	30	29	28	28	28	28	28	28	29	28	28	28	28	28	0	28	0	0	28	0	16	16											
2009	8	15	23	30	38	38	37	37	36	35	35	35	35	35	35	36	36	36	36	36	0	36	0	0	36	0	20	20											
2010	8	15	23	30	38	45	45	44	44	43	43	43	43	42	42	42	43	43	43	43	0	43	0	0	43	0	24	24											
2011	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	52	52	51	50	50	50	50	49	49	50	50	50	50	7	45	5	2	45	3	25	25											
2012	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	60	59	59	58	57	57	57	57	57	56	56	56	14	43	10	4	47	5	26	26											
2013	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	67	67	66	66	65	64	64	64	64	64	64	21	43	15	6	49	8	27	27											
2014	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	74	74	73	73	72	71	71	71	71	71	28	43	20	8	51	11	28	28											
2015	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	81	81	80	79	78	78	78	78	1800	35	43	26	10	53	14	29	29											
2016	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	81	86	85	85	2007	43	43	31	12	55	17	30	30											
2017	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	50	43	36	14	57	20	31	31											
2018	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	58	43	41	16	59	23	32	32											
2019	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	66	43	47	18	61	26	34	34											
2020	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	73	43	53	21	63	29	35	35											
2021	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	81	43	58	23	65	32	36	36											
2022	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	89	43	64	25	68	35	37	37											
2023	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	96	43	69	27	70	38	38	38											
2024	8	15	23	30	38	45	53	60	67	74	82	82	81	81	81	86	86	86	85	2007	96	43	69	27	70	38	38	38											
Assumptions																																							
Annual cohort size =	267																																						
Cohort proportions:	0 to 5 years =	0.17	6 to 12 =	0.19	13 to 18 =	0.16	19+ =	0.48																															
% graduation of 18 year olds with 6+ years of Canadian school experience =	0.72																																						
% of 18 year olds choosing immediate transition to postsecondary education =	0.55																																						

Estimating potential annual numbers of qualified 18 year olds seeking postsecondary access

As noted above, annual potential demand for postsecondary access is contingent on 18 year olds having completed secondary school graduation requirements. In the second stage of estimation, the number of 18 year olds with 5 or less years of Canadian secondary school experience must be deducted from annual 18 year totals. To obtain the number of annual postsecondary-eligible 18 year olds [i.e. those with 6 or more years of Canadian school experience], a probability of secondary school graduation must be assigned.⁶⁸ For estimation purposes, information regarding graduation rates of typical BC high school students is used, as reported by KPU's Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning [OIAP] [KPU (2012)].⁶⁹ This most likely yields an optimistic or "upper bound" forecast for refugee graduates, in part because data limitations require the assumption that all GARs with more than 5 years of secondary experience remain in school through grade 12.⁷⁰ Once second stage adjustments are made, the model predicts the potential for 69 annual 18 year old refugee secondary graduates in the South Fraser region by the steady state year [i.e. 2023].

In the final stage of estimation, likelihood of graduates deciding to enter postsecondary must be considered. For estimation purposes, the immediate transition rate for Surrey School District graduates to all BC public postsecondary institutions is used, as reported by OIAP [KPU (2012)].⁷¹ Again, this most likely produces an upper-bound forecast for potential annual refugee postsecondary demand, one that can be achieved if postsecondary access barriers for refugees are addressed. The model reports the annual potential for 38 postsecondary-qualified refugees located in the South Fraser region to seek enrollment in postsecondary education once the steady state year of 2023 is reached.

Estimating potential annual demand for remedial education

A similar modeling process can be used to estimate potential annual remedial demand; that is, potential GAR demand for language, literacy, and/or numeracy skills that would enable subsequent postsecondary enrollment in trades or academic programs. Estimation begins with the

⁶⁸ Determination of an appropriate probability of secondary school graduation for refugees is difficult. Ferde (2012) notes studies somewhat relevant when considering refugee postsecondary demand probabilities. In a study of Alberta refugee youth resettling between 1992 and 1997, Wilkinson (2002) found that half of the sample expected to complete high school and enter post-secondary education. A more recent study of immigrants from war-zone countries [Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, and Kelly (2010)] shows former war-zone students doing as well, and sometimes better than, Canadian-born students from the standpoint of academic achievement. On the other hand, in a large scale study of refugee children in the Toronto school district, Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) estimated the overall drop-out rates for refugees aged 9 to 18 at arrival to be in excess of the district's 30 percent average. Banjaree and Verma (2009) estimate refugees are 11 percent less likely to engage in education upon arrival than other immigrants. As noted by Sadler (2013), care must be taken when interpreting study findings. Studies may not account for differences in ethnicity and socio-economic status amongst refugees. Comparisons over time are difficult due to changes in Canadian immigration policy [i.e. pre- versus post-IRPA settlement policies].

⁶⁹ The typical graduation rate of grade 12 students for 2009/2010 was reported as 72% [76% of BC grade 12 students were eligible to graduate; of this number, 95% graduated, yielding an overall graduation rate of 72%]. Of course, graduation rates for refugee students may vary.

⁷⁰ In other words, while some GARs will most likely drop out of secondary school prior to reaching grade 12, drop-out rates for GARs with significant secondary school exposure [i.e. 6 or more years] are currently not known.

⁷¹ The immediate transition rate was reported as 55% for 2009/2010.

determination of annual numbers of 18 year olds who have spent 5 or less years in the Canadian secondary school system. To this number must be added annual 18 year olds with more than 5 years of Canadian secondary school experience who nonetheless fail to complete grade 12. When these factors are considered, the model reports the annual potential of 70 individuals who are 18 year olds and in a remedial position, once the steady state year of 2023 is achieved.

The next step in the estimation process requires determination of the number of 18 year olds who will follow through and seek enroll in remedial postsecondary programs. While this specific percentage is not known, the immediate transition rate for Surrey School District graduates to all BC public postsecondary institutions can be applied. Under this assumption the model reports the annual potential for 38 refugees [aged 18 years] seeking remedial postsecondary support.

