



Canadian Council for Refugees Spring 2016 Consultation
Refugees Welcome Here: Awareness, Advocacy and Action
2-4 June 2016, Saskatoon
Conference Report

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Council for Refugees' Spring 2016 Consultation was held June 2 - 4 at the Hilton Garden Inn Downtown Saskatoon, on Treaty Six territory. Approximately 320 participants from across Canada attended the Consultation, with strong local attendance from Saskatchewan and the Western provinces, and delegates from every single province.

The Spring 2016 Consultation provided a space for learning, experience-sharing and networking among people involved in refugee protection, the immigrant and refugee serving sector, and refugee resettlement across Canada. The theme for this Consultation was *Refugees Welcome Here: Awareness, Advocacy and Action*, calling attention to the current campaign being led by CCR, Amnesty International Canada and Amnesty internationale Canada francophone.

Thirty-four sessions were offered during the three days of the Consultation, focusing on immigrant and refugee settlement and integration, refugee resettlement and overseas protection and inland refugee protection.

CCR member organizations and volunteers from Saskatoon formed a local organizing committee (LOC) to host the event and successfully ensured that logistics were looked after and that a welcoming team of volunteers was ready to respond to the needs of participants. The Consultation was made possible thanks to the time, dedication, and hard work of staff from the Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA), University of Saskatchewan, the City of Saskatoon, Global Gathering Place, International Women of Saskatoon, Newcomer information Centre, and Saskatoon Open Door Society Inc. and others, and the team of dynamic and helpful volunteers they recruited.

The LOC organized successful social events on the Thursday and Friday evenings: participants first enjoyed a cocktail reception, and then buffet dinner with performances and a DJ to dance to.

At this Consultation, the CCR benefited from the in-kind contributions of SAISIA, Global Gathering Place, International Women of Saskatoon, Newcomer information Centre, Saskatoon Open Door Society Inc., Saskatoon Public School Division and Mennonite Central Committee.

The CCR gratefully acknowledges financial support for the Consultation from the Government of Saskatchewan Ministry of the Economy, the City of Saskatoon, Safari Market, the Diocese of Saskatoon, Anglican Church of Canada, University of Regina – Faculty of Social Work, Saskatoon Immigration & Employment Consulting Services, Swadesh Group, Veeman Law and Abraham Amirzadeh.

II. EMERGING NEEDS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Through workshops, caucus sessions, plenaries and the written feedback we received on the Consultation, a number of emerging needs and priorities in the refugee protection and newcomer settlement sector have been identified.

Reducing immigration detention

Participants had an opportunity to engage constructively on developing alternatives to detention, in the context of a commitment in this area by Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

Community organizations have a role to play in supporting the development of fair alternatives. Avoiding in particular the detention of children has become an urgent priority: the workshop on this topic emphasized that respecting the rights of children means keeping both them and their family out of detention.

Promoting equity in responses to refugees

The outpouring in public support, good will and volunteerism that came with the federal government policy to admit 25,000 refugees has been exciting and invigorating. However, it is important that refugees from other countries who are in need of protection not be side-lined by the recent focus on Syria. CCR participants highlighted the importance of active promotion of equity in the welcoming of refugees from various regions to Canada.

Building relationships between NGOs and sponsors

The recent influx of privately sponsored refugees, and the huge increase in new sponsors has highlighted the importance of collaboration and connection between sponsors and NGOs that provide services to newcomers. Some new sponsorship groups aren't aware of the services that refugees can avail themselves of, and sponsored refugees can wind up without adequate support as a result. The workshop held at this Consultation was a starting point for discussing strategies, and for some organizations to share the best practices they have had success with. Outreach activities and information sessions with Sponsorship Agreement Holders and the public, organized by service provider organizations, were among the best practices highlighted.

Interfaces with indigenous peoples - learning from the Western provinces

Making links between newcomer and Indigenous communities has been a priority within the CCR in recent years. In the past year it has become clear that the Western provinces have been working on this and can share experiences and promising initiatives with members in the rest of the country. At the 2015 Spring Consultation in Winnipeg and at this Consultation participants have learned of interesting initiatives and resources that will be shared via the CCR website.

Refugee mental health

Mental health remains in the foreground as a key priority. At the Fall 2015 Consultation there were workshops on access to mental health and on mental health for LGBT refugees. In Saskatoon we followed up with a session with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, which has made refugee mental health a priority for action.

III. SUMMARY OF THE PLENARIES

Some presentations are available online for CCR members at <http://ccrweb.ca/en/spring2016-presentations>

Opening plenary

Resource persons:

Loly Rico, CCR President

George E. Lafond, former Saskatchewan Treaty Commissioner

Moderators: Haidah Amirzadeh and Fanta Traore

Elder Joseph Quewezance opened the consultation with a traditional prayer, always used before meetings. Chief Felix Thomas, Tribal Chief, welcomed participants to Treaty Six Territory and spoke briefly of the priorities of the Saskatoon Treaty Council.

Loly Rico provided an overview of CCR activities over the past six months.

George E. Lafond, former Saskatchewan Treaty Commissioner, gave the keynote address, highlighting how Indigenous Peoples and newcomers share struggles for rights. He explored the history and current challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples in Treaty Six Territory in the fight for justice, within a framework of internationally recognized human rights. It is important to have strong, hard, consistent leadership and to be clear about priorities. For Indigenous Peoples, whose average age is under 25, education is the priority. The non-aboriginal population is older and their priority is health. He emphasized the importance of sharing the land and the relationships in Canada based on a tradition of signing treaties. These relationships have been tested by things such as Residential schools. The work of reconciliation must continue.

Session with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, John McCallum

A plenary session was held with the Honorable John McCallum giving a presentation and responding to questions. The Minister responded positively to a request from the CCR Youth Network that he establish a youth advisory committee.

Closing plenary and General Meeting

The consultation closed with the General Meeting, including discussion and approval of resolutions. The Head of the UNHCR Colombia Office, Martin Gottwald, spoke about the refugee situation in Colombia in the context of the current peace talks, reflecting on Canada's role in seeking the best outcome for people displaced by the conflict in that country.

