

# A Pathway Forward

A Graphic Guide Through Women's Trauma and Housing for Newcomers in BC/Yukon

## 2022 IRCC BC-Yukon Summit: Emerging Minds and Modes



This event, led by AMSSA, aimed to create space for service providers in BC and the Yukon to have big picture conversations and share and learn practical service delivery approaches and modes for eventually moving into a post-pandemic world. The Summit covered a variety of topics including, but not limited to, housing, neighbourhood house model of service, trauma informed practice for women and youth, climate change, Indigenous reconciliation and more.

### The Two Content Streams and Sub-Themes:

**Emerging Minds** – big picture conversations and ideas sharing on topics such as Immigration, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and truth-telling and reconciliation.  
**Emerging Methods and Modes** – more practical conversations and sharing of emerging approaches to service delivery.

This infographic outlines key concepts and programs covered in the housing and women's trauma-informed practice sessions, for more information visit the AMSSA website at: <https://www.amssa.org>

**Myth:** Immigrant women are "uneducated"



**Fact:** On average, immigrant women have higher levels of formal education than Canadian-born women. Those who do not nevertheless have skills and knowledge. (1)

**Did You Know?**

For every 443 Canadians born, 1 refugee is admitted (2)

44%

of refugees with PTSD present major depression (3)

18%

of immigrants in BC live in overcrowded housing conditions (4)

15.5%

of recent immigrant women are unemployed, compared to 5.2% for Canadian born women (5)

## Understanding the Issues

### Women's Employment

Many skilled professional immigrant women have difficulties finding meaningful employment in Canada due to challenges in the economic sector, childcare and gender-based violence.

Leading many women to work in low paid precarious (5C) occupations

- o Caring
- o Cleaning
- o Clerical
- o catering
- o Cashiering

Despite their high qualification in other countries their credentials and experience are not often recognized in Canada. Especially since most employers seek previous Canadian work experiences on resumes.

### Structural Issues

Systemic oppressions are embedded in our systems of society that immigrant and refugee women face based on race, ethnicity, which negatively affects their wellbeing and their ability to share their talent, skill, passions and to participate in the community and contributing to society



### Housing

As newcomers arrive in their receiving communities in BC and Yukon, they are immediately faced with issues such as finding work, integrating with their new community, and most importantly securing safe and affordable housing.

Housing is essential for newcomers to prosper and adapt to their new home, and yet in BC it is expensive and difficult to navigate for newcomers.

Those who do find it risk living in overcrowded conditions due to a general lack of affordable housing in the province.



### Structural Issues

BC housing market is expensive due to its market orientation. According to Jill Atkey, the 1990s saw the federal government cut spending back drastically on affordable housing, leading to the current backlog of 80,000 units that have yet to be built.

Lack of centralized information on current housing options, a fragmentation of housing non-profits, and insufficient cooperation between public and private housing agencies.

BC housing market relies on information such as credit scores and professional references, both of which many newcomers lack.

## Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC



### ABOUT

Established in 1977, AMSSA began as a network for multicultural organizations in BC's interior region. By working together, these organizations expanded each of their community's multiculturalism knowledge and capacity for anti-racism. In 1983, AMSSA grew to include newcomer serving organizations. As the provincial umbrella association for immigrant and newcomer serving agencies in BC, AMSSA has earned a reputation for collaborating with governments and community partners on a provincial and national level. Alongside its members and community partners, AMSSA has an important role in addressing emerging issues and impacting policy. (6)

**Vision:** A just and equitable society in which everyone benefits from social and economic inclusion.

**Mission:** AMSSA facilitates collaborative leadership, knowledge exchange and stakeholder engagement to support agencies that serve immigrants and build culturally inclusive communities.

### VALUES

We value **EQUALITY**, and strive to be the catalyst for change which disrupts systems promoting racial and social injustice.

We value **INCLUSIVENESS** and work with our members and stakeholders to place voices that have been marginalized in positions of influence, creating space for all perspectives.

We value **INTEGRITY**, striving to always work to the highest standards, encouraging innovation, risk taking and leadership; we are always open to new thoughts and maintain accountability in our work.