Trends revealed by model results

Though numerical results associated with the overlapping cohort model are sensitive to parameter estimates, the direction of underlying trends revealed by the model are not. As shown in Figure 2, the annual number of GAR youth of postsecondary age will grow over time, eventually leveling off [blue bars]. The group will initially be dominated by youth lacking significant secondary experience [red bars], but this group will eventually be surpassed by youth with significant experience [green bars].

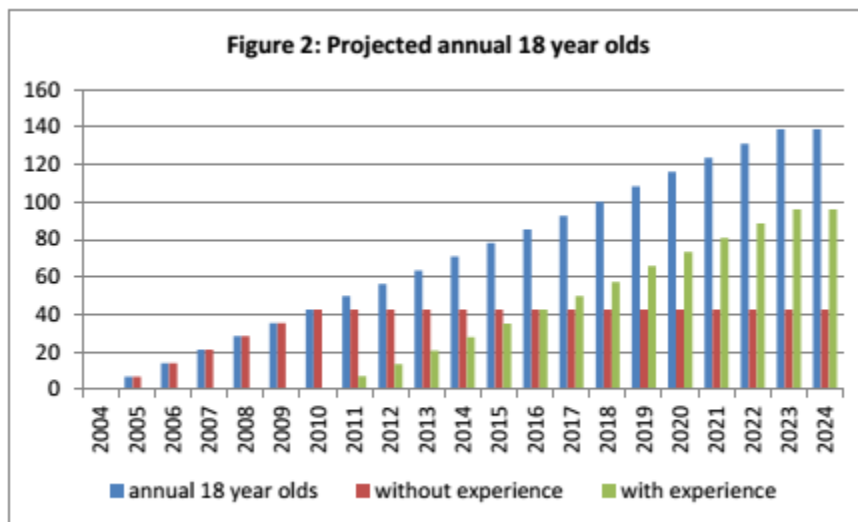


Figure 3 reveals trends in annual 18 year old high school graduates versus annual 18 year old non-graduates. Annual non-graduates initially dominate, but eventually are matched in proportion by graduates.

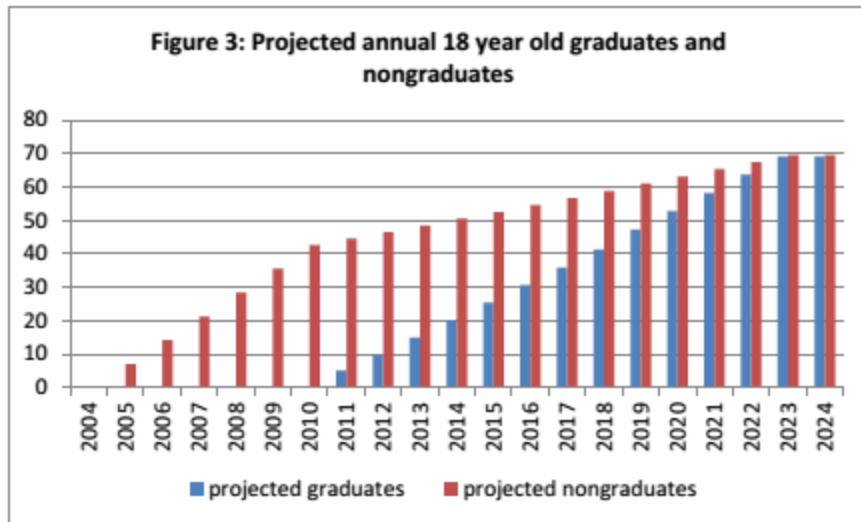
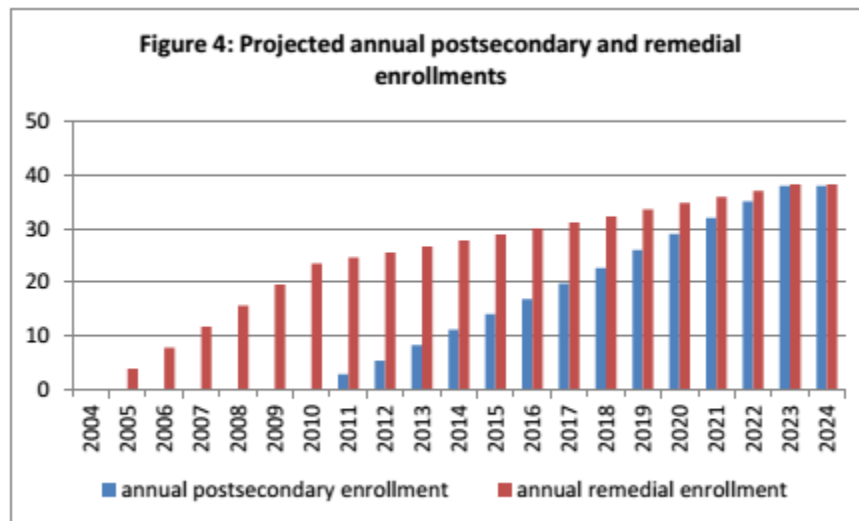


Figure 4 presents trends in projected annual immediate enrollments by 18 year olds in both postsecondary and remedial education. Annual remedial demand dominates to start, but demand for regular programs eventually catches up, achieving parity.



The overlapping cohort model thus indicates access to remedial education for postsecondary will be of critical importance in the early years of resettlement, with direct access to postsecondary education taking on growing importance in later years. In the long term, desire for access to both forms of education will reach comparable levels.⁷²

⁷² The model fails to account for additional postsecondary demand arising from those GARs who successfully complete remedial education. If this is factored in, potential annual postsecondary demand will eventually exceed remedial demand.

Appendix 2

Interview Questions Employed in Karen Community Survey

1. Questions for all Karen students:

1.1 Canadian perspective

What was your dream about Canada before you came?

1.2 High school Experience

Tell me about your education experiences while in the refugee camp. How were they different from your education experiences in Canada?

Tell me about your high school experience in Canada. What do you like about it? What would you change to make it better for you?

1.3 Goals

Tell me a story: It is 5 years from now, what will you be doing? How did you get there?