Co-chairs: Debbie Douglas and Sabine Lehr

IV. SYNTHESIS OF WORKSHOPS

Note: a number of presentations from the workshops are available to CCR members online at <http://ccrweb.ca/en/spring2016-presentations>.

Strengthening Relationships and Solidarity between newcomers and Indigenous People

Building community support in cities and communities where the refugees/immigrants and Indigenous people live in close proximity and share common public spaces is to be encouraged. This session focussed on strengthening relationships of solidarity between newcomers and Indigenous people across Canada. Speakers presented some of the interesting initiatives across the country designed to enhance cross-cultural interaction and understanding, including efforts to foster relationships between indigenous and newcomer youth.

Participants were invited to discuss challenges, initiatives and opportunities to strengthen collaborative relationships, mutual support and solidarity between Indigenous people and newcomers. There was an emphasis on the responsibility we all have to nurture the relationships between indigenous peoples and settlers in the spirit and intent of the treaties.

It was felt that newcomer communities need to come with an “open for discussion” attitude. There is currently a disconnect between the two communities, just as there is also lack of education and information about Indigenous peoples among settler Canadian populations, and racism and injustice that exist in settler communities tends to duplicate itself among newcomers.

Some ideas that came out of the workshop discussion:

- Explore/initiate partnerships between newcomer settlement agencies and Office of Treaty Commissioner in cities across Canada.
- Leadership, planning and resources are needed to sustain inter-cultural relations through. Need for community wide and integrated approach avoiding segmentation and/or one-off isolated events or projects.
- A resolution was drafted recommending that CCR support recommendations 93 and 94 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action.
- An action request to members was proposed, encouraging member organizations to develop an educational piece on indigenous history and current realities, and integrate this into their settlement orientation (as a complement to strengthening relationships with local indigenous communities, and informing themselves of the history and current realities of indigenous people in Canada).
- Continue to hold this type of workshops in future consultations. Engage members of Indigenous communities, groups, organizations in the planning of workshops in future consultations.

Resource persons:

Jennifer Heimbecker, Office of the Treaty Commissioner in Saskatchewan

Brad Bird, Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

Beulah Gana, Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA), Saskatoon

Moderators: Noelle DePape and Alfredo Barahona

25k Syrian Refugees: Initial Lessons Learned

At this workshop, sponsors reviewed their experiences accommodating the government policy to bring in 25,000 Syrian refugees with limited resources, shared the practices they employed to facilitate this operation, and worked to create policy recommendations for IRCC with respect to mass settlement policies.

Rob Shropshire covered a timeline of events leading up to the mass arrival of Syrian refugees in Canada, and spoke about the impact this had on SAH groups, as well as communities at large. Nayri Tavlian provided a brief overview of the differences between Canada's and Quebec's immigration systems in relation to refugee sponsorship, and shared her experiences in private refugee sponsorship with Hay Doun.

Participants then broke into groups to answer the following questions:

1. Was the 25,000 Syrian refugee operation a success in your opinion?
2. What are some important recommendations that you would like to bring forward for consideration if there were to be another mass arrival of refugees?
3. How do you think the operation could have been handled differently?

Each group presented a summary of their discussion to the larger group, and concerns and key points were echoed from one group to the next. Overall people felt that the operation has been successful thus far, and that it has provided a key opportunity to change the conversation around refugees in Canada from what it was previously. Participants also underlined that the process has been difficult, with people working day and night, and that it is important to remember that it has been difficult and sometimes frustrating for the refugees as well.

A list of recommendations came out of the discussion:

- Greater communication is needed on all levels (between government, SAHs, community organizations, service providers, municipalities, etc.)
- Avoid duplicating services and communications
- More profile information is needed on the population being sponsored to allow for more initial preparation and education around cultural sensitivity
- Access to information should be facilitated and accuracy of information provided must be ensured
- Cultural orientation abroad is necessary and should not be waived
- Managing expectations of both refugees and sponsors is important
- Funding from IRCC needs to be allocated earlier
- Setting of hard timelines and deadlines by government created additional challenges
- Pace arrivals over a longer period, more advance notification before arrival is necessary
- Build on current mobilization among Canadians – try to educate people about other parts of the world, attention to immigration in general.

Resource persons:

Rob Shropshire, Presbyterian World Services and Development, Toronto
Nayiri Tavlian, Hay Doun, Montreal

Moderators: Emily Woods and Gilbert Iyamuremye

Torture Survivors: Protection Issues

Refugee support workers face a huge challenge of supporting survivors of torture effectively as they may suffer from everlasting traumas. This workshop presented promising practices for the protection of survivors in a way that helps them become agents of their own healing. Specific themes explored were documentation, remedies to refoulement, and coping with the stresses of preparing for and attending a hearing.

The speaker from VAST talked about a vulnerability screening tool that organization has developed that can be shared.

Resource persons:

Ezat Mossallanejad, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Toronto

Stewart Istvanffy, Refugee lawyer, Montreal

Kirby Huminuik, Clinical counsellor, Refugee Mental Health, Vancouver

Mariana Martinez Vieyra, Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture and Provincial Refugee Mental Health Coordinator

Moderator: Jenny Jeanes and Sabine Lehr

Refugees Welcome Here: Countering discrimination through public education

If intolerant and discriminatory attitudes are left unchallenged, they can become ingrained, leaving individuals with unfounded prejudices and an inadequate understanding of diversity. This session focused on effective strategies and provided practical tools to address intolerance, anti-Muslim hate and discrimination in an increasingly multicultural Canada, through public education.

April Sora spoke on the initiatives of the City of Saskatoon in terms of activities (education, cultural, artistic) to promote inclusion of refugees and newcomers.

Bassel Martin spoke on how to build a public education campaign, with a focus on the practical aspects as well as the different stages, outcomes, and how to evaluate. Examples were drawn from the anti-racism toolkit for youth Kinamark is building in collaboration with OCASI.

Rizwan Mohamad spoke on how the NCCM addresses Islamophobia with a focus on the tools and resources they use to do so. Examples from the general anti-Muslim sentiment following the announcement of the arrival of 25,000 Syrian refugees were discussed.