We value **DIVERSITY**, recognizing our own individual biases and engaging members and stakeholders in meaningful ways that promotes inclusion of all voices and perspectives.

We value **MUTUAL RESPECT** by respecting what everyone has to offer within their own context of life experiences, opening our hearts and minds to always listening and learning.

We value **COLLABORATION**, engaging in equitable partnerships, mindfully exploring old and new ideas to advance the work of AMSSA and our members.

We value **SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION**, engaging in continuous individual and organizational reflection and collaboration to build capacity and integrate what we learn into our culture and infrastructure.

## 2022 IRCC BC-Yukon Summit: Housing Session

HOSTED BY DOUG PEAT, WITH SPEAKERS JILL ATKEY, MARZIEH NEZAKAT, AHMED OMRAN



Doug Peat (of Journey Home Community) opened the session by explaining the importance of creating safe and affordable housing as a resource to ensure the success of newcomers in their receiving communities. Peat emphasized that access to good housing acts as an anchor that enables newcomers to focus on other priorities related to adapting to their new home, such as searching for work and creating social ties. Peat also screened a documentary highlighting the experiences of newcomers who faced issues that affected their access to housing.

Jill Atkey (CEO of BC Non-Profit Housing Association) spoke about the current issues facing newcomers as they search for housing in BC. Most notably, Atkey pointed out that BC's housing market is limited in housing availability and is expensive to access, causing overcrowding for some newcomers' households, while others struggle to find any housing at all. Atkey also spoke about the tendency of newcomers to be renters upon arrival and later move to home ownership, signifying the need for more rentable housing.

Marzieh Nezakat (of MOSAIC/BC Charms) focused on the issues that led to the creation of the new BC Charms housing referral system, beginning with the specified housing issues that refugee claimants experience when trying to find housing in BC. As their status in Canada is less stable than that of sponsored refugees, refugee claimants do not have access to the same services and resources and thus face more housing difficulties than sponsored refugees. She pointed to the most important issues being a lack of professional references, no rental/credit score history, and language/cultural barriers to accessing the housing market. Nezakat finished her portion by speaking about her and MOSAIC's role in the creation of the BC Charms system.

Ahmed Omran (with S.U.C.C.E.S.S.) spoke about the state of affordable housing in BC and distinguished the actors at play in creating it. More issues that newcomers face, such as long BC Housing waitlists and the fragmentation of housing types and information, were raised. Omran also spoke about S.U.C.C.E.S.S.'s role within the non-profit sector of affordable housing, as it regularly updates its social services staff on housing programs and their availability.

## Solutions for Housing

Jill Atkey raised the importance of BC building 80,000 housing units to alleviate the current backlog for newcomers, building an additional 35,000 of low and moderate income units to prepare for newcomer needs for the next 10 years, and directing more government funding towards non-profit housing instead of market housing.

Marzieh Nezakat highlighted the hopes that the launch of the BC Charms refugee claimant housing referral system in April will allow for better coverage of the housing gaps that refugee claimants face in BC through better data aggregation, making for more efficient and precise referrals to housing and services.

Ahmed Omran spoke of the work that S.U.C.C.E.S.S. has been able to achieve in making affordable housing more accessible and understandable, especially for newcomers. This has been done through the organization's commitment to providing settlement services, affordable housing, and senior care/housing under the same roof, in turn leading to better, updated communication amongst staff about how housing needs are changing for newcomers and better referral towards housing within the organization.

## 2022 IRCC BC-Yukon Summit: Trauma Session

HOSTED BY ANASTASIA GAISENOK AND ANASTASIA SAPELNIKOVA

Anastasia Gaisenk highlighted the significance of community-based programs that 'meet women where they are at' both physically and emotionally. By meeting women in places where physically are, a higher quality of service can be given to immigrant and refugee women. While by meeting women where they are emotionally, programs like the PIRS can foster a sense of community while helping immigrant and refugee women thrive. Overall, though, Gaisenk pointed out that the aim of these efforts is to "amplify the voices of immigrant and refugee women so that they can advocate on the issues that affect them directly"



Anastasia Sapelnikova discussed how trauma takes away control from the individual, safety and connection to others and... the meaning of the experience". Regardless, she emphasized the importance of not reducing the "community to just its challenges". As such, she reinforced the importance of community-based programs, such as the PIRS, that help participants regain a sense of control and agency.