Probing question: Now pretend you are one of your parents, how do you think they would have answered the above question about you?

1.4 General barriers

What barriers stand between you and your goals?

Do you feel that Karen people have unique challenges at high school or university (more/different than other immigrants)? For example, discrimination, finances, English language, previous education?

1.5 Steps being undertaken to overcome barriers

How are you trying to overcome these barriers?

1.6 Solution perspectives

What type of support would best help you overcome these barriers?

Probing questions: Who would it be helpful to talk to? What types of resources are needed?

Kwantlen-specific questions

1.7 Kwantlen awareness

Name some Kwantlen programs you are aware of.

1.8 Kwantlen feel

Imagine that you are enrolling at Kwantlen Polytechnic University next year, how does this make you feel? (probing – may be able to get at barriers here)

1.9 Kwantlen support

Imagine I am the person at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in charge of recruiting students from the Karen community, what can I do to: Help prepare you to make the transition? Address any barriers you face (*probing – what are these concerns*)?

1.10 Closing question

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

2. Questions for Karen students who have tried to access KPU:

Same questions as 1.1 to 1.6 above, then:

Kwantlen-specific questions

2.1 Application experience

What was your experience in applying for Kwantlen programs?

Probing question: Do you feel that you were treated differently?

2.2 Gaining information

How did you find out about Kwantlen? Was it easy to find information about KPU programs? How did you do this?

2.3 Desired program

What Kwantlen program would you like to take?

2.4 Preparedness

Do you have prerequisites for that program?

2.5 Kwantlen support

Imagine I am the person at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in charge of recruiting students from the Karen community, what can I do to: Help prepare you to make the transition? Address any barriers you face (*probing – what are these concerns*)?

2.6 Closing question

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

3. Questions for Karen Parents:

3.1 Canadian perspective

What was your dream about Canada before you came?

Probing question: What is your biggest challenge/problem/disappointment about coming to Canada?

Probing question: What worries you? What steps could be taken about these problems?

3.2 Canadian experience

Tell me about your work - what do you like or dislike about it? Would you like your children to work in a similar occupation? What steps could be taken to get a better job?

3.3 Goals

Tell me a story: It is 5 years from now, what will your child be doing? How did they get there? Now pretend you are your child, how do you think they would have answered the above question?

Probing questions: What are your goals for your children? What do you think they need to achieve these goals?

Do you talk to your children about their schooling and life goals?

What do you hope your children will do after high school? Go to work? Go on to postsecondary education?

3.5 Perceptions of child experience in school; associated barriers

How does your child do at school?

What barriers do your children face in achieving the goals you would like them to attain?

3.6 Support

What support exists to help your children overcome these barriers?

What are you doing to help your children overcome these barriers?

What needs to be done to help your children overcome these barriers?

4. Service Providers:

4.1 Introductory question

Describe the work you do with Karen families. How did you get started working with this community?

4.2 Perceptions of goals

What goals do you think Karen youth want to pursue?

How do they go about trying to achieve these goals?

What goals do you think are appropriate for Karen youth?

4.3 Perceived barriers and support

What is the biggest challenge for Karen students?

What barriers do Karen youth face in achieving the goals you have designated as appropriate?

How are you attempting to help Karen youth overcome these barriers?

What support exists to help Karen youth overcome these barriers? What is missing?

4.4 Support solutions

What type of support would best help Karen youth overcome these barriers?

4.5 Closing questions

How can Kwantlen help you to better help the Karen community?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

5. Additional questions for Karen-speaking service providers:

What would you say are the key differences in the education received by Karen in the refugee camps and the education received in Canada?

Have you pursued education since you have been in Canada? What was your experience?

In your opinion, what are some of the key success factors to achieve education? (for example: guidance from parents, special help in school, money, etc.)

What could be done to help Karen youth access post-secondary education?

How do Karen parents view education?

Why do Karen students drop out of school?

What help do you need to help Karen youth better access postsecondary education?

How can Kwantlen help you to better help the Karen community?

Appendix 3

Summarized Responses to Karen Community Survey

Youth Responses

Q.1 – Your dream in coming to Canada

- Gain education that will be used to go back and make a difference in Burma
- I didn't have any dreams before. It was hard to imagine what Canada would be like [Eskimos?]
- That things would be easier than living in camp. But things are much harder than I imagined – language and financial challenges
- To be trained to work in a people-helping profession [nurse, dental assistant], I love people
- To be a policeman. But upon arrival, other dreams took over; with training – to be a fireman
- To be able to study, and for my parents to have work opportunities
- Expanded opportunities – better education, a better life
- Gain proper education – it takes care of everything, including the ability to help others
- Studying medicine to become a doctor – but my dream has hit the wall of reality, the necessary education is hard
- That Canada would be different – e.g. different food. Will I be able to succeed with my lack of education
- Didn't dream of anything – just followed my parents
- Didn't dream – just knew there would be many white people in Canada
- Didn't dream – expected a cold, white, foreign country. “It is hard to change your life from what it was back in the camp.”
- Go to university and become a nurse
- Didn't dream – didn't know what to expect

Q.2 – Your school experiences in Burma [how are they different from Canada?]

- Education was easier because it was in my own language – the need to master English makes education more challenging in Canada. The level is higher here, but I am doing okay.
- Education is less in-depth in the camp, everything was at a basic level, with little application. Education is more in-depth, more focused, more based on application in Canada.
- English played a lesser role; education is taken to higher levels, there are more specific education opportunities [not just 7 basic subjects]
- It was easier to understand because of the language. Teachers are teaching higher order things in a language I struggle with
- Classes were crowded, teachers taught just the basics. Teachers are more focused on individuals here – students have greater opportunity to apply education, be evaluated. For example, giving a presentation
- Only basic education up to grade 10 available – past that, education was expensive and out of reach. In Canada, more ability to reach via government funding.

