

A ROAD TO HOME

**WORKING WITH HOMELESS
IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES**



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WE BELIEVE

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of him/herself and of his/her family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his/her control.”

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ART 25-1

“A Road to Home” has been developed to be used by service providers as a practical guide when working with Immigrants & Refugees that experience homelessness.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	3
SEGMENT 1	4
Cultural Competence	
SEGMENT 2	10
Assessing the Specific Needs of Immigrants & Refugees	
SEGMENT 3	14
Issues to Consider	
APPENDIX 1	18
Resources	
APPENDIX 2	19
Process of Adaptation	

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Moreover, I would like to thank all the service users of our programs that motivate us to write these pages. It is thinking about them and about the many issues that they have faced during their migration process, that this work is dedicated.

This manual is a compilation of learning throughout many years of service and team effort promoting best service practices in the housing help sector through a cultural competence lens. However, all principles of service provision are based on COSTI's policies and procedures and this manual expands only in the distinctive features of cultural competence used by the Housing Help program.

Appendix 2 is an extract of COSTI's Manual "Linking Paths: a Guide to Orienting Newcomers to Ontario" written by Colette Murphy in 1994, and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

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My husband, that was my conscience for not forgetting the many challenges we went through when we arrived in Canada as government sponsored refugees without a place to call home.

Carolina Gajardo

Toronto, November 2008

INTRODUCTION

MIGRATION to voluntarily leave your home to go to a new place.

FORCED MIGRATION to involuntarily leave your home; forced to be away from one's home.

Foreign born homeless individuals, regardless of the number years they have been in Canada, have a particular reality that can be attributed to their process of integration. The process and circumstances of coming to Canada have a compound effect when facing challenging changes in personal circumstances.

All other realities such as immigration status, refugee trauma, post traumatic stress syndrome, communication barriers, ethno-racial background, family composition, gender, age, sexual orientation, mental health/addiction need to be considered when assessing the service users' capacity and personal strengths to resolve the issues they face.

Furthermore, the receiving society plays a critical role as an enabler agent, particularly when providing all its citizens, regardless of their immigration status, with the resources to facilitate integration and minimize social exclusion.

Housing workers need to assess the possible hidden factors of migration to understand the reason for homelessness among migrant individuals. An awareness of the impact of migration noted above, in addition to cultural competence, can help workers move in the right direction when providing housing stabilization services.

There is no "one style fits all" way of providing services; the uniqueness in these cases resides in the capacity of the service provider to untie the past to understand why the person found themselves in the present circumstances.

1

Cultural Competence

“**Cultural competence** is a *process*, rather than a single point in time. Further, cultural competence requires the *attainment of knowledge and skills* that will help providers and programs work more effectively with people who have diverse background and experiences. Finally, cultural competence requires action to increase access and *cultural adaptation of services* based on what is learned about individuals and communities.”¹

A culturally competent worker is the one that uses a holistic service approach that is service user centered and appropriate for people from any cultural background.

The worker is not required to be an expert in each of the individuals’ cultures. The worker incorporates in the delivery of services a broader view of the specific needs of the individual and provides services with a knowledge base of understanding that the client’s culture can influence his/her interactions with the society at large.

The worker is aware of his/her own cultural biases and how these can hinder the relationship between worker/service users. The worker is always ready to review his/her own cultural background, cultural differences and biases about other individuals, i.e.: how the worker views women that wear a veil, abortion rights, gender identity, etc.

A culturally competent worker draws on the service users as the principal source of information to understand their cultural background. The worker never assumes, judges or acts on behalf of the service users unless they are aware of and understand the implications of the actions taken on their behalf.

¹ Report of the Cultural Competence Work Group for the Project for Assistance in Transition for Homelessness PATH 2002-
http://www.pathprogram.samhsa.gov/pdf/CulturalCompetence_8_20_%2702.pdf

The worker understands the impact of discrimination and is capable of assessing how service users have dealt with it, if encountered in the past.

It is commonly noted that when communication barriers exist, service providers tend to decide and act on behalf of the service user, which occurs when it is difficult to access communication brokers -interpreters, sign language translators, etc. - that is why this mistake is pervasive.

A culturally competent worker develops an acute understanding of the possible visible or invisible barriers migrants face and accurately assesses the person's world view to understand the specific needs and the individual's capacity to respond. The following is a list of possible barriers to be considered when working towards housing stabilization:

Primary Barriers

- Skin colour ('race')
- Ethnicity/culture/religion
- Gender/sexual orientation
- Age

Secondary Barriers

- Immigration status
- Level of income
- Source of income
- Knowledge of the housing system
- Language/accents
- Household type and size

Additional Barriers

- Earning capacity
- Capacity to search for and sustain housing
- Knowledge of rights & responsibilities as tenants
- Knowledge & experience of institutions and culture
- Capacity to meet requirements, i.e. references, employment
- Ability to communicate
- Access to support
- Cultural view of housing types (i.e.: supportive housing)

COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

"Culture" refers to a group or community which shares common experiences that shape the way its members understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as race, national origin, gender, class, or religion. It can also include a group we join or become part of. For example, it is possible to acquire a new culture by moving to a new country or region, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly we realize we all belong to many cultures at once.²

Cultural identity has a number of components that need to be considered in order to effectively work with migrants of different cultures. Regardless, if we are from the same ethnic group, religion and gender or even raised in the same town as one of the migrants whom we seek to help, we may find that we have to deal with marked cultural differences related to other factors such as race, class or age.

