

**REFUGEE INTEGRATION
FACILITATORS:**

**VIEWS FROM THE
MONTREAL COMMUNITY**



FLORENCE BOURDEAU

TABLE DE CONCERTATION DES ORGANISMES AU
SERVICE DES PERSONNES RÉFUGIÉES ET IMMIGRANTES
(TCRI)

WEBSITE

37 YEARS

of expertise in the defense of refugee
persons' rights

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

The TCRI regroups 140 members across Quebec, most of them are community organizations. Their missions are diverse and vary from the defense of refugees' rights and employability to reception and integration. The TCRI is divided in different sectors depending on specific populations such as youth or women. The table's main mission is to create dialogue spaces and coordinate good practices for more impact.

According to Florence, their main claim relating to integration is: "we have to better prepare the host society."

**"WE HAVE TO BETTER
PREPARE THE HOST
SOCIETY."**

Indeed, she believes the newcomer bears the heavy burden of trying to integrate and in order to alleviate him/her we have to prepare the host society.

In line with this claim, Florence gave the example of ALPA which settled in Hochelaga, a district where poverty is endemic and immigration a recent phenomena. ALPA developed partnerships and now community organizations in the area have established a solid network, which facilitates the population's willingness to build connections with asylum-seekers.

As described by Florence, the TCRI is very active in the Protection sphere, they also run a twinning and sponsorship programs with local host communities.

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

The TCRI gathers members based on the sector they work in. Organizations focusing on refugee integration meet every 2 months in a committee called ADAC. Participants are representatives of the various levels of decision making relating to forced migrations into Quebec. Some are frontline actors working around the reception of refugees such as CBSA, IRCC, MIDI, UNHCR and PRAIDA. Some are autonomous actors working on behalf of the recognition of refugees' rights and their inclusion into local communities such as the CSAI or Action Réfugiés Montréal. These reunions help members clarify the current refugee situation, and develop anticipation mechanisms. Above all, the ADAC is about how to better combine efforts at every level for a maximum of positive impact on both the newcoming population and the host society.

“IT IS OUR MEMBERS WHO DO THE REAL JOB ON BEHALF OF REFUGEE INTEGRATION”

The TCRI's members' agenda is to “train, equip and assert the ongoing different actions.” As mentioned by Florence, the TCRI is here to facilitate the dialogue and give the right tools, but “it is our members who do the real job on behalf of refugee integration”. She is impressed by the local mobilization of organizations who don't receive any funding (except housing organizations) for working on behalf of asylum-seekers and often have to pay out of their own pockets to be able to offer services such as employability and social integration. For example, CSAI opened a branch in Lachine to respond to the growing demands of the majority anglophone asylum-seekers.

Florence is heading a new project of awareness-raising measures. Its mission is to train the social workers interacting with refugees and asylum-seekers in the processes of immigration and their inner complexities. They do this through workshops and pedagogical activities. The TCRI is also a partner of the CRIC in their “anti-rumor” community initiative which develops activities around collecting and deconstructing prejudices about refugees.

An example of mobilization which she was impressed by: how social networks were used to coordinate solidary action for Syrian refugees, for example the creation of a facebook page for the exchange of furniture and the emergence of collectives organizing the deliveries.



Credits : Unsplash

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

According to Florence, reinforcing the existing network of solidarity is a necessity that happens through training social workers and coordinating actions. It also occurs through the assertion of each members' mandates and mission.

TAKING ACTION

- Relaying the TCRI's messages of solidarity, anti-rumor and inclusion.
- Volunteering with their member organizations working directly with beneficiaries such as ALPA, CSAI, la Maisonnée, Entre-parents or le centre multi-ethnique.

COLLABORATION

- Organizations fitting the criteria of the Table are welcome to approach the TCRI to become a member.



ARTHUR DURIEUX

LE PONT
WEBSITE

130

asylum-seekers
accompanied

20

families hosted presently

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

Le Pont emerged as a response to the urgent need of PRAIDA to find temporary settlement after asylum-seekers receive their first subvention from Emploi-Québec. It was created by a handful of individuals who mobilized to gather funds and material to open a temporary residence for asylum-seekers. The project started around the beginning of September, 2017 and the House opened on the 2nd of October, when the organization received their first resident: a woman from Guinea. Since then, Le Pont has been a home to more than 130 asylum-seekers from all over the world. On paper, the time beneficiaries can stay in the house is limited to 1 month but the team is extremely flexible and people generally stay longer, until they can find a more permanent home. Le Pont follows a case by case approach as its main principles are the dignified reception, protection and integration of individuals.

Le Pont does not welcome single men but mainly families, single women and women with children who are referred by social workers from Praidia or La Maisonnée. In the sector of housing for refugees, Arthur has noticed a recent increase in homelessness (for 1 or 2 days) which worries many social workers and demonstrates that the need in temporary settlement is still urgent.

“AT LE PONT WE FUNCTION LIKE A FAMILY !”

As described by Arthur, Le Pont functions like a family-home. It is a warm place full of life, and light. Currently, it hosts around 20 families. The few problems that occur are the product of normal human interactions, not religious or ethnic tensions. In this safe and quiet environment, asylum-seekers can slowly regain control over their lives, and are continuously accompanied, even after they leave the house.