The importance of myth-busting and education to counter rising Islamophobia, including in racialized communities was emphasized throughout the workshop. It was pointed out that there are plenty of existing resources that need to be shared, and that a resource directory would be helpful. It was felt that the school system (administrators and principals) and settlement agencies should be some of the first targets for education on this issue and how to myth-bust.

Participants requested further workshops and webinars on how to combat Islamophobia, with resources on how to advocate for diversity and inclusion, and a showcasing of what organizations, institutions, and municipalities are doing to combat discrimination based on race and religion.

Resource persons:

Rizwan Mohammad, National Canadian Council of Muslims

April Sora, City of Saskatoon, Saskatoon

Bassel Martin, Kinamark, Toronto

Moderators: Rita Acosta and Esel Panlaqui

Creating Sustainable Partnerships between NGOs and Sponsorship Groups

This workshop provided an opportunity for sponsorship groups and NGOs to pool resources and share strategies around how to connect in order better to support refugees. The objective of the workshop was knowledge sharing and bringing together different groups who are working towards the same vision: resettling and welcoming Syrian and other refugees.

The panellists each gave brief presentations, discussing challenges as well as best practices in their region in the context of the influx of Syrian refugees, and from the perspective of their organization (settlement agency, sponsorship training program and SAH, respectively). Many communities have experienced a radical increase in numbers of new sponsors, so managing this and connecting to provide needed services is a challenge.

Participants then split into small groups to discuss opportunities, challenges and best practices. The groups then reported back to the larger group. Many challenges were identified, chief among them the disconnect between the many new sponsors and organizations offering settlement services. Most of the small groups pointed to the need to organize and capitalize on the surge of good will and volunteerism linked to the Syrian refugee influx.

Best practices and recommendations cited by both panelists and small groups included:

- Inviting community organizations to trainings, for example on life skills (MCC)
- Community information sessions and settlement workshops every other Saturday (ISANS)
- “Rob and duplicate” resources, offering a consistent message
- SAHs to encourage community groups to come to a settlement agency prior to arrival of refugees to learn each other’s roles
- Since school is often point of entry, notably for ESL, provide schools with a list of agencies and services to distribute to families and encourage them to contact when needed
- Work together to do outreach with SAHs: moving from working individually to working collectively. Organizations should expand who they train (teachers, schools, etc.) and expand training platforms to social media, reach out to G5s and other groups that may be overlooked
- One challenge is a lack of trust of settlement service providers, feeling that sponsors are better-placed. Settlement agencies should thus reach out to community leaders, explain services, how to prepare kids for school, jobs etc.
- While in small centres service providers and SAHs often know one another, this is not always the case in larger cities or at the national level – national coordinators should connect more.

- Involve local municipalities and mayors and inform them of community initiatives, leading to more organized networking. In Kitchener-Waterloo region six mayors created 10 subcommittees working on housing, education and other issues.
- Develop a national standardized settlement checklist that allows settlement workers and sponsors to check in on a regular basis and make sure needs are being met.
- The voice that is still missing is that of the refugees themselves – need to involve them in telling us what they initially understood and what it would have been good for them to know, and to explore inter-family relationships/issues.
- SAHs have an association, but RSTP and CCR can connect with G-5s as a great resource

Participants at the workshop felt that while this was an initial lessons learned workshop, there should be a second one once Syrian refugees have had some time to settle, where refugee voices can be more actively involved.

Resource persons:

Evelyn Jones, ISANS, Halifax

Debra Simpson, RSTP, Toronto

Dana Krushel, Mennonite Central Committee, Saskatoon

Moderator: Jennifer Rajasekar and Rob Shropshire

Challenging Media Representation of Migrant Youth

This workshop was focused on media representation of migrant and refugee youth. Following a presentation from youth active in portraying themselves and their communities in a positive role, workshop participants discussed finding ways to challenge the common narrative surrounding migrant youth.

Resource persons:

Eman Idil Bare

Moving Stories YXE participants

Moderators: Juliana Cortes and Maria Ramirez

Collaborative Approaches for Refugee Mental Health

This interactive session built on the CCR's recent [position paper on mental health for refugees](#). Participants first heard from Ed Mantler of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, who spoke about MHCC initiatives relating to refugee mental health. The moderators gave an overview of the CCR position paper, and then the group broke into groups for discussion on strategies to address barriers to mental health faced by refugees.

Each group discussion was focused around one of the topics outlined in the position paper: trauma, migration, immigration policies, social impacts, and access to appropriate services. Groups were asked to talk about the local issues they were seeing related to their topic, and to discuss possible strategies, recommendations or best practices. These discussions were intended to generate ideas for action and collaboration with other organizations. The groups then reported back to the larger group.

Mr. Mantler drew attention to some MHCC resources, including their document “Supporting the mental health of refugees to Canada”, their Mental Health First Aid training, and their upcoming National Conference on Refugee Mental Health, which will take place in 2017. There was a strong interest from participants, MHCC and IRCC representatives to continue the discussion, and there was interest in holding a virtual meeting to discuss next steps.

Resource person:

Ed Mantler, Mental Health Commission of Cnaada

Moderators: Sajadeh Zahraei and Erin Wolfson

Trafficking in Persons: Access to protection and collaborative approaches

This session fostered a conversation around trafficking in persons with a focus on access to protection without fear. It did so by bringing together three different perspectives in looking at access to protection.

Loly Rico presented on issues affecting trafficked non-citizens. As a member of the CCR’s Anti-Trafficking Steering Committee, she gave an overview of the CCR’s work on trafficking and its approach with regards to access to legislative protection for trafficked non-citizens in Canada. She also spoke from the perspective of FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto and the organization’s experience looking at intersectionalities in their work against trafficking, and raised the importance of working within a human rights framework. In doing so, she shared the collaborative framework used by the Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network.