- Learning resources were limited – only books, not like labs, etc. here in Canada. Education is applied here. In Burma, you just learn the alphabet, but don't speak much. Here, you actually speak the words, use them.
- Same experience – not much different
- Subjects are easier in the camps; here it is at a higher level.
- Education is based on memorization, not understanding. Everything was just a requirement, you didn't have to choose amongst options. Education is of a lower quality. But you have to wear uniforms.
- School was close to the forest [we could play there]. Classes were open, noisy [you could hear the rain, forest sounds] – it was hard to hear the teacher.
- Memorization in the camps; here its understanding. You were tested all in one week in the camps; here many quizzes, tests on different days
- Teachers had less education and training [especially regarding nationals – did they really understand what they were teaching?]. There were no computers; textbooks were often in

Q.3 Canadian high school experience – what do you like, what would you change to make it better.

Likes

- More options [e.g. computers, music], I can choose what I want, better funding, resources available
- Meeting new friends, having new recreation opportunities [sports teams], and the social support that comes with this.
- Greater ability to choose my path.
- Making new friends, having new choices
- Sports programs – it is easier to break in culturally, speak English, in a supportive team environment
- Being in an environment where you need to speak English
- Teachers and students are friendly and patient
- PE class – it gets me involved more
- I like all my courses, I enjoy sports
- The variety of teachers [not just one], more comfortable surroundings [no rain through the bamboo], many evaluation components worth less marks, not 100% final, not all or nothing in terms of course completion; homework is graded here based on completion
- Greater course variety, ability to pursue interests – there are more resources here, making it easier to learn
- Higher quality education at lower grades makes it easier to access more challenging material at upper grades. I have many friends – many people are helpful

Need to change

- Not being fluent in English separates you from others, especially other, non-English first language students. Karen are naturally shy and won't reach out – it would help if English speakers reached out, causing us to practice our English
- I would like more help navigating the school system and with homework. Regular teachers don't have time for this – we could use dedicated support workers, like our ESL teachers
- I need to study, apply myself more in this new environment
- It is hard to speak up using English in a classroom setting – I am afraid that others will judge, look down on my inability
- More specific support – I get more of this at an adult high school than at a regular high school
- I could use more support from teachers
- Appropriate placement if you lack necessary skills – I arrived and was placed in a Grade 10 class, but my skills were grade 8. As a result, I struggled, and had to work so hard on my studies that I could give little time to social integration.
- I need to change; to manage time better
- More integration with English speakers – math is okay, but success in many other courses depends on English comprehension

Q.4 Goals – where will you be 5 years from now? How will you get there?

Goals

- Nursing at Kwantlen
- Attend college for nursing
- To become an LPN, a CRN, or even have a nursing degree
- Become a nurse
- Plumber [experienced this in high school]
- Plumber
- In college, university
- Find a job
- Health care receptionist
- Don't know – I am lost and unsure. I would like to go back and help people in the camps
- Have a good, stable job
- Become a firefighter
- I want to help people in Burma
- Be a social worker or international aid worker

How will you get there?

- Through helpful connections
- Speak with helpful people I know
- Go to an appropriate training facility
- Help from an immigrant services worker

- Work to gain education funding, upgrade my English to be able to access higher education
- Try to finish high school
- Attend a 2 year post-secondary school
- Follow the post-secondary education requirements
- Work, save money for education
- Not sure about the future

Probing question – how would your parents answer the above?

- The same – Dad doesn't talk about this, but Mom wants to support however she can
- I don't know
- They would like me to be an electrician
- The same, but they want me to be working. They don't understand the education options as well as I do
- They support me in my choices, want me to be happy, but want me ultimately working to support the family [Dad has health issues].
- The same
- I don't know
- Complete adult high school to have skills for work
- Gains skills through further schooling
- My parents want me to gain education so as to access better jobs – they do not want me to be a laborer [work in bad conditions]
- The same thing - they support me, want me to be happy
- They are willing to support me financially, especially my mother
- They are supportive of me, will assist with finances. They get mad at me if I am lazy
- They want the best for us, they want us to make them proud
- My mother supports me, but does not have Canadian experience and therefore cannot offer much guidance – I will have to make my own decisions

Q.5 What barriers stand in the way of your goals?

- Language and finances
- Improved language skills – funding may come through government, e.g. loans
- Language, skill preparation for advanced courses
- Finances – parents can't support me. Citizenship – for accessing some careers
- The need to provide financial support for my parents, who are challenged by skills and health
- English and financial challenges
- Level of English comprehension for university courses [nursing]. Difficult to study at home – noisy, large family.
- It is language only.
- Challenging classes – my skill preparation, motivation
- Having to deal with cultural acclimatization on top of course work
- Being aware of pathways, where assistance can be found

- Everything is so new – everything is stopping me [feeling overwhelmed]
- “Most Karen students do not understand what teachers are saying”

Q.6 Do Karen have unique challenges relative to other immigrants?

- Other immigrants have some challenges in common, but Karen are unique due to education preparation disadvantages associated with refugee camps
- Other immigrants may have better English language preparation before arrival
- Financial issues may be different [some immigrants come with greater financial resources]
- People are unaware of your unique background – assume you are, for example, Korean, and therefore have inappropriate expectations of you
- Similar in terms of petty treatment – making fun of my small eyes
- In Canada we say there is no discrimination, but I feel discrimination
- “Sometimes you feel like you came from a jungle.”
- Our background circumstances are so different from other immigrants, Canadian students – “oil and water.”

Q.7 How are you trying to overcome challenges/barriers?

- Work hard, save money, study hard
- Remain positive, stay focused on the goal, anticipate help
- I need help with personal and family challenges – I don’t know what organizations and programs can help me achieve my goals.
- Continue my education, improve my English, avoid being lazy
- Relying on family financial support as well as working
- Stay positive, study hard [especially English], seek funding assistance
- Stay focused on the goal, “ignore what is bothering me” [classroom, personal struggles]
- Study more, ask lots of questions, seek help from teachers
- Get a driver’s license; make more Canadian friends to improve English
- Make friends with the nice people, ignore those who do not treat you well
- Try to fit in – seek to be “born again.”

Q.8 What kind of support would best help overcome barriers?