For example, Regina was one of the first residents of Le Pont and now lives in her own apartment. But she comes everyday to help with the tasks of the house and inform newcomers on the rules for a harmonious coexistence: people refer to her as “Mama”. She’s the one who supports newly arrived families with everyday life’s tips and good deals, such as the African market located in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve where women can find the spices they need to cook their traditional meals.

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

Many cultural activities are organized by Arthur, its team of volunteers and local community organizations. These include information sessions on housing, on the banking system in Montreal or on transportation. For example, Le Pont partnered with La Pépinière and the town hall of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve to organize a potluck on the 14th of July, where the residents will all cook a traditional dish from their country (Egypt, Nigeria, Syria...) and share it with the neighbors in the communal space of Notre Dame Des Victoires. Another activity organized by the residents was a garage-sale through which they could raise funds and raise awareness at the same time. As Arthur believes "our mission lies in making stories of people heard and known, not their files." He is very committed to the defense of asylum-seekers' rights and to changing the often misinformed media narratives around their reception and integration.

The distinctiveness of Le Pont lies in its mission of "life autonomization", equity and intersectionality. Indeed, their work is about giving asylum-seekers the right tools to empower themselves. One step at a time, Le Pont is starting to build partnerships with other organizations working with refugees at the community and municipal level, such as ALPA, la Maisonnée and CSAI. From January to April, Arthur offered McGill students the opportunity to come volunteer at the house.

Students and residents created strong bonds, and went to a Cabane A Sucre together. The team also spent a day at the TCRI to follow the training "itinéraire d'un demandeur d'asile". In addition, they were trained by CALACS in sexual violences against women, which now gives them the right tools to interact in a sensible manner with asylum-seekers.

"MY MISSION LIES IN MAKING STORIES OF PEOPLE HEARD AND KNOWN, NOT THEIR FILES."



Credits : Le Pont

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

Le Pont always welcome volunteers and is extremely open to new creative projects which create bridges between the residents and the local community.

DONATIONS

They also welcome donations (particularly winter clothes) and encourage citizens to attend their garage sales and various other community-building events.

COLLABORATIONS

One of the needs Arthur sees as primordial to address is the psycho-social problems of asylum-seekers. Therefore, they invite organizations who are specialized in this domain to offer their services in environments like Le Pont, where residents are less stressed and can work better on trying to heal their traumas. Organizations who share information about asylum-seekers' rights such as access to health are also very welcome.



VÉRONICA ISLAS

CARREFOUR DE RESSOURCES EN
INTERCULTUREL (CRIC)

WEBSITE

a key actor of cultural
mediation since

1999

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

The CRIC's global mandate is to gather actors working to facilitate intercultural connectedness. The organization started as a response to the changes in housing subventions about 20 years ago, which encouraged migrants to settle in the Frontenac area and resulted in a rise in violence and incivilities from the local population against the newcomers. The workers of the CRIC aim at giving immigrants access to resources that already exist rather than provide these resources. They accompany partner organizations and individuals in their community work. Their vision: "build bridges and avoid ghettoisation." They do this by giving people the tools to navigate the local systems.

"AT THE CRIC, WE TRY TO BUILD BRIDGES AND AVOID GHETTOIZATION."

CRIC's branch focused on refugees and asylum-seekers emerged with the arrival of the Syrian refugees who had different demands and specific needs that immigrant and resident populations did not have before.

The organization therefore had to adapt and offer new services such as the "Femmes Relai", an activity which pairs a quebecoise "raconteuse de culture" with a newly arrived woman to share about the respective values, history and social norms. Interestingly, Veronica noted that when refugees started this workshop and were asked about their view on the local society, almost all of them would describe it as "closed". But after the exercise, most of them would describe it as "open". The CRIC also runs a twinning program and several activities such as "Mé-tisse ta communauté" or a "tournée des lieux de cultes", which celebrate different cultures while trying to normalize multicultural coexistence. In the sphere of education and raising awareness, the CRIC is very committed to challenging local stereotypes, demystifying clichés and facilitating a critical mind. Their project "êtes vous de bonne rumeur" is a workshop which uses facts and precise data to counter popular arguments against the reception and integration of refugees.

"PEOPLE ARE WELCOMING BUT THEY JUST NEED TO TAME THEIR FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN."

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

The CRIC is a key actor of integration in the Montreal area. The organization constructed many partnerships over the years, such as with the TCRI or Centraide. Activities such as “êtes-vous de bonne rumeur” are conducted by people from various organizations. These activities are crucial in that they foster communication between people from different cultures, generate knowledge and thus, greater tolerance.



THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

- One of their major needs is interpretation and translations (language and cultural codes). Indeed, the CRIC has difficulties reaching out to certain communities such as the Arab or Persian ones.
- The CRIC always welcomes volunteers for their various activities and strongly encourages people to subscribe to their twinning program which is mutually rewarding.

COLLABORATIONS

- The CRIC is trying to find professionals from other organizations or people to train to run the education workshops.



RACHEL SHUGART

THE WELCOME COLLECTIVE
WEBSITE

7

months of operations

60%

of the families end up building
a long-term relationship

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

The Collective started 7 months ago by 3 founders who started the facebook page “YMCA refugee claimants donations” which regroups people who want to offer furnitures and goods to newcomers.

