

Pandemic Response



Thank you for your support throughout the COVID-19!



Spring
Newsletter 2020



@fcjrefugeecentre



FCJ Refugee Centre



Boarderless Voices



FCJ Refugee Centre



FCJ Refugee Centre

Walking with uprooted people

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Statement of Solidarity with BIPOC from FCJ Refugee Centre

Racism, and in particular anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism which has been promoted by white supremacy and colonialism is the very foundation upon which both Canada and the United States have been built. The incidents we have seen in recent weeks, incidents repeated so many times over the course of weeks, months, and years, have been a scary reminder of the realities faced by Black and Indigenous people. It is a reminder that the barbaric colonial displacement and genocide executed against North America's First Nations, and the enslavement of African peoples continues to directly affect every person, particularly racialized communities, all across North America.

We stand in solidarity with, and alongside all people across this land, in demanding justice, accountability, and equity. We are calling for a fair, unbiased justice system which includes reparations from any government and authority involved in violence against racialized communities, particularly Black and Indigenous communities. We recognize the additional vulnerabilities experienced by racialized women and youth, and the tremendous systemic barriers faced by these populations.

The priority for the government must be funding humanity and not furthering oppression.

We recognize and support the resilience, the actions, the will, and the power of all oppressed people to fight for their freedom. But we recognize this self-determination with conscious awareness of our own privileges, and welcome the responsibility of joining in the resistance; refusing to stand silently by while violent barbaric acts of systemic oppression continue. We commit to actively and deliberately breaking the silence that protects and promotes structural and systemic racism wherever it exists across Turtle Island, our shared home.

Black Lives Matter Here. Indigenous Lives Matter Here. These lives are valid, are worthy, and are loved here. This is our shared home. And we will not stay silent.



BORDERLESS HUMANITY: THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

FROM OUR KITCHEN TABLE

TAKE FROM US WHAT YOU NEED, AND GIVE TO EACH OTHER WHAT YOU CAN

This is the guiding philosophy of not only the FCJ Refugee Centre, but is at the very core of our common humanity. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen an enormous shift in the ways in which we interact, live our daily lives, and see the world around us. We have seen the turmoil that can be brought out in people when they are forced into situations of fear and vulnerability – circumstances so many of us who grew up in Canada with so many privileges have never had to face. But we've also seen the generosity of the spirit of our community.

Friends, partners, and neighbours coming together to donate food, arts & crafts supplies, toiletries. People coming together to volunteer their time and efforts to ensuring that their neighbours, and their neighbour's neighbours have enough.

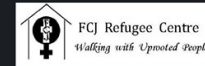
'From Our Kitchen Table to Yours' has been the manifestation of all of these efforts. An effort with results unprecedented in our Centre's almost 30 year history. We've seen our entire staff and volunteer network shift to fulfill our commitment to the community. We've established a tremendous food and housing security initiative, making hundreds of connections in weeks alone.

From our humble community pantry, and from our kitchens to yours, we stand with you in solidarity. Our door is open today as it will be tomorrow.

Count on us.

The FCJ Refugee Centre Community

Your donations are making a difference to a non-status migrant, family, child, youth, that was not left behind... it will make a difference for that borderless humanity that we are dreaming to build... Your donation is making an immeasurable difference in the lives of all non-status people enriching our community.



FROM OUR KITCHEN'S TABLE... TO YOURS



As part of our COVID-19 response we are looking for support for the women at our shelter, youth and other precarious migrants that do not have access to the emergency benefits and measures during the present health crisis.

<https://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/get-involved/donate/>



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Count on us...
WE ARE OPEN

Please contact us
416- 469 9754
or WhatsApp #
437-217 3786



Detailed Pandemic Response Report



Alexandra Garcia
Receptionist / Intake worker



At FCJ Refugee Centre we continue working in solidarity with precarious migrants. We understand that this is a difficult and uncertain time for many, and we're here to support and provide information to anyone who is in need.

The following information is a report of the services provided between Mid-March through end of May 2020.

INTAKE

During the period mentioned above we received a total of 1,738 calls resulting in:

- Close to 850 were remote appointments with our immigration and refugee services and settlement services.
- Over 500 support phone calls and emails.
- We've welcomed three members of the Youth Network to support Intake Reception efforts.
- 139 were calls to the primary clinic.
- 28 primary clinic appointments.



SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

Settlement and Housing has seen more than 230 interactions for settlement services including 27 Ontario Works Applications, ongoing support of the 27 women and children living in the three FCJ Houses, supported 4 situations of family violence, 10 housing intakes, and more for ongoing food security support. Second Harvest help us a lot in this area.





FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND RENT ASSISTANCE

We've supported 169 households with 220 grocery cards of \$100 each.

Over 500 food baskets and more than 500 interactions between Community Members, volunteers and staff. We finished the month of May with supporting more than 40 youth through our different programs supporting food security, housing security, and reduction of social isolation through our group meetings each week online.



**DISTRIBUTION
OF FOOD TEAM :
5 DIFFERENT ROUTES, 5 CARS, 6
VOLUNTEERS AND GROWING...**

PRICELESS!!



PRIMARY CARE CLINIC

Through our Primary Care clinic, we have been supporting people in various ways. One woman in particular has been dealing with challenges in her mental health, made worse by family separation, and the loneliness of the pandemic. Through our open door approach, we've been able to continue supporting her; with our food security initiative and continued appointments with Dr. Doan. These supports have been invaluable to supporting her health, and reducing social isolation. As always, our door remains open to all people, and we welcome people home as any family would do.





FCJ YOUTH NETWORK



We connect with youth across the GTA supporting more than 40 youth with groceries cards, rent assistance and/or food baskets and going up by the day. We continued to have our weekly meetings... We moved our youth meetings from our cherished great hall to the great hall via zoom! We love seeing the faces of our youth all across Toronto Virtual Movie nights every Thursday night! Follow us on Instagram

@ FCJyouthnetwork or email fcjyn@fcjrefugeecentre.org

Enrolled in OCASI Learn At Work Classes for personal and professional development, youth have been learning about the challenges newcomer youth and women face with situations of family violence.

Members of the community have partnered with Turtlehouse Ceramics for an art project to learn about different art methods, and reduce social isolation.

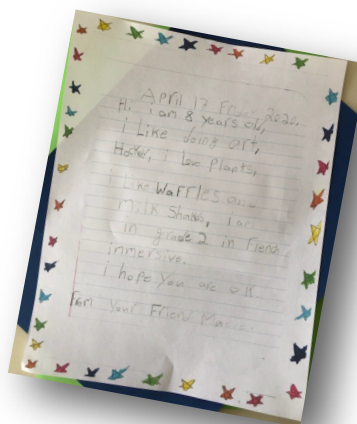
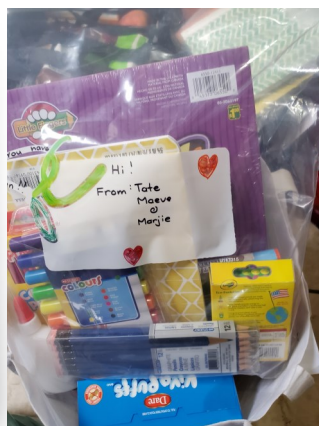
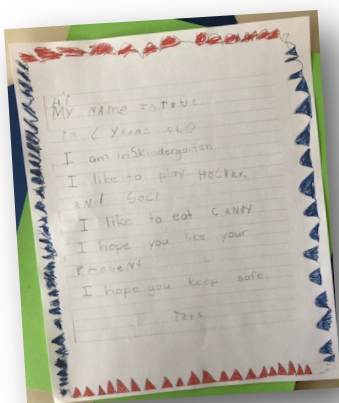
ACCESSTO EDUCATION

So far we've supported at-home-schooling for 5 families as well as accessing subsidies, technology and personalized support.

ART SUPPLIES FOR NON-STATUS CHILDREN THAT ARE STAYING AT HOME DURING THE HEALTH EMERGENCY SITUATION

We started collecting art supplies for non-status children and we were so happy to find these letters in each of the art bags. These letters defined our local neighbor... Canada. Keep doing what you are doing. Humanity need you. Keep safe, well and strong... we are together in this.

Special thanks to Maeve and Tate for your wonderful letters. They are 6 and 8 years old and send their beautiful words in solidarity with non-status children.



"..being stuck in the house is so depressing.."

MY EXPERIENCE AT THE YOUTH GROUP

"Since this time in the pandemic FCJ Refugee Centre has helped me a lot; with food, with a job, with comfort, a home, people I can count on for help or just someone to talk to for advice, someone to talk to because being stuck in the house is so depressing. Also the youth group has helped me so much too cause I am able to see my friends, see everyone at the youth group, in movies night; if it's not youth group, it's movie night, and it's just been so wonderful. We find ways we can connect so much, in different ways in the youth group that I love so much. And I love the people in there, they're people I look up to as brother and a sister. They're amazing people. This place is just amazing. I love FCJ, and without this youth group I wouldn't be where I am."



