

FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2025



The Reality of Migrants Under Threat of Deportation in Canada

FCJ Refugee Centre has seen a significant increase in the number of people coming to our doors seeking help with deportation orders. One of the hardest parts of our job is walking alongside clients who are in these removal processes. On average, we assist around 3–4 clients per month who have deportation dates. These removal orders often give people only one month or less to leave the country, which adds additional fear to an already incredibly stressful situation. In most cases, the only available option is to seek a temporary deferral of a removal order; however, we often see these deferrals refused. If refused, it is possible to seek a judicial review from the Federal Court and then bring a stay motion to try to stop the removal.



At our Centre, we help people apply for Legal Aid supports or refer them to private lawyers so clients can have legal representation to assist them with these applications. There are situations, however, where our clients are making over the Legal Aid financial income thresholds, but since these thresholds are so low (\$18,795/year for a family size of 1), people often do not have the resources to pay for private lawyers. We are fortunate that our in-house lawyer has assisted many clients facing deportations who fall within this gap of services.

It is incredibly concerning that many clients are given such limited amounts of time to pursue the legal avenues that are supposedly accessible to them.

Frontline Workers Seeing the Impact: Procedural Fairness Issues - Although we try our best to refer people to lawyers quickly in order to submit these applications as soon as possible, our team members are seeing several examples of clients receiving refusals on their deferral applications just days before their removal date. This can result in the person not having an opportunity to pursue further legal solutions and have their arguments considered by a decision-maker. Moreover, for those who are in need of Legal Aid supports, it takes additional time to process their eligibility, which can cause further barriers for people who immediately need to submit a judicial review. On top of this, not all lawyers will accept Legal Aid for these kinds of time-sensitive matters. It is incredibly concerning that many clients are given such limited amounts of time to pursue the legal avenues that are supposedly accessible to them.



More Deportations – Lower Targets – Fewer Opportunities for Regularization – The federal government seems determined to continue to increase the number of deportations. In 2023–24, CBSA spent \$65.8 million on deportations – a significant increase from the previous year’s budget of \$56 million. Recently, the government allocated \$1.3 billion to “enhance border security.” Meanwhile, there are fewer options and less spots available to pursue regularization in Canada, leaving even more people vulnerable to removal processes. For example, the federal government’s immigration levels plan – 2024 to 2027 – for the “Humanitarian & Compassionate and Other” category (this includes the H&C, Permit Holder Class, and other public policies) shows massive drops in targets:

YEAR	TARGET
2024	13,750
2025	10,000
2026	6,900
2027	4,300

Furthermore, promised pathways for regularization have still not materialized. For example, the government has offered Out-of-Status and unauthorized home care workers an opportunity to apply under the Home Care Worker pilots. This turned out to be a token demonstration of support, with only 150 spots reserved for those without status.

Looking Forward - The increase in the number of deportations, combined with reduced opportunities for regularization, has resulted in a concerning trajectory for Canadian immigration. Our clients are forced into uncertain and vulnerable situations while threats of deportation dominate their lives. We see that the impact of this increased CBSA funding, tight deadlines, and the lack of accessible legal support disproportionately affects a vulnerable population (women and children) who do not pose any sort of security threat to Canada. The increase in deportations of vulnerable migrants and families is extremely troubling. In these tough situations, we remember that we are doing our best to assist clients as much as we can. We will continue to advocate for Status for All until it becomes a reality—so that our clients can remain in Canada peacefully without these threats of deportation.

Toronto Newcomer Day 2025

On May 28 we joined Toronto Newcomer Day at Nathan Phillips Square, welcoming and celebrating newcomers. This annual event provides a great way to set up in the city, while enjoying festivities that showcase Toronto’s diversity.



Art for Everyone, Status for All: 3rd Annual Art Show & Benefit

We are proud to celebrate the powerful success of our third annual Art for Everyone, Status for All fundraiser! This two-day event brought together a dynamic and diverse group of over 20 artists-many of whom were refugees or socially engaged artists who generously donated their work to support the cause of status for all. The opening night coincided with Refugee Rights Day and marked the 40th anniversary of the Singh Decision, a landmark ruling that affirmed the right of refugee claimants to fundamental justice in Canada.

