

Youth Caucus Session

“Youth Networking and Campaign Action Planning”

CCR Fall Consultation, November 2010

Agenda:

- 1) Introducing the Campaign to Participants
- 2) Activity: Campaign Action Planning
- 3) Sharing thoughts

1. Introducing the Campaign to Participants

Intro:

- **Survey:** This summer, the CCR Youth Network created an online survey to identify key issues facing newcomer youth in Canada. From this survey, we decided to launch a national campaign called: “Children and Youth’s rights under the Canadian Immigration System.”
- **Today, we want to strategize for this campaign.**
- **After the Consultation,** we’ll use the information that we gather today to build the campaign action plan.
- We’ll also create a campaign **Focus Group**. Please tell Cynthia if you would like to be part of this Focus Group. cbeaudry@ccrweb.ca

Campaign Backgrounder:

- Canada has signed the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, but the rights of children who are not Canadian citizens are not always respected in Canada.
- The UN Convention defines “children” as anybody who is under 18 years old.
- This Convention requires countries who have signed the Convention to take into “primary consideration” the “best interest of the child” in all decisions affecting children, but Canada doesn’t always do that.
- Many immigration decisions affecting children continue to be made without appropriate (or in some cases any) consideration of the “best interests of the child”.

- For example, Canada's actions do not respect the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by:
 - Keeping children in detention (jail)
 - Deporting children when it is contrary to their best interests
 - Mistreating separated asylum-seeking children (children who come to Canada without a parent or guardian and claim refugee status)
 - Stopping separated families from reuniting in Canada
 - Giving no protection to trafficked children
 - Making children stateless

In 2011, the UN will examine if Canada is respecting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is a great opportunity for a national campaign.

For example, when the UK was examined on its compliance with the Convention, many human rights activists got together to raise awareness about how the UK wasn't respecting the Convention. Because of this pressure, the UK changed its law before the examination.

This is what we want to do in Canada!

2. Activity: "Campaign Action Planning"

- Go around the room giving each participant a number from 1 to 5.
- Ask participants to divide into 5 small groups, according to their number.
- Explain that there are 5 different "issue stations" around the room. Each group spends 10 minutes at each station to read the information together, answer the discussion questions and write their ideas on the flip chart paper.
- Every 10 minutes, ask groups to go to the next station.

1 Canada Keeps Children in Detention

Many in Canada might be surprised to know that children are routinely held in immigration detention, for weeks and even months at a time.



- In December 2008, 61 children were detained, 10 of them unaccompanied children (children who came to Canada without a parent or guardian).
- A three-year-old boy was detained for 30 days with his mother when they made refugee claims in Canada. He had difficulty sleeping and eating while in detention.
- A 16-year-old boy, also a refugee claimant, spent 25 days in detention. He suffered a lot in detention, lost weight and had nightmares.
- Over 40 children who arrived on the boat this summer (MV Sun Sea) were detained, although they had just spent 3 months on a dangerous boat trip. Some of those children are still in detention now.

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Canadian law says that **children should only be detained as a measure of last resort. When deciding whether to detain, the best interests of the child must be taken into account.**

The CCR has just published a report which shows that detention of children is **NOT** limited to exceptional circumstances and that their best interests are not always considered.

Bill C-49, recently proposed in Parliament, would require **MANDATORY** detention of some children for a **YEAR**. That means that even if the immigration officials felt bad about it, they would have no choice but to lock up the children.

Discussion question:

How can the Youth Network make more people in Canada aware of this issue?

2 Canada Doesn't Have a National Policy for Separated Children

SEPARATED CHILDREN: Children who come to Canada without a parent or legal guardian and ask for refugee status.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child says that governments must make sure that children seeking refugee status receive necessary protection and care, including where they are unaccompanied (article 22).

Despite clear UN recommendations to Canada, there's still no national policy for separated children claimants in Canada, leading to some of these extremely vulnerable children falling between the cracks. The government does not even keep reliable statistics on how many separated children are making refugee claims.

Canada also has no clear policy to make sure that children are not deported to a situation where they may be unsafe.

Also, separated children who are given refugee status **don't have the right to apply for family reunification**. This means that they can't bring their parents or siblings to Canada.

Discussion questions:

How can the Youth Network make more people in Canada aware of this issue?

3 Canada Stops Families from Reuniting:



Many children are left behind when their parents come to Canada as refugees. Once the parents are granted refugee status, they apply to bring their children. But the processing often takes years. This is extremely hard for the children. It also violates (goes against) Canada's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to deal with family reunification in a "positive, humane and expeditious manner."

These are some of the problems:

- Canada has HUGE backlogs in its offices in some parts of the world, especially in Africa.
- Some families, especially Africans and Haitians, are forced to do DNA tests, which are expensive and time-consuming.

"Can Canadians themselves accept being separated from their children and their wives for 2 or 3 years? Dad, ask one of the officials who is married and has children if he could bear such a thing." The eldest son of Irénée, who has been waiting to be reunited with his wife and six children.

The CCR already has a campaign on Family Reunification called "Wish you Were Here". Some of the campaign actions include:

- Visit your Member of Parliament
- Call a press conference on Mother's Day/ Father's Day to bring attention to separated family members.
- Support separated family members in their efforts and if they are willing to speak to the media
- Create a pamphlet aimed at the general public with anecdotes of local people who have been separated from their families.
- Organize a community event focusing on family reunification (**Refugee Rights Day – April 4th** is a great time to do this!)