Don Meikle gave an overview of how trafficking in persons occurs in Saskatchewan, which he mentioned has primarily been identified as domestic. He also presented the unique approach used by his organization and by the province’s Sexual Exploitation Intervention Committee in addressing trafficking, of which EGADZ is part. While primarily focused on sexual exploitation, the collaborative approach presented follows a youth-focused and strongly youth-led model. One of the results of their community partnership is the Iamnotforsale.ca application and website which are designed by youth to provide anyone who has been sexually exploited access to recourses to ask questions, seek guidance, learn about and utilize supports and services while remaining confidential and unidentified. The app in particular provides access to immediate 24 hour resources with confidential, non-judgemental supports.

Melissa Hyland spoke from the perspective of British Columbia as well as from an Aboriginal perspective, focusing on trafficking in persons as it impacts Aboriginal communities in B.C. and across Canada. Her presentation also helped to reflect on opportunities to bridge responses on such issues affecting newcomers and Indigenous people and to strengthen solidarity.

The workshop discussion highlighted the need to:

- **Bridge and continue to build relationships of solidarity with Indigenous communities.**

A suggestion on how to do so included encouraging settlement organizations to introduce themselves to friendship centres. As individuals, it was suggested that people start deconstructing how they view what it means to be Indigenous, that we support communities in their efforts and look for ways to walk together, and that we extend ourselves as we would to our own family.

➤ **Continue building relationships with relevant federal government departments on trafficking issues.**

This point particularly stressed the need to do so with CBSA, in order to have specific contact persons in regions around trafficking. There are in particular challenges in finding a contact person within CBSA in Quebec.

➤ **Push for capacity building and training of the RCMP and enforcement agencies around levels of coercion, exploitation and fear.**

It was noted that Caregivers are particularly afraid to report and that a strong barrier for them is the lack of sensitivity around different forms of coercion and psychological abuse.

Resource persons:

Loly Rico, FCJ Refugee Centre

Don Meikle, EGADZ, Saskatoon Downtown Youth Centre Inc.

Melissa Hyland, Wakata'kari:Te Resiliency Rising Society

Moderator: Connie Sorio

Reforming the Refugee Determination System

Three years after dramatic changes to the refugee system in December 2015, this workshop was designed to examine how the refugee determination system is working, and what changes are needed.

Some key observations noted during the discussion included:

- Timelines for RPD and RAD are too short
- Processing times for legacy claimants are unacceptable
- Consideration should be given to expanding the jurisdiction of the IRB to grant some H&C jurisdiction
- Regional disparities in legal aid coverage affecting access to counsel need to be addressed
- Concerns about the high number of postponements of hearings by the IRB
- PRRA bars, H&C bars and remaining bars to RAD access need to be removed

There was general agreement from all participants that the timeframes under the new system are too short, for both RPD and RAD. While claimants appreciate having their claims heard in a timely way, current timeframes are too short to allow the claimants to properly prepare. CARL is proposing new timeframes in which the BOC form would have to be filed within 30 days of the claim being initiated, with the hearing to take place within 90 days, but with discretion to allow for postponements for particularly vulnerable claimants. On a brighter note the IRB has been dealing with finalizing of claims after hearings in a more timely fashion: IRB data says that in the fiscal year 2015-2016 the median processing time was 2.9 months and that 80% of the time a decision was either rendered at the hearing or within 15 days of the hearing.

Legacy claimants: Legacy claimants include not only those who have never had their claims determined, but also claimants who have had successful judicial reviews, and successful RADs

who are simply not being scheduled. Those caught in the backlog are individuals (not merely numbers!). The IRB position was that legacy claimants were being left in limbo because of the legislative requirement for tight processing times. The CCR is urging the government to provide an opportunity for legacy claimants to apply for permanent residence. In the meantime, the Board was also asked to consider other initiatives including expediting particularly strong legacy claims through the paper screening process, and triaging and prioritizing claims involving family separation, both when children are particularly young, and also when they are reaching age cut offs for landing as dependants.

Expedited claims: the IRB has a policy of expediting Syrian claims which appear to be manifestly founded. Two thirds of those identified for expedited processing were accepted, with the remaining one third sent through to hearing. Most were accepted on full hearing. The IRB is considering expanding policy on expediting to Eritrea and to Iraq.

Capacity at the IRB has recently been increased reflecting increasing numbers of claimants: in 2013/14 there were 11,500 refugee claimants, in 2014/15 there were 14,800 legacy claimants and in the past fiscal year there were 18,500 legacy claimants. The IRB is focused on getting good candidates for positions coming open, including those with subject matter expertise.

Regional problems with access to counsel for refugees: in Saskatchewan there is no legal aid coverage for refugees, so claimants go unrepresented before the Board.

Cancellations: Concerns were expressed both regarding the frequency with which the Board was cancelling hearings, and with the fact that when hearings are cancelled the Board does not explain the reason. Concern was expressed about the impact of cancelled hearings on claimants travelling from out of town.

Treatment of LGBT claimants: the IRB is developing a new Guideline that will address the processing of LGBT claimants. It will also cover LGBT persons in detention. A draft of the guideline will be circulated for consultation in the fall.

Access to RAD: Although DCOs now have access to RAD, concern was expressed about the bar to the RAD for those coming from the USA under an exemption to the Safe Third Country agreement, and about the bar for claims determined to be manifestly unfounded.

Jurisdiction of the IRB: It was suggested that the IRB have jurisdiction to grant H&C in circumstances for example to ensure family unity. For example, when a child meets the refugee definition but the parent does not, the Board should have jurisdiction to provide status to the parent. The Board should also be mandated to grant status in cases of statelessness, or in situations of generalized violence.

Resource persons:

Karin Michnick, Assistant Deputy Chairperson, Refugee Protection Division, Western Region
Mitchell Goldberg, Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL)
Chelsea Peterdy, Refugee Law Office (RLO), Toronto
Fran Gallo, Kinbrace Community Society

Moderators: Catherine Bruce and Rita Acosta

Family Support Services

This workshop sought to foster a wider conversation around what services may be necessary in a holistic model of settlement service provision for diverse newcomer communities. The workshop explored key areas, including child welfare, family violence, and criminal justice. Speakers included an intersectional and anti-oppressive perspective in their exploration of the sorts of support that are necessary, especially for those who have precarious status. Those present learned from the experiences of the presenters regarding settlement services beyond the standard set addressing issues of intra-family violence and child protection.