The culturally competent worker needs to recognize the inherent power of information and how it plays within the relationship between worker and service user. It has been observed that assumptions are made from both parties, creating misunderstandings that prevent establishing good rapport.

It is important for the worker to constantly check with the service user to determine if both have the same understanding of matters discussed. When noting absence of knowledge or misinformation about how services work in Canada, the worker must spend time providing orientation in order to foster independence.

THE DO'S & DON'TS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

By realizing and acknowledging our own cultural identity, we might avoid the trap of believing that what we expect and value is "normal", and what others expect and value is "different".³

² The Community Tool Box Understanding Culture and Diversity in Building Communities- Main Section
Contributed by Marya Axner Edited by Bill Berkowitz
http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1168.htm

³ Linking Paths: a Guide to Orienting Newcomers to Ontario

REMEMBER TO BE CAREFUL WITH:

- Using stereotypical examples
- Body language
- Grafting the patterns of accents, intonation, stress, phraseology of one's own language
- Assumptions and expectations

TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION BY:

- Treating others with respect
- Accepting differences
- Being honest and straight forward
- Being positive
- Showing compassion & empathy
- Being open
- Requesting more information
- Disclosing feelings & observations
- Clarifying

ELEMENTS THAT WILL DISCOURAGE COMMUNICATION:

- Being judgmental
- Feeling & conveying sense of superiority
- Yes, I know attitude
- Not listening
- Controlling
- Showing indifference

Knowing Newcomers' Cultural Backgrounds

Though you could never fully know the multi-faceted cultural background of every newcomer with whom you work, try to inform yourself as much as possible about their home countries: their economies, family structures, political systems, beliefs, and traditions. Be willing to learn about different cultural groups and be open to exploring other people's values and beliefs.

If you have the same ethnic background as the newcomers with whom you work, you may understand the culture through your own experiences. If not, you might try informing yourself on various aspects of those countries through cultural profiles (see resources), books, T.V. and other media. As well, you might learn about them through exposure to people from that country in Canada or while travelling.

The best sources of information, however, are the newcomers themselves. Only they know the many elements that shape their culture and identity. Ask newcomers about themselves, their identities, their experiences and beliefs. Notice their patterns of speech, body language, and behaviour. Remember, however, that though it is useful to learn about a person's country of origin and background, we cannot expect all members of a particular group to be the same. Ultimately every person is an individual with a lifetime of experiences for which their culture is only the context.

Questioning Our Assumptions and Biases

Effective cross-cultural communication is not simply knowing our own and others' cultural backgrounds. It is about understanding and accepting the differences between the two. It requires the ability to take on new perspectives and suspend our own judgement. For example, many people assume that the Western worldview is the norm and impose it upon others. We need to **accept people for what they are and not what we think they are or would like them to be**. We need to let newcomers know that we respect their experience, values and insights.

Some Examples of Assumptions and Biases to Examine

Don't assume:

- That refugees should feel grateful for being here. Many refugees had no choice but to emigrate. Once here, they often face very difficult circumstances and a number of barriers such as discrimination.
- That refugees and immigrants bring crime to Canada. In fact, newcomers commit significantly less crime than other Canadians. Not only that, they commit fewer serious crimes, such as murder and rape.
- That immigration causes unemployment. Immigrants are less likely to be unemployed and are less often on Welfare than Canadian-born people. By consuming goods and services and starting new businesses, immigrants in fact create jobs for Canadians.
- That immigrants are less well-educated than other Canadians. In fact, newcomers are, on average, better educated than people born in Canada.
- That refugees have different aspirations than other people (e.g. that they would not aspire to be a doctor or nurse because they are refugees). Respect the wishes and ambitions that they say they have.
- That they need their own room or space in their apartment. People in many cultures are accustomed to sharing living space. Ask them what they need and expect.

Don't judge:

- Certain choices to be inferior or inappropriate. For instance, if parents wish to have their child learn a trade, do not look down on that choice. If newcomers spend what you feel is a disproportionate amount of money on long distance phone calls, respect their priorities and do not judge their financial management as irresponsible.

2

ASSESSMENT

- **TO ASSESS = TO EVALUATE**
- **HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT** is the process of gathering, analyzing and synthesizing relevant information into a working definition of service user issue(s) and/or need(s).
- **ASSESSMENT** is a process that provides service user and worker clarity in goals and expectations
- **ASSESSMENT** is a process in which worker identifies service user barriers to access services
- **ASSESSMENT** provides a framework to deliver services and evaluate outcomes

The initial assessment of a homeless migrant person requires the same considerations as an assessment of a non migrant person. The evaluation of the present circumstances takes precedence over the migration issues i.e.: worker needs to firstly assess safety, access to temporary shelter, access to meals and immediate health concerns.