- Support from family and friends
- Resources that improve English language skills
- Help addressing family issues so I can be freed up
- Having those who can help me navigate the college system
- Having those who would act as references for a job
- My parents don’t speak English and can’t help me – I need others
- I need someone to help my family with employment, etc. so I can be freed up
- I need friends and family to support me so I can stay positive
- Homework club to continue to the University level
- A university tutor, as well as someone who can help me navigate the system

- Help with courses, course planning
- Do others really want to support, help me?
- Pucks program – assistance where I need it

Q.9 Who would it be helpful to talk to? What specific resources are needed?

- Parents, siblings, Community Diversity program workers
- Social workers, settlement workers have connections. Some in government can help
- Mentoring - “I want someone to share their experience of school or life goals; how did these people get there, what were the challenges.” “Candy helps a lot. She explains to us and tells us what to do for a better life.”
- Resources that assist in finding employment
- More translator workers
- More targeted programs like Diversity in the Surrey School District that support new Canadians
- People willing to take the time to understand my specific needs – not just general resources offered without further questioning, assistance
- Study groups including people with different backgrounds, also volunteers with good English. Share stories, experiences, lessons.
- Scholarships
- Transportation assistance – my parents don’t drive.
- Having internet access, a driver’s license.

Q.10 Kwantlen programs you are aware of:

Surrey Karen

- None
- Accounting, welding, computers, criminology
- Business, nursing [from friends who are taking courses]
- None at Kwantlen. I have looked at SFU, Douglas and BCIT
- Textiles, business, nursing, teacher training, early childhood education, media (journalism), and interior design and fashion design
- I am aware of many programs, but have focused my investigation on nursing – through the Kwantlen website

Langley Karen

- Many, through the website
- Mechanic, automotive, plumbing, electricity, wood work.
- Trades, electrical, plumbing, welding, construction. Horses [farrier]. Special computer program classes. [After prompting: programs to make things with like engineering, drafting]. Many degrees. The sciences.

Q.11 How would you feel attending Kwantlen?

- Feel isolated, shy, intimidated – it would be hard
- It would be challenging, difficult [a big step from high school], but I would be proud to be there, thankful, but not happy – it means yet additional layers of work
- I would be hopeful, but it would be hard work
- Excited to keep learning, but realistic about the greater challenges, especially with English
- Hopeful but worried about the difficulty – will I get a good job?
- I don't know anything, I don't know where to get help. What will it be like? Do I have the money?
- I would feel good if I had a friend with me, but I would most likely be “solo” so it would be scary
- Afraid of failure
- Excited, nervous
- Back in Thailand, university is a huge deal, and very hard to access. Accessing it in Canada would therefore be huge – would there be help for me at Kwantlen?
- Happy and surprised at myself
- “Lost! Lost on campus, how to study, everywhere!” But happy to learn I have been accepted.

Q.12 What can Kwantlen do to help you address barriers, make the transition?

- Encourage, welcome, and support Karen students. Give accurate assessment of ability to be successful [e.g. English language requirements], and provide remedial advice.
- Identify a student or teacher who can tell me what to expect and help me to navigate, especially in the first year.
- Provide someone who can give context on many fronts – nature of programs, nature of necessary skills, nature of evaluation – help me become aware.
- Explain program requirements, expectations clearly
- I need financial help and tutoring assistance [funding for classes, and required learning resources (e.g. plumbing tools)]
- Explanation of job outcomes upon program completion
- Show me around the campus, present the possibilities, present the expectations, what is necessary to succeed
- Ensure that the linkages between high school and Kwantlen are appropriate. I met the English 12 requirement, but struggled in English 1100 at Kwantlen. Provide qualifying English classes?
- Provide interaction with students in Kwantlen programs who can share experiences, expectations, challenges
- Provide “test-drive” experiences so we really know what we are in for. We might be excited to arrive, but later end up being disappointed.

Q.13 Anything else?

- I need friendship, support
- I need interaction with Canadians who can help me with English, culture
- Universities other than Kwantlen present transportation issues

You have Kwantlen experience:

What was your experience applying?

- “I went alone – had no one to help me. I had to navigate application and registration myself. I was given general course guidance, but English 1100 proved beyond my capability.”

Do you feel like you were treated differently?

- “I was treated like I knew everything. Given my English language challenges, I wish I had been treated differently.”

How did you find out about Kwantlen? Was it easy to access information?

- “Kwantlen came to my high school. I could find out information online.”

What is your desired Kwantlen program?

- Nursing or sociology

Did you have the prerequisites for the desired programs?

- Yes, but my inability to pass English 1100 has kept me from success.

How could you have been better supported?

- Treat me like you care about me, like a brother or sister. Provide full information, including expectations, and then provide support.

Parent Responses

Q.1 What was your dream coming to Canada?

- I wanted to work, my children to study. These freedoms do not exist in Burma
- My children to further their education. There is no opportunity for this in Burma
- I want my children to have a future through education. I want to access education too, but am not sure how it would work.
- For my children to go to school here
- I thought it would be new, exciting – a big city, unlike the camp.
- I didn’t think about it, I didn’t think it would really happen.
- Living in a big city, accessing technology, good education, well paid jobs.
- I came for my children to have a chance at gaining education

Q.2 What is your biggest challenge/disappointment coming to Canada?

- Language issues – it is hard to communicate, people look down on me at work
- Those over 19 have to go to adult high school [this is viewed as less desirable for some reason – there was no age limit in Thailand]. They face language issues, the need to work, their academic preparation isn't strong – life is hard.
- Language issues, plus lack of work experience make it more difficult to find a job
- Lack of education makes it harder to access jobs.
- No challenges
- Difficult to learn English as an adult. Sad to leave my home.
- Language – can't do anything, go anywhere
- How to live, function in an entirely new world. From the forest to the big city. Unable to read mail, paperwork, working through protocols at the bank, doctor, etc.
- Children and youth being exposed to many new things and influences, some bad, such as drugs. Worried about children getting into trouble
- Gaining transportation to do all the necessary things in life – being mobile

Q.3 What worries you? What could help?