Laura Teed and Janice Coates of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Programs, presented a brief overview of the work of Child and Family Programs, including the legislative basis of their mandate (The Child and Family Services Act) which is to provide services to families where children under 16 years old are in need of protection. The programs seek to promote the well-being of children in cases of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, domestic violence, and neglect. Every person who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is in need of protection is required to report the information to the authorities and an investigation must be conducted to determine if the child is in need of protection. In cases where the investigator determines that the child is in immediate danger the child will be removed and placed until the issues have been addressed.

The core issues presented by Ashley Korn (Manager, Provincial Programs, Client Support Services Program) included the ways in which migration is invariably challenging and can contribute to stressors on family. Newcomer systems in Canada require assessment of institutional adaptation in order to better support refugee families as they face unfamiliar governmental systems. There are some promising emerging practices that meet basic needs of settlement, and even families that face challenges in these areas will often stabilize, with the help of community supports. Client Support Services help Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) to develop their capacity to navigate services independently. Sometimes challenges arise when there are different parenting and cultural norms for families. The experience of GARs with Child Protection Agencies varies between municipalities; in some cases they have developed partnerships with local agencies to support families with children in difficult situations. Migration can lead to shifts in family roles and intergenerational relations as well as poverty, situations that can contribute to family breakdown and violence. She noted that programming focused on stabilizing the family through providing supports that address the social isolation and poverty that are aggravating factors can help reduce family breakdown.

Sherman Chan (Director of Family and Settlement Services for MOSAIC) gave an overview of his organization's integrated services model. He focused on the children and family programs offered for children and parents, including specialized programs such as support/social groups for fathers, Vietnamese family counselling, and initiatives to stop family violence.

After the presentations, workshop participants continued the discussion regarding how encounters with child protection systems can accentuate issues related to precarious status. This led to a motion on the final day that became a proposal for a session in the next CCR consultation focused on the matter of "don't ask don't tell" in relation to child protection agencies.

Another topic, settlement services for families having members encountering the criminal justice system, was touched upon in relation to intra-family violence and child protection matters.

Resource persons:

Sherman Chan, MOSAIC, Vancouver

Janice Coates and Laura Teed, Child and Family Services, Government of Saskatchewan

Ashley Korn, YMCA of Greater Toronto

Moderators: Juliana Cortes Lugo and William Payne

Refugee resettlement: who is coming, who's not?

Through a series of short monologues, this workshop took participants on the journey of a refugee's resettlement from country of asylum to Canada. With the refugee's story serving as the heart and soul of the narrative, the interwoven monologues showed how the outcome is governed by other players: UNHCR caseworkers and policy representatives, government visa officers and policy makers, and at the end, settlement workers.

The narrative at the heart of the workshop was the story of two refugees, one Somali and one Eritrean, stuck in Cairo. Along with their description of the refugees' experiences, it provided the details related to how such cases are processed, from the perspectives of a UNHCR policy advisor and interviewer, and Canadian government policy makers and visa officers. It ended with the perspective of the Canadian settlement worker on the receiving end, dealing with outcomes in Canada.

The response to the approach taken in the workshop was very positive, with requests to repeat or make a video of it. However, the most practical proposed action was to develop an information sheet that captures the various perspectives and explanations of the "nuts and bolts" of the resettlement process. Given the variability of situations that arise, it is not clear that such a document is possible.

Resource persons:

Sharmarke Mohamed, Saba Andu, Ali Abukar, Michael Casasola (UNHCR), Jean-Marc Gionet (Director of Resettlement, IRCC) and Tyler Arrell (IRCC), Sabine Lehr

Moderators: Gilbert Iyamuremye and Mary Purkey

Strategy Session: Migrant workers

At this strategy session participants were invited to learn about the CCR's campaign on migrant worker rights and discuss the CCR's next steps. Participants discussed the government review of the TFWP and CCR strategy in engaging with the new government on other questions relating to migrant workers, as well as issues being faced locally and how CCR members and allies can take action.

The session began with an overview of CCR's recent migrant worker campaign activities, and the current federal government review of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. Participants then broke into groups to discuss a variety of issues, looking at what are the challenges, what policy changes do we need and what should CCR as well as individuals do to address needs.

Participants felt very frustrated that the TFWP review process was not inclusive, and suggested that CCR should be sure to respond to the report to be published by the HUMA Standing Committee.

Facilitators: Alfredo Barahona and Esel Panlaqui

A National Housing Strategy through Racialized Eyes

This workshop explored the root causes of homelessness from a structural and systemic point of view, looking at who is disproportionately disadvantaged and made invisible. It explored how refugee and migrant voices can and should be involved in mapping out Canada's strategy to end homelessness.

Cheyenne Ratman presented the lack of permanent safe and stable homes for many youth, and the risk of being homeless in Toronto. She focused on how hidden homelessness is affecting many newcomer youth nowadays. Different pathways to ending up homeless include conflicts with family, abuse in family, and lack of income or employment. Other factors such as country of origin, immigration status, gender identity and level of education can lead to mental health issues or lack of access to support.

In order to prevent homelessness, the program What's the Map was created. Its main objectives are to encourage cross-sectoral collaborations and to increase communication between organizations in Toronto. It is hoped in this way to move beyond the traditional understanding of homelessness to include various precarious living conditions and arrangements.

Vincent Wong provided a broad explanation of the ways in which tenants' rights are violated within the Chinese and Southeast Asian communities in Toronto. Vincent spoke of the injustices tenants sometimes face, despite the protections of the *Residential Tenancies Act* (RTA) in Ontario. The Metro Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic is a community-based legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario which provides free legal services to low income, non-English speaking clients from the Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian communities in Toronto, and aims to empower the communities they serve through public legal education.

Scott Duffee and Tim Yee presented on housing issues faced by the aboriginal community in Saskatoon. Important factors are prejudice, discrimination, and family violence. Saskatoon Indian & Metis Friendship Centre's main objective is to use a holistic approach to provide prevention, intervention and protection for those affected. They also try to address poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, spousal/child abuse and cross cultural issues as all of these factors can have harmful results that may lead individuals to homelessness.