During the first encounter it is important for outreach workers to carry with them simple instructions in a few languages or have the capacity to contact other service providers that can explain basic information if a language barrier exists.

It is a **mistake** to conduct an in depth intake or assessment when language is a barrier.

During the second stage of services, workers need to prepare in advance for the assessment interview. The following checklist can facilitate the work ahead; it is recommended to consider this as a framework that will help the worker and service user in developing a realistic plan to accomplish the immediate and long term goals.

The service user needs to be the central decision-maker of what his/her needs are. The worker is the facilitator of the process towards permanent housing stabilization. An important first step to support service users is by recognizing their natural survival strength.

Preparation Prior to Assessment

- ✔ Review first intake form and follow-up on any issue identified. (i.e. medical needs, children concerns, legal considerations).
- ✔ Review cultural profile; learn more about where and when the person arrived in Canada, immigration status, etc.
- ✔ Review literature about process of adaptation to understand state of mind.
- ✔ If necessary request interpreter in advance.
- ✔ Have resources available in the person mother tongue i.e. Doctor's list, ethno specific services, settlement services, etc.

Introduction to the session

- ✔ Introduce yourself; explain who you are and what your role is.
- ✔ Collect information that could allow you to assess the migration process only if the person is open to it. **REMEMBER** that trafficked victims can have family members back home that are hostage of the trafficker. Many refugees are hesitant to disclose information regarding their immigration status if they have fear of deportation or have been victimized by authorities in the past.
- ✔ Clarify why you are asking questions and why notes are being taken; this is particularly important when working with refugees and victims of trafficking.
- ✔ Explain the importance of assessing their needs i.e. for you to be able to work together towards a satisfactory housing stabilization outcome.
- ✔ Explain the organization's confidentiality policy and consent form if applicable. The person should not be pressured to offer any information that they do not wish to share.
- ✔ Use empathy to build a relationship based upon mutual trust. This can be instrumental in engaging a person in other forms of service delivery (i.e. trauma counselling, therapy, etc.)

What to Assess

Personal History before and after arrival

- ✓ Family composition (significant others in Canada)
- ✓ Discrimination/Human Rights issues
- ✓ Living conditions prior to arrival (Rural vs. Urban, refugee camp, etc.)
- ✓ Health (coverage, illnesses, addictions)
- ✓ Traumatic experiences/ Family losses/Bereavement
- ✓ Process of reaching and length of time in Canada
- ✓ Immigration Status
- ✓ Educational background
- ✓ Working experience
- ✓ Literacy and Language proficiency (English, French)
- ✓ Level of knowledge of Canadian laws, institutions and services
- ✓ Personal networks i.e. ethno specific associations, communities of faith, family & friends, etc.

Immediate Needs

- ✓ Accommodation/Shelter
- ✓ Food/clothing
- ✓ Family issues, Safety
- ✓ Financial support
- ✓ Children's issues (education/care)
- ✓ Identification
- ✓ Health (mental/emotional well being)
- ✓ Immigration Issues
- ✓ Legal issues

Long term Needs

- ✓ Family Reunification
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Employment
- ✓ Support programs
- ✓ Social Supports
- ✓ Other Needs

3

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

- *Refugees **escape** from a conflict or crisis; they do not choose to become refugees.*
- *Refugees **do not choose** to leave their country. Migrants choose to leave and settle in a country of their choice.*
- *Refugees **do not choose where to go**; it depends on the means they travel. Migrants choose means of transportation, time of arrival and other plans for settlement.*
- *Refugees **do not plan their trip**; they leave behind love ones and personal possessions. Migrants plan their trip, sometimes for years; they can sell possessions or even decide to keep them in the event the settlement is not successful.*
- *Refugees, due to their sudden departure, are **emotionally unprepared**. Migrants are able to say goodbye to family and friends. Some of them are successful in migrating with extended family members that support the settlement such as grandparents.*
- *Refugees often escape **without documentation**. Migrants are well informed and prepare in advance all relevant documentation, including work and educational related documents.*
- *Most of the time Refugees are **prohibited from returning home**, sometimes for years, increasing health related issues especially if severe trauma was experienced. Migrants have the freedom to go back to visit or return permanently.*

STRATEGIES TO BUILD SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

- Incorporate direct access to interpretation services
- Dissemination of information in different languages
- Outreach to newcomers
- Targeting ethnic associations, specific services of communities of faith, local agencies and community groups
- Building partnerships with other health, settlement services and supportive providers for direct access
- Long term partnerships to provide ongoing support systems through training for cultural competency, language provision, community networks

REVIEW SERVICE BARRIERS

- Complex intake procedures
- Insufficient cultural awareness
- Not open to alternate therapeutic methods
- May ignore client's strengths
- Not familiar with effects of racism & poverty on clients
- Promptness to recommend medication

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Service providers need to recognize the inherent diversity of their client populations
- Racism & poverty have a great impact on clients' conditions/situations
- Mental health, addiction and related services, approaches/interventions must be culturally competent, client-centered to enhance chances for a successful outcome

STATUS

Definition in 1951 Refugee Convention a refugee is any person who:

" ...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (sic) nationality and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."⁴

Categories of Immigrants

Skilled Worker Class: based on skills and experiences of foreign professionals and workers.