Despite the good intentions of the page, only the most vocal and outspoken people got the help they needed, and the others were left very isolated. Consequently, the pilot project was created in order to better organize the material and cultural exchanges, and permit everyone to have access to them. They partnered with the YMCA and PRAIDA and were referred 3 families per week to match individually with Montrealers who wanted to help them settling in their empty apartments.

“OUR MANDATE IS TO HELP WELCOME GROUPS HELP TO LEAD ASYLUM-SEEKERS THROUGH THE INTEGRATION PROCESS.”

Each Welcome Group can be a family, a group of friends or neighbors and office colleagues. They make contact with the asylum seekers, meet them at their apartment, and arrange to have the basic necessities delivered to the families within 3 weeks (mattresses, clothing, cooking utensils...).

To be eligible to join the collective, asylum seekers must be pregnant women, single women with children under the age of 5, large families and individuals with disabilities.

The most vulnerable people are referred to the Collective by the YMCA social workers who make sure everyone has access to the complementary services despite their financial strain during the first month they settle in their new apartment.

“WE MAKE SURE THE FAMILIES THAT WOULD NEVER COME FORWARD TO ASK FOR HELP ARE GETTING SUPPORT.”

Rachel’s main role is to be the social worker for the welcome groups and help them interact with a wide range of issues asylum-seekers are facing. Part of the process of preparing the welcome groups is to give them the tools to be culturally sensitive, rethink priorities and help them see through the newcomers’ perspective: “we help the welcome groups take into account the needs of individual families. For example, a blender is the main component of Nigerian cuisine and a must-have for newly arrived families, even though it might not seem like a necessity.”

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

In addition to their partnerships with the Trottier Foundation, YMCA and PRAIDA, the Collective has partnered with an environmental organization for a pilot project aiming at delivering furnitures, which brought together asylum-seekers and McGill students.

The Welcome Collective is also planning on organizing community events to create bonds between asylum-seekers and local welcome groups, such as meetings and picnics. They want to give the chance for the families in the neighborhoods to get to know each other, but they are waiting to make sure this is something beneficiaries would really want in the first steps of their integration. One of the most difficult challenge for Rachel is to make sure everyone who volunteers with them respect their boundaries. The connections they facilitate build special relationships, but sometimes Rachel needs to remind volunteers it's ok to say no or to not be able to help on a specific issue.

“60% OF THE FAMILIES END UP BUILDING A REALLY LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP,

THE OTHER 40% MIGHT NOT STAY IN TOUCH BUT THEY HELP IN THE BEGINNING.”

Another aspect of the Collective's connections is advocacy and raising awareness about the realities asylum-seekers are facing when settling in their new environment: as stated by Rachel “we make a hundred little advocates for asylum-seekers' rights every week because through us local residents realize the importance of connecting with newcomers.”



Credits : Welcome Collective

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

- Forming a welcome group: “we needs individuals or groups willing to collect the material goods for a family and stay in touch from 3 to 6 weeks.”
- Drivers are also needed for the truck.
- Interns willing to set up research projects and gathering neighborhood resources that are specific for asylum-seekers are also welcome are welcome.

COLLABORATIONS

Organizations that can help the Collective simplify their processes, managing resources and keep their model going are very much invited to get in contact with them.



CAMILLE TESTE

MEDIAFUGEES
WEBSITE

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

Mediafugees is a platform which emerged as a way to for refugees to express themselves, tell their stories of exile and integration and give them the tools to change the global narratives on refugees and migrants. It is an opportunity for people to get involved in a creative way and reach out to publics who would not otherwise be targeted, such as artists. The website was launched in April 2018 and started with videos of refugees sharing the perspectives on how we understand exile today. The platform is now divided into 3 sections: news, stories and expression. Anyone who has been forcibly displaced out of their country of origin can participate and get familiar with the concept of "self-journalism", which Camille believes to be the most relevant and honest way to a tell stories of refugees in this world where journalism is in a "structural crisis" and conveys biased representations.

The mission of Mediafugees is a tool to change people's and media's perspectives on refugees and migrants globally and locally.

"WE PROPOSE A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO GET INVOLVED IN A CREATIVE WAY."

Mediafugees also provides opportunities for refugees to integrate into the sphere of journalism in Montreal. One of the limits Camille notes is that newly arrived refugees are not very willing to get involved as they have more urgent priorities and refugees who have been here a long time have turned the page on their stories of exile as they are moving onto new chapters of their lives.



Asylum in Canada: the Newcomer's Fantasy

John has fantasized a lot about Canada. But

Credits : mediafugees.com



Mohamed's Fight 1/4

Iraq: to be born on the wrong side of the tracks.

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

Mediafugees has collaborated with artists, illustrators who offered their help because the organization responds to the popular criterias of an innovative, dynamic and technological startup. With their creative design they propose different ways to think about refugees. However, Camille believes that “the tech aspect could also be the enemy of the project” because it makes our reach too global.” In the future, she wishes to implement local actions such as distributing a journal in community that convey refugees’ messages more effectively and builds stronger ties within communities.

