

Promoting Refugee and Newcomer Resilience:

In the Settlement Sector and in the Community

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camh

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale

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About the research

- *Refugee Mental Health Practices* — services and support systems across Canada
- *Refugee Resilience* — how recent refugees have demonstrated resilience, and continue to do so
- Guide of Promising Practices
- Chapter focused on role of settlement agencies

From Proverbs to Practice

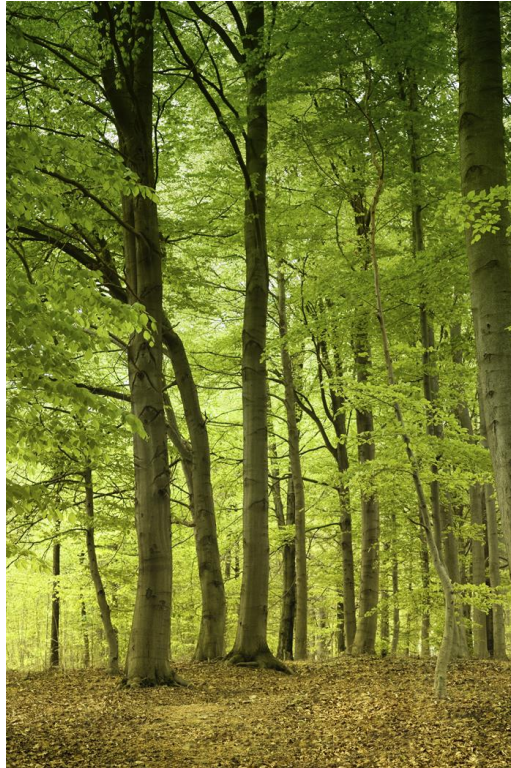


Photo by Adam Jones adamjones.freesevers.com

About refugees...

Common Assumptions

- Traumatized
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- “Queue Jumpers,” trying to get to Canada dishonestly
- Financially dependent

What We Know

- Strength and positive coping skills
- Post-migration conditions have greatest impact on mental and physical health
 - Housing
 - Labour market participation
 - Social and family connections
- Involuntary migrants
- Want to work

Workers, not agencies, serve clients

“When we make a referral, we make a referral to a person, not to an agency. We need to know what is going to happen. It is not written policy, it is the way everybody prefers to do business. It is, ‘I know you. We have met. I have this person.’ We are basically entrusting somebody’s life to somebody, not to something.”

--Settlement program manager in Ontario

Value added with having “ethnic match” on staff

- Evidence of increased service use
- Not just a matter of having the same language and similar cultural background, but having the sociological insight in to values, behaviour, needs
- Skilled, well-travelled Canadian born staff can also have these skills and insights.

Workers Serve Clients.... BUT



Workers Operate Within A Context

- Working Conditions
- Program and Policy Context
- Professional Support
- Professional Codes and Boundaries
- ***Community Support***



Community Support

- **NOT** (necessarily) about recruiting and maintaining volunteers
- ✓ Fostering skills and capacity within “mainstream” organizations (i.e. not in the settlement sector)
- ✓ Asking outside professionals to partner with existing staff/ programs
- ✓ Community engagement/ building goodwill

Example Case: Settlement Agency + Local Psychologists

- Staff at agency were stressed, overwhelmed with emotional/ mental health needs of refugee clients
- Call out to all practicing psychiatrists and psychologists via local CMHA: *you should be giving our clients pro bono services.*
- Great uptake! 😊
- Low long-term retention 😞

How to make the community support sustainable?

Two Lasting Programs



1. Family ESL/ Arts Program

- Volunteer-run
- Friendship
- Non-linguistic expression and healing
- “Keeping people busy”

2. Practicum for final year Ph. D. students in clinical psychology

- Didactic + practicum
- Training in working with interpreters
- Intensive supervision
- Free therapy for clients who are most in need (e.g. survivors of torture)
- *Long-term benefit for the profession and for Canadian population*

How to make community support sustainable?

- Fulfill unmet needs both for the agency/ its clients, ***and*** “the community”
- Piggyback on to pre-existing resources/ infrastructure when possible
 - don't assume new volunteers, funders or donors
- Need a champion for the project/ partnership

Why partner with “the community”?

“I think it’s important to realize that a lot of people don’t have trust in institutions. I think it’s more important, for me, for newcomers to be more integrated with the community, and to be involved with community activities AND institutions, not just institutions, because they’re not treated the same way. There’s a feeling, like, we have to laugh at everything they say, and they’re really special, we have to treat them special. But really, in everyday life, that’s not the way it goes. You’re just like anybody else, and I think that is helpful for them in the community.”

-Community Liaison Worker in Vancouver

THANK YOU

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