

## ONE IN TEN AFGHANS IS A REFUGEE

Mr. Dave Jenkins of Vancouver recently returned from fifteen months as chief delegate for the League of Red Cross Societies in Pakistan, where he helped the Pakistan Red Crescent Society run a relief programme for 100,000 Afghan refugees.

Mr. Jenkins estimates that there are close to two million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, 1.6 million being registered with the UNHCR. Of these, 30-40,000 are nomads who traditionally spend the winter in Pakistan, but in 1978 did not return to Afghanistan following the April coup that installed the communist People's Democratic Party government. The majority of the refugees are labourers and farmers, once homeowners, now living in tents along the border. Some urban and professional refugees are living in Pakistan's cities on their savings.

The most pressing material problem for these refugees, Jenkins said, is the extreme cold. For example, because the refugees are scattered wide apart in tribal clusters of tent villages - often so wide apart that they have to walk for days to receive their monthly rations - sanitation has not yet posed a health hazard, and disease is not more prevalent among the refugees than within Afghanistan or Pakistan. However, the cold means that the condition of anyone who does get sick can deteriorate rapidly: a child with the measles who would recover at home in bed may die on the cold ground in a tent. Jenkins turned most of his efforts to obtaining tents, blankets and warm cloth and clothing.

The refugees brought three million goats, sheep, and other livestock with them, so they aren't starving, "although that does not mean the people aren't hungry." International agencies provide wheat, oil, tea, and sugar, and the government of Pakistan provides the refugees with cash to purchase meat and vegetables locally.

The women face particular problems, Jenkins noted. In Afghan culture, it is unacceptable for a male doctor to examine a woman. The international agencies' medical teams therefore include "lady health visitors." Another problem facing women is that rations are distributed through heads of households or through tribal leaders. Women, especially



widows, sometimes do not get their fair share and special programmes have had to be developed to help feed women and children. Also, the girls receive no education.

Whatever time these refugees don't spend for survival they devote to religious education. A common sight, Jenkins said, was young boys huddled behind a stone wall to ward off the wind, learning the Koran by rote under the tutelage of the religious leaders.

When will these people be able to return home? Pakistan has discouraged the erection of mud buildings, because the land the refugees occupy is not government-owned. Jenkins speculated on an additional reason: such building would imply the long-term nature of the problem and, in turn, acceptance of it. But no one has gone home yet, and a few educated, urban refugees have turned to resettlement in third countries as the only possible solution to their problems. The rest continue to wait.

- K.H.

## THE CANADIAN FOUNDATION FOR REFUGEES

Throughout the past spring many Canadians participated in local consultations held under the auspices of the Canadian Foundation for Refugees regarding the need for a national grass-roots organization on behalf of refugees. The Board of Directors of the Foundation has already decided to act on several of the 68 specific recommendations in the draft report:

### Distribution of the report:

One copy of the full draft report will be deposited in a convenient place in each community where a workshop was held. Each participant will receive a copy of the summary of the workshop in his community and information on the location of the full report. Comments are welcome. (Although the report itself had recommended that copies of the recommendations should also be distributed to all workshop participants, the Directors felt this would be unnecessarily costly.)

### Loans to help organize local networks:

In order to facilitate the development of local, regional

and provincial organizations, seed money will be made available in the form of loans, repayable if and when the organization obtains federal and provincial grants, to enable existing community organizations to organize local chapters of volunteers in association with settlement workers, language teachers, ethnic organizations concerned for refugees, etc. Details are being worked out.

### Documentation Centre:

The Foundation is in the process of creating a Documentation Centre for the distribution of refugee-related materials in both English and French. The kind of documentation centre recommended in the draft report "should not originate needed documents but should solicit invitations to produce such documents by local organizations and assist to arrange the funding for their production" (p. 38).

- K.H.

*Suggestions for additional members of the Board are encouraged.*

**Friendship Family hosts birthday party for Southeast Asian newcomer.**

*Foster Friends, Be A Friend, Friendship Families, Canadian Friends, Mes Amis de Partout . . . In almost every Canadian community that took in both private and government-sponsored Southeast Asian refugees, volunteers have come forth to offer government-sponsored refugees the personal support privately-sponsored refugees receive.*

*In general, the federal government provides refugees with hotel accommodation when they first arrive, with basic orientation classes on such topics as shopping and banking, and with financial support until the refugees' incomes can meet their basic needs. For many this is sufficient for them to find their way in their new home.*

*But for every newcomer - from the one who, unable to speak a word of English or French, wanders into a refugee aid agency clutching a scrap of paper, "Somebody please help this man find a place to live", to the one who is independent within a month yet two years later may still have no Canadian friends - some personal contact with members of the older community seems essential to full integration into our society.*

