relationships with their new friends and many have requested second and third families.

FRIENDSHIP FAMILIES IN TORONTO

by Roni Chaleff, Operation Lifeline

Finding housing, employment and language classes, let alone friends, is not easy for newcomers no matter where they are. When mass transit enters the picture; when one needs to be able to read the newspaper to locate jobs and housing, call quickly, and get there before someone else gets there first; when there is no community centre and sometimes not even an easily-defined community; the situation grows impossible. In a sprawling urban environment, it is crucial to know there is someone you can turn to when you need help and the Manpower office is closed. It is crucial to know there is someone who cares.

Any person, family or group who is interested in becoming a Friendship Family to provide this orientation assistance and social contact to a government-sponsored refugee on an ongoing basis, first attends one of our monthly orientation meetings. Then he submits an information sheet about himself, and the process begins of matching him with one refugee or refugee family newly arrived in the city, either from overseas or often from elsewhere in the country.

NDS, FRIENDS . . .

Employment and Immigration Canada Employé et Immigration Canada

... and Mrs. Mai:

forgive me for writing in English. I wish that I could write in your own language, but Quyen assured me that you would be able to read English.

allow me to introduce myself. Quyen came to Canada under the sponsorship of the Canadian government, and I am the government representative responsible for the wellbeing of the Vietnamese immigrants in the St. Louis area, which is where Quyen was sent. It is my responsibility that they are enrolled in English-language classes as soon as possible, that they have a suitable place to live, enough clothes and food and to help them find employment when they have learned English. I have done for Quyen: he is now settled in a very pleasant apartment with two other young men from Saigon, and they are all studying English, and doing very well in their English classes.

I decided to write this letter to you for several reasons: first, because I am your mother myself--my husband and I have five children, some of whom are around the same age as Quyen, and therefore I know how difficult it can be for you to have your oldest son so far away in a strange country, and how concerned you must be for his welfare.

More than that, my husband and I have become very fond of Quyen and his friends. They have been to our house many times for dinner the evening, and we have come to feel almost as if they were our sons. They are very fine young men, very courageous, and we are sorry that their lives have been interrupted by tragedy. However, Canada is a good country, with many opportunities for young people who are willing to work hard, and we will ensure that they get the help they need to build their lives again.

Quyen is obviously a very intelligent young man--he is one of the best students in his English class--and when he is at our house we enjoy his company very much. He is well and happy--except for the fact that he misses his family. He has shown us pictures of his brother and sister, and often speaks of you. I am sure that you miss him very much as well. However, please do not worry about his welfare--we will take care that he is taken care of.

I would like to write to me, I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Mary Butler

In such a large city we find it necessary to screen volunteers before actually introducing them to the refugees. A volunteer social worker does this by phone.

The Friendship Family and the refugees are first introduced by an interpreter. Later, since the Friendship Families come from all walks of life and from all parts of the city and would never have a chance to meet, organized meetings offer them an important opportunity to share their stories, their experiences in coping with difficulties, their discoveries of fun and cheap activities. Meetings for the newcomers in their own languages help clear up any concerns they have about their Friendship Families or any questions about employment, language classes, getting their families out of the refugee camps, etc. Finally, parties and cultural events contribute to a sense of community spirit on both sides, which is usually so difficult to create in a large city.

The Friendship Families themselves do much of the administration of the programme, including general office work, organizing social activities, speaking to their church groups to recruit more volunteers, and giving interviews to the media to publicize the programme. But one full-time coordinator is also necessary, as well as contract workers who speak Vietnamese, Chinese, Lao and Khmer.

WINNIPEG'S ESCORT SERVICE

by Marjery Soloman, Manitoba Joint Refugee Coordinating Committee

The "Be A Friend" programme of the Manitoba Joint Refugee Coordinating Committee was initiated in response to concerns expressed by the community for the government-sponsored Southeast Asian refugees arriving in Winnipeg.

We asked volunteers to work for one half day a week escorting people to medical appointments, helping to enroll children in school, explaining public transit or helping a family with their shopping. Soon many of the volunteers were recruiting their spouses, teen-age children and friends to help, and increasing their own volunteer time.

