



POTLUCK EVENT WITH REFUGEE STUDENTS AND EMPLOYEES FROM MSRI

A CAPSTONE PROJECT: Experiences of a CAPI Crossing Borders QES Intern

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Friendship through Food Sharing - A Resettlement Process

By Siobhan Davis

My experience as a QES intern working at the Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI) in Kuala Lumpur has been one of the most enriching and valuable learning experiences of my life thus far. As a program assistant at MSRI, I had the opportunity to get to know and become steadfast friends with people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds while learning extensively about migration and displacement issues. At MSRI, I worked with Malaysians, Italians, Iranians, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Afghans, and Somalis, among others. Some of my coworkers were also clients of MSRI – an organization that operates as a support center for minority displaced peoples living in the urban areas of Kuala Lumpur. For the displaced peoples (refugees and asylum seekers) that I met and worked with, many perceive Kuala Lumpur as a space of limbo where they await a more permanent home, a space where they can feel safe and access basic needs such as healthcare and education. Nonetheless, while in Kuala Lumpur refugees do their best to live their lives; they make friends with the locals, learn the language, try the local food, visit national landmarks, etc. Despite the trials and tribulations that MSRI clients face, they continue to move forward and keep positive, with hope that they will soon be resettled to a third country that will accept them as part of their society.

Food and Friends

Renowned Chef James Bear (1903-1985) once said – “Food is our common ground, a universal experience”. Growing up in multicultural Malaysia, I was exposed to diverse food cultures and traditions. Many Diwali’s, Chinese New Year’s, and Eid’s were spent at my friend and family’s houses stuffing my face with delicious and unique foods. While working at MSRI, lunchtimes and after work dinners were opportunities to get to know my co-workers and build friendships. My personal favourite moments were when I was invited over to homes of my co-workers and English class students where they prepared home-cooked Afghan, Palestinian, and Iranian foods. At these dinners, we bonded over stories from back home, played ukulele and shared music, learned new card games, and participated in a lot of dancing. Although the foods at the table were different, our love for eating and trying new dishes were in sync and we bonded through Bolani and Fettucine Alfredo. Through these dinners, I filled my stomach and my heart by making lifelong friends. Although it has been many months since I left Malaysia, I still keep in touch with my peers from MSRI and hope to return to visit Kuala Lumpur soon – or better yet, visit them in a space where they have found a more permanent and safe space to live.

Food and Resettlement

Upon returning to Victoria, I was eager to stay involved with the issue of displaced peoples in my local community. In particular, I am interested in the process of resettlement – which is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to a State that has agreed to admit them and grant them permanent settlement. As one of the small number of States that is taking part in the UNHCR’s resettlement program, Canada receives refugees from the UNHCR through private and government initiatives. As newcomers to Canada, refugees

sometimes face challenges adapting to the lifestyle and day to day activities that locals take for granted. For instance, language, banking, and transportation may be confusing - even visiting the clinic may be a tricky endeavor to a newcomer who is used to different processes from the previous countries they lived in. Through a national non-profit organization called the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) that have operations at the University of Victoria, I have been involved with the Social Committee of the Student Refugee Program (SRP). The SRP is a youth-to-youth sponsorship program that provides the opportunity for student refugees to pursue their education in a Canadian university as permanent residents. Canadian students such as myself are involved in this process by building a community to support sponsored students in adjusting to local societal structures so that they can thrive in their new environment. At the University of Victoria WUSC, social events are emphasized as a way to connect SRP students to build friendships and feel involved with the local community. Some of the events I have participated in thus far include hiking, soccer games, and a Netflix movie and pizza night which was held at my home. As part of my Capstone project, I wanted to recreate the food sharing occasions that I experienced in Kuala Lumpur and organized a potluck and games night through the WUSC community at my home here in Victoria. About 10 people participated in the potluck and we had a variety of cuisine such as Malaysian, Thai, Middle-Eastern, and Sudanese. After filling our stomachs with the amazing food we decided to play 'Guesstures', a charade-like team game that is a favorite at my family dinner events. After a couple hours of Guesstures, we finally wined down with some tea and good conversation before everyone went home. This event will be the first of many that I plan to organize and participate in as a member of the WUSC community. To highlight experiences of food sharing and friendship building, I would like to share my photos from these occasions below – these photos exhibit my experiences in Malaysia as well as the potluck that I organized in Victoria recently.

Photos



Afghani dinners with coworkers from MSRI and students of Sahabat Support Centre in their home. They invited us over a number of times and taught us some awesome card games and Afghan dancing style. These young men are excellent cooks and hosts!



One of my main jobs at MSRI was to be a support staff at the Sahabat Support Centre Clinic. This is where I met these wonderful ladies there who work as nurses, dispensers, and translators at the clinic. They are also amazing cooks, and when I invited them over for dinner, I was blown away by how delicious Middle-Eastern cuisine could be.



Enjoying some April sunshine in my front yard while eating the delicious food that people brought to share. Unfortunately, I forgot to take a picture of the food selection!



I took this photo some moments before the last of the group left - thanks for a fun night guys!



The Guesstures game in action: Doug trying to convey a word through movement, this game can get pretty hilarious. Both teams did an amazing job and I feel as though everyone had a blast!

Gratitude

As a CAPI and QES intern, I was able to gain invaluable experience that has changed my life by connecting me to new friends, and reoriented my focus to pursue a career with an organization that works to address issues involving migration and displaced peoples. The work experience that I acquired through my internship at MSRI will contribute to the career path I aim to pursue - words cannot express how grateful I am to have had this opportunity. I would also like to extend a thank you to the diligent and always supportive people at CAPI who have been very understanding and have facilitated the internship process so that we interns are able to effectively learn and make the most out of this experience. Finally, I would also like to thank the University of Victoria's WUSC community who have been instrumental to the organization of my Capstone potluck event, and I look forward to continue being involved with such a wonderful group of people.

In Solidarity,
Siobhan Davis
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