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Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market  
Development

## **\$7.2M PILOT HELPS B.C.'S MOST VULNERABLE REFUGEES**

VICTORIA – A unique B.C. pilot program has opened six locations in the Lower Mainland offering young refugee children and their families nurturing places where the needs of the children can be assessed, announced Moira Stilwell, Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development.

“Our government is committed to ensuring that refugee children and their families, often traumatized by the life they left behind, receive relevant services that help them adjust to their new life in our province,” said Stilwell. “This \$7.2-million targeted funding is critical to provide meaningful services that will help transitions for young B.C. refugees and their caregivers, smoothing the way for their future in British Columbia.”

The Early Years Refugee Pilot Project has five centres and one outreach program focused specifically on helping vulnerable young refugee children and their families who have selected B.C. as their Canadian destination of choice. Many of these children have experienced the trauma of being in refugee camps in war-torn countries. The overall goal of the pilot is to gradually transition children into mainstream services and resources, such as StrongStart BC, and early learning centres, and to facilitate children’s successful entry into school and future academic success. It is the first initiative of its kind in British Columbia.

The pilot projects are located in Surrey, Richmond, Tri-Cities, Burnaby and Langley. The Vancouver pilot will not have a centre; instead, outreach workers will visit and work with the refugee families in their homes. All pilots will end by Dec. 31, 2010, at which time they will be evaluated to inform future development of appropriate early childhood support for immigrants and refugees.

The programs offer young children (aged between 0 and 6) a safe and comfortable place, where parents and caregivers can share experiences, ask questions and learn about early childhood development/early learning, and where together they can feel connected to their new community.

“The B.C. government is committed to supporting young refugee children and their families by providing early childhood development support and learning,” said Mary Polak, Minister of Children and Family Development and Minister responsible for Child Care. “The Early Childhood Refugee Pilot Project is offering these families a safe haven where they will receive special support that will make a positive difference in their future.”

The provincial government has contributed \$5.6 million, with the United Way of the Lower Mainland providing \$1.1 million to the Early Years Refugee Pilot Project. The remaining \$405,000 comes from various sponsors and partners, including community service providers, boards of education, local health authorities and municipal governments, with some providing funds and others in-kind resources. This \$7.2-million investment is being made over three years.

“This government is committed to helping refugees and their families succeed in Canada. Programs such as the Early Years Refugee Pilot project assist young newcomers and their families on the path to integration,” said Jason Kenney, federal Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. “We are very pleased to be working in partnership with the Province of B.C. to support these early learning centres and to make newcomers feel safe and comfortable in their new surroundings.”

“Ensuring that children are developmentally ready for school can literally change the future for all of us,” said Michael McKnight, president and CEO of the United Way of the Lower Mainland. “The Early Years Refugee Pilot Project is a great example of partnerships in action. Because of our donors and community partners, people’s lives are better and communities are stronger.”

The Province is providing these Early Years Refugee Pilot Project services through WelcomeBC, which helps immigrants access services to better adapt to life in their new communities and builds on the province’s history of welcoming newcomers and creating inclusive communities. More information can be found at [WelcomeBC.ca](http://WelcomeBC.ca).

WelcomeBC is supported through the Agreement for Canada-B.C. Co-operation on Immigration. This agreement transfers approximately \$120 million per year from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to the B.C. government which is responsible for administering settlement services for new immigrants.

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