- I worry about my children gaining good education – I worry about the cost of funding education. I want positive influences for my children, so they will be successful, gain good work.
- My daughter has health issues. Access to health care is needed [and being provided], but it makes life more challenging
- Availability of good jobs. Lack of education limits your options. You need to be healthy, and I face health challenges.
- I worry about my children's education and the ability to fund it.
- Language skill and finding a job.
- My language ability. Need to learn more.
- I worried about coping after 1 year of government support was up. Volunteers have been very helpful, things have worked out.
- Finding employment. My children using drugs. Not sure what will help.
- Accessing transportation

Q.4 Tell us about your work – do you like it? Would you like your children to work in a similar occupation? What could help them access a better job?

- I work at a greenhouse. Without language skills, people blamed me for all mistakes. Now, with better skills, I am blamed less [can protect myself]. I like my job because my supervisor is nice to me [respects me]. It is too late for me because of language and age. I want better employment for my children. School will give them training and *connections*.
- I work at a recycling company. I don't mind the work – it is flexible. I like that the manager is good to me. I don't have the opportunity or time for another job. I don't want my children to

do what I do. I tell my children to study hard, education creates more options; options I don't have.

- I help others, and like this, but my job is stressful. I want my children to gain postsecondary education [not just high school] to gain better jobs.
- Not working.
- I make flowers from ribbons. I am not allowed to talk while working, require permission to speak in my own language [e.g. to my sister, who works near me]. My children should have higher dreams. Learn English, get involved with English-speaking people, gain education and connections for a better life.
- I like my job in a sewing shop. My husband has poor health and does not like working in a greenhouse [cold, hard work, must work fast]. Children need to work in better jobs, study hard, learn about better job opportunities.
- At a sewing shop. Likes her job [coworkers and boss are friendly]. Children need better jobs, must study hard, still study after high school.
- I am a painter – but do not enjoy it. My kids need better work – they need to study. It is up to them, I can encourage them.

Q.5 What will your children be doing in 5 years? How did they get there? Would they answer this question differently?

- My daughter will be a nurse. She will do this by being diligent in her education, not wasting time with friends. She sees this the same way.
- I am not sure, I do not know all the options. My child wants to work at a bank – I encourage her to gain the training. My children may answer differently because they are more able to know the options than I do.
- My children will be in postsecondary school. But they must have a specific goal/dream – they can't just take courses that lead nowhere and end up not obtaining a job.
- Going to school or working. School requires money, I think they can borrow it from the government. They see things the same way.
- Children will be [a] missionary, [b] work in government, [c] become a doctor. Not sure if it will come true.
- Go to university. The other will be a truck driver.
- Continue studying. Become a nurse, policeman, fireman.
- A doctor or nurse, but it depends on their school performance.
- Depending on their education success, go either to university or trade school. They will rely on me for support [lodging, food]

Q.6 What are your goals for your children – what do they need to achieve these goals?

- To become educated, to become a professional. I do not want them homeless on the streets. They need financial support – I cannot give it. They need assistance with their studies.

- I don't have any specific goals for them – I will support their goals. They need education and skills to get them to their goals. They need postsecondary. They need financial support, but I do not have the money.
- I want them to work in the community, as a teacher or early childhood education worker. Nursing would be good, but may be too hard. They need education and the assistance of others [teachers, the community] – I can only encourage them. They need to study hard and share experiences with others.
- They would like nursing or policing. They need to study – I will support them.
- My children need to try hard, take initiative to reach for help, discover the pathways.
- University is the first step. I want some to be a mechanic.
- Become professionals so their life will be easier. Continue education, work hard, listen to teachers and parents.
- Be a doctor or a nurse, gain a good salary.

Q.7 Do you talk to your children about their schooling and life goals?

- Yes, I tell them to work hard. They sometimes tell me that English speakers settle for less and take lower paying jobs, but I encourage them to aim higher.
- Yes, to go to school, work, eventually be in a place where you can support yourself.
- Yes, but they don't always agree. There are many influences to consider, some are negative.
- Yes, every day I tell them to study hard, work hard, listen to me.
- Not specifically about school, but tell them to work hard. I pray for them.
- I do not know the specifics of their situation, but tell them to work hard, don't waste time.
- Yes, study hard, get good grades that will access post secondary.
- I work a lot, so I am often not home to talk. My wife encourages them. A good job means a good life – it is up to them. They can choose to work in Canada or go back to the Karen state.

Q.8 What do you hope your children will do after high school? Work? University?

- University – the issue is funding.
- University – but if funding isn't available, they must work.
- University – do it when you are young and have energy.
- College – but I don't know if they have the ability. Is there anyone to help them?
- University – but afraid they do not want to.
- University, but if lack ability or motivation, maybe a mechanic.

Q.9 How does your child do in school?

- Average or above average [As, Bs, some Cs – 60 to 90%]
- Doing well, but need to further develop language skills, they are afraid to speak English
- Not too bad – it is getting better.
- My son is struggling – he does not know how to read.

- Language barrier [speaking to teacher, reading report cards] makes it hard for me to truly know how my child is doing. I am afraid teachers say things are fine when they are not [just moving kids along – the example of Dhada’s English grade?]
- Okay, but it is hard [especially math and science] – it is hard to find a tutor.
- Middle grades, but very hard

Q.10 What barriers do your children face in attaining the goals you would like them to attain?

- The biggest barrier is the English language issue – I would like to see support for this.
- They have a hard time understanding homework. They face challenges different from Canadian students. I cannot help them, but encourage them to complete it on time. They must do it, or they will not be successful in the future.
- Language and cultural barriers. And limited finances for education
- Language and the motivation to try hard
- Language, transportation, and money
- Language and money, and the fact that some students look down on them
- I don’t know what the barriers are. But I know my children must ask for help.

Q.11 What support exists to help your children overcome these barriers?