They also partnered with Singa Québec (the “refugee airbnb”) in order to get in contact with local refugees willing to tell their stories. In addition, one of their partner in France is the “Maison des journalistes” and in Montreal the “institut du nouveau monde” has invited Camille to present the project and show young people how to convey a message through journalism.

Local media such as the Devoir helped Mediafugees gain visibility and demonstrated how mobilized and supportive the Montreal civil-society is.

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

Because the question of refugees is such a global one, Camille believes that on a local level efforts could be better combined and there is a potential for more economies of scale to be created for a greater impact.

TAKING ACTION

- Referring refugees who want to tell their stories or have creative projects.
- Collecting testimonies and providing support to refugees.
- Proposing creative content for the platform and innovative projects that can make the original idea evolve.
- They welcome individuals who contribute to change narratives and defend refugees’ rights on a global and local scale.

COLLABORATIONS

- Mediafugees encourages existing organizations to support them with their expertise in various sectors (technologies, integration services, resources and building partnerships...).
- Another way to help perpetuate this innovative initiative is by donating funds.
- They are also very open to connect with local media to relay their messages and the need to change narratives around refugees by hearing their voices directly.



ADELLE TARZIBACHI

LES FILLES FATTOUSH
WEBSITE

20

Syrian women employed

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

The Syrian catering project “Les Filles Fattoush” started in September 2017, and was launched in May 2018. Adelle Tarzibachi and her cofounder were inspired by similar initiatives of catering service offered to refugee women in Lebanon, and realized that despite the important presence of Syrian refugees in Montreal, no such activity existed to help women integrate and find a job. According to Adelle, finding employment is the biggest challenge refugee women have to face. Moreover, as she notes, Syrian women work at home a lot, and their cuisine is one of the cultural richness of the country. Step by step, she decided to combine employment opportunities with the art of cooking and in just a few months they have concluded many contracts.

“WE HAVE OUR OWN SPICES AND TASTES, WE LIKE VISUALIZING THE MEALS WE MAKE AND PRESENT THEM IN AN AESTHETIC WAY.”

“OUR WORK GOES BEYOND THE KITCHEN: IT’S ABOUT MEETING PEOPLE AND CELEBRATING THE DIVERSITY OF OUR CUISINE WITH THE PUBLIC.”

The team is now made of 20 people and Adelle focuses on giving the women the maximum hours of work she can rather than employing new women. Once the demand is greater and more contracts signed, Adelle will be able to offer this opportunity to more women. The benefits of working with the Filles Fattoush are clear. Simple things like going out of the house, having a schedule, meeting other women are essential components of integration. Through the catering service, women get to interact with customers, practice their french. All in all, Adelle believes that it is by sharing their culture and stories that refugees enrich host societies.



Credits : lesfillesfattoush.com

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

The women are in the kitchen for working and they go out together for their meetings or simply to have fun and talk about their lives and project. Adelle does not consider herself as a “boss”, even though she runs the kitchen and is the primary spokesperson for the organization. Indeed, she sees herself as “being there for the women”, accompanying them in their integration and job, and supporting them in the various challenges they face.

Adelle’s story is also inspiring for the newly arrived women: a Syrian immigrant to Canada, Adelle launched her own company ADECO and successfully made her way into the business sphere of Quebec while still providing opportunities to Syrian people. This year, the Filles Fattoush were invited to the C2 Montreal conference panel: “Ideate for impact” to present their project.

07

“THE TERM ‘REFUGEE’ IS TOO LOADED. FOR SYRIAN WOMEN TO FEEL AT HOME IN MONTREAL, THE SOCIETY NEEDS TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS OF THEIR INTEGRATION.”

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

- Spreading the word and encourage people to make orders: “each order is more hours of work for the women.”
- Volunteering (communications, marketing...)
- They also need someone to coordinate the volunteers
- Donations

COLLABORATIONS

For now all the efforts are put in the kitchen but in the near future Adelle would like to build connections with other organizations working with refugees in Montreal and see how they could support each other especially in the sphere of integration through employment.



PAUL CLARKE

ACTION RÉFUGIÉS MONTRÉAL
WEBSITE

17

women were matched
in 2017

OVER 20 YEARS

of expertise in breaking
social isolation through
friendship

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

The mandate of ARM is to accompany persons seeking Canada's protection. In addition to the sponsorship and program focusing on detention, their main integration initiative is the twinning program whereby they match a woman who has been through the refugee experience with somebody from the host society. According to Paul Clarke, the twinning program was conceived to offer some extra-accompaniment to more vulnerable women. Some women self-identify as wanting to partake in the program during information sessions at the YMCA, others are referred by lawyers or social workers. In the total scheme of the organization, Paul Clarke notes that in the total number of people ARM accompanies, only some of them benefit from the integration program which is still very small. For instance, in 2017, 17 women were matched. The way the social support program works is after the refugee women is identified as needing some accompaniment, an interview is organized with ARM to find out what her age is, her interests, which part of town she lives in, what kind of activities would she like to be doing. Volunteer women are interviewed in the same way and are then matched with the refugee women.