Business Class: experience running or investing in businesses.

Family Class: reunites immediate family members.

Provincial Nomination: Most Canadian provinces have programs that encourage immigrants to settle in those provinces and benefit their economies.

International Adoption: Adopting children from abroad to Canada.

Quebec-Selected Immigration: Quebec is responsible for selecting immigrants who wish to settle in Quebec.

Refugees

Through its refugee protection system, Canada offers a safe haven to persons with a well-founded fear of persecution, as well as those at risk of torture or cruel and unusual treatment or punishment. Canada's refugee protection system consists of two main components:

The **Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program**, for people seeking protection from outside Canada; and

Asylum in Canada, for persons making refugee protection claims from within Canada.

Canada has signed the United Nations [*1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol*](#). This Convention protects refugees from being returned to a country where they would face persecution.

⁴Citizenship and Immigration Canada <http://www.cic.gc.ca>

Residency Obligations for Permanent Residents

Permanent residence status gives non-Canadians the right to live in Canada. They must meet certain residency obligations to maintain their status as permanent residents.

Rights and Entitlements

As a permanent resident, they have a right to enter Canada. They also have most of the rights that Canadian citizens have under the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#).

They cannot, however, run for political office or vote until after have been granted Canadian citizenship.

During this period they get a **permanent resident card**.

They can apply for Canadian citizenship after three years of residency in Canada.

APPENDIX 1 RESOURCES

- Settlement information and resources <http://settlement.org>
- All other social service resources <http://www.211toronto.ca>
- Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture-services for victims of torture and war <http://www.ccv.toronto.ca>
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada <http://www.cic.gc.ca>
- CCR Canadian Council for Refugees-Facing Facts-Myths and Misconceptions about Refugees and Immigrants in Canada <http://www.ccrweb.ca/documents/FFacts.htm>
- Cultural Profiles <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/index.html>
- Updated Cultural Profiles <http://www.cp-pc.ca/cpstatus.html>
- UNHCR -Psycho-Social and Mental Health Programmes <http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/3bc6ec457.pdf>
- UNHCR-Mental Health of Refugees <http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/3bc6ec74.pdf>
- New Zealand Government-Refugee Health Care: A Handbook for Health Professionals <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/1292?Open>
- NFB Across Culture-Through the lens of a camera, discover some of the NFB collection that documents the contribution made to Canada by different ethno cultural communities. <http://www3.nfb.ca/duneculturealautre/index.php?&lg=en>
- Report2 of the Cultural Competence Work Group for the Project for Assistance in Transition for Homelessness PATH 2002 http://www.pathprogram.samhsa.gov/pdf/CulturalCompetence_8_20%2702.pdf

APPENDIX 2 THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION pgs 39 to 58

COSTI-“Linking Paths: A Guide to Orienting Newcomers to Ontario”

Migration is a crisis period in the lives of individuals, a challenge for which they can never be totally prepared. From jet lag and exposure to a variety of illnesses, to climate and culture shock, the physical, mental and emotional effects of migrating can be profound and long-lasting. It is essential to have a good understanding of the experience of migration and of the process of adaptation to the new country before doing any work with newcomers. The issues discussed in this chapter form the framework from which we approach all other orientation topics. These issues are the context in which newcomers face important choices and challenges, whether those be related to health, housing, education, or employment. *Because issues related to the process of adaptation will tend to come up while you are focusing on other subjects, we suggest that you be prepared to deal with them at any time.*

A session on the process of adaptation may help newcomers to identify and understand any related problems they may be experiencing, and to find ways to cope with them. It might also make them aware of any stresses they may face in the future. Outlining problems that many newcomers encounter in the process of adaptation will emphasize that they are not alone in their experience and that their feelings are legitimate.

If you are dealing with people who have arrived very recently, i.e. in a Reception Centre, we would suggest that you discuss the topic briefly during your first meeting with newcomers. Mention that it is normal for their sleeping or eating patterns to be disrupted by jet lag and climate shock, and for them to be more susceptible to illnesses and exhaustion during the initial weeks and even months. Also mention that children often exhibit significant changes in behaviour after migration, such as withdrawal or hyperactivity.

Because understanding the process of adaptation is so essential to our work, doing additional reading on the topic may be helpful.

FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

Although there are important similarities in the process migrants go through as they adapt to a new country, their emotions and problems will be influenced by the many elements of their particular situation.

The degree of difficulty they encounter in adapting will be affected by such factors as:

- Age
- Sex
- Trauma caused by an event such as rape, torture, persecution or war crimes.
- The degree of similarity between their home culture and language and those of the new country.
- The availability of social services and support in their place of arrival.
- Whether there is a community of their cultural background in the place of arrival.
- Whether they came by their own decision, that of a family member, or were forced by a natural disaster, war, or political/religious persecution.
- Whether they came with the intention of staying or hoping to return home someday.
- Whether they are joining family or friends here or hope to have family join them here.
- Whether they know or are unfamiliar with what will happen after they arrive.
- Whether they know something of the culture and/or language of the new place.