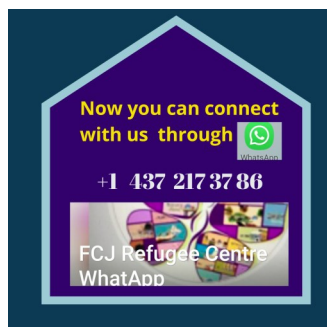
Pandemic Response Migration and Refugee Protection

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we have continued to offer our services, moving to remote service delivery. The Immigration Help and Refugee Protection program is still supporting precarious migrants virtually. The Immigration and refugee protection team has been working on inquiries regarding any issue or situation related to the immigration and refugee process.

Through remote work practices we've fielded a lot of online services that breakdown as follows:

- 97 Refugee Orientation & Support Calls
- 118 Immigration Orientation Calls
- 27 Humanitarian and Compassionate Application Calls
- 8 Sponsorship Calls
- 7 Appeal Process Orientations
- 5 Change of Address appointments
- 4 H&C Positive Answer
- 6 H&C Updates to Immigration
- 13 H &C Ready to be sent to immigration
- 1 Appeal to RAD
- 2 PRRA
- 56 Work Permit Application appointments
- 11 Sponsorship Application Appointments
- 13 Permanent Resident Application

*For those who do not
have access to a
local phone number
now you can
connect through
WHATSAPP*



SUCCESSFUL STORIES OF HUMANITARIAN AND COMPASSIONATE (H&C) APPLICATIONS

H&C Positive Decision - making impacts - 'Katrina' is a woman who came to Canada more than eight years ago, to work as a live-in-caregiver, first working with young children, and then giving her love and professional expertise to supporting an older couple in their home.

She did all this with a family of her own in her home country, but always working towards a better and brighter future. After years of applications being denied for medical grounds due to the medical condition of one of her children, she came to the FCJ Refugee Centre for support. Her story is one of inspiration because in spite of all the hardship, and personal tragedies, she has had to endure, she has not given up hope.

She came to Canada with the zeal to work hard and provide not only financial support to her three children in her home country, but also to make herself an independent woman.

Today she is thriving and continues to work to support herself, and in May 2020, after fighting for so many years, she has received a positive decision for her Humanitarian & Compassionate Application



ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MIGRANT WORKERS MOBILE PROGRAM

A CASE OF WORK EXPLOITATION

When our office first had the opportunity to connect with 'Martin' and his colleagues, it was immediately clear that they were working in exploitative work conditions, and were suffering human rights abuses.

Having come to Canada to work in the agriculture sector - a sector now during the time of pandemic being seen as essential, but is a sector given far too little recognition and respect – these gentlemen were being forced to work excruciatingly long days, given no breaks, forced into horrible living conditions, and had their communications restricted.

With the connection to the FCJ Refugee Centre, we were able to connect them with information on immigration and labour rights.

The community members organized a collective campaign and with their well-documented evidence of exploitation, 'Martin' and his colleagues were granted Temporary Resident Permits, with a clear pathway to Permanent Residence.

The most recent activity was a successful online forum: Celebrating Courage, Renewing Commitment, Anti-Human Trafficking online forum. The event was organized by the Toronto Counter Anti-Human Trafficking Network.



This program has been very active online. The WhatsApp phone number (647-9712153) has been an excellent option for migrant workers that do not have access to a Canadian phone number. We are providing to Migrant Workers remote services in the following languages: Spanish and Portuguese.