“IT COULD BE THAT THEY GO FOR A COFFEE, A WALK ON MONT ROYAL, A BIKE RIDE...THE HOPE IS THAT THE HOST SOCIETY PERSON WILL INTRODUCE THEIR TWIN TO THEIR SOCIAL NETWORK.”

ARM sets up about 10 to 12 group activities a year, which enables ARM to take people to for example the Jardin Botanique de Montreal, to the Jean Talon Market, or to a Cabane à Sucre. These activities allow the twins to meet other people and experience how other people are living the twinning program. The time commitment is 6 hours a month for at least 6 months. A social worker follows up with all the participants and carries out surveys. There are many successes in terms of helping people find jobs, encouraging them to go back to school. Beneficiaries report a better understanding of the Québec society and the host society participant also benefits because they learn to see life through the refugee perspective.

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

On the 4th of April is refugee rights day in Canada. For the occasion, ARM organizes a 5 à 7 event where they invite program participants, donors, lawyers, people working in other community organizations, and anybody who cares about refugees. Program participants are offered an opportunity to volunteer and be involved in ARM's work. It also helps people share their positive views on the refugee integration experience. This year, a Pakistani refugee came to Paul after the party and said "now I know I am not alone." World Refugee Day is also an event where ARM cooperates with other community organizations and invite program participants.

Paul Clarke believes that media outings and events are important to counter misinformation. In his view, the Canadian experience is composed of people coming in and strengthening the society with what they bring. Paul believes that we can't expect people to conform right away and it is civil society's responsibility to create the conditions for integration, understand people's viewpoints and to welcome the many different contributions made by newcomers.

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

- Volunteering
- Donations
- Physical goods when there are particular needs
- Letter writing and advocacy campaigns are activities where other organizations and citizens can get involved

COLLABORATIONS

In ARM's work, partnerships and collaborations with other organizations are important but for them to be more effective, more resources are needed. Paul believes that ARM needs to stay true to its mandate given their relationship with government organizations, and establish effective collaborations when needed.



ELEANOR NASH

PROMIS
WEBSITE

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

PROMIS has traditionally served all kinds of immigrants over its 30-year history, but it has not made a specific effort to reach out to Anglophone groups which it is now doing. Even though Eleanor does not intervene directly with beneficiaries, she considers herself a facilitator of integration in the broader sense because she is putting people in touch with the resources they need to integrate.

“WE HAVE A BROADER MISSION THAN THE GOVERNMENT MANDATES US TO DO.”

As noted by Eleanor, PROMIS is financed by the government to facilitate the integration of immigrants holding a Certificate of Selection of Québec, permanent residency, or naturalized citizenship. No group in Quebec has a government mandate to work with asylum seekers, but there are organisations who are mandated by their own missions to serve people with such statuses. PROMIS is one of those groups -- helping refugees is parts of its mission.

If someone shows up at their door, PROMIS will offer them as much help as it can and will refer them to other resources. However, PROMIS is not actively seeking out the most isolated refugees. Eleanor believes there are many people that PROMIS is not currently serving because these people are marginalized somehow, either in that they are unaware of services available to them or they do not know how to find nearby resources.

This is something PROMIS is trying to address by updating their electronic services such as implementing online follow-up which would save people time and money. Collective activities for integration at PROMIS in which asylum-seekers can partake include French classes, CV writing sessions and training for job interviews. In addition, information sessions on renters' rights and various other topics are a major resource of integration for refugees. PROMIS' Community Food Action offers a fruit and vegetable basket purchasing group and free bread deliveries which are also open to asylum-seekers. PROMIS' counselors make sure everyone gets access to as many services as possible.



WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

PROMIS is involved with several community roundtables such as the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI). PROMIS has had contacts with organisations at the local, regional and provincial level since its beginning. That being said, Eleanor is excited about the fact that PROMIS is now seeking to expand its network to include contacts with other groups that have cultural mandates or that work with different cultural communities so that these communities' members can benefit from PROMIS' services. Private individual groups have reached out to PROMIS in order to collaborate and share resources.

“CONNECTIONS MAKE US MORE EFFECTIVE IN HELPING US IMPROVE PEOPLES' LIVES.”

PROMIS has also offered information sessions at places like Welcome Hall Mission/Mission Bon Accueil, which offers a food bank for asylum seekers. Eleanor notes that the language barrier is a major challenge in Quebec as many asylum seekers do not speak French. Moreover, people often want services for which they are not eligible, such as having their credentials recognized, which is something that is outside of PROMIS' control. Above the obstacles and challenges, the integration success stories Eleanor likes the most are those of families or individuals who adjust enough to their situation that they are able to help somebody else. In her words, “When someone feels integrated and welcome to the point of helping others with their own integration, that is success.”

One story Eleanor shared is the following: “There was an asylum seeker from Nigeria who, having recently started taking our free part-time French courses, decided to participate in a focus group we were holding, despite the fact that it was all in French. He persevered through the focus group and participated as much as he could with his limited French. At the end, we spoke in English and he explained his situation a bit. He soon took an appointment with one of our Regionalisation counselors and worked with her over the course of a few visits. When we had a membership campaign in the spring, he joined PROMIS, and he attended our Annual General Meeting.” To Eleanor, taking an active and interested role in the organisation who is supporting your integration is a sign of success. She hopes this man continues to play a role in their organisation! Another moving story she shared is the one of a PROMIS client from Senegal who is the single parent of young children with health problems. Nonetheless, she plays an enormous role in helping new families feel welcome in the activities offered by PROMIS' Family Support Services and Community Food Action. She is a leader in the Collective Garden, and she volunteered at the Free Tax Clinic last spring.

