



FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE
WALKING WITH UPROOTED PEOPLE

*Integrated Model
of
Refugee Protection
and Integration*

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FCJ Refugee Centre Integrated Model

FCJ Refugee Centre helps uprooted people overcome the challenges of rebuilding their lives in Canadian society. With an open door approach, the Centre offers an integrated model of refugee protection, settlement services and education, including shelter for women and their children.

The FCJ Refugee Centre has a mandate to assist refugees and other uprooted people in re-establishing their lives and integrating into Canadian society. We do this by:

- ▶ *Offering inclusive counseling and support, including interpretation, referrals to legal assistance, employment training, programs on Canadian culture and life, and other educational workshops.*
- ▶ *Providing temporary shelter for women and children.*
- ▶ *Collaborating with relevant organizations to deliver popular education about the protection of human rights and dignity of uprooted people.*

The FCJ Refugee Centre Integrated Model provides supportive services to ensure that refugee claimants, particularly uprooted women and women victims of violence, receive the appropriate information and support to navigate the complex Canadian refugee system. The centre offers an integrated model of refugee protection, settlement services and education, including shelter and transitional housing for refugee women and their children.

Our integrated model follows a refugee's journey from the time they make a claim (and sometimes before), until they become permanent residents of Canada. This model has two core components: **Refugee Protection and Integration Process** (focus on uprooted women) and **Popular Education and Networking**.

The refugee protection and integration process component links information with support. We believe that in order to make appropriate decisions we need to have the appropriate information. Our Centre provides information about the refugee process and supports claimants through the process. We help people complete forms and advocate on their behalf to access services. We provide information sessions to help people navigate the Canadian system and facilitate their integration process to the larger society.

The popular education and networking component facilitates the dissemination of information to address systemic issues and the protection of the human rights and dignity of up-rooted people. We work in collaboration with other organizations and deliver popular education to bring awareness of the structural barriers refugees face. Through networking and popular education we strive to address systemic issues and improve the living conditions of refugees and up-rooted people.

FCJ Refugee Centre's Services Walking with uprooted people

This guide provides information about the Refugee Protection Process in Canada and list some of the services FCJ Refugee Centre provides. All our services are free of charge and everyone is welcome.

A) LEGAL REFUGEE PROTECTION and INTEGRATION PROCESS

Upon arrival at any port of entry in Canada, a refugee claimant faces the possibility of being detained for the following reasons:

- To complete an examination;
- Suspicion that the person is either inadmissible to Canada or is a danger to the public;
- If the immigration officer believes that the refugee claimant is unlikely to appear for another examination or appointment;
- If the refugee claimant does not present proper identification or has false identification papers

FCJ Refugee Centre staff goes weekly to visit the detainees held at the Immigration Detention Centre in Toronto (Rexdale). We assist and support them by providing information or filling out forms such as BOCs and PRRAs. We are part of the Toronto Refugee Affairs Council (TRAC) that regularly visits people in Immigration detention Centre.

After a refugee claimant leaves Immigration Canada (at the border or at the International Airport) they will have to find a place to stay or emergency shelter. In Toronto, the Canadian Red Cross First Contact provides 24 hour/7 days a week emergency telephone service for new arrivals to the city who need **immediate shelter assistance (416) 771- 9540 or toll free 1-866-902-4996**.

FCJ Refugee Centre specializes in gender related cases, particularly women victims of violence. If the refugee claimant is a woman, with or without children, and we have vacancy in our shelter, we will accept her/them. We have the capacity to house 25 women with their children. If we do not have space, we will refer them to other shelters. FCJ Refugee Centre is a gender sensitive environment and has more than 15 years working with uprooted women. As part of our services we explain to women their rights, options, realities and services available to them here in Canada. We connect them to social services in order to obtain financial support, legal aid, legal advice, language interpretation, English as Second Language classes. We act as companions and sometimes this may include accompanying them to appointments, procedures, etc, if necessary.

