

SPRING NEWSLETTER



FCJ Refugee Centre
Walking with Uprooted People

2019



LEARN ABOUT :

- ★ Housing Report
- ★ Writing Workshops
- ★ Actions against legal aid cuts
- ★ Foreign workers program changes

UPCOMING EVENTS:

AGM

JUNE 25:

6:30 pm at 208 Oakwood Ave.

STREET PARTY

JULY 13:

**208 Oakwood Ave. and
Glenhurst Ave.**

/fcjrefugeecentre



@Refugeecentre



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Provincial *cuts* to *Legal Aid Ontario's* funding for immigration services

Legal Aid cuts are jeopardizing precarious populations. FCJ Refugee Centre has been participating in different demonstrations standing up for refugees to ensure that access to justice is provided for the most vulnerable communities. Since the Legal Aid cuts came into effect, the Center estimates the number of clients who can't afford a lawyer have increased in the last semester.

The Coalition of Service Providers, which FCJ Refugee Centre is part of, has been very active raising their voices on this issue. One of them is a letter to the Attorney General of Ontario, that describes the impact of this situation:

Hon. Caroline Mulroney
Attorney General of Ontario
Ministry of the Attorney General
11th Floor, 720 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2S9

Dear Hon. Caroline Mulroney, Attorney General of Ontario:

The Coalition of Service Providers for Refugee Claimants in Southern Ontario calls on the Attorney General and the Ontario governments to ensure that the current level of funding for immigration and refugee law services of Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) is maintained in the upcoming budget.

The letter that you delivered to the Federal government was alarming to our Coalition, indicating considerations of cutting the province's contribution to the immigration and refugee program of LAO. Potential cuts will put at risk the lives of thousands of people seeking safety here in Ontario. Even one life is one too many to be put at risk.

The agencies of the Coalition are on the front line when it comes to responding to the needs of refugee claimants in Ontario. We, as service providers to refugees, support thousands of people each year as they navigate the complex refugee determination system. We also assist them in exercising their right to access legal representation. We see firsthand the critical role of proper legal representation in accessing justice.

Our agencies are already beyond capacity in providing essential settlement services to refugee claimants. In addition to helping them access legal services provided by LAO, we support refugees in accessing affordable housing, education, health care, and other essential social services. As you are well aware, the desperate housing situation in many parts of Ontario has occupied many refugee service providers' time almost completely. We are therefore unable to fill the huge gap in legal support that would be created by any cuts. Furthermore, our agencies are financially constrained charities staffed by settlement workers and volunteers. We are not legal professionals. Refugee and immigration law is a highly specialized area of law that requires well-trained and experienced lawyers. We as community workers simply are not able to provide the legal support necessary for refugee claimants to effectively seek protection.

As outlined below, the consequences of inadequate legal representation will be serious.

- Refugee proceedings have life and death implications. We expect the number of negative decisions at the Refugee Protection Division will increase, putting refugees' lives at serious risk. Poor or inadequate representation leads to decisions that can result in removal to a situation where refugees will face persecution, torture or death. This would amount to refoulement.
- More negative decisions at the RPD will require more applications to the Refugee Appeal Division (RAD) and/or the Federal Court to address the errors. Without adequate Legal Aid funding, these critical processes will be compromised. Both appellate processes are very complex and require legal expertise and familiarity

FCJ Refugee Centre

with case law. Settlement workers are no substitute for proper legal representation in the appellate processes.

Wrongful decision making will result in increased instances of failed refugee claimants choosing to remain in Ontario without legal status due to serious fear of return to their country of origin. This situation puts vulnerable people in a precarious situation without access to essential services.

Many refugee claimants who lack financial resources will seek alternative ways to pay for counsel, thereby increasing their vulnerability. Refugee claimants already face too many barriers in the process of seeking protection. Many could be at risk of exploitation by employers taking advantage of their desperation for an income to pay their legal fees. Refugee claimants come here to seek protection and may have to prioritize legal costs over their own basic needs. We expect to see refugee claimants without financial resources directing a significant portion of their social assistance towards paying legal fees. This will force already vulnerable claimants to depend more on shelters, food banks, and other services. In turn, this will inevitably push them into situations of extreme poverty. Furthermore, the pressure on social services such as emergency shelters, which are already under significant stress, will be multiplied. The undesirable consequence will be that the cost will be borne by other government departments in an indirect way. Proper Legal Aid funding will prevent a crisis.

