

Researching Rural and Regional Refugee Resettlement



CONSCIOUS POLICY and program support for the resettlement of refugees in regional and rural areas is a relatively recent trend in Australia. Since 2003, the Commonwealth Government actively encouraged the settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants in regional areas to address the demand for less skilled labour and assist new arrivals to achieve early employment (DIMIA 2003). Since 2004, the financial support and number of sites and programs in regional areas have all steadily increased. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) has encouraged regional settlement in a number of locations – Coffs Harbour, Wollongong, Goulburn, Wagga Wagga, Geelong, Shepparton, Logan/Beenleigh/Woodridge, Toowoomba, Townsville,

Cairns, Gold Coast, Mandurah, Launceston, Tasmania's North-West Coast and Alice Springs (DIAC 2005). By the beginning of 2007, refugee regional resettlement initiatives had been implemented in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Western Australia. Particular initiatives included grants for humanitarian community services, needs-based planning frameworks and improved settlement information in rural and regional areas (DIAC 2005).

Resettlement is a complex process that hinges on the establishment of viable communities; however, the outcomes, especially for refugee communities, are potentially mixed. In 2007, VicHealth commissioned the RHRC and Foundation House to review the lessons learned

so far from Australia's rural and regional resettlements. The report was based on literature reviewing case studies throughout Australia, with a particular focus on Victoria, and culminated in a VicHealth roundtable that explored the issues with policy makers, service providers, regional community representatives, academics and refugee communities. Given that settlement is a dynamic process and the approaches to rural and regional settlement are evolving, the report provided twelve propositions for a more effective and integrated approach to policy and practice.

The review of the Australian experience and the views expressed at the VicHealth roundtable suggest that regional refugee resettlement initiatives have the potential to provide benefits to refugee

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communities and host communities if care is taken to ensure a well-planned, well-integrated and well-resourced approach. However, as evidenced in the report, creating viable communities in rural and regional areas is a complex process. Given that the views of all stakeholders are critical in the selection of sites, effective processes for consulting and engaging with refugee communities are essential along with a supportive host community. Services to support regional refugee resettlement are also crucial and need to be adequately resourced and well integrated. Finally, to ensure outcomes meet expectations, impacts need to be monitored.

From the perspective of policy and coordination, the review found that there is a need to identify mechanisms and processes for ensuring a whole-of-government approach to planning for refugee resettlement in Victoria. As part of this approach, appropriate arrangements for supporting local government as a lead

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coordinating agency must be investigated. Consideration should also be given to developing closer linkages between skilled migration and refugee resettlement programs, in particular to investigating the possibility of a common planning framework. The challenge will be to consider the implications of varying pathways to refugee settlement in regional areas, including direct resettlement and both formal and informal secondary migration (often referred to as relocation). Future government programs must be developed carefully, with the long-term sustainability of refugee communities in mind.

Introducing... Brooke McDonald-Wilmsen

POSITION: Research Fellow

QUALIFICATIONS: PhD, Development Studies (The University of Melbourne), BA (Hons), BSc (Environmental Science) (The University of Melbourne)

What led you to join the RHRC?

I joined the RHRC after becoming disillusioned with the mismatch in policy and practice in development-induced displacement. It seemed that despite the progression in policy and the clear relationship with research, practice continued to operate in a silo. The outcome for those caught in the development pipeline was commonly long-term impoverishment. I was drawn to the RHRC because it provided an opportunity to

undertake applied research. The unique partnership with Foundation House means that research is linked into policy and practice with clear outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants. I can only be satisfied when undertaking research that will have clear benefits on the ground.

What current projects are you working on?

I am currently coordinating a research project titled "The relationship of family reunion to refugee resettlement and

wellbeing". This study focuses on the impact of family reunion, or lack thereof, on the settlement and wellbeing of refugee communities in Victoria. Very little research has been undertaken to date on the relationship between family reunion and refugee wellbeing. This project is a joint initiative between the RHRC and the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (Foundation House).

