

Auckland Refugee and Migrant Women Resettlement Project

Organisations Involved & Contact Details

Organisation: Business & Professional Women International (Auckland Club)
Email: projects@bpwnz.org.nz
Web: <http://www.bpwnz.org.nz/index.html>

Aims & Target Group

The aim of the project was to build bridges of tolerance and peace by assisting local refugee and migrant women to resettle in the New Zealand community.

Project Description & Components

Resource Booklet

Following on from the conference the BPW New Zealand National Conference held in Auckland in May 2003 in which this project was canvassed, a publication entitled 'Resettlement Issues for Refugee and Migrant Women' based on taped sessions of the conference workshops, and the community group project workshop ideas, was compiled by members of the Franklin and Tamaki BPW Clubs.

The Booklet has been registered with the National Library of New Zealand and is in high demand from individuals, Government agencies, civic libraries, universities, technical institutes and non-government organizations to use as a resource for their work with refugee and migrant women in New Zealand. To date 21 organizations have obtained copies and orders continue to come in. If each one uses the information to help just 15 women, at least 315 women will have been assisted through use of the booklet.

Translations of the Business & Professional Women's (BPW) Network NZ brochure

Following on from the launch of the booklet, local BPW members present at the marae held workshops to consider how they could best establish direct connections with local refugee and migrant women at a grassroots, community level and maintain links with the marae.

As a first step, our BPW NZ membership brochure was translated into 4 different languages – Maori, Samoan, Chinese and Arabic - so that refugee and migrant women had a basis for understanding what our organisation was about. BPW Clubs are now using the translated brochures to actively seek members from other ethnic groups who live in their locality. As an example, Auckland BPW now includes members from 13 different ethnic and cultural groups.

The establishment of direct connections was intended to enable a transfer of skills and resources from BPW members to local refugee and migrant women. Transfer of skills was seen as fulfilling the aims of our international organisation, promoting peace in our community and encouraging a much greater awareness of cultural diversity within our community.

Migrant women's cooking classes

One of the issues reconfirmed at the 2003 National Conference workshops was the desire by refugee and migrant women to develop social skills, often being isolated in their homes, gaining skills in sourcing and cooking local ingredients and dishes and gaining skills in speaking English with native speakers (English is New Zealand's predominant language of communication).

Members of the Auckland Club organised cooking classes for the women which also provided them with an opportunity to practice their English language in a safe environment. In this way it is estimated more than 30 refugee and migrant women were directly helped to improve their English language skills, to shop independently and provide nutritious New Zealand meals for their families.

A pilot project, based on the model developed with the Shakti Women's Resource Centre in 2002, was established between BPW Auckland and local Burmese refugee women in May 2004. The project was coordinated by two Auckland yBPW members, Amanda Aye (Burmese) and Elena Fowler (New Zealand) and involved the establishment of ongoing joint cooking classes held at the Ruapotaka Marae over a number of months. Together the Burmese women and BPW members agree what ingredients are needed, buy them from a local supermarket and cook the dish for the day. As shopping skills develop, that part of the class is no longer necessary. Each month the Burmese women decide what they want to learn.

The purpose of the cooking classes is threefold:

- (i) To enable BPW members to share with the Burmese refugee women their methods of cooking and sourcing local ingredients within their neighbourhood,
- (ii) Providing a forum whereby Burmese women could regularly practice English skills with native English speakers, and
- (iii) Providing a regular monthly point of social contact for Burmese women

10 women participated in the classes and the project has proved to be a very practical and fun way to help build relationships of trust, improve English language and communication skills and promote peace, tolerance and friendship in the community.

Process

The project began in 2002 when members of the Auckland Club made contact with the local Shakti Women's Resource Centre and became aware of the issues facing refugee and migrant women as they tried to settle into a new way of life in New Zealand.

The methodology was based on the importance of first hearing from refugee and migrant women about their own needs (with the use of interpreters if required). It was then necessary to ensure that any projects to improve the status of refugee and migrant women were driven by the people affected, with BPW providing appropriate support and transfer of skills and resources.

At meetings at the Shakti Centre, the women themselves identified the difficulties they faced in a new country. These included learning to speak English and shopping for food when they could not understand the labels on food packages. They also did not know what to do with the unfamiliar New Zealand foods they saw in food markets and wanted to cook local food, especially for their children attending local schools.

Outcomes

It is estimated that to date more than 540 women have been assisted in their efforts to resettle in New Zealand as a result of this project.

Local BPW clubs in Auckland are beginning to establish direct working relationships with both the tangata whenua women of New Zealand and local refugee and migrant women. Since the project began, clubs have also gained new BPW members from amongst local refugee and migrant groups, making for a more culturally diverse organisation.

The project has helped to break through cultural barriers at many levels and foster a spirit of peace, tolerance and harmony within the Auckland community between women of different backgrounds.

In May 2004, the project received a personal citation from the New Zealand Government Race Relations Conciliator for positive contributions in race relations.

Challenges & Obstacles

While capacity-building and confidence-building help improve the status of refugee and migrant women, the goal of improved status and equal participation is still far from being a reality.

Funding

Funding comes from BPW affiliates such as government and non-government organizations.

Images

