



The Toronto Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5R 1C7

Quaker Committee for Refugees
Annual Report 2013

Introduction

Quakers believe in the equality of all people and are opposed to all forms of discrimination. One of the ways in which Friends' Peace Testimony is given witness is by service to the needs of displaced persons and refugees. This has been a concern of the Quaker Committee for Refugees for the last thirty years, as it continues to be an unpopular cause that deserves full attention from all of Canadian society. We continue to do what we can to relieve the unnecessary suffering caused by those who do not understand the plight of a refugee. Refugees and new immigrants often come to Canada as a result of wars and injustice in other parts of the world; our work seeks to alleviate the consequences of such injustice in their lives.

Annual Report 2013

It is with pleasure and gratitude that the Quaker Refugee Committee celebrates another year serving refugee and immigrant communities. This report outlines briefly our efforts and the importance of our services.

Over the past years, we have seen an increase in the severity of the regulations faced by people in need of protection. These new regulations have closed the doors to entire families. The migratory experience is a difficult process already, but the new regulations and the lack of family support make their lives much more difficult. While government policies have shown a clear interest in strengthening the economic aspect of the migration process, they have neglected to understand the need to protect people through refugee programs, or the importance of family reunification. The year 2013 was particularly a year of losses, where the vulnerabilities of immigrant populations became more marked, with greater difficulty in the acquisition of migratory status and family unification.

• New Refugee System:

This system had been initiated a few years ago, though it was not launched until year 2013. The results at the end of the year were really concerning. The lack of time to present a case before the Immigration and Refugee Board has left the applicants with less time to access adequate support, usually resulting in the Refugee not being able to present his/her case properly. Basically the time allowed to prepare for the case has gone down from 28 days to 15 days. The claimant needs to acquire legal assistance and documentation for the case; in most instances the time needed to obtain references and documentation requires longer than just two weeks.

• Designated Countries of Origin:

The government now has the authority to identify designated countries of origin (DCO). The rules set by the Conservative government may decree countries to be DCOs even if they do not respect human rights and offer state protection to certain groups – like the Roma in Hungary - just because they do not normally produce refugees. If we consider that limited time to prepare a case affects its success, it becomes clear that access to protection in Canada under the new system works against those who deserve to be heard, based on their country of origin rather than on the justice of their cases. Sadly, such applicants not only have less time to prepare their cases, but also they have access to fewer legal resources.

• Access to Health Services:

Refugee claimants have been affected by the cuts imposed by the federal government, which has argued that giving health coverage to refugee claimants takes away health services to Canadians. These statements are untrue. The health services offered to Canadians are not affected by services offered to refugee claimants. Although under the Federal Health Interim Program limited services were offered, they helped to save many lives. One would think that it is a moral obligation of the state to offer this service to "save lives," since refugee

claimants arrive in Canada precisely in search of protection. Luckily for refugee claimants, several provinces, such as Alberta, Quebec and Ontario, have recently decided to provide them with health services, considering that not only an act of humanity but an obligation to society.

• **Permanent Residents:**

New rules created by the Federal Government make it much easier to lose the status of Permanent Resident. Figures such as "Conditional Permanent Residence" make new immigrants more vulnerable.

The new rules also punish Permanent Residents who have committed a crime in Canada. If we take into account that "crime does not define the individual" and "not all crimes are equal"; Permanent Residents, who might have lived in Canada all their lives, with all their family ties here, can be removed from Canada with no right to appeal that decision. The same applies to those refugees who have obtained permanent residence; under the new rules they may lose their residence automatically if the government considers that they are no longer people who require protection.

This is certainly a different picture from what many of us remember from previous years and certainly does not fit the idea of a country that welcomes newcomers. Furthermore, these conservative policies do not reflect the true values of Canadian society, and fail to remember the fact that Canada is a country made up of immigrants.

Despite all these new challenges we will continue to do our best to provide a place for refugees and newcomers, where they have always been welcomed and respected.

The tables below provide some statistical and demographic information about the people who have received assistance from our office at Friends House in Toronto.

Table A

Nationality of People served

Afghanistan	3
Algeria	3
Angola	2
Argentina	8
Bangladesh	2
Bolivia	9
Burundi	2
Cameroon	3
Colombia	45
Costa Rica	15
Chile	8
China	7
Czech Republic	4
Dominican Republic	5
Ecuador	7
El Salvador	15
Eritrea	6
Ethiopia	2
Ghana	4
Guatemala	13
Guyana	3
Grenada	7
Honduras	12
Iran	13
Iraq	6
Israel	4
Liberia	5
Mexico	37
Namibia	1
Nicaragua	7
Pakistan	7
Paraguay	3
Peru	5
Sierra Leone	5
Somalia	3
Sudan	5
St. Lucia	11
St. Vincent	5
Trinidad	3
Total	305

Table B

Types of Services provided to Refugees at Friends House

Application forms	149
Food and transportation	1
Furniture bank appointments	13
Intake forms for Christmas party	54
Income taxes	9
Letters	35
Long term housing	11
Oral interpretation (lawyer's office)	41
Personal Information Form (PIF) assistance	19
Referrals	139
Short term housing (shelters)	19
Translations of documents	110
Telephone calls	1,390
Grand Total	1,990

Table C

Immigration Status of People Assisted

Convention refugees	49
Caregivers	7
Failed refugee claimants	74
Landed immigrants	85
Persons without status	11
Refugee claimants	56
Temporary residents (Students, temporary workers and visitors)	23
Total	305

Immigration Holding Centre in Toronto.