Keep in mind that refugee women, unlike most men, may have been sexually abused or assaulted as a tool of repression or as a means to punish them or members of their family for political activities, or to obtain information.ⁱ

Barriers to Cultural Adjustmentⁱⁱ

Barriers within the Host Society

racial intolerance
discrimination based on ethnic origin or culture
climatic and cultural differences
lack of recognition of employment qualifications
unemployment
lack of traditional support systems such as family members and elders

Personal Barriers

lack of language skills
family conflicts
trauma suffered in flight
illiteracy
age
religious practices
shift in class status or role in community

In addition to these barriers, many of which may particularly affect women, women face additional barriers due to:

- Sexual discrimination.
- Family pressure for them to conform to a previously understood role.
- Woman assault and abuse.
- Isolation, when women are expected to stay home and care for their children.

Being aware of how such factors and barriers shape the situations of newcomers will help you to respond appropriately to their needs.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorderⁱⁱⁱ

The cultural adaptation of some immigrants, particularly refugees, may be hindered by the aftermath of traumatic events, such as torture, rape, natural cataclysms, loss of friends and family, solitary confinement, and war experiences. These events may directly cause **short- or long-term physical problems** such as broken bones, injured muscles and tendons, or kidney disease (as a result of electric shock).

In many cases, victims of such events will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Injured and very young and elderly immigrants are more likely to suffer from the disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder can be either acute (if symptoms last for less than 6 months or begin within 6 months of the traumatic event), or chronic (if symptoms last at least 6 months or begin at least 6 months after the traumatic event).

In both cases, characteristic symptoms involve:

1. Re-experiencing the traumatic event through recurrent and intrusive recollections or nightmares or by suddenly acting or feeling as if the event was occurring again;
2. numbing of responsiveness to or involvement with the external world, manifested by less interest, a feeling of detachment from other people, and/or reduced emotional response, and;
3. at least two other symptoms, such as hyperalertness, insomnia, survivor guilt, depression, anxiety, increased irritability, loss of memory or trouble concentrating or completing tasks, phobic avoidance of situations that bring back memories of the trauma, and worsening of the symptoms on exposure to situations that resemble the traumatic event.

Post-traumatic stress disorder can severely affect the well-being of individuals and their families. Relatives, especially children, may themselves develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress such as depression, irritability, poor appetite, and problems with concentration and memory. *As a result of the stress, sufferers and their families may experience learning difficulties which you should take into account as you deliver your orientation programme.*

Avoidance of situations resembling the traumatic event may hinder the individual's working life or recreational activities. People with stress disorder also have an increased chance of developing a drug or alcohol addiction, and of making suicide attempts.

Acute post-traumatic stress disorder often disappears on its own without psychiatric treatment. The longer the symptoms last, the worse the prognosis. *If you suspect that a newcomer is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, refer him/her to a doctor, psychiatrist or the appropriate resource in your community.* Treatment may include:

- Behavioural techniques such as relaxation therapy, especially when the patient is anxious or phobic
- Medication for symptoms of anxiety
- Psychotherapy
- Occupational and social rehabilitation

Giving newcomers the opportunity to discuss their past experiences during orientation sessions may help them liberate the ghosts of their past and begin to grieve their traumas and losses. Discussion in groups may be particularly helpful, as it may reduce their sense of isolation.

CULTURE SHOCK

Everyone who moves from one culture to another experiences culture shock to some degree. The new culture may no longer embody all the values, assumptions, and religious, folk and political traditions which the newcomer has learned through family, education, society and life experiences. People in the new place may not exhibit all the same attitudes, behaviours, or patterns of thought as did people in the newcomer's home country. For instance, a newcomer from a culture where the use of time is not dictated by the clock, or where male and female roles are strongly differentiated, may be puzzled by Canadian attitudes to time or gender roles. This cultural shift is all the more shocking because, until we are confronted with a new culture, we tend to assume that the way we have always thought and done things is what is natural and normal for *all* human beings.

This shift in cultural norms means that newcomers are cut off from the cultural cues they depended on. They can no longer express themselves in the subtle and indirect ways they could before. Their behaviour may no longer produce the expected results. For instance, when they try to bargain at a supermarket as they would at home, the cashier gets angry. They may feel as if they were playing a game for which no one has explained the rules. Their own values, which they may have seen as absolute, are questioned.

The process of adaptation means understanding and coming to terms with both one's own culture and that of the new country, and creating a healthy balance between the two. Understanding one's own culture and examining it in relation to the new one can help avoid problems caused by cultural misunderstandings.

We believe that, as settlement counsellors, we need to keep in mind that the onus is not solely on immigrants to adapt, but that it is also up to Canadian society to work to find a balance between its culture and the cultures of newcomers.

