

FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE FALL NEWSLETTER 2023



Ride for Refuge 2023

FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE

Empowering lives, fostering belonging, and championing dignity for those uprooted, FCJ Refugee Centre stands as a beacon of hope, offering comprehensive support, shelter, and advocacy, nurturing the journey of rebuilding and integration into Canadian society.



**FCJ
REFUGEE
CENTRE**

Walking with Uprooted People

**GUTHRIE AWARD 2023
FCJ LATE CO-DIRECTOR
FRANCISCO RICO-MARTÍNEZ,
NAMED 2023 GUTHRIE AWARD
RECIPIENT**



FCJ LATE CO-DIRECTOR FRANCISCO RICO-MARTINEZ, NAMED 2023 GUTHRIE AWARD RECIPIENT

The FCJ Refugee Centre is immensely proud and deeply grateful to announce that our late co-director, Francisco Rico-Martínez, has been posthumously honored as the recipient of the 2023 Guthrie Award by The Law Foundation of Ontario.

Francisco's unwavering dedication to the cause of access to justice left an indelible mark on our organization and the lives of countless individuals. As we commemorated this extraordinary moment, we continue to draw ongoing inspiration from his unwavering commitment to justice for all.

The presentation of the Guthrie Award stands as a powerful testament to his extraordinary legacy. We take this moment to celebrate and pay tribute to the man who fervently championed access to justice with unparalleled heart, passion, and vision.

His legacy lives on through the daily work we undertake. Together, we ensure his mission perseveres, perpetuating a profound impact on the lives of those in need.



“Francisco was the greatest advocate our community could imagine,” shared Diana Gallego, FCJ Senior Director and who nominated Francisco for the Guthrie Award. “There is not a single person who was not touched by his grace, encouragement, and nurturing. He was a great champion for the rights of the marginalized, the forgotten, the ignored. Francisco worked every day to ensure no one would be left without hope or would find a closed door. We continue this fight for justice in his memory, inspired, and guided by his life’s work.”

[HTTPS://LAWFOUNDATION.ON.CA/NEWS/FRANCISCO-RICO-MARTINEZ-RECEIVES-2023-GUTHRIE-AWARD/](https://lawfoundation.on.ca/news/francisco-rico-martinez-receives-2023-guthrie-award/)



GARAGE SALE TO FUND RAISE FOR YOUTH IN ACTION GATHERING

FCJ YOUTH NETWORK AND CCR YOUTH ACTION GATHERING 2023

The FCJ Refugee Centre and FCJ Youth Network have a long history of being closely involved and proactive in participation at the Canadian Council for Refugees, and the CCR Youth Action Gathering is no exception to this. There have been FCJ Youth Network members on planning committees, facilitation of workshops, and even served as CCR Youth Network Core Team members in the past. The CCR YAG 2023 was the first time since the pandemic that newcomer youth from across the country were able to gather in-person to share, learn, and strategize together about how to address common challenges that young migrants face. One of the highlights of attending the YAG was to observe the proactive leadership, networking, knowledge sharing, and peer support skills displayed by two of the FCJ Youth Network member's participation in hosting workshops. One of the youth spearheaded the conversation on Community Involvement and Youth Engagement speaking from lived experience of navigating barriers as a newcomer by networking and participating in community, and how that contributed to them never losing sight of achieving their goals. The other youth was instrumental in providing context to the formation of the workshop materials, in taking official notes of the session on Access to Education and Post-Secondary Institutes, and further drafted all the action items and suggestions that will be produced in the final official YAG 2023 report.

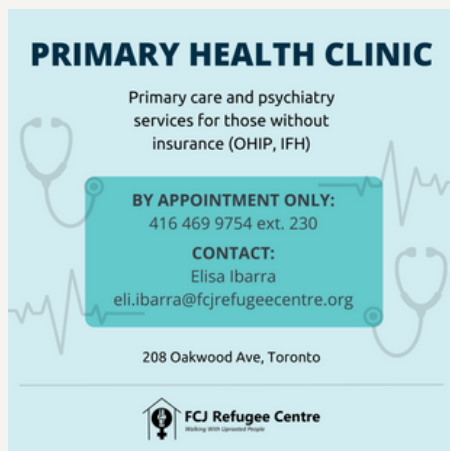
The FCJ Youth Team were closely involved in the planning and logistics of the YAG. Through this process, one of the major roles were organizing workshops on topical areas decided by the CCR Core Team. The five workshops we organized were - "Community Involvement and Youth Engagement", "Access to Education and Post-Secondary Institutes", "Cultural Adaptation: Coping with New Culture", "Mental Health & Well-being", and "2SLGBTQIA+ Rights and Intersectionality". The overarching feedback of these sessions were a strong readiness to follow-up on action items and continue to remain engaged on the frontlines towards equity in the intersectional diversities of newcomer youth lives in Canada.