Resource persons:

Cheyenne Ratnam *MSW*, What's the Map: Mobilizing newcomer homeless youth, Toronto

Vincent Wong, Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic

Scott Duffee, Saskatoon Indian & Metis Friendship Centre

Tim Yee, Housing First, Saskatoon Indian & Metis Friendship Centre

Moderators: Aurora Canales and Ronald Labrecque

Detention and the Best Interests of the Child

This panel explored the Best Interests of the Child (BIOC) in the context of immigration detention. The panellists offered critical perspectives on proposed new CBSA guidelines for dealing with children held in detention.

Stephen Bolton started by explaining that CBSA has been working on a National Detention Strategy over the last year and a half. The main pillars of the strategy are: infrastructure, the Alternatives to Detention (ATD) program, mental health, modernizing standards and policies, and deepening and improving partnerships. The question of minors in detention is especially relevant for: ATD, modernizing, mental health, and partnerships. CBSA wants to float a policy paper on minors in detention sometime this summer, and is aiming to get more Operational Guidance by late summer/fall.

Stephen Bolton presented the following issues that CBSA seeks feedback on:

- Looking to reduce to a minimum the number of children detained by CBSA and be proactive about offering alternatives to detention
- Detention as a last resort, and that children and parents' wishes be taken into account
- Eliminate the housing of Canadian children with their non-status parents.

Principles of CBSA's strategy:

- It should be clear that the liaison officer has to contact Children's Aid before taking any decision about whether to detain
- We should be moving towards unaccompanied minors not being detained at all.
- The child should be released to the other parent if possible; both parent and child should be released unless they present a danger to the public. In the case of young infants and nursing children, we should seek to keep them with the mother, wherever she is.
- Aware of need for compliance. There are some challenges with child protection services, sometimes we've been told that they can't take the kids.
- Allowing for community supervision with voice verification, which would mean fewer families detained.
- There are concerns about human trafficking. Members of family or extended family are ideal for taking care of the children, but challenges around identification make this complicated.
- Challenge: fewer children in detention but how to do this right? Where can we place them if the parent is not with them? That's where it gets more complicated.

Jenny Jeanes then gave examples of challenging situations where the Best Interest of the Child must be considered. She spoke to the importance of taking a family-centered approach, where the rights of children are seen as interlinked with the rights of parents. Since detention is bad for mental health, even for a short time, but since it can also be worse for children to be separated than detained with their parent, the only solution is no detention.

Other points from Ms. Jeanes' presentation included:

- Despite rapidly changing legislation related to immigration, there has been little legislative/jurisprudential change regarding detention in Canada
- The UN Global Strategy on Detention calls for an end to the detention of children
- The current language that detention of minors “should be a measure of last resort” is unclear: because it is such vague language it doesn't stop detention, or offer anything to hold officers to account in their decision-making.
- Detention deprives parents of the liberty to make choices around parenting, and this affects children. It is thus important to look at the family perspective. For most children it is in their best interests to be with their parents and for parents, to have freedom to make parenting decisions.
- Trying to assert a legal case about the interests of children is extremely difficult to do from detention.
- Unaccompanied minors are in need of protection, whereas when detained they are isolated, not allowed to call anyone unless they have been approved. Sometimes they only see the security guards. Isolation hurts them.

In conclusion the presenter encouraged the IRB to have a much broader view of Best Interests of the Child and to incorporate that lens in decisions about whether to detain parents. The children should not be an afterthought, as they are now.

Julia Huys gave a legal framework, talking about the international legal instruments relevant to Best Interests of the Child, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. She spoke of bringing a children's lens to the work being done, by getting instructions from clients who are minors, not just taking the adult perspective.

When considering the BIOC it is useful to use the rights awarded from the CRC such as the right to education, healthcare, freedom and freedom from discrimination. There is no need to use the adult's judgment, but rather what is awarded to them under the Convention. Primary consideration must be given to the BIOC in any detention order *that affects interests at any stage of the proceedings*. E.g. an H&C application must consider BIOC where any child is directly affected by the application of an adult.

Under domestic law:

- Canadian law must be interpreted to be in compliance with international treaties.
- Children are deserving of heightened protection because of their inherent vulnerability. They did not choose to come to Canada in most cases.
- The Supreme Court in *Kanthasamy* said an “assessment must involve deciding what in the particular circumstances is most likely to be conducive to the kind of environment in which a particular child has the best opportunity for the best care and attention.”
- 2012 Committee on CRC urged Canada to ensure that BIOC be the primary consideration in all detention/asylum decisions involving children.

The role of Children's Aid Societies is to look into reports about a child not being properly cared for or being abused. When called, they undertake a particular investigation of that child. After investigation, they may close file or:

- Enter into a voluntary service agreement (VSA) with that child. Work on a plan with the parents for the child's needs to be addressed. Or might agree to have child removed to another caregiver. Consent can be withdrawn by any party at any time. If child is 12, can withdraw consent also.
- Other option is CAS applies to court for a child protection application. If parent unwilling to enter into a VSA. Parent will have to appear in court 5 days after apprehension then 90 days afterwards. Court may order a temporary care order. Child goes to foster care or group/foster home. The court won't agree up front for child to be returned to parent when parent released from detention, CAS investigation will need to continue. Complicated.
- Going into foster care may mean placing them with others who are in distressing situations.

Ms. Huys warned that CAS can be a long and complicated procedure and care might not take place. A simpler solution would be ending child detention.

Additional points were made during the discussion by both panelists and workshop participants. Some of the salient comments included:

- The problem is not taking BIOC into account until after decision to detain a parent is made. The right to family integrity should be the first decision, which should almost always lead to non-detention of children.
- There should be administrative deferral of removal when there is an H&C decision pending that impacts a child, so that detention decisions (i.e. flight risk when deferral request refused) just won't happen.
- Working with CAS can be challenging: antagonism, power imbalances, and lots of lawyers involved. This can be traumatic for families who may have difficulty accessing resources, or who may have troubling history with authorities.
- Unaccompanied minors: there is a need for more proactive approach. Even in Quebec where PRAIDA exists, they are overworked with big caseloads. Minors have trouble reaching social workers on the phone. They mostly only have contact with them at the CAS offices or at the IRB. Having officers working in the centres checking regularly, being more involved in a gentle way would be important.

