

## 18. REPORT ON SEMINAR MEETING HELD ON 21.6.01

The Seminar meeting of the Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board was held on Thursday, 21 June at 3.30pm. The theme for the seminar was Ethnic Issues. The following matters were considered.

### 18.1 Refugee and Migrant Service

Anne-Marie Reynolds, Regional Co-ordinator of the Refugee and Migrant Service provided a briefing on her role and what is happening in the city. She was accompanied by Zeinab Hussein, a refugee from Somalia who came to New Zealand in 1993. Zeinab has recently been employed by the Refugee and Migrant Service for 20 hours a week.

Anne-Marie told the Board that New Zealand is one of ten countries in the world that annually takes in refugees. New Zealand currently takes in 750 refugees. There is huge pressure to re-unify families.

Anne-Marie noted that the refugees arrive in New Zealand in Auckland. They spend six weeks there undergoing tests and initial orientation. Over 50 percent stay in Auckland – others are then relocated to other cities including Christchurch. Often they do not want to leave Auckland but they are encouraged to come.

Anne-Marie said it is a difficult job to help re-settle refugees. Some have a long history of camp life. Next week Christchurch is receiving 62 refugees, of which 46 are Kurdish some who have been in camp life for 20 years. They are looking for better quality of life. However, they are used to having everything done for them. It is the role of the Refugee and Migrant Service to try and empower them to become self-sufficient.

Housing is one of the larger issues that face the Refugee and Migrant Service trying to resettle refugees, particularly suitable, warm homes with four or five bedrooms as some of the families have between seven and nine children.

Language is another huge barrier. However, they tend to learn English quickly. PEETO (Pasefika Education and Employment Training Organisation) are planning a six week orientation course which also deals with some legal information, and information re agencies such as Department of Work and Income etc. It is difficult for women to attend this course as there is no funding for childcare.

Some of the refugees arrive with very high expectations. In Christchurch a very good service is provided for them. Three volunteers work with one family. All the volunteers now undergo a six week training programme.

Employment for some refugees is becoming easier, particularly with halal killing in works. The recognition of previous qualifications that some of the refugees obtained in other countries.

Teenagers are often the most disadvantaged in terms of education. Hagley College have set up a special class for them.

Anne-Marie Reynolds said that the Christchurch City Council is one of the most proactive Councils in working with refugees.

### 18.2 Ethnic Council

Weng-kei Chen, a Council officer who has recently been re-elected national president of the Ethnic Council.

Weng Kei is Ethnic Chinese and spoke to the Board about issues he has had to deal with since coming to New Zealand as a student in the 1970s. He started working at local government in 1974. At that stage there were approximately 500 Ethnic Chinese in Christchurch. In 2001 there are 8,500.

He talked to the Board about the impact that different dialects of language can have and noted that people of a smaller ethnic groups often have greater difficulty.

The Ethnic Council has been in operation for 12 years. It meets three times a year and receives funding from various Government agencies. Issues it has considered recently are registration of overseas doctors, animal welfare, human rights protection and the restructuring of the Race Relations Conciliator/Human Rights Commission.

A recent conference in Hamilton considered the issue of employment. As a result the Department of Work and Income is now involved at looking at the employment of ethnic people.

Weng-kei told the Board that the Wellington City Council has recently formed an Ethnic Council within the City Council.

In Christchurch there are currently 22 ethnic groups represented on the Christchurch branch of the Ethnic Council.

**Chairman's**

**Recommendation:**

1. That the information be received.
2. That the Community Board write and thank Anne-Marie Reynolds from Refugee and Migrant Services and Weng-kei Chen for their presentations.