**2SLGBTQIA+ &
Intersectionality**

CCR YAG 2023

**JEUNES
CCR
YOUTH**

*YAG 2023 theme -
"Embracing Youth
Inclusion and Diversity"*



FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE'S ONGOING COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY HEALTH

The FCJ Refugee Centre Clinic continues its support, tirelessly working to provide essential medical services to the uninsured community. In this edition of our newsletter, we're excited to share some of the significant updates and achievements from our clinic program, highlighting our dedication to promoting the health and well-being of precarious migrants and refugees.

Access to Medical Services:

The FCJ Refugee Centre Clinic has been committed to its mission to provide medical care to those in need. Over the past year, we have offered doctor appointments to 459 families, extending our support to a diverse range of individuals and families in our community. Additionally, we have conducted 101 psychiatric assessments, emphasizing the holistic approach we take to address the health and well-being of our clients.

Supporting Youth and Children:

The well-being of youth and children is a priority for us, and this year, we hosted four vaccination clinics in partnership with Toronto Public Health (TPH) to ensure that young members of our community are up-to-date with their immunizations. We also organized an additional fall vaccination clinic, providing flu, COVID, and regular TPH vaccines to further protect the health of our young residents.

Contributing to Research:

The FCJ Refugee Centre Clinic actively participated in three different research projects this year, reflecting our commitment to advancing the field of community health:

- City of Toronto's COVID Ambassadors Project: We were part of this important initiative, which aimed to engage with communities and promote critical information regarding COVID-19 and public health.
- Annual Online Networking Event for (Co)Leaders in Community-Engaged Health and Wellbeing: Our involvement in this event underscored our dedication to connecting with other organizations and individuals working towards similar goals in community health and well-being.
- St. Michael's Research Project: We collaborated on a project focused on engaging newcomer families in health studies, contributing to a growing body of knowledge in the field of health research.
- Women's College Hospital's Re-Imagining Digital Health Compassion for Newcomers: Our participation in this project aimed to explore innovative ways to enhance digital health services and support newcomers.

Promoting Primary Care for Refugees and Newcomers:

On September 22nd, 2023, the Primary Care Clinic Program took part in the Women's College Conference: Optimizing Primary Care for Refugees and Newcomers. FCJ, in collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), had the distinct honor of being the only settlement agencies invited to promote our medical and other services within the medical community. This recognition reflects the critical role we play in enhancing primary care access for refugees and newcomers.

As we continue our journey, these updates are a testament to the FCJ Refugee Centre Clinic's unwavering commitment to providing high-quality medical services and contributing to research in the field of community health. We remain dedicated to ensuring the well-being of the uninsured and underserved individuals and families in our community.



GROWTH AND IMPACT: EXPLORING ACCESSIBILITY AND PROJECTS AT FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE OPEN HOUSE

On November 22nd, 2023, the FCJ Refugee Centre opened its doors to the community for an extraordinary event, showcasing the incredible work of our dedicated team and highlighting the remarkable accomplishments achieved over the years. The event also highlighted the amazing improvements made to the Centre and its three women's shelters.

The occasion was a vibrant space filled with meaningful interactions, learning opportunities, and community-building. Our Open House provided a unique opportunity not only to celebrate our past achievements but also to emphasize our ongoing commitment to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all.

The Event Highlights:

1. **Presentation of the Centre's Accomplishments:** At the Open House, we guided our visitors through a journey showcasing the remarkable achievements of the FCJ Refugee Centre.
2. **Insights into Our Expanding Projects:** We offered insights into our ongoing and upcoming projects aimed at bolstering support for refugees and precarious migrants. These initiatives underscored our commitment to continual improvement and our adaptability to the ever-evolving needs of our community.
3. **Accessibility:** The primary objective of the event was to spotlight the accessibility enhancements made within the Centre and the Women's shelters.

