

Buffalo: A Modern Day Melting Pot

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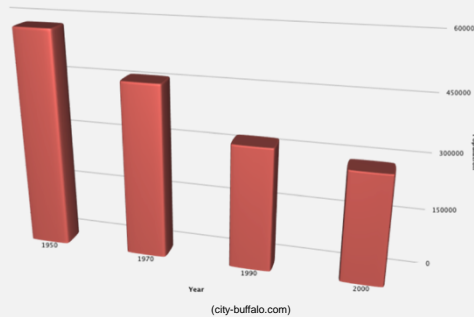
Introduction

- B.R. was born in Bhutan. She and her husband N.R. are refugees from Nepal and have been in Buffalo for 3 months.
- She relocated to the U.S. through the International Organization of Migration, that allows refugees to only stay 3 months in a specific location until they decide whether they want to relocate to a new city in the U.S. or remain in their current one.
- She has decided she wants to work here in Buffalo and help support her family. She feels that a lot of refugees choose to work instead of go to school because they want to earn money and support their family members here.
- Buffalo is welcoming, however she doesn't know much of the area because she does not have a car or a license and depends on the local bus route to move around her neighborhood.
- Many refugees feel such as B.R. does, and her story is just one of many about hardships that refugees face.

Why Buffalo?

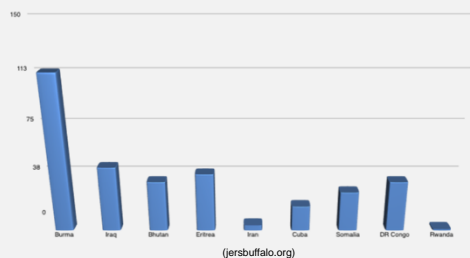
- The population of Buffalo has been declining since 1950.

Population of Buffalo



- To combat this problem the Refugee Protection Act of 1980 was passed (Coen, 2011).
- Many west-side groups (Journey's End, International Institute of Buffalo, Catholic Charities, Vive La Casa) see refugees as an investment in the city's future.
- Refugees can only choose the country in which they wish to settle, and the government chooses the city.
- Most refugees arrive from Burma, Iraq, Eritrea, Bhutan, and D.R. Congo (Journey's End, 2009).

JERS Refugee Resettled in 2009



Problems

Pre-migration

• Religious persecution and violence

A refugee from Pakistan found himself persecuted for his Christian ministries in his home country (Beck, 2010). He was thrown into a garbage can unconscious and could not walk for over three months.

• Oppression from the government and discrimination

One family was driven out of Bhutan because of the King's strict rules regarding everything from inter-cultural marriages to the clothing one was permitted to wear (Beck, 2010).

A refugee from Bhutan who lived in Nepal was denied job positions because he was not a citizen of Nepal (Journey's End, 2011).

• Poverty

A refugee from Bhutan stated that he left his homeland because he had no home, could not sleep, and wanted a better life for his family (Journey's End, 2011).

Post-migration

Primary challenges in Buffalo:

• Language barrier:

"Newcomers spend up to 8 hours on weekdays in English classes..." (Warner, 2009).

"I want to read, I want to improve English," says a refugee from Bhutan, who has been here for a month. She wants to support her family.

Organizations that help refugees have different levels of support and funding for their ESL programs. While Catholic Charities is backed by BOCES, Journey's End relies totally on unpaid volunteers.

• Trouble securing a job:

A refugee from Bhutan hopes to find any type of job he can find. He mentioned he would be willing to clean homes, work in a store or do any job that pays the rent.

Transportation poses another problem to refugees.

"Every Sunday he bikes to work from Buffalo to Clarence to be on time for his 6AM shift" (Journey's End).

The job economy is still weak in the US. Refugees often lack the benefit of extensive education, even aside from the language barrier. This makes them less competitive for jobs.

• Weather

A refugee from Bhutan mentioned the cold was unusual for him.

Post-migration (cont.)

• Stress-related

Because of the chaotic and often violent situations in their home countries, cases of PTSD, trauma-induced mental illness, depression, and alcoholism are more common in refugees (Coen, 2011).

Refugees are afraid to seek help from authority (Coen, 2011). They do not contact their case managers when they run out of food or electricity. They do not want to feel like a burden (Warner, 2009).

Solutions

Local Efforts

• The Grover Cleveland Boys' Soccer Team Goes Global

The boys' soccer team at Buffalo's Grover Cleveland High School, comprised of 18 refugee teens, went on to become the Section VI and regional soccer champions (Simon, 2009).

• Buffalo's West Side Community:

The West-Side Bazaar

Gives refugee businessmen the opportunity to sell their products before starting their own shop located on Grant Street (Kryszak, 2011).

Bicycle Drive

GO Buffalo's Community Workshop refurbished 50 donated bicycles. The bicycles were distributed by HOPE volunteers to refugee families (Edwards, 2011).

• Although these refugees face many hardships, there are many facilities in Buffalo that help them with their circumstances and make Buffalo their home.



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