

Hidden Immigrants: Helping Missionary Kids Transition

By Paul Dyck

"I think home for me will always be in East Asia. It's where I grew up and where I feel most 'at home.' Yet, it pains me to say that I don't feel I will ever belong there completely."

Marika's words echo in the hearts of most Missionary Kids (MKs) as they return from the mission field; they are returning "home" to the foreign, sometimes unnerving, land of Canada. But a new program, launched by the Canadian Missionary Kid Network (CMKN), is easing that transition by offering MKs a crash course in Canadian culture and providing them the chance to meet and befriend other MKs who are also walking the lonely road of repatriation.



This summer, CMKN held their second week-long ReBoot retreat, partnering with the Jaffray Centre for Global Initiatives at Ambrose University. They hosted 21 MKs returning from 14 different countries, from Liberia to Japan, with 11 mission agencies represented, including five agencies that are not yet among the 20 member-organizations that make up CMKN.

But why is a program like this needed?

Cyndy Ingram, a former missionary and this year's ReBoot Director, says, "these kids come back and they look like Canadians, they talk like Canadians, but for most of them Canada is not a familiar place. It's a huge transition for any kid to graduate high school and figure out life as an adult, but at the same time MKs are facing all the re-entry transition issues."

After returning to Canada, Ingram says her kids seemed fine, but under the surface they wrestled with tough identity issues.

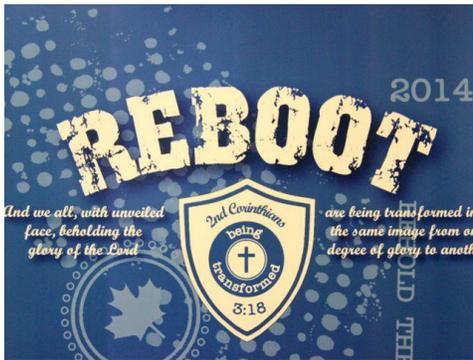
Similarly, Marika says she knew Canadian society would be different from what she was used to, but the adjustment was still difficult.

"One trouble I had was the lack of shared experiences. Many of my [Canadian] peers had similar experiences growing up, whereas my experiences were drastically different."

Jacob Harada, who also attended the retreat this year, says he expected to relate to Canadians easily given the lack of language barrier, but once he landed he found that was not the case.

"Being something of a perfectionist, it was agony to be so lost, confused, and socially awkward," he explains. "Finding a job was very scary. I had so little knowledge of etiquette and was so uncomfortable with the idea of selling myself to an employer."

But Harada didn't have to face these struggles alone. ReBoot connected him with others working through the same issues and helped him let go of the perceived need to prove himself.



"Reboot explained me. Something in the atmosphere communicated that this is not the end of us, rather this is a hard process that naturally causes uncomfortable experiences. Aware of the pitfalls MKs face, I can now act in more healthy ways."

Ingram says she delighted to watch the participants bond almost instantly as they realized they were not alone in what they felt.

"Several times we had MKs say, 'I thought I was the only one who felt like that.' Realizing their struggles are a normal response takes away the edge and some of the fear and discomfort. ReBoot also gives them community. [Afterward] we set up a Facebook group where they encourage and pray for each other as they head to their first job interviews and face other challenges."

Marika put it this way, "If you feel weird or alone as an MK, you're not! Reboot is an amazing place to meet people like you, learn more about yourself, and about how to deal with challenges of reintegrating or going to university. I made friends that I hope to keep for a lifetime."

For more information about ReBoot or the Canadian MK Network, go to www.canadianmk.net



Paul Dyck, who was raised in the mission fields of India, now leads the Canadian Missionary Kid Network. He also provides Member Care resourcing through Outreach Canada and is affiliated with the B.C. chapter of the Canadian Member Care Network.