

SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

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Refugees learn about Canada and Jesus

Transitional classroom helps young children find their way

Rachel Bergen
Special to ChristianWeek

WINNIPEG, MB—When refugees from overseas arrive in Canada, it is not only the adults who deal with culture shock. The youngest newcomers sometimes have trouble transitioning into a new country and way of life as well.

Entering into a new culture requires a person, whether they are young or old, to learn the language, culture, societal norms and many other things. This can be a daunting task for many, especially when they don't have a community to connect with.

With this in mind, Winnipeg's Linden Christian School (LCS) established a "transitional classroom" in partnership with City Church this past September.

Lead teacher Brenda Wiebe works alongside educational assistant Joanna Dyck. "The dream for this classroom developed out of a need we recognized," says Wiebe.

City Church is mainly populated by newcomers to Canada, including refugees from two people groups in Myanmar, the Karen and Chin tribes.

These refugees recently came to Canada from a refugee camp in Thailand which borders their home country. Their children had expressed an interest in attending LCS but weren't quite ready to enter into the regular classroom.

"They had a really tough time with English and our culture is such a drastic change from theirs," says Wiebe.

The transitional classroom teaches English as an additional language through the various school subjects and Canadian culture to 21 elementary students in Grades 1 to 4.

"We teach them basic daily cultural things that are acceptable practices in Canada," says Wiebe. For example, "in their culture, they might eat rice with their fingers, but here other students might laugh at them for that."

The classroom setting allows students to connect with others of their own age and ethnicity, as well as those from other ethnicities that they might not normally talk to because of their different languages.

Teaching the children about Jesus is also a focus of the transitional classroom.

"We pray together, sing together, read Bible stories and have Bible classes every day," says Wiebe.

The transitional classroom has added "a really unique element

to LCS," says Wiebe.

Because many of the transitional classroom students live in the core area of Winnipeg and are searching for some form of community, there is a risk of them eventually getting involved with gangs, says Wiebe.

The LCS teachers hope to combat that risk by creating a healthy, supportive, Christ-centred community for the children.

Wiebe hopes LCS will one day be able to incorporate more age groups and more nationalities in the transitional classroom to foster a larger community of international students.



Spots

- Linden Christian School provides Christ-centred education for over 850 students in our city.
- The LCS transitional classroom involves elementary school children, Grades 1 to 4.
- 21 students participate in the transitional classroom.
- The transitional classroom involves two people groups from Myanmar, including the Karen and the Chin groups, both of which speak different languages.



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