Many of the Coalition members are transitional housing organizations. These organizations will inevitably absorb the cost of much of the financial pressures placed on refugee claimants, particularly if claimants are put in the position of having to pay legal fees over rent. We cannot in good conscience close the doors on those who see no other option but to direct social assistance to legal fees. However, the charitable sector is financially constrained. Our work of supporting refugee claimants will be further constrained if we find ourselves covering the costs of housing that are left when governments do not fulfill financial responsibilities. This would mean our overall ability to provide even basic services to refugees would be severely compromised.

The mandates of our organizations are to support at-risk people in finding protection and navigating essential social services at the same time. We do not have the resources to provide extra services. Legal representation is crucial to the refugee resettlement process and not something in which we are trained or have the capacity with which to assist. Therefore, we cannot support any action that will contribute to denying essential services to refugee claimants.

We implore you to stand up for what is right, and to ensure that access to justice is provided for the most vulnerable among us. Protection, justice and compassion are values that we as Ontarians must work together to uphold.

Sincerely,

The Coalition of Service Providers for Refugee Claimants in Southern Ontario

Adam House, Toronto
Angela Rose House, Windsor
Carty House, Ottawa
Casa El Norte, Fort Erie
Casa Maria Refugee Homes, Peterborough
Chez Marie, Fort Erie
Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, Toronto
FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto
Fort Erie Multi-Cultural Centre
Matthew House, Fort Erie
Matthew House, Ottawa

Matthew House, Toronto
Matthew House, Windsor
Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support, Kitchener
Micah House, Hamilton
Quaker Refugee Committee, Toronto
Ray of Hope - Welcome Home Refugee House, Kitchener
Romero House, Toronto
Silas Hill Home for Refugees, Toronto
Sojourn House, Toronto

WOMEN'S SUPPORT PROGRAMS

During spring time residents of the houses have been participating in the jewellery making workshops. Jacinta Goveas, one of the board members, and Tsering Lhamo, the housing coordinator meet with the residents of our transitional houses every other Saturday. In every session participants make their own designs of unique earrings, bracelets and necklaces.



The product is shown and sold during events. The money the residents receive helps them to keep running the program, buying more material and earning some money for themselves.

The workshop activities along with the fieldtrips planned for this season were a great opportunity for the residents to get together, and learn new skills .

For summer time they are planning to do fieldtrips to visit different places in Toronto and attend the festivals and events that the City of Toronto organises.



Toronto Writers Collective

Another successful program implemented during spring time was the WRITING WORKSHOPS. Thanks to the Toronto Writers Collective, the residents were able to practice and improve their writing skills. The program is looking to engage people in enhancing their health and well-being through practical and therapeutic support services and broader social change, and inspire them to live into their dreams and discoveries.

A new series of writing workshops will start during summer time on Mondays at FCJ Refugee Centre. Along with the writing program FCJ Refugee Centre is also planning to organise other workshops on other topics like sexual health and healthy relationships, oral/dental hygiene, poetry workshops, etc



FCJ Refugee Centre



ART BETWEEN US

We had an amazing evening of visual art, music and stories in celebration of Refugee Rights Month. Thank you to all our



supporters!! Andromeda Diaz, Carlos Delgado, John Gross, Mao Correa, Jack Martin, Nawaaz Makhani, Sandra Gonzales, Sandra Patricia Lobo, Youth in Motion, Helena Mariana Bolanos, Paula Pinheiro.

FCJ Youth Network was front and centre in hosting an incredible night of Art and Cultural Sharing at our inaugural “Art Between Us” event. One of our core



TORONTO NEWCOMER DAY



FCJ Refugee Centre joined the 5th annual Toronto Newcomer Day 2019. Toronto Newcomer Day was a big celebration, as around 10,000 people attended the event throughout the day. It was a great opportunity to talk about the FCJ Refugee Centre programs and services we provide to precarious populations. According to the City of Toronto a total of 74 community agencies and 22 City Divisions shared information and resources at the

Information Fair.