STAGES IN THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

There is no established time frame for how long adaptation takes, but it is a lengthy process. It may take some months or years before an individual adjusts to the new situation enough to function normally and feel at ease. For most immigrants, adaptation is an ongoing and constant process that will continue to shape the rest of their lives.

Migration generally provokes a reaction akin to grief. Upon leaving their home country, immigrants experience a sense of loss, having separated from family, friends, and all that was previously familiar to them. Arriving in the new place, they are forced to confront new realities. As with the grieving of the loss of a loved one, they must eventually start to come to terms with their new situation.

However different the cultures and circumstances of immigrants, many researchers have found that the *process* of migration is remarkably similar from individual to individual. All immigrants tend to go through similar stages in the process. The stages we present below, however, are only a model. Keep in mind that reality is always more complex, fluid and disorganized than any theoretical model.

I. Initial or "Honeymoon" Stage

This stage, sometimes called the "honeymoon period", occurs prior to arrival, during migration, and in the initial period after arrival. In this period, migrants are full of great expectations and illusions about what life will be like in the new country. Their feelings may range from excitement, euphoria, thankfulness or calmness, to anxiety and exhaustion. They may also feel confused, disoriented, and distracted. How positive or negative their feelings are will depend on such factors as whether they have chosen to leave or were forced to flee, whether they see their move as permanent or temporary, etc. Unrealistic ideas about the host society are a survival mechanism--a way to escape from realities and difficulties which they are not yet ready to handle. Initially, they may suffer from a variety of physical problems such as the effects of jet lag, climate and diet on sleep patterns, digestion and the immune system, as well as from mental problems like memory loss, problems concentrating, disorientation, and flashbacks to scenes from their past.

II. Stage of Confrontation with the New Society

At some time or another, immigrants must start confronting the new society. They may be absorbed in solving practical issues such as finding housing or employment, enrolling in an English as a Second Language course, or registering a child in school. At this point they will begin to experience culture shock. Their assumptions about reality may be continually shattered, and they may be forced to re-evaluate their perceptions, values and identity. Children may encounter problems if, in their new school, their behaviour does not produce the expected response. They may feel disoriented and puzzled as they try to figure out how to make friends, play new games, relate to teachers, etc. Newcomers' feelings may include frustration, embarrassment, fear, anger, guilt, nostalgia, irritability, or depression.

III. Stage of Adjustment to the New Society

After the initial confrontation with the new society, a longer period follows in which newcomers face the daily realities of surviving in the new place. They may have feelings of failure, uncertainty, and self-doubt as they find that they cannot easily meet their own expectations. Unable to express themselves well and manage with their old behavioural repertoire, they may feel like a baby surrounded by adults. For young children, it may be hard to be learning to read and suddenly to have to do it in a new language. Adolescents may resent not having had any control over the decision to migrate. They may also find it very hard to deal with the new situation while also grappling with difficult physical and emotional changes. Both children and adolescents face the additional challenge of living with parents who may be under a lot of stress.

Some newcomers will have negative reactions to these difficulties, such as escapism (through sleep, introversion or drug/alcohol dependence, for example), aggressiveness and hostility toward their environment, and/or dependence on other people or institutions. Others, however, will mourn what they left behind, accept their new situation, and slowly make a healthy adjustment to the new society. They may withdraw at times and gain strength and courage from reflecting on their situation.

In adjusting to the new place, immigrants can take various attitudes to their native culture and to the new country. Their attitude will be influenced not only by personal factors, but also by barriers within the host society, such as systemic discrimination. Many immigrants have integrated into Canadian society by maintaining their original cultural integrity while also working toward becoming an integral part of the new society. Other immigrants choose to assimilate, by relinquishing their cultural identity and adopting the new culture exclusively. Many see that as the only solution in a society which is unwilling to fully embrace cultural diversity. Some may withdraw totally, clinging to their original culture and language. A small minority may become alienated and lash out, withdrawing both from their native culture and from the new society.

IV. Stage of Reconstruction

Ideally, immigrants are eventually able to build upon their own inner strength. They begin to feel more comfortable. They gain a sense of control over their own lives in the new situation. They may start to feel attached to new friends, activities and objects.^{iv}

During the confrontation and adaptation stages, counselling and orientation play especially critical roles. They can help newcomers to acknowledge and understand their feelings and regain control of their lives as a result.

POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON THE FAMILY

Recently migrated families are particularly vulnerable to stresses and strains during the process of adaptation. They face the hard task of reshaping their identity as families, of finding the best compromise between their previous structure, traditions and identity, and the demands of their new circumstances. In this process, they often face problems as the result of three factors:

I. Changing Roles

All the members of a family may find that they must adopt new roles within the family after migrating. Such shifts in roles can be very difficult, as they put each individual's basic identity into question.

In some cases, migration might have caused **structural changes in the family**, when only part of the family was able to emigrate, or when the stresses of migration caused the family to split up. If, for instance, two sisters emigrated together, the older one may feel responsible for the younger one and assume a parental role. Depending on whether the younger one accepts or rejects the new dynamics of their relationship, conflict may occur.