What has been one of the highlights of working in refugee research?

The VicHealth roundtable undertaken in conjunction with RHRC and Foundation House was certainly one of the highlights of working in

RECOMMENDED READING

The reports can be accessed on the VicHealth website at: http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/RefugeeResettlement_Web2.pdf

- Broadbent, R., M. Cacciattolo, et al. (2007). An Evaluation of Refugee Relocation in Swan Hill and Warrnambool: Final Report. Melbourne, VicHealth and The University of Melbourne.
- Sharp, M. (2005). Regional refugee settlement support requirements: measures for the meaningful assessment of service need, in *Hopes fulfilled or dreams shattered? From resettlement to settlement*, 23-28 November 2006, The Centre for Refugee Research, University of New South Wales, Sydney.
- Stilwell, F. (2003) Refugees in a region: Afghans in Young, NSW', *Urban Policy Research*, 21 (3): 235-248.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

WELCOME to our third newsletter for 2008. As featured in this issue, we continue our diverse program of applied research. The Australian Government's increased focus of refugee resettlement in regional and rural areas requires a strong research component that assesses both processes and outcomes for refugee and host communities. The recently published VicHealth funded research on Refugee Resettlement in Regional and Rural Victoria has highlighted the potential benefits of the program as long as it is carefully planned, well integrated, and adequately resourced. The success of the program also requires effective consultation and engagement with refugee communities and a supportive host community.

As more research is required, our 2-year study of refugee men's health and resettlement (SettleMEN Project) that started in February 2008 is investigating resettlement outcomes among men from refugee backgrounds living in Brisbane and Toowoomba (Queensland).

The November-December 2008 study tour to Bangladesh is also featured in this issue along with some encouraging news from participants in the 2006 study tour, who have continued their links with Bangladesh and forced displacement through volunteering and work placements. This demonstrates the long-term benefits of the study tour



program for students and communities.

We welcome the recent changes to Australia's immigration detention policy announced by the Australian

Government. Foundation House is currently undertaking a pilot study on the experiences of long-term immigration detention and its impact on the wellbeing of adult refugees living in Melbourne. Research is a very important tool to document the consequences of policies on real people so that we learn from the past and inform future decision-making.

— Dr Ignacio Correa-Velez, Deputy Director & NHMRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow



refugee research. The opportunity to listen to the various viewpoints of regional communities, policy makers, academics and refugee communities was incredibly interesting.

What research areas are you interested in pursuing in the future?

It is important that the long-term experiences of refugees and humanitarian entrants

resettling in rural and regional areas are investigated. The VicHealth report is a preliminary review of how the resettled families are faring in regional locales. However, as refugee relocation to rural and regional areas is growing, ongoing research can provide information to policy makers and service providers that can assist in planning for sustainable settlements.

Centre News

■ A PILOT STUDY exploring the *Meaning and Consequences of Long-term Immigration Detention* is currently underway. Funded by Foundation House, the study is investigating the experience of immigration detention and its impact on adult refugees detained for two years or longer. Guy Coffey, Ida Kaplan, Robyn Sampson and Maria Tucci are currently completing in-depth interviews with ten former detainees. This material will provide the basis for further work and contribute to our understanding of the ongoing consequences of extended periods of detention.

■ THE RHRC Seminar Series has two more dates for 2008. Caitlin Nunn will present *A Space to Speak: Challenging representations of culturally diverse communities*

on Wednesday 1st October. Dr. Colleen McFarlane and Dr. Ida Kaplan will present *Researching services for survivors of torture and trauma: A preliminary investigation about recovery outcomes* on Wednesday 26th November. Seminars are held at Foundation House in Brunswick, registration at 5:00pm for a 5:30pm start – free of charge. Check our website for the program.

■ THE RHRC team based in Brunswick have now moved into the recently completed ‘west wing’ extension of Foundation House. After two years in temporary office space, the team have rejoined their colleagues on the one site. Check our website for their new telephone numbers.