- Settlement workers, Diversity [special school district employees], who help us navigate health care, school system issues [specific names given].
- Teachers contact service [i.e. settlement] workers, who contact parents. So, teachers and service workers are essential. They work as a team.
- LST and ELL teachers assist with English [some help is happening]. Immigrant society provides help for new comers. Diversity Welcome Centre provides help for afterschool needs.
- No support seems to be available
- A school-based service worker. Service workers with Karen language skills are important, but they too need training.
- Teachers and the Homework club.
- I can help with transportation, but not with school work. Homework Club, but more volunteers needed.
- My children do not talk to me, so I cannot really say.
- As parents we cannot help them with anything involving school. They must try hard to help themselves.

Q.12 What are you doing to help your children overcome these barriers?

- I talk with them, encourage them, connect them with a service worker. But by the time they reach high school, I cannot help them with their studies.
- I can only encourage them. I tell them to go to the library and read lots of books.

- I direct them to teachers, service workers. I will try to pay for tuition, but worry that it may not pay dividends. And I worry about myself – what happens to me when I am old and cannot work?
- I help by cooking and encouraging. Older ones are working and may provide some financial assistance.
- I can't help them, but I pray for them.
- Provide necessary transportation, when I am not working.
- I can't help because of the language barrier and its interface with education.
- Can't help. I encourage them to seek help from friends.
- I encourage and provide education when I can.

Q.13 What needs to be done to help your children overcome these barriers?

- They need assistance with language, homework, awareness of opportunities, pathways. I want help learning too – English.
- My children need extra education outside of school. But there are not enough volunteers or opportunities. I cannot afford to pay a tutor.
- They need a free tutor – we cannot afford to pay.
- Someone to teach English, help them with their school work, fund postsecondary education.
- They will be helped if I am better connected with their teachers, if I can understand how they are doing, their grades, their strengths and weaknesses.
- Tutoring: greater hours available at Homework Club.
- Someone to show them the steps to take to get to postsecondary, how to fill out funding forms

Service Worker Responses

Q.1 Describe the work you do in the community – how did you get started?

Responses not provided to maintain service worker anonymity.

Q.2 What goals do you think Karen youth want to pursue?

- Education [postsecondary] so as to get jobs.
- Parents want them to pursue education, but some youth do not want to. For some, they recall that education did not bring many benefits back in the camps – there was no opportunity for it once you finished. This blocked their dreams.
- Gain an education – their parents are sadly so uneducated [grade 1-3, illiterate even in their own language]. They often desire to go back with skills that can assist a peaceful Burma.
- A key point is that they have career goals, but they have no actual sense of the details of that career, the requirements, the necessary steps.
- Go to school, graduate, get a good job, improve language skills to become connected.
- To finish school at a higher level, improve living standards. Youth come from a hard background – camps and civil war.

- Master English, gain education in caring professions [nursing, doctor], support their families, and ultimately help those back home in the camps. The latter is their main priority.

Q.3 How do they go about trying to achieve these goals?

- They wonder about how to pursue a job, how to write a resume, what are the steps. They pursue education, face language and skill barriers, but reach out for help where it is available, e.g. through the homework club.
- They are now taking study more seriously, reaching out for help, trying to build credits.
- Some come to homework club and try hard; others just come for a social gathering and do not take it seriously.
- For older youth, work to support their family, and try to gain education on the side. It is hard. For younger youth, they can focus on education.
- Put as much effort into education as possible. Not all succeed, but many try. What many need is programs that build their social and emotional skills, so they can build supportive networks in the community.
- Gain English skills at whatever level they are at [initial 20 year olds have kindergarten, grade 1 English skills]. They do not mind starting out at a basic job, as long as they feel they can advance, support their family.

Q.4 What goals are appropriate for Karen youth?

- Finish high school, develop workplace competencies, social skills needed in the work force.
- Just taking a next step. They have such an empty frame of reference, that setting lofty goals is not productive. They need to learn how to research, gain information, when forming dreams. They need orientation, field trips, a buddy system.
- For those who arrived as young adults, the goal of university is too high due to background deficiencies in education and language. For these youth, trade school is the best option.
- Education that brings more options. They are challenged by the need to support their families
- Anything is possible – dream big, try hard, don't give up. For many, though, English mastery seems insurmountable.

Q.5 What is the biggest challenge for Karen students?

- Language skills. Having confidence. Being aware of systems, pathways, steps. Lacking context.
- Language skills. Young children will be okay, but youth are hard pressed.
- English, and parents who can't provide guidance. This really frustrates the parents.
- Language skills, negative cultural influences like drugs.
- Family dependency on their better language skills. Providing for other family needs [e.g. income]. Dealing with health issues arising from the absence of health care, nutrition in the camps. Mental health issues related to anxiety and depression in the camps. English barriers are more complex in high school – dealing with counselors about more complex issues
- Engaging with other cultural groups. Outside of their group, Karen people are not vocal. They wait until other people approach them to communicate, not the other way around.

- Language challenges. Frustration and lack of resulting motivation. This is especially true for boys. The result can be poor choices – go for fast money through drugs
- Financial challenges – parents came with nothing, and lack skills for significant income employment.

Q.6 What barriers do Karen youth face in achieving the goals you have identified as appropriate?

- People. People who do not understand that a refugee needs a bit more time. Talk slower. Be more patient.
- Language and skill preparation – it is a challenge when you are always trying to catch up. This can lead to youth discouragement, which becomes a barrier.
- Just understanding how it all works, not making poor choices, mistaken choices that come back to hurt you.
- Financial means. Some have the ability to attend postsecondary, but they feel the pressure to contribute so as to help the family.
- Motivation. You need to want help, then go grasp the opportunity. Some youth are made aware of help, but do not take advantage.
- Parents cannot provide sufficient support – income, homework, knowledge of systems, availability due to need to work. They become disconnected from their children’s experiences, lives
- Lack of youth programs specifically orientated toward Karen needs [general youth programs – hard for Karen to integrate given language skills]
- The need to provide family support, to work
- For older youth, the compressed time to get everything done. The need to support their families. Language and work skills.
- Karen often do not get full credit at high school. This requires additional steps to complete credits [e.g. adult high school], which takes more time, expense, travel, less one stop convenience.

Q.7 How are you helping Karen youth overcome these barriers?

