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Alberta Association of Immigrant
Serving Agencies

Celebrating 30 Years

AAISA Connection



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WINTER 2010-11

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **AAISA hosts the CCR in Calgary.**
- **The role of newcomers in the development of the environment sector.**
- **The ongoing debate about Bill C-49.**

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CCR Fall Consultation in Calgary

By: Sipiwe Mapfumo

The recent CCR Fall Consultation in Calgary, held Nov. 24-26, brought together over 350 refugee settlement workers, academics, immigration experts and legislators, policy makers and other stakeholders to discuss a wide variety of issues related to the refugee and immigrant settlement sector.

These biannual meetings provide an opportunity for discussion amongst service providers and legislators, who influence the settlement of over 240 000 immigrants and refugees annually. This year's theme, aptly termed "fairness," looked into issues such as temporary migrant workers (TMW) with particular reference to provincial governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The workshop on TMW looked at the three axes of the CCR campaign to raise awareness about migrant workers in Canada. It also discussed and looked at various strategies to move the campaign forward and promote access to services, and options for permanent residence for this group of workers.

Despite an existing voluntary monitoring system, CCR noted that "abuses of temporary workers by employers are widespread and have been well documented". The CCR resolved to advocate that the federal government enforce a mandatory monitoring system for the employers of the TFW

to safeguard the foreign workers.

Another issue that brought a lot of discussion was the port of entry interviews of refugees by immigration officials. There was a call by CCR to look at the system and address any irregularities which could be deemed unfair to refugees. The discussion revolved around complaints that many refugees were made to undergo an interviewing process that disregarded the fact that most of them arrive at the border in a state of shock, some of whom would have escaped torture and rape.

A presentation of the outcomes of research conducted by the CCR and Sojourn House last summer on the experiences of refugees during the port of entry interviews was reviewed for results.

A workshop about QLGBT looked into creating safe and positive spaces for gay, lesbian and transgender newcomers. Resource persons from Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal were invited to speak and shared their experiences and expertise from various community zones. They gave advice on research and training needed for frontline workers in the immigrant and the refugee serving sector. This, they said, "...is important because there are many gay newcomers who arrive in the country and struggle as they are unaware of support groups that could help

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Upcoming Training Sessions

- **February-March 2011:** 2J Facilitation Small Groups, An Introduction
- **March-April 2011:** 2K Facilitation Work Force Entry
- **May 2011:** 2I Needs Assessment Action
- **October 2011:** 3B Advocacy and Outreach
- **June-July 2011:** 2B Building Understanding of Cultural Communities
- **November 2011:** 2F Basic Counseling Skills in a Cross Cultural Context

The courses and schedules listed here are subject to change.

Greetings from AAISA

*“New Year is
a time
when,
symbolically,
we start
over...”*



By: Dale Taylor, Chair

Seasons' Greetings to the settlement sector in Alberta!

On behalf of the Board and staff of AAISA, I would like to wish you a happy festive season, and all the best in the New Year. I hope that this Christmas will be an opportunity for you to connect with family and friends near and far, to rest and rejuvenate, and

to enjoy the benefits of a few extra days of getting up in the morning and *not* going to work.

One of the interesting things about the tradition of Christmas is that it is celebrated in the season when European cultures celebrate the New Year – approximately at the time of the winter solstice, when the days are short and the sun is disappearing off the southern horizon. This story about a baby and a new beginning is situated in the darkest, coldest time of the year.

In our multi-cultural workplaces, we have the opportunity to celebrate many New Years – whether they are based on religious or political events or on various natural cycles. The New

Year may begin with the harvest in the fall or with the season of planting in the spring; it may be linked to the spring equinox, or to the cycles of the moon.

In every New Year tradition, there are similar elements. This is a time to look back with thanks on the things we have received and have done, and to offer our good wishes to those around us. Most importantly, the New Year is a time when, symbolically, we start over: things are not perfect, but that's okay, let's try again with a new beginning.

Best wishes from your colleagues in AAISA, as we look forward to another season of welcoming newcomers to Alberta.

