

group activities and individual supports.

Another program, New Beginnings, which operates out of SHARE Mountain View Family Resource Center in Coquitlam, provides a play area at which parents can gain information about health, education, housing food, parent and other community resources, as well as meet other families.

Meanwhile, all recently arrived newcomers have access to an ISSofBC summer program

that aims to provide a head start on the school year through English language tutoring and related assistance.

Hayfron is pleased to see the community throwing out a plusher welcome mat than the one she stepped onto when arriving here from Norway in the 1990s. A self-described social butterfly, she thinks she was able to deal more easily than most with the issues involved in coming to a new country—but she also believes the Vancouver region is a

particularly difficult place to arrive in.

"It's not that people here don't accept diversity," she says. Rather, the local culture puts less emphasis on community, and more on independence, on doing your own thing. Fine maybe for those who are able to take advantage; not so good for those who are struggling.

So now she's among the many who are working hard to transcend that little wrinkle in the local culture. And maybe even to change it.

# IMMIGRANTS ARE YOUNG

Almost half of all newcomers are under 25 upon their arrival in the Tri-Cities.

## Population in private households by age at immigration

	Tri-Cities		Greater Vancouver	
	Total Immigrants	Recent Immigrants	Total Immigrants	Recent Immigrants
Under 5 years	9.82%	8.16%	8.16%	6.57%
5 to 14 years	18.89%	17.73%	16.58%	14.20%
15 to 24 years	17.60%	13.36%	21.53%	16.59%
25 to 44 years	43.18%	43.79%	41.34%	44.82%
45 years and over	10.51%	16.88%	12.38%	17.82%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Data Source: Census Canada

## THE TRI-CITIES WELCOMING COMMUNITIES PROJECT

As one of Canada's leading centres for the settlement of recent immigrants, the Tri-Cities of Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody have embarked on an initiative to ease and enhance newcomers' experiences while making the region a more welcoming and inclusive community. Initiated by S.U.C.C.E.S.S. a diverse group of community leaders and stakeholders are working together as an active Advisory to develop, implement and oversee all elements of the Tri-Cities Welcoming Communities Project.

### MEET OUR ADVISORY MEMBERS

- ACT 2 Child & Family Services
- City of Coquitlam
- City of Coquitlam, RCMP
- City of Port Coquitlam
- City of Port Moody
- Coquitlam Public Library
- Douglas College Douglas College, The Training Group
- Fraser Valley Regional Library
- ISSofBC
- Ministry of Children & Family Development
- Port Moody Public Library
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
- School District No. 43 (Coquitlam)
- SHARE Society
- Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce
- Tri-Cities Seniors Planning Table
- Vancity West Coast Family Centres Society

Project Coordinators  
PEERs Employment & Education Resources



## INSIDE



### OUR HOME, OUR STORIES

This is the sixth in a series of information packages prepared by the Tri-Cities Welcoming Communities Project.

Written by Jim Sutherland.  
Photographs by Paul Joseph.

## STARTING THEM YOUNG

AN ARRAY OF PROGRAMS—AND A SMALL ARMY OF WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS—ARE GEARED TO MAKING SCHOOL THE BEST YEARS OF NEWCOMERS' LIVES, NOT THE TOUGHEST.

Sally Hayfron has arrived at Vanier Centre School for a staff meeting. An immigrant youth worker who divides her time between Centennial Secondary and Port Moody Secondary, Hayfron could be just about anywhere:

At one of the schools, visiting a truant student at home, chatting with someone in need of help; directing one of the group programs that she organizes. But today there's time to talk about some of the issues faced by late-arrival immigrant youth—crucial questions like what's the thing with lockers?

to get along with a half-dozen almost entirely different sets of people, reducing the odds of finding a tight-knit group of friends. "Being an immigrant is tough," Hayfron says. "But for teenagers it's maybe toughest of all."

Leaving aside the Great Hall Locker Debate, Hayfron's observation is borne out

Hayfron laughs as she describes her own reaction when she arrived in Coquitlam as a 14-year-old, by way of Norway and Ghana. School lockers, she says, are a mostly North American phenomenon. In other countries students spend most of their time in home rooms and don't need to stash a backpack and jacket. Accord-



ingly, they're not prepared for those fiddly combination locks or for the frantic hallway action that occurs between classes. Nor for the reality that, instead of spending most of their school year with the same small group of students, they'll have to learn

by research: perhaps surprisingly, teenagers and young adults face some of the biggest challenges of any immigrants. For the most part they rise to these challenges with considerable success, disproving many of the myths that surround the subject. For example, immigrant youth in Canada have essentially the same academic, social and psychological outcomes as native-born youth, according to the 2006 International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth, which studied immigrant youth in 13 countries. Meanwhile, in the Tri-Cities, experts in the field doubt the widespread

continued on page 2



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## IN BRIEF GANGING UP?

### ARE IMMIGRANT YOUTH PRONE TO CRIMINALITY AND VICTIMIZATION? PEOPLE IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH BOTH NEWCOMER YOUTH AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AREN'T SO SURE.

The scenario is depressingly familiar and has been for centuries: Immigrants arrive in a new country in search of a better life and find jobs that have them working long and hard but near the bottom of the employment ladder. Their children, often living in comparative poverty, left to their own devices for large parts of the day, and discriminated against whether in school or out, band together for mutual support. Before long they organize themselves into gangs or fall prey to already established ones who exploit their vulnerability.

Greater Vancouver certainly has its gangs, but how realistic is the cycle outlined above? Possibly not very, according to some of the people who work closely with newcomer youth in the Tri-Cities.

