Supporting Refugee Families Into Early Exits From Homelessness

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The Team

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Setting the Canadian Context

Canada

How thousands of asylum seekers have turned Roxham Road into a de facto border crossing

Close to 50,000 have entered Canada at the unofficial border crossing point in just two years

Toronto

4 in 10 people using Toronto homeless shelters are refugees or asylum claimants, report finds

The city is calling for a full reimbursement of extra costs incurred, and new ongoing funding

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Relationship With the U.S.

- Safe Third Country Agreement
- Impact of media and the Trump administration narrative
Understanding the Nuances

• Refugees who are asylum seekers vs. resettled

#WelcomeRefugees: Canada resettled Syrian refugees

Operation Syrian Refugees was Canada’s response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Over the span of 100 days, beginning in November 2015, we worked with Canadians from coast to coast to coast, private sponsors, non-governmental organizations and provincial, territorial, municipal governments and international partners to welcome more than 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016.

Learn how we welcomed 25,000 Syrian refugees in 100 days:

✔ Our commitments to Syrian refugees
👉 How we did it
➢ Key figures
📍 Map of destination communities and service provider organizations
🗂️ What we learned and what happens after
In Comparison with Here

- NYC has an estimated 30,000 asylum seekers
- Estimated only 18,000 refugees will be resettled nationally in 2020
- Usually about 1/3 as many additional individuals are granted asylum
- New York state settles as much as 10% of those who are resettled
Ending Homelessness

- The promise of Housing First
The Cost of Emergency Shelter

Sources: City of Toronto (2009); The Conference Board of Canada (2010); Jac and Vincent and Morin (2010).
The Limitations of Housing First

- Chronicity criteria
- Acuity criteria
- Downstream
The State of the Science
Prevention & Diversion

FIGURE 2
Typology of Homelessness Prevention

1. STRUCTURAL PREVENTION
2. SYSTEMS PREVENTION
3. EARLY INTERVENTION
4. EVICTION PREVENTION
5. HOUSING STABILITY

ENDING HOMELESSNESS

PRIMARY  SECONDARY  TERTIARY
So.....

• Is there a way to divert asylum seekers away from emergency shelter and directly into permanent housing?
Methods

- Critical Narrative Inquiry

- 15 asylum seekers residing in two family shelters in London and Toronto, Ontario

- In-Depth interviews

- Braun and Clarke thematic analysis (team-based)
What We Heard

- “I had no means of income at the time, I couldn’t find a place, I had no identification at all, no documents, no passports, nothing.”
- “I have no money, I have no family, I have no Canadian ID, I have no idea how to apply as a refugee.”

Starting With Nothing
• “Because I’m new to Canada, I don’t know anyone, how do I get a reference?” [for a housing application]
• “I don’t understand where to go, you know. Here they say, ‘Go to this place or that place, go here, not there’, but I don’t even know what these places are.”
• “It took me two months just to get my basic ID and I couldn’t do anything else till then.”

The Bureaucratic Mire
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Findings

Participants had an incredible number of bureaucratic tasks to handle:

- Obtaining ID (one at a time)
- Making a formal claim or appealing a result
- Obtaining social assistance income
- Housing applications (including social or private market)
- Health needs
- Getting kids in school
Findings con’t

- Those who were in shelter, particularly shelters with staff who were experts in refugees, had the best outcomes

- Those who struggled, finally stabilized in shelter

- Key shelter services included access to: safety, accommodation, translation, health care, legal support, ID access, advocacy
Conclusion

- For the most part, asylum seekers are not an appropriate population for shelter diversion.

- Rather, asylum seekers who are homeless should be encouraged to access emergency shelters.

- The appropriateness of diversion is population specific.
Implications

- Shelters geared to the needs of asylum seekers

- Making all shelters the right door for asylum seekers
Questions
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