Canada is considered to be among the countries that best respect human rights and that offer a most generous welcome to refugees and immigrants in general. This is partially true if we compare Canada to other countries of the world, but the sad reality for those who manage to get this far, find a Canada that fails to accommodate them. This is the reality faced by an average of 120 and 125 people who are detained from time to time at the holding centre. Some are denied access because a removal order has been made against them; others because of lack of proper Identification; and some cases because the person is considered to be a flight risk. Whatever the reasons for detention, the country where the person comes from, or how long the person has been in Canada, our presence at the Immigration Holding Centre aims to provide orientation, referrals to Ontario Legal Aid, shelters and to make sure they understand why they are detained without having committed a crime. We continue to meet every three months with CBSA staff and representatives from the Red Cross, United Nations and other NGOs concerned about the wellbeing of the population at the holding centre.

Despite the increasingly restricted regulations made by the Canadian government, we continue to have a good relationship with members of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), and are very thankful for the support we get from the NGO sector and other government bodies. The guidance of Fred Franklin, and his continued lobbying to improve detention conditions, have resulted in benefits to the detainee population, their family members and to Canadian society in general.

On March 26, 2013 York University- Seneca College's School of Community Services presented awards to four community leaders as part of the Third Annual Social Services-Immigrant and Refugee Forum. Narsin Tabibzaher from the Refugee Law Office, Sister Lois Anne Bordowitz from FCJ Refugee Project, Fred Franklin and Eusebio Garcia from the Quaker Refugee Committee were recognized for their long-standing service to immigrants and refugees. As representatives of the Quaker Refugee Committee who received this award, we were both very humbled by the experience and recognition, which inspired us to work even more diligently to help our fellow human beings from around the world.

Finally, although we respect Canadian laws we believe that mandatory detention does not and will never achieve any productive goals but will continue the victimization of the less fortunate people who seek to be part of and contribute to our Canadian society.

The number of people served at the immigration holding centre in 2013 by the staff at the TRAC office reflects only a small portion of the people detained. These numbers and their nationalities always seem to

fluctuate although they are given here to provide an idea of the nationalities of the population of detainees who seek orientation at the TRAC office.

Table D.

People Served at the Holding Centre

Afghanistan	26
Algeria	4
Angola	3
Antigua	10
Argentina	3
Bahamas	2
Bangladesh	4
Barbados	1
Belgium	3
Bermuda	2
Botswana	2
Bulgaria	2
Brazil	4
Cameroon	13
China	10
Colombia	7
Costa Rica	9
Cuba	10
Czech Republic	1
Djibouti	2
Dominican Republic	1
Dominica	1
DR Congo	1
Ecuador	2
El Salvador	12
Eritrea	18
Ethiopia	8
France	1
Gambia	13
Georgia	9
Ghana	32
Grenada	3
Guinea-Bissau	1
Guyana	4
Greece	10
Honduras	1
Hungary	27
India	35
Indonesia	2
Iran	24
Israel	19
Italy	1
Jamaica	34
Japan	1
Jordan	3
Kenya	1
Kosovo	1
Lebanon	4
Liberia	2
Lithuania	3
Libya	3
Mexico	64
Namibia	4
North Korea	3
Nigeria	45
Pakistan	21
Philippines	10
Poland	12
Portugal	7
Russia	1
Senegal	1
Serbia	2
Slovak Republic	2
Somalia	7
Sri Lanka	4
St. Lucia	15
St. Kits	4
Sudan	1
Spain	11
St. Vincent	36
Tanzania	3
Thailand	4
Tibet	1

Trinidad	5
Uganda	2
Ukraine	8
Viet Nam	1
Yemen	3
Zambia	3
Zimbabwe	3
Total	678

Table E

Number of people by immigrant status

Live-in caregivers *	8
Failed Refused claimants	275
Safe Third Country detained (Not eligible to make a claim in Canada)	4
Sponsorship breakdowns	16
Overstayed farm workers	15
Overstayed student visas	18
Overstayed visitors	47
Visitors (held on suspicion)	114
Withdrawal of Claim	11
Refugee claimants	170
Total	678

*Individuals who are qualified to provide care for children, elderly persons or persons with disabilities in private homes without supervision.