This was more than an art show-it was a moment of reflection and resistance. Together, we honoured how far we've come in advancing refugee rights, acknowledged the systemic injustices that persist, and recommitted ourselves to the fight for full and permanent immigration status for all.

We would like to extend our special thanks to the City of Toronto and Councillor Alejandra Bravo for joining us and officially proclaiming Refugee Rights Day and month, helping to reaffirm the importance of protecting the rights and dignity of all residents. The art, conversations, and sense of community at the event reminded us of the power of creativity in building movements and the importance of standing in solidarity. It was a time to look back, reimagine what's possible, and recharge to keep pushing forward-together.



FCJ Refugee Centre Board of Directors' President, Honoured for Access to Justice Leadership

We are honoured to share that FCJ Refugee Centre Board of Directors' President, Sharry Aiken, is the 2025 recipient of the Law Society of Ontario's (LSO) J. Shirley Denison Award, bestowed annually in recognition of significant contributions to access to justice and/or poverty issues.

"For more than 30 years, Aiken has been a steadfast advocate for human rights and access to justice for the most marginalized members of society — in her scholarship, the classroom, the courtroom, and the public square," said a statement from Queen's University, where Aiken is a professor.

"Aiken has made exceptional contributions to advancing social justice, human rights, and access to justice for individuals and communities across Canada throughout her career," the University added.



Reflecting on this recognition of her work, and quoted by Queen's University, Aiken stated: "This award is not 'my' award. It is rather a testament to all the incredible people, campaigns, and organizations I've had the great privilege of working with and supporting over the course of my career." She also said that she views the award as a testament to her late mother, "who was a fierce and courageous advocate herself and the best possible role model."

Leading Change, Implementing Solutions, Sharing Knowledge

The Refugee and Im/Migrant Youth Conference, titled *Leading Change, Implementing Solutions, Sharing Knowledge*, was a great opportunity to connect and work toward creating a better system for the youth we serve. The Conference, held in Toronto on February 21, brought together organizations and youth to showcase projects focused on supporting refugee and migrant youth and minors.





Understanding Exploitation on a Spectrum: Victims and Survivors of Crime Week 2025 at FCJ Refugee Centre

As part of the Victims and Survivors of Crime Week, the FCJ Refugee Centre hosted a powerful full-day event titled *Pieces of the Puzzle: Understanding Exploitation on a Spectrum*. This event brought together community members, advocates, and survivors to reflect on the often-unseen forms of exploitation that fall outside narrow legal definitions of human trafficking.

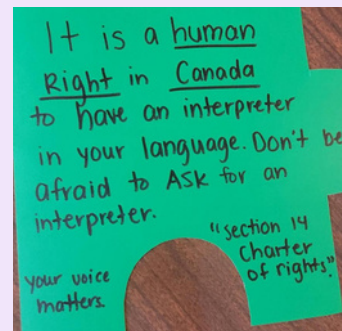
The day opened with a migrant worker exercise, where participants engaged in an interactive simulation that explored the systemic vulnerabilities of temporary foreign workers in Canada. The activity illuminated how power imbalances, closed work permits, language barriers, and precarious immigration status can create conditions for abuse and exploitation, often without triggering legal protections.

One of the most impactful moments of the day came during the panel discussion, where three courageous individuals shared their lived experiences: One panellist shared his journey as a temporary foreign worker who arrived in Canada with a closed work permit. Despite experiencing severe abuse and threats, he was not immediately recognized as a victim. With FCJ's support, he was able to apply for an Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers (OWPVW), which gave him the freedom to leave his abusive employer and begin rebuilding his life.

Another panellist, a survivor of human trafficking, shared how he was deceived into coming to Canada under false promises. He was subjected to labour exploitation, abuse, and forced to live in deplorable conditions. He received support from law enforcement, victim services, and FCJs to maintain legal status throughout a multi-year police investigation. Five years later, he is applying for permanent residence under the Permit Holder Class, supported by FCJ and grounded in hope for a safer future.