In her capacity working with late-arrival youth at Tri-Cities schools, Sally Hayfron has only rarely seen gang associations and criminal activities crop up. In fact, boys—who are generally more prone to criminality—seem to adjust to their new lives comparatively easily, she believes. “I

*continued on page 3 sidebar*

view that immigrant youth are more prone to criminality and gang activity. Still, there's no getting around the reality that arriving in Canada as a student or young adult can be very difficult.

Moreover, there are a lot of newcomer students and young adults. Because Canada's immigration system favours younger people over older ones, there's a preponderance of young families everywhere, but it's especially the case in the Tri-Cities. As of 2011, some 18% of recent immigrants here were aged five to 14 at time of arrival, compared to 14% for Greater Vancouver.

The 13% of immigrant arrivals to the Tri-Cities who were 15 to 25 does trail the rate for Greater Vancouver, but that's largely because independent young adults tend to favour central cities over suburbs.

Accordingly, the school system in the Tri-Cities has a larger proportion of newcomers than most other places in Canada—or for that matter, the world. Out of a total student body of about 30,000, some 4,000 are enrolled in English as a Second Language programs and several thousand more speak another language in addition to English.

Studies generally identify learning English as the largest impediment to Canadian adjustment for students. For obvious reasons, a lack of language skills makes it difficult to excel or to fit in, both at school and in a workplace. At the same time, a low English language ability is far from the only issue.

Poverty is perhaps a larger barrier than generally recognized. While some two-thirds of immigrants to B.C. are classified as Economic, the situation is quite different when it comes to newcomer youth. In fact, slightly more than half of youth arrivals in B.C. between 2004 and 2008 came from the Non-Economic class, primarily as refugees or through family reunification. Partly as a

consequence, 49% of youth lived in households that fell below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off. The effects of poverty are extensive, and include poorer overall health, greater likelihood of physical and mental health risks and decreased ability to concentrate.

Moreover, it is more difficult for newcomer youth to pull themselves out of poverty, as they face greater barriers in the workplace. In recent years the unemployment rate for immigrant youth has ranged up to five percent greater than the already high rate experienced by non-immigrant youth.

Social isolation is another issue. Poverty can lead to being left out of groups and activities, as can discrimination, which remains widely prevalent, even if not widely intended. The 2006 ethno-cultural youth study found that discrimination was the largest contributor to problems, and that Canada's relatively low level gave immigrant youth here an advantage over many other countries.

Feelings of alienation are a natural result of discrimination, as is a tendency to look for friends from among the same ethnic group. The support is valuable, but sustained marginalization makes it that much harder to integrate into Canadian society.

Does it also place youth at higher risk for gang recruitment and involvement in criminal behaviors? Both popular wisdom and some research suggests so, but that hasn't necessarily been the case in the Tri-Cities (see “Ganging Up”).

Fortunately, while the needs of immigrant youth are indisputably great, services are widely and increasingly available.

Back at Vanier Centre, Principal Krisztine Trumley recognized early that finding ways

### Immigrant youth in Canada have essentially the same academic, social and psychological outcomes as native-born youth, according to the 2006 International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth.



SALLY HAYFRON AND SOME OF THE KIDS SHE WORKS WITH AT CENTENNIAL SECONDARY. BOTTOM: THOSE INFERNAL LOCKERS.

to make life easier for immigrant youth would be an important part of her job. Especially older children. “It's one thing to come when you're six, another when you're 11 or 14,” she says. “They're not likely to feel accepted, don't understand the slang, aren't part of the cool crowd.”

School District 43, which serves the Tri-Cities, has been aggressive in launching programs such as the Citizenship and Immigration Canada funded Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS Program), which puts settlement workers at the service of students and their parents. Typically a SWIS worker proactively contacts newcomer parents and students to assist them with their settlement needs; refers the families to more specialized community resources as needed; provides group information sessions for newcomer youth and parents; and provides orientation about the settlement needs of newcomers to school staff.

**“It's one thing to come when you're six, another when you're 11 or 14. They're not likely to feel accepted, don't understand the slang, aren't part of the cool crowd.”**

With her specialization in older arrivals, SWIS worker Hayfron takes some of these activities further and in different directions. At any given time she will be working with about four dozen high-needs students. She begins with a group meeting where the talk

*continued from page 2 sidebar*

think that girls have a harder time,” she says.

Meanwhile, Barb Thornborough of the Coquitlam RCMP watches the issue closely as part of her communications and community relations role. “Unfortunately we don't have data one way or the other,” she says. “What I can say is that there are risk factors that make a person more prone to victimization, and age is one of them but status as an immigrant is not.”

She says the Coquitlam RCMP takes a proactive role in establishing relationships with newcomers, with a slate of officers who speak several languages.

As Thornborough points out, research data that would clarify the issue is mostly lacking, whether from the Tri-Cities or elsewhere in Canada. One thing that is for certain: The crime rate here has dropped dramatically since the early 1990s, even as immigration numbers have increased.

is about whatever interests them. “We always start with the journey to Canada,” she says, definitely a topic of universal and overriding interest.

She recruits a group of mentor students who have been here a little bit longer and settled in well, and organizes an assortment of group projects. She has a weekly girls group and a monthly program that brings inspirational speakers into the schools. Perhaps most importantly, she works one on one with students who need a steadying hand, and often too with their parents.

For refugee and other multi-barriered youth, there are additional services, including Reaching For Success, an after-school program in Coquitlam for six to 12-year-olds. Silvana Guglielmetti, who coordinates the program for Immigrant Settlement Services of B.C. (ISSofBC), notes the society employs multi-lingual staff and offers an array of

*continued on page 4*