



The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Innovation
The Ministry of Children and Family Development
The Burnaby Board of Education

In August 2010 the mass arrival of 25 Sri Lankan women and 47 children in British Columbia presented a unique challenge in providing child and family centred, culturally responsive services.

In the interest of keeping the families together, the Ministry of Children and Family Development made the decision to house the detained women and children at the Burnaby Youth Custody Centre (BYCSC).

Minors who were not detained were able to live together at the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre rather than separately in foster homes and possibly far from the rest of their families.

From the outset a philosophy emerged and rapidly spread throughout the management of staff at the centre. It is best described by the following:

- We will do whatever it takes.
- We will provide the services that we would want for our own family members.
- We will be open, flexible and we will work as a team.

A cohesive and collaborative response, demonstrating strong teamwork, caring, compassion and professionalism was delivered by the various disciplines and program areas.

Staff worked tirelessly upon arrival at dockside, admission to the facilities, through the initial days of arrival and in the months afterwards to ensure the 70 plus women and children were well settled in the new environment.

A group of teachers and district administrators from the Burnaby School District worked with the BYCSC to provide educational services to the Tamil migrant families. Their spirit of service and care greatly added to the team's ability to meet the unique and significant needs of the children and their mothers.

All of these people demonstrated a flexibility and responsiveness above and beyond what might be expected in assisting the families to transition into their new lives in Canada.

In the early days of the program one of the youth supervisors who happened to be close to retirement age was learning to count in the Tamil language with the help of a nine year old girl. He was struggling to count to six when she quickly and effortlessly counted from 1 to 100 in English. Her mastery in comparison to that of the youth supervisor brought everyone – mothers, children and custody centre staff – to laughter. It was a bonding moment. We all recognized that we were a community brought together to support each other in every way we could.