POLICY CORNER

Major Changes to Immigration Detention Policy and Parliamentary Inquiry into Immigration Detention

ON 29 JULY 2008 the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Evans, announced major changes to Australia’s immigration detention policy. These changes have been welcomed by the refugee sector as a move to a more humane approach to asylum seekers that is consistent with both the government’s human rights and national security responsibilities.

The Minister announced seven ‘key immigration values’ which result in a risk-based approach to immigration detention. Minister Evans said, ‘The presumption will be that persons will remain in the

community while their immigration status is resolved. If a person is complying with immigration processes and is not a risk to the community then detention in a detention centre cannot be justified. The Department will have to justify a decision to detain – not presume detention.’

Under the new policy, an unlawful non-citizen would be held in immigration detention only as long as required to establish their health status, identity and whether they are a risk to the community. Asylum seekers will also be able to access independent review of unfavourable decisions on their asylum applications and

receive publicly funded legal advice.

The full text of the Minister’s speech can be found at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/speeches/2008/ce080729.htm>.

In addition to these policy changes to immigration detention, the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Migration is conducting an inquiry into immigration detention in Australia. Among other issues, the terms of reference of the inquiry include the criteria that should be used in determining how long someone should be held in immigration detention and exploration of community

based alternatives to immigration detention. The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) has made a submission to the enquiry which will be available on the Committee’s website <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/detention/index.htm>. The full terms of reference of the inquiry can also be found here. The committee will continue to accept submission during the course of the inquiry.

Contributed by the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (www.fasstt.org.au)

Bangladesh Study Tour Class of 2006



Kristel Schmitt being welcomed by ESDO in Bangladesh.

THE RHRC and Foundation House are once again facilitating a study tour to Bangladesh. *Displacement, Development, Disadvantage* is a unique Summer School opportunity for La Trobe University undergraduate students from a range of disciplines. Over a twenty-two day period during November-December 2008, students will visit some key organisations and spend time with communities in order to engage with the contemporary challenges faced by Bangladesh in relation to displacement, development and disadvantage.

Students from the 2006 Bangladesh Study Tour have since built on their

experiences in interesting and impressive ways. Several students have returned to Bangladesh as part of travel, volunteering and work placements.

Suzanne Jamieson and Emily Fajerman are on their way to Bangladesh to work as volunteers with UTSHO, an NGO which provides accommodation and education for disadvantaged children and is committed to creating social change. Suzanne is currently in Dhera Dun, India working with a Tibetan Refugee community. She is helping to write health policies and procedures at the local hospital, teaching English and becoming involved in other initiatives aiming to address

current health issues and improve employment opportunities in the community.

Molly Anggo spent three weeks in July 2008 with Padakhep, a development NGO in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Molly's role in one of Padakhep's HIV/AIDS projects was in a team working on a youth prevention and advocacy program. She wrote a report reviewing the implementation of this project and suggesting recommendations for the future. Her duties included reading up on Padakhep's proposal and the Bangladeshi government policy, interviewing the project staff and project participants, and attending workshops.

As an Australian Youth Ambassador, Kristel Schmitt is working as a fundraising officer for the Environmental and Social Development Organisation (ESDO) in Bangladesh. ESDO is implementing an interesting Eco-village project in the rural areas of Natore and Rangpur (north Bangladesh) aiming to enable communities to become self-reliant and environmentally sustainable. Kristel's assignment is to build the capacity of the ESDO staff in applying innovative fundraising strategies to generate sustainable funds. Kristel plans to deliver various participatory workshops, write a 'fundraising manual', help with funding proposals, develop a fundraising and communications/promotions strategy, build relationships with potential donors, and assist to host fundraising events. She reflects that "...it should be a busy, inspiring and rewarding year!"

The 'Class of 2006' have also held several photo exhibitions in Melbourne to raise funds and awareness since their return from Bangladesh. The next exhibition is happening at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale Street from August 28 to September 17. Contact Adrienne Wentworth for details; ph. 0405 419 195 or afourleafclover@optusnet.com.au.

Researching Refugee Health

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