The third panelist, Leny, representing the MIGRANTE organization, brought insight into the challenges faced by many survivors, who did not meet the definition of a "human trafficking victim" and faced barriers in accessing justice, obtaining status and receiving services. Leny emphasized the importance of trauma-informed, survivor-led approaches in advocacy and support services as well as the importance of holding governments accountable, from sending and receiving countries, to protect victims and prevent exploitation.



The day concluded with a collaborative art activity titled *Pieces of the Puzzle*. Attendees were given cardboard puzzle pieces and invited to write reflections, supportive messages, or creative expressions using colours and drawings. These pieces formed a collective display of solidarity and shared vision. Each puzzle piece represented a unique perspective, symbolizing the importance of community, connection, and collective action in addressing exploitation.

Pieces of the Puzzle was not only a space for education, but also for healing, advocacy, and empowerment. It reminded us that the spectrum of exploitation is broad, and that all survivors, regardless of how their experience is categorized, deserve recognition, protection, and a path to justice.

This event was funded by the Government of Canada (Department of Justice Canada), and held in partnership with the Mary Ward Centre and the Collaborative Network to End Exploitation.

International Women's Day

As every year, FCJ Refugee Centre participated in the International Women's Day March, this time with the theme *For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment*. We reaffirmed our commitment to working collaboratively toward building a better world for all women—one grounded in equality and inclusive opportunity. At the Centre, we organised a special activity with the staff (photo below) to commemorate the date.



Skilled Student Interns Strengthen Our Core Programs

We are grateful that our supporters are very highly skilled students with the capacity to help in many areas and core programs, such as the Immigration & Refugee Protection area, Settlement support, Education, Research, work permits, Humanitarian and Compassionate applications, etc. We have capacity to receive an average of 10 placement students who donate their time providing support through our core programs.

 **Thank You, FCJ Refugee Centre**
A Place of Growth, Support, and Inspiration 

Create a Welcoming Environment for Everyone

 **A True Learning Space**
At FCJ, I didn't just gain professional experience—I gained perspective. I learned how to walk alongside migrants and refugee youth with empathy, understanding, and commitment. Every task, from assisting with school enrollments to community outreach, helped me grow.




 **Supportive Team, Empowering Mission**
The staff at FCJ embody the spirit of advocacy and care. Their tireless efforts to empower marginalized communities have inspired me deeply. I witnessed the real meaning of compassion in action—a value I will carry with me into my future career as a Social Service Worker.

"I came to learn, but I left inspired. A heartfelt thank you from a grateful student."

Victoria Sobande
2025 Humber College SSW

 **Welcoming & Inclusive**
From day one, FCJ Refugee Centre made me feel seen, supported, and included. Their warm environment helped me transition smoothly into my placement and feel confident in the work I was doing.

 **Gratitude & Growth**
Thank you, FCJ Refugee Centre, for:
Welcoming me with open arms 🤗
Encouraging me to think critically and compassionately 🧡❤️
Showing me the strength of community and resilience ⭐



Epistle of a Refugee



Where Fear Comes to Rest

By Jorge Eurico*

There are cities that welcome. And within those cities, there are places that embrace. The FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto is one of those rare spaces where, for a moment, fear comes to rest. There, people arrive with eyes marked by the journey — not just across oceans or borders, but through pain.

They fled war, hunger, the silence of authorities, and nights with no tomorrow. They arrive with a backpack on their shoulders and a question in their chest: what now? FCJ doesn't offer ready-made answers. It gives something more valuable: it listens. It listens to the woman who lost her children during the crossing. The young man who traveled hidden in trucks across countries.

The man who no longer knows if he still has a country. In a world where migration has become a sin, this center whispers the opposite: You have the right to exist. Amid documents, consultations, psychological support, and legal guidance, there's an invisible thread that holds it all together: respect for human dignity.