Resource persons:

Stephen Bolton, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)

Jenny Jeanes, Action Réfugiés Montreal

Julia Huys, Canadian Foundation for Children Youth & the Law

Moderators: Richard Goldman and Jennifer Stone

New Challenges and Opportunities in Resettlement to Canada

This workshop explored the current challenges and opportunities following the outpouring of public interest in the Syrian resettlement program. Through group discussion, participants considered strategies to overcome any challenges and build on the current momentum to further resettlement in Canada.

Participants divided into six groups to discuss the opportunities and challenges for resettlement in the current context, and respond to questions about changes participants have made in their organization or as SAHs/sponsorship groups, reflections on equal treatment for non-Syrian refugees, and any success stories.

Key opportunities cited:

- Integration among sponsorship groups and settlement organizations
- Engaging more people on refugee issues – capitalizing on sudden interest and resulting funds, media interest, volunteerism
- Increased public education and celebration of “Canadian values”
- Strengthening of partnerships within communities (e.g. corporate donations and discounts)
- Recreating programs such as HOST program
- Government collaboration with settlement unique in context of last decade, new sponsorship groups created

Challenges:

- Organizing willing new volunteers, lack of staff time to organize and train
- Competition between agencies
- Finding interpreters in small communities
- Transportation challenges
- SAH caps
- Self-care of support staff and volunteers – high risk of burnout
- Lack of services for mental health
- Getting stuck between funders/departments who don’t want to take responsibility, especially in health and education
- New sponsorship groups lack expertise - will they endure?

Changes made by organizations and groups:

- More training and opportunities for volunteers
- Rented mobile homes for temporary accommodations
- Created new positions for community engagement and coordination
- More partnerships between SAHs and other organizations to do presentations together
- Lunch & learn sessions once a week on topics such as IFH, taxes (topics determined based on demand)
- Engaging the academic community to do more participatory research

Equal treatment for non-Syrians

- Important to advocate for non-Syrians, some organizations already doing education on other refugees for the public
- Community engagement with Syrian situation has brought opportunity to engage on other refugee populations
- Making sure all communications speak of all refugees (not just Syrian), also prepare media package (ex. ISANS) to help steer discourse

Success stories:

- Creating role of community coordinator within settlement agencies to do outreach and organize volunteers; have a group that works on partnerships and building collaboration
- Continuous donations and support from the community, proactive communications
- Sponsorship of large extended family because of collaboration of synagogues and mosques to sponsor jointly
- Inter-agency collaboration
- Bringing in experts (e.g. retired teachers) to lead conversation circles
- Saskatoon started a refugee health clinic as a direct result of the Syrian resettlement – did assessments and matched them to a family physician
- Toronto private sector came together to subsidize housing

Impact of new awareness in the future

- How to keep the public interested?
- New courage to tell government “you’ve done this before, you can do it again”
- Mobilize people to be advocates
- Some sponsors have been discouraged by delays – need to address these feelings so they don’t spiral downwards.
- Use this opportunity to raise the awareness that social assistance rates are not enough for anyone, including refugees
- Raise awareness of international issues that create refugees

Moderators: Ellen Woolaver and Louisa Taylor

Training: Privacy and professional ethics

The workshop provided practical information to those who want to be sure that they are acting in ways that are ethical and respect refugees and other people’s privacy. Participants heard about how to develop policies on issues such as privacy, confidentiality and codes of conduct as a way to provide a framework for risk management. The development of policy and guidelines was discussed as a way of thinking ahead to prevent problematic situations from arising, and participants gained an understanding of how policies act as supports for staff to protect private information and support clients including refugees.

Facilitators: John Dubé and Debbie Hill-Corrigan

Caucus: Responding better to African refugees

This caucus provided an opportunity to hear about the African Leaders Network, a Toronto-based initiative concerned with the situation of African refugees. Participants were invited to bring forward other initiatives and ideas from elsewhere in Canada and discuss how we can collaborate across the country to advance the interest of African refugees.

The caucus began with a brief overview by Ibrahim Absiye of the work of the African Leaders Network (ALN), a Toronto-based fledgling organization that is hoping to expand across Canada. In March, the group sent a letter to the Minister of IRCC highlighting situations in Africa where displacement is not receiving attention and support from Canada.

Participants discussed a proposed resolution brought forward by the ALN to encourage the Canadian government to increase diplomatic efforts to support countries with large refugee populations, particularly in situations where there is a risk of refoulement, both through financial assistance and through resettlement. The background for this proposal is the deteriorating situation in Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya. The hope is that Canada can take some immediate actions to help prevent the closing of Dadaab and at the same time, increase resettlement out of Dadaab. Because the group did not have sufficient time to refine and present such a resolution to the membership at the general meeting, it was decided to table it for consideration at the fall consultation and to focus on an action item proposal instead.

There was a fairly extensive discussion of a variety of African situations including Burundi, Botswana, Eritreans in Sudan and Libya, and religious minorities in Egypt, and questions from those who wished to learn more about what UNHCR is doing.

Some specific points that emerged from the discussion:

- The tripartite agreement between Somalia, Kenya and UNHCR was explained briefly; UNHCR is trying to encourage the Kenyan government to rethink its position because of its commitment to the agreement. Meanwhile Kenya has apparently shut down the branch of the government that deals with immigration and refugee issues.
- Parallel situations in which international support has been crucial (e.g. Turkey) were noted.
- Some in the diaspora have argued that camps should be closed because they are like prisons, and people are abused in them, saying that camps are short-term solutions lacking in economic opportunities, and that other solutions need to be considered. Yet because emergency shelter is needed, both short and long-term solutions need to be considered.
- The threatened closure of camps provides an opportunity for a new focus on Africa and on resettlement.

Some immediate priorities for action were identified to be brought forward to the CCR Executive for communication to the government regarding the situation in Dadaab.

A list (with email addresses) of those interested in being informed further about the African Leaders Network and/or the issues raised was submitted to the facilitators.