## 2022 IRCC BC-Yukon Summit: Trauma Session

### PRE-ARRIVAL

Many of immigrant and refugee women face traumatic experiences that they carry with them to their new country. Whether the result of gender-based violence, or the result of political turmoil, this trauma can burden refugee and immigrant women as they attempt to begin a new life.

### POST-ARRIVAL

Post-arrival trauma can deeply impact immigrants and inhibit their ability to participate in their new society. This type of trauma may stem from a variety of causes, namely isolation, depression, or alienation. Yet, regardless of the source, in immigrant and refugee women post-arrival trauma can add to the already stressful situation of settling down in a foreign country.

This increase in stress AND trauma has emphasized the importance of the PIRS' approach to their model of programming: mutually supporting overlapping principles and approaches, but especially 'meeting women where they're at' (Gaisenk). By meeting women in places where they feel comfortable, ie. churches, community centres, their homes(during covid), this model of approach can foster a sense of community and help address trauma.

## Solutions for Trauma

### PACIFIC IMMIGRANT RESOURCES SOCIETY (PIRS)

**Vision:** a society that values the diverse contributions of immigrants and refugees and promotes the enrichment of their lives .

**Mission:** to empower immigrant and refugee women and children to fully participate in Canadian life through neighbourhood-based, accessible and inclusive programs. (7)

### TRAUMA INFORMED & HEALING-CENTERED APPROACH

The goal of this approach is to nurture environments of choice, control, and connection. By doing so, the PIRS aims to address the identified needs of newcomer women and work with them to learn and address their unexpressed needs in the hopes of developing coping skills and resilience.

The focus of this approach is two-prong:

- Relational: all about building community relations
- Flexible: being adaptable to different experiences and alternative approaches



## Resources and Conclusions

### HOUSING RESOURCES

- BC Charms Refugee Claimant Referral System: currently set to launch in April through the work of MOSAIC and MAP, the BC Charms system will aggregate data on the housing needs of refugee claimants, as well as current housing availability. As a result, it will better be able to address these needs and
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S.: As Ahmed Omran explained, this organization provides many social services that can help orient and refer newcomers to housing resources.

### TRAUMA RESOURCES

- Cameray Counselling and Family Services is a community-based service that offers counselling for youths and their families based on their needs. These services may include parent support, and family therapy.
- The Pacific Immigrant Resources Society provides immigrant and refugee women with a wide array of programs, including outreach support via groups or one-on-one communication such as phone calls or messaging.

### CONCLUSIONS

- All in all, our goals – both individuals and organizations align on core values of advocacy, education and open-mindedness. The trauma newcomers experience vary drastically therefore programs and approaches must be catered selectively to provide the most helpful tools for settlement. These efforts ought to include approaches to system change work, upstream prevention and the removal of barriers.
- Structural and systemic issues of inequality are prevalent in our societies and refugees & migrants often times face greater challenges in these regards. As such, promoting advocacy and equity are fundamental in working towards dismantling prejudice.
- Ultimately, alongside direct action plans from policy-making perspectives we also need to meet newcomers where they are at in their lives; not just physically but psychologically and emotionally to amplify their voices and establish agency to campaign on the issues that affect them directly.

1. Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women. *Immigrant and Refugee Women*, 2003.  
2. Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women. *Immigrant and Refugee Women*, 2003.  
3. K. Pottie et al., "Evidence-Based Clinical Guidelines For Immigrants And Refugees", *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 183, no. 12 (2010): E824-E925, doi:10.1503/cmaj.090313  
4. TBD  
5. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Immigrant Women*, [www150.statcan.gc.ca](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca), February 23, 2016.  
6. Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, 2022.  
7. Pacific Immigrant Resources Society. *Our Mission and Purpose*, 2022.