It's there that chaos starts to make sense. That hearts find solid ground. That the foreigner begins to feel human again. Because at the FCJ Refugee Centre, more than assistance is offered — they offer hope. And hope is the first roof a refugee needs.

* TNG Community Services Placement Student at FCJ Refugee Centre



Food Security Program

The Food Security Program at FCJ Refugee Centre supports around one hundred people per week through the distribution of food supplies. This support is made possible through collaboration with several community partners, most notably Second Harvest, our main food provider, and What A Bagel, which generously donates a variety of breads twice a week, ensuring we can offer fresh and nutritious food to those we support. FCJ Refugee Centre also extends its gratitude to Loblaws St. Clair and Luciano's No Frills for kindly providing space for our donation boxes. Your contribution helps us make a difference every day. Together, we are building a stronger and more compassionate community.

Hispanic Non-Profit Fair

On May 3, we participated in the second edition of the Hispanic Non-Profit Fair, organized by La Red de Hispanos in collaboration with ACCES Employment. The event aimed to showcase non-profit organizations that offer services in Spanish in Toronto and promote their programs, services and events to the Spanish-speaking community, thus facilitating the adaptation of immigrants in Canada.



Pages of Hope



In *Pages of Hope: A Mixed-Media Artist Book*, a workshop organized by the Migrant Women's Counter Human Trafficking Alliance, and facilitated by Carolina Gajardo, we explored the transformative power of positive words and vibrant colors through the creation of handmade artist books.

Diverse Residents, One Community: Street Party 2025

Let's get together and build community!

The FCJ Refugee Centre's annual Diverse Residents, One Community Street Party is coming up!

Join us for this family event, where you'll find activities for children, games, food, music, live performances, piñatas, and much more.

- **When:** June 21, 2025, from 12pm to 6pm
- **Where:** Right outside of our office location
- **Address:** Outside our office location: 208 Oakwood Ave., Toronto



Garage Sale to Support Newcomer Youth

You're invited to the FCJ Youth Network annual fundraising garage sale! Find something special to purchase and support newcomer youth. You will find a great assortment of donated items, including kitchenware, vintage clothing, toys, books, electronics, rugs, art and much more.

- **When:** May 31, 2025, 10 AM to 2 PM
- **Where:** FCJ Refugee Centre (208 Oakwood Ave, Toronto)

We accept donations from Tuesday to Thursday, 10 AM to 5 PM, at the FCJ Refugee Centre location. Please make sure your donation is in good condition.

Thank you for your generosity!

Annual General Meeting

FCJ Refugee Centre invites you to our Annual General Meeting, which this year will include a presentation by Joshua Eisen, FCJ Refugee Centre's In-House Lawyer: *The Kanyinda Case & Equal access to childcare for migrant families: an overview of FCJ Refugee Centre's joint intervention in the Supreme Court of Canada*. This is an important case because it directly addresses systemic barriers that refugee claimants and other precarious migrants are facing.

- **Date:** Tuesday, June 17, 2025
- **Time:** 6:00 pm
- **Place:** Friends House (60 Lowther Ave., Toronto)

This meeting is open to the public, but only members can vote. To become a member please register and pay the membership fee (\$10.00). For more details and registration, go to: fcjrefugeecentre.org/events/annual-general-meeting-2025



Free Music Classes for Kids

Come build musical foundations through fun, educational and engaging activities!

As a part of our Uprooted Junior Program, FCJ Refugee Centre and Musicbox Children's Charity are offering a new season of free music classes (private lessons), open to kids 6-12, and hosted by skilled volunteers that speak several languages.

- **Where:** In-person at the FCJ Refugee Centre (208 Oakwood Ave., Toronto)
- **When:** Tuesdays 5:00-6:00 pm, from July 8 to August 12, 2025

This year we had our very first MusicBox showcase at the end of the Winter 2025 cohort. We had 7 kids who played the keyboard and guitar with an audience of their families and volunteer instructors.

It was an enriching experience that allowed parents to see the outcome of the program first hand and gave everyone involved a sense of accomplishment and encouragement to stay engaged with the creative arts.