Facilitators: Ibrahim Absiye and Gilbert Iyamuremye

Caucus: Alternatives to Detention

CBSA is exploring alternatives to detention. This caucus presented an opportunity for Consultation participants to give input to CBSA and to refine CCR's proposed model of alternatives to detention.

Three CBSA officers attended the session, one of whom presented on CBSA's objectives.

- Broaden alternatives to detention
- Deepen partnership with different stakeholders
- Launch a National Program (Spring 2018)

CBSA would like to move Alternatives to Detention (ATD) forward based on two points:

- Enhancing the voice verification program
- Release component

For this project, CBSA would like one National Service Provider (NSP) to work with Community Organizations who could then sub-contract other service providers to provide services in these key areas: Mental Health and Addiction, Employment and Housing, and Child Related Services. Service providers would be expected to report to CBSA as far as case coordination, but CBSA says it would not be the service provider's responsibility to make decisions or be involved in the enforcement component of the program

After the CBSA presentation, Nazrin Azar presented the CCR draft proposal of basic principles for ATD, which CBSA responded to.

- CCR proposes moving away from a criminality model - CBSA responded that they are looking into a case management model.
- CCR encourages many different ATDs - CBSA is looking for other services and options such as National Tool Bond Release Surety
- CCR proposed adopting a case management model - CBSA is looking into community-based models
- CCR proposed that CBSA officers need to be sensitized – CBSA agreed, and mentioned the possibility of hiring a “Release Liaison Officer” that would work with service providers and that could assess release plans
- CCR suggested that the presumption should be that people will comply with conditions
- CCR emphasizes the importance of access to legal counsel - availability of counsel is not sufficient especially within the 48 hour detention review - CBSA agreed to take the issue back to their office.

CBSA's main goal is to have fewer people in detention.

The issue of detention on the basis of identity was raised, with the point made that it is easier to acquire identity documents when one is out of detention. In some cases CBSA is detaining people even if they have proof of identity, such as a birth certificate or other national identity document. CBSA invited CCR to go back to them with suggestions related to identity issues.

Concerns were raised about cases where officers abuse their power. On the matter of accountability, orientation, training and attitude, it was suggested that CBSA needs to do more than just offer seminars to their officers.

Facilitators: Claire Roque and Debbie Hill-Corrigan

Caucus: Family Reunification

This caucus session provided an opportunity for participants to share experiences of barriers to family reunification and challenges for families in receiving adequate support once reunited. There was a focus on strategizing around solutions and advocacy.

In the first part of the session, participants were able to share some of their key concerns regarding barriers to family reunification. These included:

- Waiting for federal government to follow through on changing age of dependent from 19 to 22 (apparently this type of change takes about 18 months; still no announcement yet whether it will be retroactive)
- Waiting for government to follow through on commitment to remove conditional permanent residence
- Negative mental health impacts of family separation, especially for refugees who already suffered so much because of trauma of war, and long separations for caregivers.
- Some refugee claimants are married (civil and ceremonial) but don't have documents so they don't declare that they are married, then when immigration finds out then they are banned for life (Regulation 117(9)(d) – excluded family members).
- Cost of DNA testing is another problem, some can't afford it.
- Convention refugees wait longer to bring their families here.
- Refusal of those with children with disabilities.
- Syrian refugee experience serves as a lesson in terms of how to fast track immigration processing. We should learn from this experience.

It was noted that CCR can intervene on some cases involving children separated from their families who are in dangerous or abusive situations.

Recommendations coming out of the discussion:

- Reach out to Canadians for compassion on families separated
- Push the government to also put priority on immigration not only to immediate family but extended family members. The way refugees define “family” includes siblings, parents, aunts and uncles
- Continue lobbying and doing advocacy to make the process faster and more efficient
- Do research on the impact and integration of Syrian refugees in Canadian society. We can partner with folks from academia to develop evaluation framework, etc
- Create a committee to support CCR with its Family Reunification campaign
- Continue to educate the Canadian public about myths on refugees

Facilitators: Esel Panlaqui and Loly Rico

V. PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

Although relatively few evaluations were received from Saskatoon Consultation participants, they were nonetheless informative and included helpful feedback and suggestions. As always, participants greatly appreciated the opportunity to network with others from across the country who are working on similar issues. More than half of respondents stated that one of the things they liked best about the Consultation was the participation of the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, John McCallum. Some respondents praised the inclusive atmosphere and opportunity for everyone to contribute, highlighting the handout entitled “Tips for an Inclusive Consultation” that is included in the conference kits, and the emphasis on inclusion and anti-oppression throughout the conference.

Many of the respondents reported appreciating sessions with small group discussions, as well as the Q&A periods at the end of workshops. One participant stated of a workshop with small group discussion: “This was the most valuable session for me because it allowed me to directly contribute to the dialogue and gave opportunity to discuss challenges with individuals and groups I would never otherwise have been in contact with.” Although CCR was commended for its efforts around inclusion, it was nonetheless noted by one respondent that refugee and newcomer participants were sometimes squeezed out of spaces to participate by others with more CCR experience. For example, at the session with Minister McCallum, and when the representative from UNHCR’s Colombia office spoke at the closing plenary, they observed that such participants were beaten to the mic by those who traditionally take up more CCR space. One respondent who appreciated the efforts to inclusion, noted that nonetheless ‘it is hard to get “oldtimers” to truly embrace the implications of the power wheel. It is important to go over the power wheel and to remind participants that language really matters.’

There were some insightful suggestions also regarding workshops: one person suggested that speakers should be introduced with more detail, and another suggested that presenters should have more guidance on what participants are hoping to gain from their presentation, citing a workshop in which the presentations of some speakers were not particularly edifying. There were also a few suggestions about logistics, including accessibility of coffee during the breaks, and the need for a substantial vegetarian option at the social event dinner. Respondents reported being pleased with the Consultation programming, although as usual participants reported that it was difficult to choose between concurrent sessions.

Overall the participant evaluations were positive, with respondents reporting having made important new contacts, meeting inspiring people, accessing useful tools and resources, and learning about what is happening in other parts of Canada. CCR will take into account all the suggestions for improvement.