Regarding PROMIS' operations Eleanor believes more resources are needed for their social impact to be greater. But above all, she believes that clarity is key, especially about seemingly ever-changing government policies. Indeed, it is hard to take action and make concrete steps collectively when the future for asylum-seekers is so unclear.

“THE FEEDBACK WE GET IS: THANKS FOR THE EFFORTS YOU HAVE MADE FOR US.”

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

According to Eleanor, there are three primary ways that PROMIS' actions could be better supported by other organisations and citizens:

TAKING ACTION

- Other organisations and individuals can refer clients to both PROMIS' individual and collective services, and PROMIS can refer to other organisations' services.
- With other organisations and individuals, PROMIS can look at new ways to collaborate around common issues/problems, new services, and activities.
- For funding agencies and individuals, PROMIS can always benefit from financing for their activities, projects, and services.



ABDULLA DAUD

THE REFUGEE CENTRE
WEBSITE

150 refugees benefitted from the Centre's help to get admitted to university in 2017

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

The main mission of the Refugee Centre is to encourage the student population to work together with the community to help strengthen the refugee & immigrant population through unity and integration. As Abdulla puts it "we see integration in two ways: the responsibility of the newcomer to integrate and connect with the society and the society's responsibility to be the welcoming party and create the avenues of integration." He considers himself a facilitator of integration for the newcomers and for the Canadians who volunteer with them.

For Abdulla, the refugee-situation in Montreal is very distinct from other cities and provinces. The Refugee Centre emerged with the realization that asylum-seekers are given very little recognition here and simple things such as housing and employment are enormous challenges. But because the integration process doesn't stop with the governmental approval of refugee status, the Centre also helps refugees and immigrants. The organization is trying to address the lack of English education and academic counseling, especially with IELTS and TOEFL, which refugees need to enter university.

"WE ENCOURAGE REFUGEES AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY TO CREATE TECH AND GLOBAL SOLUTIONS TO MIGRATIONS ISSUES."

Just last year, around 150 refugees got the Centre's help to get admitted to university. In addition to English education, the other part the founders saw as missing was economic integration, reason why they launched DevBloc, an incubator for entrepreneurial refugees in the tech sector.

"ALMOST ALL OF THEM WANT TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL."

In terms of economic integration, Abdulla makes a distinction between "dead-end jobs" which don't help refugees become financially stable, and "careers", which benefit refugees and economic markets on the long-term. The Centre organized a career fair with a number of companies and banks which was a collaborative success as a lot of refugees got jobs. According to Abdulla, such events help "normalize" the situation of refugees in the work sphere. Moreover, through the activities offered at the Centre, social integration is also fostered. Indeed, through the language or coding classes and the various events, newcomers get to grow their social networks. Despite all the success stories they help facilitate, the Centre is also confronted with difficult situations, which they try to address one step at a time.

Abdulla said that the stories that touch him the most are the mothers with multiple children who are able to go back to studying or get jobs.

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

The Refugee Centre works with government officials, big companies like google and IBM and with many international and grassroots organizations offering services to refugees and asylum-seekers such as the UNHCR, Amnesty International and MSF. They do a lot of facebook online campaigning but use grassroots means like fairs and community events to reach out to community organizations such as the Renaissance church.

Advocacy is also a big part of the Centre's work. "What we do is that we try to advocate for a better system which facilitates integration for asylum-seekers, that's different from defending their rights, which would mean their rights are being infringed upon by the government." Indeed, Abdulla states that he is most fearful of the system as it is currently structured taking advantage of asylum-seekers. He takes the example of the illegal, unconventional rules sometimes applied on asylum-seekers by landlords.

It is in that sense that the Centre and its partners advocate for their protection and put forward their own solutions. For instance, the Centre's team is working on an app which would render Housing in Montreal much easier by referring the vacant apartments and matching them with individuals. The platform would also provide information to refugees on their rights.

Finally, the Centre's next steps is to start sponsoring refugees. They are creating an innovative online platform which would give the opportunity to refugees to start integrating as soon as they apply to the program overseas.

“REFUGEES COULD START LEARNING THE LANGUAGE, THE CITY, EVEN GET ACCEPTED TO UNIVERSITY OR HAVE A JOB SET UP... SO THAT WHEN THEY DO COME THEY ARE MUCH MORE PREPARED.”



Credits : <https://www.facebook.com/TheRefugeeCentre/>

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

- Businesses wanting to hire refugees are always the frontline actors for integration and target of the Centre's mandate
- Volunteering and internship opportunities are also offered at the Centre (teaching, commucations...)