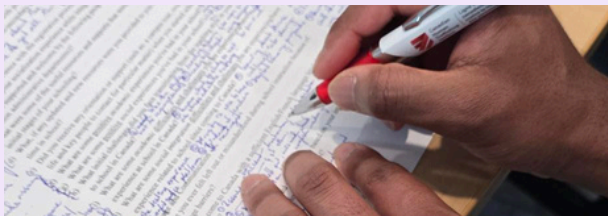



Youth and Access to Education: Focus Groups and Workshops



We are looking for people currently enrolled in or facing challenges in accessing secondary or post-secondary education. The scope of these focus group discussions are to gather experiences of folks with precarious immigration status at the intersection of education at the following levels: Secondary 18+ and/or Post-Secondary.

These levels include programs such as EdVance (ages 18-21), Adult School (21+), Sanctuary Scholars Programs, and Colleges/Universities all within the province of Ontario. These inputs will be brought to a round table discussion with various stakeholders and decision makers in September 2025 and further reflected in a reference toolkit.





Call for Focus Group Participants

Are you 18+ years old? This is a good opportunity to share your experience in accessing to education in Ontario

The FCJ Refugee Centre is conducting a series of focus groups under the Access To Education program, to collect community feedback on 18+ Secondary and Post-Secondary education in Ontario.

We are looking for people currently enrolled in or facing challenges in accessing secondary or post-secondary education; precarious or non-status individuals.

208 Oakwood Avenue,
Toronto, ON M6E 2V4

2PM - 4PM

Eligibility: age 18+

Thursday, May 15, 2025


Thursday, June 12, 2025

Thursday, June 26, 2025

Thursday, July 10, 2025



Thursday, July 24, 2025

Deadline to express interest: Friday before the date of the focus group.



Scan the code to access the focus group discussion form

Honorarium and TTC tokens will be provided



Youth Network Workshops

We have had a very active year of workshops this year within the FCJ Youth Network. Some of the key topics discussed were Sexual Health with AIDS Committee of Toronto, Healthcare Professional Pathways with Black Medical Students Association of UoFT, and Consent and Healthy Boundaries with Women's Support Network to name a few.

Virtual Ready Tour: Everything You Need to Know About Your Refugee Hearing

If you are a refugee claimant, you are invited to participate in the IRB-RPD Virtual Ready Tours. This is a great opportunity to meet RPD (Refugee Protection Division) officers, who will explain what is going to happen during your refugee hearing and how to be ready.

The Ready Tour is divided into two sessions. In the first one, staff from the FCJ Refugee Centre explain about refugee rights, key steps in the refugee process, and resources available for refugee claimants. We review free services for refugees, as employment preparation, language assessment, mock refugee hearings, etc. We also highlight the importance for asylum claimants to understand commonly used terms and acronyms, as well as the roles of the various Canadian government agencies involved in the refugee process.

In the second session, Immigration officials explain what to expect on the day of the hearing, how the process works, and the rights and responsibilities of the applicant. They share useful links and resources, talk in detail about documents and deadlines, guide the attendees through the steps involved in completing the Basis of Claim (BOC) form, and show how to navigate the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) website.

Ready Tours take place twice a month. How to register:

- Please check the calendar to see the next Virtual Ready Tour available and fill in and send us the register form.
- You will receive a confirmation email with the date and the time of the Ready Tour you are registered for.
- The Virtual Ready Tour is facilitated in English. If you need an interpreter, please let us know in the register form the language you need support with.

Virtual Ready Tour

REFUGEE HEARING ORIENTATIONS

Every other Thursday, 1:00 PM to 3:30 PM

A free program for refugee claimants

JUN 5 JUN 19

JUL 3 JUL 17

AUG 7 AUG 21

SEP 4 SEP 18

What is going to happen during my refugee hearing?

A great opportunity to meet the RPD officers who will explain what is going to happen during your refugee hearing and how to be ready.


FCJ Refugee Centre




 **CONTACT US**

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