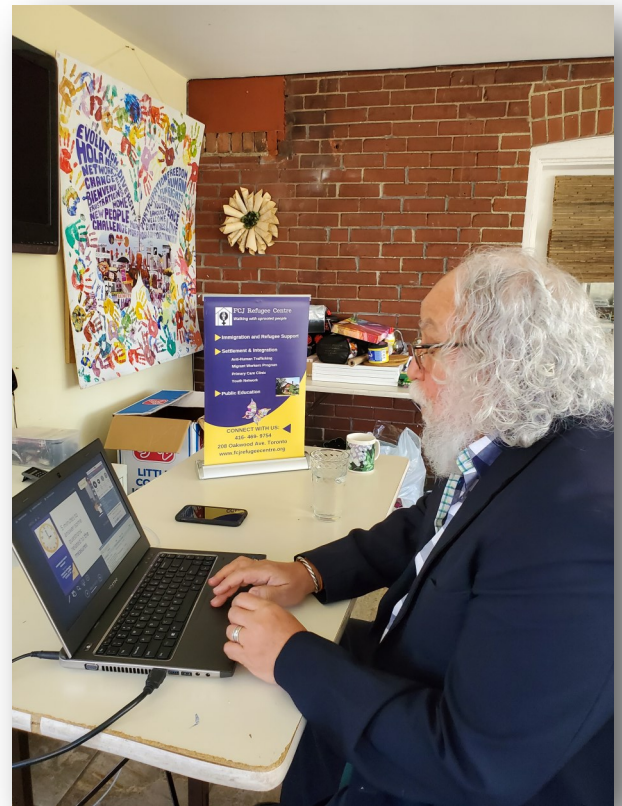
Also our virtual communications expanded to include our new section on podcast: BORDERLESS VOICES. During the last 12 weeks we produced 14 podcast episodes, on different topics and in different languages.





VIRTUAL INFO SESSIONS — WEBINARS AND PODCASTS

During this difficult time with Covid-19 looming over us, FCJ Refugee Centre is working hard to offer useful informative sessions every Thursday in English and Wednesdays in other languages. So far we have delivered 16 webinars to over 700 participants.



TOOLKITS

We produced 2 toolkits with key information on immigration issues and other one with information on how to find settlement support. Both are available at our website.



- Health Support
- Access to foodbanks
- Shelter in Toronto
- What to do in domestic violence situations
- Access to Ontario Works

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BORDERLESS VOICES PODCAST



COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Our website traffic demonstrates the unabated request for support. The amount of visitors is double in comparison to the beginning of the year.

Through the Facebook platform now reaching up to 20.7 k people, 1,873 followers on Twitter, and a burgeoning 400 followers on Instagram.

Thank you for connecting with us!!!



BORDERLESS HUMANITY VIDEO

We produced a video to say thank you for all your support. Due to the donations and help received we have been able to continue offering our services and supporting individuals and families who do not have access to emergency benefits.

Through our BORDERLESS HUMANITY VIDEO we want to thank you for your support through the COVID-19 pandemic. Check out our video at our YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EINKL0BCaCw&feature=youtu.be>

OPEN HOUSE

The video was broadcast during our first Virtual OPEN HOUSE. It was a great experience to meet with all our FCJ Refugee Centre community.



**WE MUST ACT, AND WE MUST ACT IMMEDIATELY. LIVES ARE AT RISK.
ONE LIFE LOST UNNECESSARILY IS ONE TOO MANY.**

Open Letter from Coalition of Service Providers

All of us are in emergency mode for the COVID -19 and are taking precautions in our shelters. However, for some of the TO shelters, it has been complicated to keep the suggested physical distancing and isolation. The result is the new cases we are seeing at the City Shelters. Taking into consideration the above information we endorsed the following open letter:

The Ontario Coalition of Service Providers for Refugee Claimants calls on the City of Toronto, municipalities across the Province and the Ontario Provincial Government, in partnership with the Federal Government of Canada, to immediately evacuate all individuals and families living in emergency shelters, refugee houses and other congregate settings into hotel rooms so that all homeless and precariously-housed residents are provided with the opportunity to effectively isolate and stay healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the Coalition calls on the City of Toronto and municipalities across the Province to provide immediate access, coordination and necessary rent support so that refugee claimants, precarious migrants and individuals living in emergency shelters can move into available vacant rental units in their communities.

The Ontario Coalition of Service Providers for Refugee Claimants writes this open letter in solidarity with refugees, migrant workers, non-status individuals, persons experiencing homelessness and all of the frontline workers who support these vulnerable groups. The agencies of the Coalition are themselves on the frontlines when it comes to responding to the needs of refugee claimants and precarious migrants in Ontario.

We, as service providers to refugees, support

thousands of individuals and families each year as they navigate complex Canadian immigration processes, access social services, and move forward with their settlement in Ontario.