CCR Continued from page 1



Marisa Berry Méndez, CCR Settlement Policy Director, plays Capoeira at the CCR banquet event.

them as they settle.” The challenges that refugee youth continue to face were brought to the table and it was noted that there were serious misconceptions and myths about newcomer youth, which subsequently influenced many Canadians’ perceptions of them. The CCR Youth Network is working to debunk some of these myths through national strategies and campaigns in collaboration with various immigrant-serving agencies. In an effort to reinforce equity through deepening understanding of refugee youth settlement experiences, participants explored refugee youth perspectives and experiences of settlement in Canada using theatre techniques. While enhancing their own understanding, participants learned new skills and methods to spread awareness of

youth refugee realities to others.

Other issues that were brought up for discussion were empowering women survivors of violence in the immigration and refugee process, convention on rights of the child and Canada’s compliance, and the upcoming changes to the refugee claims process.

The conference report can be found at:
www.ccrweb.ca/meetings

ECO Immigrant Bridging Program

By: Evelyn Tanaka

The ECO Canada Environmental Immigrant Bridging Program is designed for internationally trained professionals with skills that align with the environmental sector.

The Environmental Immigrant Bridging Program consists of 120 hours of in-class training. It was designed by ECO Canada with input from industry stakeholders to provide information specific to Canada’s environment and deliver the essential skills needed for immigrants to thrive in the Canadian workplace. Following training, participants partake in a work placement with an environmental employer to gain hands-on work experience.

The Calgary program deliv-

ered by our partners, the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) will begin on February 21, 2011. Apply online at www.eco.ca until February 10, 2011. The application and program are available at no cost and are intended for newcomers to Canada who have 5 years of environmental experience from their home country and a Canadian Language Benchmark of 7 or higher.

ECO Canada is also looking to partner with more Immigrant Serving Agencies in the delivery of our Environmental Immigrant Bridging Program. Partner organizations are required to obtain operational funding to cover the costs of running the program (including the licensing fee for the curriculum), adhere to specific facility and equipment requirements, and hire

a program facilitator.

For more information on becoming a partner organization please visit www.eco.ca.

For all inquiries regarding the Immigrant Bridging Program please contact:

Evelyn Tanaka
 Manager, Training Partnerships (403) 476-1930
etanaka@eco.ca



“...newcomers to Canada will play a major role in the development of the environment sector.”

Bill C-49: A Miscarriage of Justice?

By: Sipiwe Mapfumo

The much anticipated Bill C-49 was a topic of frequent discussion at the recent Canadian Council for Refugees Fall Consultation, which was held in Calgary on Nov 24-26.

This bill, if passed as law, will affect the future of many refugees whose only way of escaping ruthless conditions is to flee their home countries and rely upon the services of unscrupulous human smuggling operations.

One of the objectives of the proposed Bill is to crack down on human smugglers who abuse Canada's humanitarian and generous immigration system. Another is to make it easier for law enforcement agencies to prosecute those who are involved in this trade. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), this Bill "will deter human smuggling operations abroad before illegal migrants depart for Canada," thus strengthening the integrity and fairness of Canada's immigration system.

The controversy comes hot on the heels of the arrival of the 492 Tamil refugee claimants on the MVSunSea last August. Most refugee advocates look at this number as "a drop in the sea" considering Canada processes approximately 30,000 refugees and 240,000 immi-

grants every year.

The government's response to this particular case has brought a barrage of reaction from advocacy groups in Canada including some NDP legislators. Popular census within the CCR and its members is that Bill C-49, which could soon go for its second reading and become law by early next



Bill C-49 has yet to be voted on in the legislature.

year, is "unfair and intends to punish the refugees".

CCR president Wanda Yamamoto expressed concern and said, "Measures keeping some refugees longer in detention, denying them family reunification and restricting their freedom of movement, are likely violation of the Canadian Charter and of international human rights obligations."

The bill, which is labelled "The Anti-human Smuggling Bill," is viewed by many refugee advocacy

groups as applying equally punitive measures to human smugglers as well as the refugees they transport. The latter group often includes women, many of whom are victims of rape, their children and others who have been orphaned or abandoned and victims of torture. These groups feel they are forced to escape their circumstances to save their lives and some elect to come to Canada for the protection that they need. Many will be forced to seek whatever means possible to escape. In many cases, these refugees have no way of obtaining formal travel documents.