Our Co-Director Loly Rico participated as one of the speakers at the event. She said that "This type of event is great because it gives the opportunity to all different organizations, newcomers as well refugees and people with precarious migration status to celebrate and feel proud to live in Toronto"



HOUSING REPORT

Thanks to the support of Maytree we launched our report on the experience of Refugee Claimants and other precarious migrants navigating the housing system.

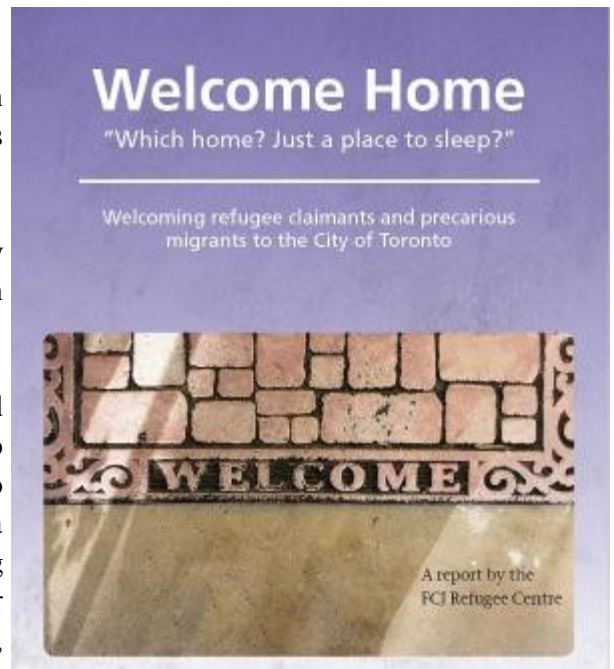
Displaced persons and precarious migrants are particularly vulnerable to a range of other human rights violations that can then impact their right to housing.

They are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, racism and xenophobia, which can further interfere with their ability to secure sustainable and adequate living conditions. People who have been forcibly displaced will often have suffered trauma during their journey, and will have lost familiar coping strategies and support mechanisms. Often unable in practice or because of their legal status to rent adequate accommodation, many are forced to live in overcrowded and insecure conditions.

These challenges are compounded by Toronto's ongoing housing crisis, which is a long-standing problem.

Many of our clients facing this situation came to FCJ Refugee Centre looking for support. This report shares our findings on the challenges that refugee claimants and precarious migrants face in finding a place to stay in the city, whether that is a temporary shelter or more permanent housing through the rental market. We are grateful to those who shared their stories with us. We wanted to bring attention to these issues as these vulnerabilities are not given the due attention they deserve, either in the media or in government policies.

We invite you to read the complete report on our website: <https://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/2019/06/welcome-home-which-home-just-a-place-to-sleep/> Following is a quote from the report:



Lack of information and fear of deportation

C. and her daughter ended up at the FCJ Refugee Centre very soon after they arrived in the country. They landed at Toronto's Pearson airport with a tourist visa on a short stay. Having spent all her savings to get here, C. had little more than \$30 on her. (Luckily she was not asked about this at immigration.) Nor did she have any contacts in the city... just an idea that hopefully arriving in Canada would provide an opportunity for a safer life.

After arriving at the airport in the nighttime, she and her daughter decided to wait till the morning, sitting on a bench till about 5 am. A man who was an immigrant himself eventually began speaking to them, as he was also a person of colour. He ended up helping them, taking them to someone who could assist. Soon afterwards they were referred to FCJ.

While C. intended to file a refugee claim, she did not opt to do so upon arrival at the airport, thinking that there was a possibility she could be refused and she and her daughter sent back on the next plane. She also knew she was very nervous and very conscious of saying "the wrong thing."



YOU ARE INVITED

JULY 13

From 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm

- **MUSIC**
- **DANCE**
- **FREE FOOD & DRINKS**
- **PERFORMANCES**
- **GAME FOR KIDS**
- **AND LOTS OF FUN**

STREET PARTY

**Let's celebrate the diversity of people residing in
Canada and the union of all communities in one
voice.**

**208 Oakwood Ave
Toronto ON**



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