Working collaboratively to support the wellbeing of refugee and migrant populations for over 20

years, we have seen the many ways in which the vulnerable people we serve have been disproportionately impacted, marginalized and left behind.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, these longstanding inequities have been magnified, and many refugees and migrants across the province now find themselves in circumstances where they are not being provided with the opportunity to follow public health orders and practice physical distancing. Moreover, many of the individuals and families

we serve must also contend with the fact that much of the emergency supports and economic relief being provided to others during this difficult time are not accessible due to various barriers, including immigration status, a lack of housing and economic instability.

It is clear that all individuals who are living in shelters or experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the conditions they are forced to live in. This includes the refugee claimants and precarious migrants we serve, who remain overrepresented among the province's homeless population, as was the case even before the COVID-19 pan-



**WE MUST ACT, AND WE MUST ACT IMMEDIATELY. LIVES ARE AT RISK.
ONE LIFE LOST UNNECESSARILY IS ONE TOO MANY.**
Open Letter from Coalition of Service Providers

demic took effect. Now, in context of COVID-19, the situation for the communities we serve has become increasingly dangerous and unbearable, and so we are raising our collective voice to demand that all levels of government do more to ensure that we provide protection and do not leave anyone behind.

We recognize that certain initiatives have been undertaken by the City of Toronto and other municipalities in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are grateful for the additional supports that have been extended. However, we must also recognize that shelters continue to be a high-risk environment for contracting COVID-19, and far too many individuals and families remain in these crowded, congregate settings. Again, it is simply an impossibility for individuals and families who are living in emergency shelters and refugee houses to follow public health directives and practice safe physical distancing. By failing to provide such an opportunity, individuals experiencing homeless-

ness—including many of the refugees and migrants we serve—are being put at an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. It is for this reason that we are calling on the City of Toronto, municipal governments across the Province and the Ontario Provincial Government to ensure immediate access to hotels and housing for everyone experiencing homelessness.

Within Canada, Ontario has always shown a willingness to welcome and settle refugees and migrants as they seek safety and build a new life for themselves and their families. As the city that welcomes the highest number of refugees and migrants, Toronto has long stood at the forefront in offering protection to those fleeing persecution and providing support to those living with precarious migration status. Now, in this unprecedented and ever-challenging time, we are asking Toronto and Ontario to live up to those reputations, to respond accordingly and to act with urgency. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind.

Walking together with uprooted people and in solidarity,

Adam House, Toronto
Angela Rose House, Windsor
Becoming Neighbours
Carty House, Ottawa
Casa El Norte, Fort Erie
Casa Maria Refugee Homes, Peterborough
Chez Marie, St Catharines
Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, Toronto
COSTI / Immigrant Services, Toronto
Diocese of London Refugee Ministries, Windsor
FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto
Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural

Matthew House, Ottawa
Matthew house, Toronto
Matthew House, Fort Erie
Matthew House, Windsor
Micah House, Hamilton
Peace Bridge Newcomers Centre, Fort Erie
Quaker Committee for Refugees, Toronto
Romero House, Toronto
Sojourn House, Toronto
The 519, Toronto
The Peoples' House, Toronto

IN SOLIDARITY: WE CANNOT LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND

We are sharing with you a joint Open Letter from more than 30 community organizations and groups in Ontario. We are asking that the governments of Canada and Ontario as well as the local municipal councils include all people with precarious immigration status in all emergency benefits and measures for housing, health services, education, employment and income support during the present health crisis

We write this Open Letter in Solidarity with Migrant Workers, Non-Status individuals and their families as community workers, organizers, volunteers, teachers, students and residents of Ontario, Canada.

We are writing to ask urgently that the governments of Canada and Ontario as well as the local municipal councils include all people with precarious immigration status in all emergency benefits and measures for housing, health services, education, employment and income support during the present health crisis.



For decades, temporary and migrant workers have supported our livelihoods in crucial ways, like caring for our loved ones or picking the fruits and vegetables that feed our communities. At any given time, those with precarious immigration status, international students and non-status individuals face multiple challenges in accessing income supports, and social and essential services such as:

- Housing or subsidized housing
- Education
- Employment and employment support
- Health support services

This leaves these groups (migrant workers, inter-

national students, non-status workers, refugee claimants and rejected refugee claimants), who are already working in minimum-wage positions in even more precarious situations.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they were often living in vulnerability – concerned about basic necessities like rent and food, while at the same time grappling with significant impacts on their health and wellbeing as they navigate an uncertain pathway to permanent residence.

Now, in light of COVID-19, the situation for these communities is increasingly unbearable.