COLLABORATIONS

All skills and expertises are welcome if people want to contribute to any sector of the Centre's operations



NABIL BEITINJANEH

BURSARIES FOR REFUGEES WEBSITE

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

Bursaries for refugees was a community-based online campaign launched by McGill Seeds of Change to fund bursaries for refugees that enable all newcomers to transition into the Quebec/Canadian workplace. The founders of the initiative believed that bursaries for the McGill School of Continuing studies would allow refugees to pursue their studies, improve their knowledge and skills, and transform their careers and lives. The project adopted a social media approach and inspired the creation of 3 additional separate community based funds: one for bursaries for Syrian refugees and one for Syrian newcomers, which are need-based. The third fund is merit-based and aims at financing scholarships for refugees.

Each course at SCS costs approximately \$300 and five courses are required to obtain a certificate. Therefore, Nabil, who is a founder of the project and also the director of the Syrian Cultural Centre reached out to his contacts and set up events to raise enough funds on behalf of the bursaries initiative. For instance, a “concert for Syria”, an exhibition and a celebration of Iftar during ramadan were organized between 2017 and 2018. The money raised permitted the SCS to start giving bursaries last semester. Overall, Nabil was impressed by the mobilization that took place at McGill around the project, and the multiplier effect it triggered.

“WE HELP REFUGEES WHO HAVE DEGREES CONTINUE THEIR STUDIES AND GET INTO THE JOB MARKET.”

The story that touched him the most is the donation of a student whose aunt was a refugee from Hungary and got financial help for her PHD after she arrived in Montreal. He decided to donate to the project as a way to give back so that other refugees get the same chance and future generations can benefit.

“REFUGEES NEED THE METHODOLOGY FOR GOING FORWARD.”

The project emerged in response to an educational gap in the integration process of refugees. Indeed, Nabil believes that government-sponsored refugees arriving in Quebec have a high educational background (engineers, pharmacists, doctors and other professionals...) but don't know how to access the job market here. Therefore, they need the local know-how to be able to start a career transition and avoid getting stuck in “dead-end jobs”. For instance, Nabil wants people to focus on doctors who arrived as refugees, which is a big issue in Quebec. Indeed, their qualifications are often not recognized or they don't want to put them on their CVs for fear of being overqualified and not getting a job at all. Therefore, they would go back to CEGEP and take technical courses to be able to work in manual entry jobs from which they will rarely transition.

Nabil also believes that in each phase of the newcomer's integration process the demands and needs are different. In other words, there's no “one-size fits all” solution to facilitate inclusion in the work sphere. This is the reason why he wants to include mentorship or twinning programs in the framework of the bursaries project so as to build bridges between someone from the local community and the newcomer in need of academic advising and social connections.

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

Bursaries for Refugees partnered with the McGill Career Advising and Transition Services (CATS), a free, separate unit and training ground that helps students to get into the job market. There, refugees have access to advising on the psychology of the marketplace in Montreal, such as the legal aspects and the expectations. If such initiatives are usually very useful to newly arrived students, Nabil recognizes that the language criteria is often a barrier and only permits some individuals to get access to bursaries and advising. Therefore, he would like to work on providing the language skills so as to be eligible to apply to the SCS's bursaries.

In terms of making the Bursaries Project known, Nabil spoke on a community radio several times and articles were written, in the Montreal Gazette for example.

However, such coverages are not systemic and the initiative mostly gets known through word of mouth.

“YOU HAVE TO CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN: THERE LIES THE POWER OF CHANGE.”

According to Nabil, the next steps of the project will focus on capacity-building. Indeed, he will now be working on creating an effective infrastructure to make the project sustainable. He is an adept of the “design-thinking” approach, which provides a more rational view on refugees’ educational backgrounds and needs using data and statistics, rather than broad perceptions on numbers.

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

- Put one’s academic or local expertise at the service of the project
- Help raise funds for the project
- Mentor a refugee-student who benefits from the bursaries to accompany him/her in the integration process
- Advocate for refugees’ qualifications to be recognized in order for them to avoid getting stuck in entry jobs

COLLABORATIONS

Nabil believes partnerships should be organized organically, and that sustainability is key. In other words, organizations should be careful not to step on each others’ lines and do the maximum possible in the framework of their mandates. In this context, he is very willing to meet and partner with organizations which could support and benefit from the bursaries project.



GABRIEL BOUBEKEUR

OPPORTUTORING
WEBSITE

13 to 15

active students

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

Opportutoring is a platform providing english tutoring sessions to refugees in different regions of the world. Their mission resides in expanding refugees' horizons through online education. The project started in 2015 as the arrival of Syrian refugees to Canada triggered a historical community mobilization on behalf of newcomers' integration. Today, they have about 13 to 15 active students who were referred by the UNHCR and who follow a curriculum imagined with professionals and carried out by volunteer tutors based in Montreal. The end goal of the tutoring sessions is for refugees to obtain language qualifications which will help them on the next step of their resettlement journey.

Opportutoring's approach is unique in the sense that it creates a local community dedicated to creating social bonds with refugees overseas, particularly in Turkey and Greece. The way Opportutoring works is by setting up 6 to 8 hours of tutoring per week, divided between 4 tutors. It is an intensive program for young refugees to follow, as they have been identified as the population with the least activities and opportunities available to them in refugee camps. However, it is a reasonable number of hours for the tutors to dedicate to the project (2 per week).

As Gabriel notes, the main reason for volunteers to partake in the project is to build connections with individuals going through the refugee experience. From the tutoring sessions emerge a trust relationship and cultural exchange which goes beyond the academic framework.