We provide information about all immigration and refugee procedures to any person (including non-status people) during our intake day. In addition, we also provide information over the phone either directly to the person in need or to the front line worker assisting them. Our services include:

- Support to complete the Basis of Claim Form (BOC)

- Assist people in completing all types of Immigration, Citizenship and Refugee forms
- Help people apply to Legal Aid, and if necessary appeal a L.A. decision.
- Provide appropriate lawyer referral, according to the basis of claim
- Support clients through all the steps of the refugee process.
- Help claimants that have been denied legal aid in finding a pro-bono lawyer or negotiate low/affordable legal fees.
- Support claimants through all the steps of the refugee process, i.e. appointments, hearings, etc.
- Provide support groups to women living in the transitional housing program.
- Facilitate information sessions that provide orientation to Canadian culture and discuss various issues related to participant's settlement process.
- Provide counselling – emotional support and referrals.
- Provide employment counselling/referral. Connecting women with employment trainings as well as guiding them through the process of validating foreign credentials.
- Provide interpretation and translation services.
- Follow-up.

At FCJ Refugee Centre no one is turned away. Our mandate is simply to serve people's needs regardless of their Legal Aid status, or geographical catchment area (in fact, we assist with cases remotely- helping with various matters by phone or online and hosting people who need to stay with us when they finally come to Toronto for their hearing). We have no limit or maximum number of cases we can take. We require no proof of financial status, and often serve a profoundly marginalized demographic: poor working people who receive no social assistance, and others who do not fit well into mandates defined by agencies and the government.

Legal Support

Due to the fact that the Basis of Claim Form (BOC) must be completed within 15 days – a very short time frame for a person under pressing circumstances – our legal case worker, directly or through a volunteer, will help the refugee claimant prepare his/her BOC free of charge. This is to ensure that the claimant's case is moving into the refugee determination system without having to wait for a final decision from Legal Aid in order to act.

As soon as a Legal Aid decision has been reached and if a certificate is received, we ensure that the refugee claimant gets an appropriate lawyer. On the other hand, if Legal Aid is denied, we continue working on the case, and after the claimant has submitted the BOC to the IRB, depending on the case, we may send the claimant back to Legal Aid to apply again, presenting the narrative as new information. Sometimes Legal Aid is then given for counsel at the refugee hearing. If Legal Aid is still denied, we continue the search for either a private lawyer or a legal clinic. If we do not find anyone else to represent the refugee claimant, and/or if they do not have legal aid, we will do the following:

- Help them by facilitating the acquisition of relevant documents.
- Refer them to appropriate NGOs/professionals for help and support (e.g. to the Canadian Centre for the Victims of Torture (CCVT) and to different doctors for physical and psychological evaluations).

- Assist by preparing them as to what to expect at the refugee hearing and provide them with the necessary translation of documents.
- Our legal caseworker may go with them as a companion to the IRB if they do not have any legal counsel.
- Sometimes there is follow-up to the refugee hearing if the claimant is asked to provide more documentation.
- Support is also provided during the wait for the decision.

While working on Legal Aid and filling out the BOC, we also do the following:

- Make appointments for medicals, which are only done by CIC designated doctors in the city.
- If the refugee claimant does not speak English, we will find a school with ESL classes (one with a day care if there are young children in the family). If there are school-age children, we will help enrol them in a school.
- Find a family doctor. In case of the women living in our houses we refer them to a psychologist and to a Community Health Centre to help them to cope with the stress and trauma to give their history
- Apply for a work permit and Social Insurance Number
- Some Refugee Claimants who are expecting a child may need special attention. We help them find a family doctor and after the child is born we guide them to get the birth certificate and other documents for their Canadian child

Women living in FCJ Refugee Centre Transitional Housing

Women living in transitional housing have access to all the services provided by FCJ Refugee Centre. In addition, they have their own monthly support groups and weekly house meeting. They are encouraged to participate in programs such as community kitchen and workshops in order to support community building within the houses.

The length of stay varies depending on individual circumstances. Women that have had a positive decision from the Immigration and Refugee Board are encouraged to look for housing and move out within two months. Those that have had a negative decision are encouraged to stay in Transitional Housing in order for FCJ Refugee Centre to continue working with them.

If a refugee claimant finally faces removal from Canada, we try to see that it happens with dignity. We contact CIC removal, to let them know that we are still supporting that particular rejected refugee claimant.