Responses not provided to maintain service worker anonymity.

Q.8 What support exists to help youth overcome these barriers? What support is missing?

- More one-on-one , individualized help is needed to deal with specific needs. We can only do the best we can in a group setting.
- Having support workers *in the school*. Having people that can demonstrate, provide guidance at university
- It took 5 years to get funding for a support worker in the high school. We lost a lot of kids in those 5 years.
- Sport in school is good, results in positive experience, mixing.
- More support in the schools – not just wasting time because there are no specific resources to advance them.

- English programs exist for older youth, but they are not tailored to their needs. For example, not offered in evenings [Karen youth must work], not for credit [recognition not gained], taught at levels not associated with Karen needs
- Settlement programs, school-based assistance, ESL programs, student work programs. Older Karen youth need flexible school options [after work], and linkages with employers that are experience and skill building [job shadowing, work experience programs]

Q.9 What kind of support would best help?

- Of course, financial support.
- To provide youth with “immersion” experiences. Job shadowing, campus tours, class test drives. These will answer questions, bring clarity, and possibly generate more dreams.
- Skilled tutors, not just well intentioned but under-equipped volunteers.
- Organizations focused on the Karen, and led by the Karen [they will have the greatest understanding of the situation]. Parent education programs.
- Karen dual language speakers need to be involved in language training, not just English speakers. However, few Karen have the qualifications
- Businesses that accept Karen for internships, training offered at appropriate times. Efforts to create Karen interaction with the rest of the community

Q.10 How can Kwantlen help you to better help the Karen community?

- Given lack of knowledge and experience held by parents, they need more assistance from others. Kwantlen needs to inform Karen youth before grade 12 about what is needed for postsecondary access, and inform about options. Go to the high schools, target the Karen.
- Provide an encouraging support team that can reach out to Karen youth.
- Greater immersion opportunities. Staff, support workers who get it, that Karen are different than other immigrants. Compassionate, caring staff that will take the time.
- Kwantlen has the resources – they need savvy gatekeepers who can streamline, understand, not put people through the rat race. Tenacious people will eventually succeed, but the timid, unsure will just get discouraged.
- Provide adult basic education for the 20 year old group lacking skills. They need to pursue life-long learning.
- One on one tutoring, possibly on-line
- Kwantlen can come to the community, come to the service centers, be welcoming, address questions, inform [provide a personal touch, versus just the internet or brochures]. Front-line workers need to be Karen friendly – Karen need to be referred to such people.
- Financial support would be good
- Provide scholarships. Kwantlen students can provide mentoring, tutoring, in the community [e.g. student involvement in the homework club].

Q.11 Anything else?

- Karen youth need more than the average immigrant. I hope your work reaches those who can use it to make a difference for the Karen youth.

- Karen youth need to work hard, rely on themselves, not just be dependent on others
- Past Karen experience has stifled motivation and self esteem. They need space to redevelop these qualities.
- Karen need to be giving to others in the community, as well as receiving.
- Karen who are experiencing success at Kwantlen need to be show-cased in the Karen community

Additional questions for Karen service workers:

What are the key differences between former [e.g. camp] education, and education received in Canada?

- You learned things, but you felt because there was no opportunity, you would never use it. So this closed your mind to the value of education. Students need to see that education in Canada is a key that will open doors. You are not being educated in a deep, dark, valley.
- Limited resources, and training of educators in the camp
- Education only to grade 10, not recognized outside of the camp – any education beyond that is very challenging, and out of reach. Education based on memorization, not critical thought demonstrated by the individual

Have you pursued education in Canada? What has been your experience?

- Only ESL levels. I cannot complete all levels because classes are offered in the day, and I must work.
- Little more than ESL. I learned English with Australian accent – it is very hard to learn with the Canadian accent.
- I worked hard, was able with considerable expense and effort to get high school qualification in Thailand, then accessed postsecondary with scholarship help in Canada

What are the key factors to succeed in education?

- Your own motivation, people who can point you in the correct direction.
- Better linkage between teachers and parents – e.g. language translation, parents need to know where their children need help
- Role models in your family and the community

What can be done to help Karen youth access postsecondary education?

- Homework club, summer school, tuition assistance. But the youth must be motivated.
- Have a Karen Student Association at Kwantlen so they can share, discuss common issues, challenges
- They need more than just information about post-secondary, they need inspiration

How do Karen parents view education?

- Very valuable, always encourage studying.

- It depends on the level they have attained. If they have limited education, then just learning English is good enough. After that, go work. If they have more education, they see more possibilities, and therefore value higher education.
- Some think that discrimination, bias will mean that even with an education, you will end up with a labor job

Why do Karen youth drop out of school?

- Tired of the pressure, pressure from parents. Get involved in the wrong environment and get led away [e.g. drugs].
- Boys in particular find school so hard because they have never learned how to focus. As a teacher once told me, “they came from illiterate homes.” No books, no parents reading to them. Research, knowledge seeking was not the norm.
- Its mainly the older ones, who had the least preparation, that face the greatest challenges.
- So, when they get into a Canadian school, it’s expected that they know how to look up stuff on the internet, they know how to go to the library. If they have, if they need to do research the know how to do it. That they’ve been reading their whole lives and that they’re fluent in their own language and *shoom*, that they should be able to quickly be able to switch over to English. So I think that the kids I’ve seen drop out, I also think because of having trauma, fleeing a war, malnutrition, sometimes all you had was rice and salt. I’ve heard that story so many times. There’s learning disabilities, It’s not easy to learn. So for some, It’s all that mushed together
- Some have children at a young age, and must work to support family. And they end up repeating the cycle.
- They are not sure if there will be opportunity at the end of the tunnel. There are pressing needs to work and make money now.
- Because their parents have pressing needs and demands. To drive them around, to speak English for them, to provide income assistance because of health challenges.
- Because they suffer from depression.

What help do you need to help Karen youth better access postsecondary education? Kwantlen?

- Come to the youth, show them the way, provide funding.
- Youth need emotional and social support to be in a place to take on more
- More one-on-one help
- Youth counseling and mentorship