Acknowledgement:

Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation. And especially we would like to thank Jessica Farias representing the Ontario Trillium Foundation for sharing valuable perspectives and insights.

We also thank MPP Marit Stiles for visiting the open house and showing support to the FCJ Refugee Centre.

In a world often divided, the FCJ Refugee Centre remains committed to bridging gaps, fostering understanding, and providing hope to those who need it most. The Open House on November 22nd, 2023, was a celebration of our past achievements and a glimpse into a future of continued support and unity.





DIANA GALLEGO, FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE'S SENIOR DIRECTOR, TAKES ON NEW ROLE AS PRESIDENT OF CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES (CCR)

From November 16 to November 18, 2023, the FCJ Refugee Centre actively participated in the CCR Fall 2023 Consultation held in person in Calgary. The three-day event unfolded at the Best Western Premier Calgary Plaza Hotel & Conference Centre, featuring a rich itinerary of 16 workshops, 3 plenaries, and 1 social event. Under the theme "The Power of the Collective: Decolonizing and Advocating for Systemic Change," the consultation focused on addressing critical challenges within the refugee and immigration systems. Attendees engaged in workshops, caucuses, and meetings, collaborating, sharing insights, and exchanging resources and strategies with government officials to respond effectively to these issues.

A significant announcement during the consultation was the election of Diana Gallego, as the President of the Canadian Council for Refugees, a voluntary position with a two-year term. Diana's dedication and expertise make her a pivotal addition to the leadership team of the CCR.

Diana Gallego, a Colombian-trained lawyer, sought refuge in Canada in 2002 due to circumstances which forced her and her family to leave her home country. Since then, she has been deeply committed to supporting immigrants and refugees. Diana holds a degree in Community Work from George Brown College in Toronto and actively engages with organizations advocating for the rights and well-being of newcomers.

She has been instrumental in promoting the protection and integration of refugees in Canada. Her journey led her to join the FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto in 2015, where she assists refugees and vulnerable newcomers. Diana currently serves as the Senior Director at FCJ Refugee Centre, playing a crucial role in shaping the center's strategies, programs, and services for those seeking refuge and support. Furthermore, she contributes as a part-time professor in the Centre for Community Services at George Brown College.

The Canadian Council for Refugees is a national non-profit umbrella organization dedicated to upholding the rights and protection of refugees and vulnerable migrants in Canada and globally, focusing on settlement and integration in Canada. Its membership comprises organizations involved in refugee and immigrant settlement, sponsorship, and protection, serving as a platform for networking, information exchange, and advocacy for its members' needs.

Diana Gallego's position as the CCR President marks a significant milestone, reflecting her dedication to advocating for refugee rights and shaping policy changes to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for newcomers in Canada.



RIDE FOR REFUGE 2023

We are thrilled to share the incredible success of the FCJ Refugee Centre's biggest fundraising event of the year, the "Ride for Refuge 2023," which took place on September 22nd. This event was a testament to the power of community support, as participants came together for a 20 Km bike ride or a 2 to 4 km walk to raise funds for a truly noble cause. The day was a remarkable display of unity and solidarity as our community rallied around the FCJ Refugee Centre's mission. The event drew an impressive number of supporters from the community, all eager to contribute to the cause and make a tangible difference in the lives of refugees and precarious migrants. The heartwarming aspect of the event was the involvement of the youth from the FCJ Refugee Centre's youth network, who volunteered their time and energy to help organize and ensure the smooth operation of the event. They worked hand in hand with the resource development team and other dedicated staff members, resulting in a well-executed, enjoyable, and meaningful experience for all participants.

The "Ride for Refuge" event spanned over four hours, and throughout this time, our community's dedication and enthusiasm were truly palpable. We are delighted to announce that we were able to achieve our fundraising goal for this year, thanks to the unwavering support from our community and the generosity of countless donors.

We would like to thank CERC (the Canada Excellence Research Chair) for their fundraising initiatives to support our campaign as they have raised over \$9,400 in support of the FCJ Refugee Centre.