A former home economics teacher spends three afternoons a week explaining the complexities of shopping in a North American supermarket and showing families where they can find the oriental groceries necessary for their cooking. A retired businessman spends many hours preparing resumes and helping to find employment. New mothers are visited in hospital by a volunteer who not only makes sure that they will be able to manage on their own when they go home but supplies them with whatever baby clothes and equipment they may need from a seemingly endless supply she gathers from friends and acquaintances. Expectant mothers want to be assured that "Mrs. Mary" will come to see them after their babies are born.

Volunteers help people through the maze of government and agency offices - they act as advocates - they help to locate more suitable housing - they drive people to the hospital regardless of the hour - they take families on friendly outings - they seldom say "no."

We are pleased that our seventy plus Canadian volunteers are now being joined by many volunteers from the refugee community. These people are now ready to "be a friend" and help someone else start a new life in Canada.

CONFERENCE NOTES

NGO/UNHCR Consultation

Nine Canadian delegates attended an NGO/UNHCR consultation in Geneva, from 20 to 22 May 1981. The consultation stressed the need to achieve a balance between coordination of refugee relief activities on the one hand and the advantages of the diversity and independence of NGOs on the other. For instance, NGOs have the flexibility to assist people in refugee-like situations who do not qualify for formal refugee status; to act quickly and pragmatically, since they often already have connections within the relevant country, and to deal with refugees in an informal, person-to-person manner. At the same time, UNHCR can often act where difficulties arise between governments and foreign or local NGOs, and can facilitate cooperation and coordination in planning and implementation.

The UNHCR's principal interest in the consultation, evidenced by the lack of representation of NGOs from first-asylum countries, seems to have been extending its cooperation with NGOs to include Public Relations/Fundraising campaigns in donor countries. This proposition received a mixed reaction from the NGOs.

Many of the NGOs, who had paid their own way to the conference, felt that little was produced relative to the amount spent.

- K.H.

The Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees - 1981 Refugee Consultation

The Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees met in Hamilton, Ontario on June 5, 6 and 7, 1981. Information was presented on topics including:

- resettlement concerns across the country, including vocational training and retraining and secondary migration
- the Canadian Foundation for Refugees
- the UN International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa
- the history and protection role of the UNHCR in Canada
- the federal refugee programme for 1982
- a visit to El Salvador.

Recommendations were adopted on topics including:

- larger refugee quotas for Africa and Central America
- improved federal government funding of voluntary resettlement services in Canada
- improvements in the refugee status process in Canada such as better quality interpreters, greater speed, ensuring that a claimant have access to any material contributing to a negative decision on his case
- facilitation of family reunification through flexible sponsorship arrangements such as having Canadians act as guarantors
- access of all organizations who participated in consultations regarding the future of the Canadian Foundation for Refugees to the draft report on the consultations.

Minutes of the meeting are being prepared.

- K.H.

International Roundtable

On the occasion of the official visit to Canada of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Poul Hartling, the Canadian Foundation for Refugees and the UNHCR hosted an international round table discussion on the subject of integration of refugees. Ten delegates from across Canada and delegates representing Denmark, France, Greece, Hong Kong, Norway, Spain, Sudan, the U.K., and the U.S. shared their experiences regarding initial reception, language acquisition, and cultural and emotional problems of refugees.

The European and North American countries all shared several of the same concerns:

- selection priorities that ensure less fortunate and less resourceful refugees access to resettlement
- settlement of refugees in sufficiently large communities of their own ethnic groups that they can retain their cultures and be involved in refugee policy and decision-making
- an international clearing house for information
- language training and orientation programmes for refugees in countries of first asylum in preparation for resettlement
- family reunification, family stress, and lack of guidance for young people separated from their families.

These concerns were, however, in sharp contrast to those of Sudan and Hong Kong, which in addition to being countries of resettlement are also countries of first asylum. The delegate from Sudan, where refugees walk across the border and go to friends or relations, did not think of integration in terms of permanent settlement, but of long-term but temporary asylum. The delegate from Hong Kong, which with its 5½ million people had given 14,300 Southeast Asian refugees permanent resettlement and still harbours 15,000 awaiting durable solutions, emphasized that problems of integration were not urgent compared to the need to find places for resettlement.

- K.H.