WE CANNOT LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND

These specific communities should be acknowledged and included in current discussions and

solutions related to employment, financial and well-being/health support programs as we face this challenge across our country, our province and in our local municipalities.

THE CHALLENGE.

There has been significant response to support Canadians. The Canadian Government's Economic Response Plan was implemented to support workers and businesses facing unprecedented challenges – including those not eligible for the Employment Insurance (EI) program and those without paid sick leave.

While we applaud these supports, there are glaring

IN SOLIDARITY: WE CANNOT LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND

gaps. People who fall between the cracks are some of our most vulnerable community members.

Many marginalized and oppressed people who walk through the doors at Refugee and Migrant support centres across the province and the country, find themselves in need of support.

Most migrant workers, refugees (claimants and rejected claimants) and non-status individuals are ineligible to apply for current supports. They do not qualify for EI and Canadian Revenue Agency managed programs. Often, they are paid at minimum wage, some even below. International students are already restricted on the number of hours they can work per week, limiting their access to EI.

Thus these communities are already excluded. In light of current public health concerns, such exclusion runs deeper - and their needs are greater than ever.

- Imagine not having enough money to cover rent and put food on your family's table at the end of the month.
- Imagine having to rely on a shelter system that is already over capacity, where finding space is extremely difficult.
- Imagine not having enough money to cover prescriptions, even for prescriptions unrelated to COVID-19.
- Imagine that you suffer from existing health issues that now leave you with increased vulnerability.

These are some of the experiences of many of the individuals and families we support. For the most part, we are not seeing these concerns addressed by government responses to COVID-19.

Inaction by any level of government can compromise public health, not only for the aforementioned communities but for ALL of us. This is a HEALTH for HUMANITY concern.

THE OPPORTUNITY

We appreciate the Ontario government announcement that it will provide COVID-19 assessment and treatment to uninsured people in the province and waive the three month waiting period.

We are appreciative of the moves to ensure access to healthcare regardless of OHIP and immigration status. We want to reiterate the importance of implementation and ensuring this directive is actioned on the ground.

Health is a human right. Any individual in need of medical attention should seek and receive the support they need, especially during a pandemic.

Additionally, migrant workers, international students, non-status workers, refugee claimants and rejected refugee claimants must have access to benefits such as sick leave.

Without paid sick days, many go to work – even when sick - because they cannot afford to take the day off. Again, this increases the risk to all of us. For many of these workers, a work from home option is not available. So they are finding themselves forced to work - or in some cases have been laid off - while others have not been paid appropriately for this month.

This leaves many with limited choices and often choices that put them at risk physically or financially (often both).

A lack of much needed supports is compounding factors that further drive these communities into a deeper state of insecurity.

For those who are not eligible for the various emergency benefits announced by the Federal Government, we urge the Ontario government, to implement an emergency Ontario Works for All three month program.

We recommend this emergency program consist of:

- a) Benefits for three months;

IN SOLIDARITY: WE CANNOT LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND



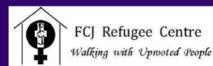
- b) The same application process (either by phone or online) for residents and others in need that qualify for Ontario Works;
- c) The access to benefits for emergency applicants at the same rate any other Ontario Works recipient.
- In unique times like this, Canadians must come together and not leave anyone behind.

Walking together with uprooted people and in solidarity:

Adam House, Toronto
Angela Rose house, Windsor
Becoming Neighbours
Carty House, Ottawa
Casa El Norte, Fort Erie
Casa Maria Refugee Homes, Peterborough
Chez Marie, St Catharines
Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, Toronto
Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, Toronto
Colour of Poverty, Colour of Change
COSTI / Immigrant Services, Toronto
Diocese of London Refugee Ministries, Windsor
FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto
Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
(Loretto Sisters)
Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre
Matthew House, Ottawa

Matthew House, Windsor
Matthew House, Fort Erie
Micah House, Hamilton
Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC)
OCASI
OHIP For All
Office for Systemic Justice - Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph
Peace Bridge Newcomers Centre, Fort Erie
Quaker Committee for Refugees, Toronto
Romero House, Toronto
SALCO
Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada
Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus
Sojourn House, Toronto
The 519, Toronto
The Centre Oblat- A Voice for Justice
The Peoples House, Toronto

CONNECT WITH US...WE ARE HERE



Connect with us

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Count on us... **WE ARE OPEN**

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WWW.FCJREFUGEECENTRE.ORG