The FCJ Refugee Centre would like to extend its deepest appreciation to everyone who donated and participated in the "Ride for Refuge." Your support enables us to continue our mission of providing refuge and support to refugees and precarious migrants, assisting them in finding a new home in Canada.

As we reflect on the success of the "Ride for Refuge 2023," we are reminded of the positive change that can be achieved when we come together with a shared vision. We look forward to even more extraordinary events and initiatives in the future, fueled by the spirit of solidarity and the power of community.

Thank you once again for your incredible support, and let's continue making a difference together.





FORT FRANCES & THUNDERBAY ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRIP

One component of the Anti-Human Trafficking team is travelling to rural and remote areas to meet with migrant workers who may have barriers accessing services and supports.

In October, the Anti-Human Trafficking team travelled to Northern Ontario visiting Thunder Bay and Fort Frances, a town bordering the United States. The team was contacted by an organization in Fort Frances, Giishkaandago'lkwe Health Services, about potential labour exploitation cases in the rural area of Fort Frances. There had been a growth in migrant workers in the community, and the community organizations there felt unequipped to support them. FCJ's team travelled there and stayed for four days, providing trainings to service providers about labour exploitation and offering mobile clinics to migrant workers.

The team went into the community and met with several organizations such as the Salvation Army, Victim Services, health services, community services as well as local businesses. They advertised FCJ Refugee Centre's mobile clinic in Fort Frances, as well as our supports that could be offered remotely. Before travelling to Fort Frances, the team stopped in Thunder Bay, and met with the Newcomer Legal Clinic to foster a connection between this local Thunder Bay immigration clinic and the community in Fort Frances. This was an essential connection to be made, in order for migrants in Fort Frances to receive immigration support locally.

As migrants find employment in Northern Canada, we hope that we can continue staying connected in order to offer support when needed. Our goal is to breakdown any barriers that exist and prevent migrants from feeling isolated in their communities.



FROM TIME, BY VALERIE CHIANG

SISTER NORMA PIMENTEL: A BEACON OF COMPASSION AT FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE

We were deeply honored to have Sister Norma Pimentel, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, visit our offices and share her incredible work experience in helping refugees in the United States. Her dedication and compassion have touched the lives of over 100,000 people at the border of the United States and Mexico.

In her own words, she said, "For me, truly, it's an honor to be here. I am very impressed and deeply moved by the fact that there are so many of you from all over the world who have come together for such an important mission. I am humbled to see the beautiful work that you are all doing. It is important that we do our part and be confident that what we are doing is the right thing. It is what we must do, and we must encourage others to join us and recognize that we have a mission to take care of each other. Humanity is one family, and we must look out for one another and let others know that every single life matters."

The FCJ Refugee Centre team was deeply moved by the stories she shared. As a grassroots organization, our team also has its own heroic stories of struggle and success. It was a wonderful conversation where we shared our stories, discussing where we came from and how our work is truly making a positive impact, not only on the people we serve but also on ourselves. It motivates us to come to work every day. She shared her inspiring stories, emphasizing the importance of shedding light on our mission to care for one another, to build a better community and a better world, and to treat each other with the dignity and respect they deserve. The people we help every day come from difficult backgrounds, and we aim to uplift them.

For over a decade, Sister Norma has tirelessly provided food, shelter, and assistance to immigrant families, including many children who have been separated from their parents.

Sister Norma, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, has been a beacon of hope for those in need for decades. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed, as she was named one of The 100 Most Influential People of 2020 by Time magazine, earning her the title "the Pope's favorite nun." In 2015, Pope Francis himself recognized and personally thanked Sister Norma for her remarkable work on the border.

"Humanity is one family, and we must look out for one another and let others know that every single life matters."

Sister Norma Pimentel

FCJ CHRISTIAN LIFE CENTRE (FCJ RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTRE)

"I would like to say a big thank you for hosting us at your place. From the moment we got there, you made us feel right at home. Your welcoming and kindness made our stay extra special and it motivated us even more to give back to the community we serve."

Tsering Lhamo
Associate Director



We extend our gratitude to the Trillium Foundation for providing us with a new accessibility ramp.

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