*In some areas, the Manpower Officers have taken this role on themselves, going into the refugees' homes to show them how to cook cheap meals when they can't make ends meet on their allowance, running English conversation groups, inviting people to dinner in their*



*homes. In other cases, sponsors have endeavoured to help the friends of the people they sponsored.*

*But in many communities, organized volunteer programmes evolved to meet this deficiency. Some of these communities share their experiences here, in the hope that others will share theirs.*

## **THE FIRST FRIENDSHIP FAMILIES**

by Vera Arkell, Windsor

Windsor - the city with the big heart. It is known to give more to charities per capita than any other city in Canada. With equal generosity, Windsor opened its heart to the Southeast Asian refugees.

On March 15, 1978, the "Mayor's Committee for Vietnamese Refugees," an informal group comprising the mayor and a few concerned citizens, met out of growing concern for Indochinese refugees. The group decided to assist twenty families from Indochina to resettle in Windsor. Because of the vast cultural differences between their countries and Canada, and the ordeals they had experienced, we believed that a close, personal association with a Windsor family, person or group of persons would help alleviate the overwhelming task of resettlement.

So the Mayor's Committee established contacts with local church congregations and informed them of the need and ways in which they might help the refugees. The role of the Friendship Family was to befriend the new arrivals in whatever way possible, in order to build a relationship of mutual trust which would support the refugees in their search for identity and acceptance in a new culture. The response of Windsorites was immediate and enthusiastic. In June 1978 a telex from Singapore expressed thanks and stated that Windsor was the leading city in sponsoring refugees.

As we enter mid-1981, we see that this programme did much to cultivate a sense of acceptance and security for the refugees, and to enrich the lives of the people involved. Many Friendship Family groups or individuals have maintained strong ties with the refugees since their arrival almost three years ago. And we believe that the first experiences in Friendship Family responsibilities greatly fostered the efforts at private sponsorship.

## **FRIENDS,**

### **SUDBURY FAMILIES WELCOME REFUGEES INTO THEIR HOMES**

by Carole Paré and Tien Hoang, Sudbury Regional Multicultural Centre

Some Canadians may think of Sudbury as an isolated mining community. We like to think of ourselves as the heart of Northern Ontario, a prosperous, modern and very friendly city of 160,000 people. In the past two years, Sudburians have warmly welcomed more than 400 Indochinese refugees, approximately 85 government-sponsored and 315 privately-sponsored.

The Sudbury Regional Multicultural Centre works closely with Employment and Immigration Canada in coordinating refugee settlement and adaptation. Through our "Home Placement Programme" for government-sponsored refugees, new arrivals are placed directly with Canadian families until an apartment can be found.

Previously, these people were put into a local hotel and sometimes spent two to three weeks isolated and often very lonely. The Home Placement Programme helps to overcome some of these initial fears and frustrations, because there is someone to help in those first few weeks. And for the refugees, it is also a chance to learn first-hand the Canadian language, culture and way of life. When they arrive they are given a choice of whether to go to a hotel or a house, and no one has yet chosen the hotel.

Each host family is given \$45 a week per person for room and board, which represents an enormous savings to the government.

This system has been a tremendous success! All of our participating Canadian families have been so pleased with the experience that they have formed lasting

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.

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

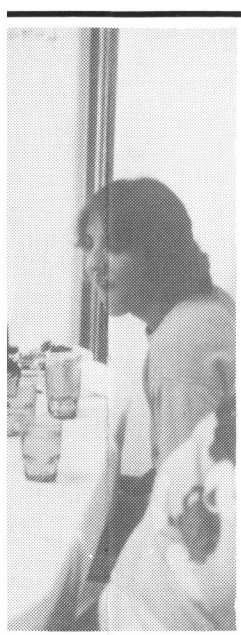
The "Be A Friend" programme of the Manitoba Joint Refugee Coordinating Committee was initiated in response to concerns expressed by the community for the government-sponsored Southeast Asian refugees arriving in Winnipeg.

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.



## FRIENDS, FRIENDS . . .

 Employment and Immigration Canada    Emploi et Immigration Canada

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Mai:

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

Please 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 Oakville area, which is where Quyen was sent. It is my responsibility to see 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. This 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 very hard, and doing very well in their English classes.

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

But 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 or for the evening, and we have come to feel almost as if they were our own sons. They are very fine young men, very courageous, and we are so 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 make sure that he is taken care of.

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

Sincerely,

*Rosemary Butler*