

## A Community Helps Burmese Refugees Learn English

This is the VOA Special English Education Report.

About eighteen thousand refugees from Burma have come to the United States each year since two thousand seven. Some have settled in Howard County, Maryland, between Baltimore and Washington. A local school began teaching English to the children of the refugees.

But while the children learned the language, their parents did not. That makes communication with teachers difficult.



Currently almost fifty Burmese youngsters attend Bollman Bridge Elementary School. Laurel Conran is a teacher there.

LAUREL CONRAN: "The main idea is the global idea."

She teaches English to speakers of other languages.

LAUREL CONRAN: "Today we were doing text structures. I wanted them to know the vocabulary, the language of text structures, so when they go back into the classroom and work with their peers, they can do this successfully in the classroom."

One of her students is Tha Neih Ciang. Another student is Tha Neih's mother, Tin Iang. Ms. Conran practices English with Tin Iang at the mother's workplace. Many Burmese refugees work at Coastal Sunbelt Produce, a supplier of fruits and vegetables to restaurants and other businesses.

Laurel Conran started classes at the company to help refugees from the country also known as Myanmar learn English.

LAUREL CONRAN: "The program is a six-week session. It's once a week, on every Wednesday, from twelve to one o'clock. So every Wednesday I go to Coastal Sunbelt."

As the Burmese workers eat lunch, they also practice their new language skills. They sit in small groups with an English-speaking volunteer.

Lisa Chertok has a child at Bollman Bridge. She is also a manager at Coastal Sunbelt. She helped Ms. Conran develop the lessons, which she says have really helped.

LISA CHERTOK: "Well, when the Burmese employees got here, they were very, very shy. Now I find that they are more responsive as employees. They're more communicative. They're also, as parents, they are more involved in their children's school."

Jonathan Davis is the principal of Bollman Bridge Elementary School.

JONATHAN DAVIS: "I really see it as the beginning of a great partnership between a business and a school, and we've just begun to scratch the surface with how that could benefit, really, the greater community."

Mr. Davis hopes the lessons will help Burmese parents feel better about communicating with the school.

JONATHAN DAVIS: "Even as simply as making a phone call to say that their son or daughter is sick, even if that's the amount of English that they have gotten from the program, that truly will help us."

SPEAKER: "Please welcome Laurel Conran and Lisa Chertok."

For their work, the two women received a Community Builders Award from Howard County.

LAUREL CONRAN: "I love this program. As a community we want to work together, collaboratively, because when everybody works together it is a win-win situation."

And that's the VOA Special English Education Report. You can read, listen and learn English and much more with our programs and activities at [voaspecialenglish.com](http://voaspecialenglish.com). You can watch a video about the Howard County program on our website. And you can find captioned videos at the VOA Learning English channel on YouTube. I'm Steve Ember.

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