Children generally acquire the new language and adopt some of the behaviours of the new culture more quickly than their parents. They may therefore become intermediaries between their parents and the outside world, as interpreters for instance. On one hand, this may undermine **parents'** authority and make them dependent on their own children. On the other hand, it places an undue burden on **children**, who are asked to take on adult roles but are still treated as children.

Older immigrants may lose their previously central roles as conflict mediators, decision-makers and resource people for the family and community. In the new society, people may turn to other sources for advice and counsel.

It may happen that within **couples**, one person moves into the host society to deal with day-to-day tasks, while the other person remains isolated, clinging to the past. This may cause tensions in the relationship, as one becomes increasingly dependent on the other. It is therefore very important that all members of a family maintain a healthy connection with both the native country and the new society.

Though **women** have worked in and, frequently, outside of the home, in the new country they may have to take on new types of work or work physically outside of the home for the first time. This change may cause tensions within the family if it challenges previous family structures and roles.

II. Loss of Status

In some cases, immigrants face a loss of status in the new society which can have a considerable effect on their sense of worth.

Older immigrants may find that they no longer receive the respect that their wisdom and experience might have warranted them. Their previous roles as respected advisers and decision makers may have disappeared and with them, the high social status they might confer. Older newcomers may therefore feel worthless and isolated, being unable to communicate in the new language or participate meaningfully in the new society.

Newcomers may find that they lose a great deal of status in the new country, when they can no longer practice their **profession** or trade without learning the new language, passing requalifying courses and exams, and getting related Canadian work experience. They may have to take jobs completely unrelated to their training, at lower pay and with lower social status. This can give rise to feelings of demoralization, frustration, or lack of purpose.

Immigrants who were **leaders or activists** in their native countries can also experience a loss of status. Feeling unable to be effective in the struggle in which they were engaged, they may lose their sense of purpose. They may feel lonely and isolated and resent the lack of recognition they receive, particularly if they were well-known in their home communities. These newcomers may think that they have no role to play in the new society, and that they will never fit in.

III. Intergenerational Conflicts

Children tend to adopt the attitudes, values and language of the new place more quickly than their parents. These different rates of adjustment are often the cause of cultural conflicts between generations. In many cases, linguistic and cultural barriers make communication between parents and children quite difficult.

Parents may find it difficult to accept the importance that their children attach to their school and peers. This is particularly true if they come from a culture in which family plays a more central role in the child's life than friends. Parents may find their own authority on such issues as dating or dress undermined by the messages their children are getting from friends and the larger society. They may feel criticized and judged by the new society for their parenting practices.

If they are told not to use their own methods of discipline but are given no alternative, they may feel they no longer have effective disciplining methods. For this reason, support groups and other assistance around issues of child discipline can be very helpful.

For children, the contradictory nature of the demands of their parents and of their peers and society may be a constant strain. Parental pressure to perform well in school may cause children added stress. They may have trouble doing well in school because they are not familiar with the structure and expectations of the new school. For instance, the schoolteacher may expect them to answer in class without being called upon, while in the child's native culture, such behaviour would be considered rude or unacceptable. Thus while children may be getting poor marks due to cultural miscommunication, their parents may punish or berate them for not trying hard enough.

The fact that children soon *appear* to be well-adjusted to the new language and culture is often misleading. Children adopt the new behaviours and attitudes in an attempt to be accepted by their peers and teachers. Yet the repercussions of migration on their self-image, family situation, and academic performance can be severe and long-term. They may be factors in hyperactivity, withdrawal, poor attendance and performance at school, participation in gangs, and other problems.

The difficulties and conflicts described above may be prevented and alleviated by:

- Respect and acceptance of the newcomers' culture by the receiving society.
- Parents becoming more receptive to and familiar with the new culture and language. Cross-cultural interchange such as that fostered by host programmes can help in this process.
- Parents and children using their native language at home.
- Parents and children reading to each other in their native language.
- Parents exposing children to their language and culture. This can be done through stories about the family's history, letters to and from friends and family in the home country, visits to the country (if possible), involvement with the ethnic community in the new country, heritage language classes, etc. It is important that the host society make a diversity of cultures an integral part of the curriculum. Such exposure helps foster cultural pride and a sense of identity.
- Parents becoming active agents in their children's education.
- Creating a partnership between children, parents, and educators.

HOW TO COPE

The migration process can be extremely stressful, especially when such things as family conflicts, past traumas, unemployment, or the problems of adolescents are added. The challenge for newcomers is to recreate themselves in a new land, building on their inner strength. They are working toward regaining self-esteem and a sense of control over their new circumstances. Below are a few suggestions for coping with that challenge.

Prevention Through Knowledge

Foreseeing and anticipating possible physical, emotional, mental and practical problems is the best way to prevent them or make them more manageable. With such knowledge, newcomers can set realistic goals for themselves or know where to go for help if they encounter problems.