Refugee Weekend Report 2013

Once again Labor Day weekend at NeeKauNis was marked by a spirited and memorable Refugee Camp. The camp brings together recent refugees, most of them young and often culturally disoriented, with former refugees, now successfully established in Canada. Year 2013 was remarkably like last year's: number of campers: 85, down 1 from last year; age range of campers: 1 – 72, the only change being that our eldest participant was now one year older. The participants' time in Canada ranged from less than 2 months to several years and their countries of origin: Afghanistan, Colombia, Congo DR, El Salvador, Eritrea, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Iran, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, St Lucia, and Tanzania. Fewer countries from East Africa were represented compared to the previous camp, but Congo DR, Iran and Pakistan were new additions. The changes are an obvious reminder of the impact of political upheaval on refugee communities. They are also a reminder of the importance of a weekend such as this one, both as a retreat from the stress of the whole refugee process and as an introduction to a part of Canada beyond Toronto.

This year's newcomers, most of them young, included an Afghan student, forced to flee his home after the Taliban discovered he had been studying English (a close friend had been abducted and killed for the same “offence”); a single mother and infant from the Caribbean; and a young Iranian couple, one educated as a business professional, the other a scientist. But no matter the country of origin, and no matter the conditions which had brought them here, their stories were similar in their resilience and hopefulness, and in their determination to make new lives for themselves in Canada. The opportunity the Camp experience provided for them to mingle in a secure, supportive environment served to bring them together as a community.

Despite prolonged periods of rain, there was a great deal of outdoor activity. Though some soccer was played, the favorite sport on the upper field was volleyball, particularly among the younger (i.e. under 30) campers. There was a much cautious interest on the waterfront, a reminder that in most parts of the world bodies of water are sources of illness and home to predators. The indoor program included an audio-visual presentation by FutureWatch, dealing with global environmental issues, but presented from a small community perspective - setting up composting infrastructure, etc. The thrust of the presentation was on empowering individuals to bring about meaningful social changes. Another evening was devoted to music and comedy: the music was energetic and much of it was beautiful; the comedy leaned toward broad farce and slapstick, and its lack of subtlety overwhelmed any language barriers.

Many thanks to our wonderful volunteers from the Salvadoran Canadian Association (ASALCA) and FutureWatch and to our Directors, Rae and Ken Mavor who gave so much of their time to make of this camp a successful one. Special thanks to Camp Ne-kaunis Committee and the individual donors who sponsor some of the newcomers for the three days they spent at the Camp.



Christmas Party

On Thursday December 19 more than one hundred children and their parents attended our Christmas party. This celebration was sponsored by the CHUM Christmas Wish and the joint effort of a group of volunteers that are always present at this time of year helping with gift wrapping, food distribution and everything that has to do with the logistics around the evening program.

The celebration started at 6:00 PM at the Quaker House with Judith Pocock, through the story of the little Jesus, sharing and highlighting the meaning of this special date, the importance of holding a Christmas event amongst people from different backgrounds, and the similarities of part of Jesus' childhood to the contemporary reality that many refugees and immigrants lives here. In that spirit of sharing some boys and girls entertained the audience by playing melodies on piano and the guitar. The evening closed with a snack and the delivery of toys from Santa Claus.

For the Quaker Refugee Committee this is a perfect opportunity to share and accommodate newcomers, especially children from other countries, who have come to Canada with their families in search of peace and with hope to start a new life. The joy and sense of belonging on the part of the children is priceless.

This special event is an encouragement for us as a society to continue welcoming people from less privileged places who come to live in Toronto.

Thank you

The Quaker Committee for Refugees remains true to our mandate to continue serving the needs of the refugees and new immigrants so they can integrate and participate in Canadian society. Our capacity to assist the number of people mentioned at the beginning of this report would not have been possible without the assistance and support of many individuals and organizations. Among our recent donors are:

Argenta Monthly Meeting

Halifax Monthly Meeting

Camp NeeKauNis Committee of CYM

Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC)

CHUM Charitable Foundation

Future Watch

Nancy's Very Own Foundation

Samuel Rogers Memorial Trust

Memorial donations, and many other generous individuals.

The money received from the donors named above is, as always, administered by the treasurer of Toronto Monthly Meeting (TMM), whom we thank for this service. All donations to the QCR are spent on the work of the committee, which is required to raise these funds to pay for all its expenses. As a concern of the TMM (Quakers), the Refugee Committee is a federally approved charitable organization (#11926-6955-RR0001). We welcome any cheques, which may be made out to Toronto Monthly Meeting, with Quaker Committee for Refugees in the Memo line and mailed to: 60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5R 1C7.

As always we are also grateful to the Resident Friends for their warm welcome to the refugees who come to our doors, and to the generosity of TMM and its staff for supporting our work in so many ways. Members of the refugee committee this year were Philippa Davies, Fred Franklin, Eusebio Garcia, Brydon Gombay, Sarah Hall, Ebby Madera, Judy Pocock and Frank Showler.