Discussion Questions: How can youth contribute to this campaign/make more people in Canada aware of this issue?

4 Canada Doesn't Protect Trafficked Children:

TRAFFICKING: A person who is trafficked is kept under the control of traffickers and exploited in some way, sometimes after having been transported across a border.



For examples:

- A child is brought into Canada with a family. He is not sent to school: instead he is made to work in the home.
- A young woman is brought to Canada to work as a domestic servant. Her passport is taken away from her and she is forced to work long hours while receiving no pay.

Canadian law DOES NOT PROTECT trafficked persons. Instead the law promotes their detention (including children). Detaining children without considering their best interest goes against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child! As a result, an 11-year-old girl spent a month alone in detention in 2008.

The CCR has a campaign on human trafficking called “Protection?” Some of the campaign actions include:

- Proposal to change the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The proposal would provide temporary and permanent protection to trafficked persons. Organizations are encouraged to endorse (declare their public approval of) the proposal.
- Website on human trafficking for organizations to share resources
- Letter writing campaign to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration asking that the government adopt the CCR’s proposal to change the law.

Discussion Question:

How can youth contribute to this campaign/make more people in Canada aware of this issue?

5 Canada makes Children Stateless:

STATELESS PERSON – a person that no state recognizes as a citizen. Some refugees may be stateless but not all are. Similarly, not all stateless people are refugees.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child says that every child has the right to a nationality. Governments must protect this right, especially where the child would otherwise be stateless

Canada's Citizenship Act was changed in 2009 in a way that leaves some children stateless.

This actually happened to Chloé who was born in July 2009 in Belgium. Her mother is Algerian and her father is Canadian. Chloé is not eligible for citizenship:



- Under Belgian law
- Under Algerian law
- Or, because of the recent change, under Canadian law. This is because her father is a Canadian born outside Canada to a Canadian parent.

So Chloé is stateless. She has no passport and cannot travel outside Belgium. She cannot come to Canada to visit her Canadian grandmother.

There are 12 million stateless persons in the world, and now Canada is adding new stateless children to the number.

Discussion question:

How can the Youth Network make more people in Canada aware of this issue?

Results

1) Canada Keeps Children in Detention

- Creative Shock Campaigns (using extreme but real examples to gain public's attention)
- Public awareness workshops – in libraries, community centres, in schools
- Get under 18 youth involved to spread the message (make videos, use social media, refugee youth give peer-to-peer presentations)
- Public Education on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child within the community through petitions and rallies
- Cultural sensitivity training of detention centre staff
- More child-friendly areas in detention centres
- Letters and petitions to policy makers
- Peaceful protest in front of the parliament against detention of children

2) Canada doesn't have a national policy for separated children

- Short videos
- Social media
- Media involvement
- Taking a case to court (funding)
- Campus groups
- Petition
- Public awareness
- Children bringing learning to parents
- Putting yourself in another person's shoes campaign with policy-makers (For example, the Halifax and Edmonton Red Cross organize summer camps where students come for a weekend of global issues. They wake them up at 3am with masks on, walk through the woods, and debrief for hours. Hundreds of young Canadians have gone through this experience.)
- Case study circulation
- Curriculum modification in schools to include a workshop class encompassing these issues
- Working with allies

3) Canada stops families from reuniting

- Video with youth and children's perspectives on being separated
- Involve allies
- Stories of waiting and pain, how children are affected

- Make a symbol – put it on a t-shirt, promote on Facebook! (like wear purple day)
- Interview people in the society, mainly Canadians, who have similar experiences with the refugees who have been separated with family members
- Simplifying the message about this campaign and clarify the cause and effect to the refugees
- Promote April 4th in every city (not just the job of CCR Youth Network representatives)

4) Canada doesn't protect Trafficked Children

- Internet campaign (Facebook)
- Campaign in schools
- Mobilize school authorities (board, trustees, principals) to promote the issue, through letter writing campaign to policy makers
- Involve allies
- Work with groups internationally
- Campaign against “punishing the victim”
- Community Awareness – signs of trafficking
- Website notforsalecampaign.org
- Workshops for raising awareness
- Strengthening local law to obtain national strategy, refer to other countries that has one
- Public awareness concert – art, music, etc
- PSECA: Protection of sexually exploited children in Alberta, adopt similar legislation across Canada

5) Canada makes children stateless

- Trace stateless youth worldwide and ask them to be a part of the Youth Network
- Have a survey committee
- Rally/Demonstrate across Canada
- Begin a youth network comprised of youth who are/have been stateless – SPEAK OUT
- Rally the community to do action plan to address local situation/cases
- Advocate change to law to ensure no child born to a parent with Canadian citizenship is stateless
- Talk more about statelessness in general
- Explain the law (instructional video)

Comments:

- Some refugees don't want to criticize Canada

- We need to point to ways that we should work together
- Allies are important
- We need to use the strength of organizations
- Some people wanted to talk about the deportation of youth on criminality grounds, but we didn't have time. This is a serious issue. Often youth don't even speak the language of the country to where they are being deported.