Volunteers often put more time and efforts into accompanying their students, helping them write their cv and cover letters for university or job applications. Gabriel wishes to put more efforts into accessing more marginalized individuals in the camps through local organizations, such as young women who would not automatically come forward and ask for language courses.

In March 2018, Opportutoring organized an Art Exhibit where musicians, singers, rappers, dancers, drawers and painters blended together. The exhibit presented drawings of a student portraying his experience as a refugee. The donations dedicated to his artworks were sent directly to him, and this is a concept Gabriel would like to replicate in the future. Moreover, he is thinking of expanding the resources available to students after they finish the tutorings, such as universities' online courses.

“WE DIDN'T INVENT SKYPE NOR ENGLISH COURSES, BUT BY LINKING THE TWO WE RESPOND TO ONE OF REFUGEES' BASIC NEEDS.”

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

In addition to their partnership with McGill university, Opportutoring is creating partnerships with universities in Waterloo and Beijing and ultimately in Sciences Po Paris and UCL. Their added value lies in their flexibility and use of a technology (skype) which is available everywhere on the planet. Among their other partners are Banaat Connect, an organization supporting online language-exchange sessions between Palestinian refugee women and girls learning English and female Arabic students in the U.S., Canada, & Europe. Lilo, a search engine supporting environmental and social initiatives is also contributing to Opportutoring's funding and visibility.



Credits : Unsplash

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

Gabriel invites individuals who want to get involved to become tutors and members of the team. Being a non-hierarchical structure, Gabriel highlights Opportutoring's openness to new ideas and projects which could get the organization to the next steps of its development.

COLLABORATIONS

As they are expanding beyond McGill Campus' area, Opportutoring is open to new partnerships (local and international) as well as sharing valuable resources and expertise with other organizations working on behalf of refugee integration.



CHARLES PIERRE CONSTANTIN

CENTRAIDE
WEBSITE

50 MILLION CAD
collected per year

Supports Montreal-based
community projects since
1975

WHO THEY ARE, WHAT THEY DO

Centraide is a donor organization which has been supporting Montreal-based community projects since 1975. Their mandate is to accompany organizations who contribute to the development of local communities and to breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. They collect more than 50 million CAD per year in Montreal's region and do significant investments to build capacity among communities. Centraide's "integrated territorial approach" is based on each territory's needs with the goal of improving quality of life. Immigration is a transversal challenge for the network of their organizations, which is the reason why much emphasis is put towards improving services for refugees' inclusion at a community level.

As explained by Charles Pierre, such actors are known as "frontline organizations" for refugees reception and integration. One of Charles Pierre's main mandate is to ensure that the funds are strategically targeting the right issues. "Communities evolve rapidly, and an organization whose actions were relevant 10 years ago might not be anymore." This is why Centraide works in the field, conducts interviews with frontline actors and partner organizations in order to draw a diagnostic profile of the community they plan on working with.

"LA DIVERSITÉ EST UNE RÉALITÉ MONTRÉLAISE."



Credits : www.centraide-mtl.org

WHAT THEY DO IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

According to Charles Pierre, the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2015 initiated the political changes that Centraide was waiting for, and gave more visibility to the issue of migrations. However, it has always been one of the key problematic for Centraide's actions, as they are raising awareness among their organizations to foster newcomers' inclusion. Consequently, he believes that It's now a new phenomena, but there has been an important evolution in this domain. In the 80s, Centraide knew in which communities refugees were going to settle, based on access to services, capacity and housing opportunities. Today, diversity is not centralized in Côte des Neiges, Parc Extension, Montreal Nord or St Michel. Rather, it is disseminated in the whole of Montreal.

In Quebec, immigration used to be the responsibility of the federal government and as it was transposed to the provincial, community action developed to be what it is today. Organizations working on behalf of immigrants' integration went from being mono to multi ethnic and started being supported by the ministry in each of Montreal's districts.

Centraide supports these organizations so that the newcomers they are directly helping can become full citizens and enjoy their new life in Quebec.

The services offered to refugees are similar in each community and range from reception, settlement, administrative support and housing to employment and academic counselling.

Centraide is a donor organization so funds are always needed !

But above these formal services, Montreal distinctiveness lies in the sociocultural activities that allow an active and true interaction between the newcomer and host community individuals. Pierre Charles believes that community organizations' role is limited to such activities and if refugees need more professional help they should turn to government services.

“WE NEED TO ADAPT EXISTING SERVICES TO EVOLVING NEEDS: FOR INSTANCE, ASYLUM-SEEKERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN THE CLSCS.”

The story that moved Pierre Charles the most is the refugee experience of this Syrian man whom he met during a community activity organized by the CARI. He benefited from the organization's integration services and is now a volunteer. Not only he speaks french but he works with others and is willing to actively take part in his host society. According to Pierre Charles, this is the type of stories which legitimize Centraide's investments and give meaning to their everyday efforts.

THEIR NEEDS AND HOW THEY CAN BE BETTER SUPPORTED

TAKING ACTION

Volunteering with Centraide and with their partner organizations

COLLABORATIONS

Centraide is a donor organization so funds are always needed !