Many who protest the bill cite the treatment of the involved refugees as a major problem. As the bill states, these groups can be placed under detention, at their port of entry, without a case review or contact with family members for up to a full year after arrival. It is further argued that most of these refugees have no other option and in most cases they would have paid their last dollar for their only hope of escape.

When, and if, the detained refugees are granted refugee status in Canada, a process that can take between 2-5 years to finalize, they will most likely wait for up to another 5 years to sponsor and become reunited with family members.

“[Bill C-49] will deter human smuggling operations abroad before illegal migrants depart for Canada.”

Bill C-49 Continued...

Bill C-49 has been criticized widely and is stated to be in contravention of Canadian law that “forbids arbitrary detention and discrimination.”

Immigration law expert and former chair of the Immigration and Refugee Board, Peter Shawler called the bill “faulty” and characterized it as “littered with charter violation. The majority of refugees must resort to smuggling networks to escape the country of persecution and cross borders. Canadian and international laws

have recognized this necessity and prohibit prosecution of refugees for the violation of immigration regulation”.

Similar reaction is presented elsewhere and many advocates from across the country are calling for more review and less extreme punishment for refugees who get caught up in the human smuggling operations as a last option to escape persecution.

At the recent consultation,

CCR representatives, members and other advocacy and human rights groups urged the government to reconsider the bill in its current form and address the issues of human rights that it does appear to infringe upon.

The discussion still rages on in Ottawa with as many pushing for the bill as against.

We at AAISA Connections will continue to maintain a close watch on the proceedings and will endeavour to

keep the readership informed.

In the meantime, please visit: <http://www.ccrweb.ca/en/c49> for updates, action, CCR strategy and suggestions and links to relevant media articles.

Latest News and Upcoming Events

- Immigrant Services Calgary is hosting the **15th Annual Immigrants of Distinction Awards Gala** March 18 at the Westin Calgary.
- Jewish Family Service Calgary is hosting the **39th North American Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Family and Children’s Agencies** in celebration of JFSC’s 50th anniversary; May 15-17 at the Westin Calgary.
- **AAISA Provincial Conference** October 26-28 at the Radisson Hotel in Edmonton.
- Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association recently released the book **Proud Women: A Collection of Stories**. All of the stories have been collected and written by immigrant youth who sought out senior role models to provide them with insight, passion and stories. To purchase a copy, call 403-263-4414.
- **CIC Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration** The report focuses on the Department’s activities and initiatives, and announces the immigration plan for 2011. Full report: www.cic.gc.ca

SAVE THE DATE

**The 15th Annual
Immigrants of Distinction Awards Gala
March 18, 2011
Westin Calgary**

We hope you will join us in honoring and recognizing immigrants who have enhanced the Calgary community with their exceptional contribution. Awards will be given in the categories of:

- Arts and Culture
- Business
- Community Service
- Distinguished Professional
- Organizational Diversity

The esteemed Hadassah Ksienski Award and Youth Scholarship Awards will also be presented at the gala.

Reserve your seat or corporate section now: (403) 538-8352 or isabelle@immigrantservicescalgary.ca

We look forward to seeing you on March 18th, 2011!

Immigrant Services Calgary

AAISA Staff 2010-11



From left to right:

Patrick Hanlon,
Project Coordinator

Monique Greenwood Santos,
Provincial Coordinator

Emese Zakradnik-Csorgo,
Administrative Assistant

Sipiwe Mapfumo,
Project Coordinator

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Alberta Association of Immigrant
Serving Agencies

**The leading voice for immigration
and integration in Alberta**

**915—33 Street NE
Calgary, Alberta T2A 6T2**

Phone: 403.273.2962

Fax: 403.273.2964

Email: contact@aaisa.ca

Website: www.aaisa.ca

AAISA members include:

ASSIST Community Services Centre.
Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth.
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society.
Catholic Social Services.
Calgary Immigrant Educational Society.
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association.
Central Alberta Refugee Effort (C.A.R.E.) Committee.
Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du nord de l'Alberta.
Centre for Newcomers.
Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women.
Edmonton Immigrant Services Association.
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers.
Immigrant Services Calgary.
Immigrant Settlement Services/GPRC.
Indo Canadian Women's Association.
Jewish Family Service Calgary.
Lethbridge Family Services-Immigrant Services.
Saamis Immigration Services Association.
YMCA Wood Buffalo-Immigrant Settlement Services.

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