From our website:

Non-status people – marginalized and vulnerable – absolutely require places to go with their legal and social dilemmas where they feel safe and can trust those they encounter. Trust is the fruit of working truthfully. We are committed to providing services free of charge, and speaking to people directly, in a way that honors their adulthood and autonomy. Whether it is a volunteer or a staff person sharing the information, the emphasis is placed on truth, whatever difficult consequences it may have. Most importantly, personal responsibility for the case is put squarely in the hands of each individual; though they are supported in every way possible, there is never any confusion as to who is in charge of the case.

B) POPULAR EDUCATION AND NETWORKING

The individual cases within our model are not dealt with in isolation. Our concept is that the only way to really treat refugee cases fairly is to improve both the conditions and the system for refugee claimants in this country. By 'improve the conditions', we mean specifically improving both the skills of the refugee workers/advocates and the communication/networking among them. When we refer to 'improving the system', we mean to offer a critical analysis of the immigration and refugee situation in Canada. We encourage people to advocate with and for refugees, both aiding individual refugees and petitioning for systemic reform. Such public education provides the necessary basis for the effort to make the Canadian refugee process more just and more humane. The following steps arise from those previously mentioned, and are implemented concurrently.

Popular Education Program.

This step is implemented in parallel to all the steps of the integrated model. This program is directed toward community workers and volunteers who work with refugee claimants, as well as to refugee claimants themselves anywhere in Canada. Educating community workers provides them with an important network of support. Educating refugee claimants themselves about the immigration process enables them to interact more effectively with the Immigration and Refugee Board, a complex and forbidding process. Thus, the program allows people to exercise their right to a sense of empowerment, rather than feel completely vulnerable throughout the refugee determination process. The program also provides practical help in advice, referrals, etc.

It is worth mentioning here that the Centre has become an educational institution in its own right. Not only do we train placement students from law schools, but we offer hands-on experience and internships to students from various community worker and social work programs, schools of journalism, as well as mentoring opportunities for International lawyers interested in IRPA.

Other components of the educational concept:

- Workshops:* We do more than 100 workshops per year. These seminars and workshops outline the refugee determination process and latest changes. Participants analyse critical issues of the refugee situation and receive a detailed examination of the inland refugee determination process.
- Orientation sessions:* every week, in a question and answer format, we outline the particular immigration or refugee procedure that the attendees, mostly refugee claimants or non-status people, are interested in hearing about. We inform approximately 3 to 5 people every week.
- Our Website:* Our website is designed to be a resource for both frontline refugee workers and refugees themselves. It contains a comprehensive explanation of the refugee determination process as well as all our publications. Please visit www.fcjrefugeecentre.org.
- Refugee Update Newsletter:* This quarterly newsletter analyses the current refugee situation in Canada, monitors government policy, and provides a forum for informed debate. It is produced in collaboration with the Canadian Council for Refugees.
- FCJ Refugee Centre Newsletter:* It is a seasonal publication with all the newest information about activities, events, new programs and services at FCJ refugee Centre. We produce a newsletter on



summer, fall, winter and spring.

- “Refugee Help in Refugee Hands” Manual:* The manual is a practical reference that thoroughly explains all of the processes involved in the Refugee Determination Process. We try to update the manual every year.
- Country-specific research:* Staff travels to countries to research and interview key persons about the lack of protection in the country. To date we have reports on Costa Rica, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, etc. The reports are available on our website.

Networking.

As the previous step, this step is also implemented in parallel to all the steps of the integrated model. The goal is to work with the already existing bodies within the field of refugee policy and service, such as the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), the Coalition of Service Providers for Refugee Claimants, Sanctuary Coalition, The Toronto Refugee Affairs Council (TRAC), Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), and to build and strengthen our alliances.

The main components of this concept are:

- Practical networking: We provide on-going legal support for refugee front line workers. Our staff is available for any in-person or telephone inquiry about any step of the procedure of the Refugee Determination Process.
- We attend and host meetings and conferences.
- We offer both a grassroots analysis of the immigration and refugee situation in Canada and support to initiatives aimed at the improvement of the conditions of uprooted people.