Here are some ways newcomers can equip themselves to deal with their new circumstances:

- Preparation before the move, such as learning English, is very helpful but not always possible.
- Anticipating loneliness, homesickness, and other possible feelings helps to legitimize them.
- Foreseeing problems that may occur during the process of adaptation can help newcomers cope when they do arise.
- Expecting problems to arise as a result of cultural differences and misunderstandings helps newcomers to avoid blaming themselves for experiences they may encounter.
- Maintaining contact with people "back home" can be a source of emotional support and continuity.
- Learning about the practicalities of the new reality such as how to get a doctor or apply for a job can go a long way toward making daily life more manageable.

Getting Support

Emotional and practical support can be critical in this time of challenges and conflicts. Because newcomers' traditional support systems have in most cases been lost due to migration, they may need to seek support elsewhere. Women, in particular, may have to deal with multiple tasks, pressures, and emotions, supporting and comforting their families while receiving little support themselves. Here are some options for getting support:

- Friends and relatives
- Newcomers' ethnic communities and their services. This can help to alleviate homesickness and relief from the stresses of the new culture.
- Information about the new society from a settlement counsellor or community centre, for instance.
- Settlement counsellors, social workers, and psychologists/psychiatrists.
Remember that looking for help and emotional support outside the home may be a foreign concept for some.

Achieving Financial Security

Financial problems can be a great source of stress for a newcomer. Knowing how to find work, how to manage on a limited budget, and where to get financial aid can help newcomers feel more secure financially. For information on these topics, see this book's chapters on employment and on shopping and finance.

Getting Involved in the New Community

Involvement in the community may be the best way for newcomers to reduce their feelings of isolation and rootlessness and become more connected to the new society. It also makes developing friendships and getting support a lot easier. Volunteering, taking a course, and taking part in a Host Programme are all great ways to get involved.

Using Relaxation Techniques

Spending quiet time alone, doing nothing, or taking a warm bath can help newcomers to relax. Taking 5 or 10 minutes a day to breathe deeply, tense and relax their muscles, do stretching exercises, or give themselves a massage can also help. Their community centre may offer stretching, yoga or relaxation classes if they are interested.

Doing Recreational Activities

Newcomers face many challenges and stresses in adjusting to the new society. Making time to relax and refresh the mind and body on a regular basis is essential to the newcomer's physical, mental, and emotional health. Listening to music, reading, and going for a walk are some good ways for newcomers to relax, have fun, and perhaps meet people. Here are just a few of the other recreational options that may be offered in their area:

Libraries

Here newcomers may consult or take out books, magazines, cassettes (Including language learning tapes), compact disks, videos, films and projectors. These materials may be available in a wide variety of languages and on a large number of topics. They can help newcomers learn English, inform them on their new surroundings and the services available to them in the community, and help them to relax and enjoy themselves.

Libraries also often show films, present lectures, and hold book discussion groups. Community programmes and services may also be offered in libraries, including ESL, TOEFL, and citizenship classes. For children, libraries often have story hour, play time, parent-child drop-in programmes, and programmes for toddlers and preschoolers. Library services are free with a library card. Cards can be obtained by taking two pieces of identification, including one with proof of address, to any library. Children can own cards but must have the forms signed by a caregiver. If library users do not return borrowed items by the due date, they will have to pay a fine for every day past the due date.

Drop-in Programmes Community centres, libraries and churches may run free drop-in programmes. Here, people can gather on an informal basis to socialize, play games or cards, watch T.V., or spend some quiet time relaxing. Some programmes cater to specific groups such as caregivers and their children, adults, senior citizens or teenagers.

Community Centres Community centres offer a variety of recreational activities for free or for a nominal fee. Usually community centres are accessible to people living in a specific geographic area, but they are sometimes open to the general public. Depending on the centre, the newcomer may find some of the following: sports, clubs, and arts and crafts; special events such as a film series or holiday celebration; discussion groups; information services such as legal information and referrals or workshops on accessing community services; educational programmes such as literacy, skills upgrading, after school and prenatal classes; programmes for newcomers such as ESL and citizenship classes; counselling/support such as food banks or Alcoholics Anonymous, parent-child programmes, and seniors' programmes. Consult the blue pages of the telephone book for the addresses and telephone numbers of community centres.

Outdoor Activities Parks, gardens, waterfronts and nature centres are great places to have picnics, play sports, walk, cycle, or enjoy the occasional free music or art event. For information about municipal parks and their locations, newcomers can contact their municipality's department of Parks and Recreation (in the blue pages of the telephone book). Ontario's federal, provincial, and private parks are ideal locations for camping, hiking, boating, and nature activities. For more information on these parks, newcomers can contact Parks Canada or Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources.

Places of Worship Religious institutions can often give people a sense of community. They are good places to meet people, reflect, find spiritual direction, and engage in volunteer work or recreational activities. In some municipalities in Ontario, religions from around the world are represented.

**Other Free or
Inexpensive
Activities**

Many cities and large towns offer film, theatre, dance, art, music, and cultural festivals on a regular basis. Museums and art galleries often have reduced rates or free admission on certain days. Universities and many organizations offer lecture series throughout the year. Free concerts, reduced theatre tickets and other events may also take place in the newcomer's community. To find out about events in their area, newcomers should check listings in a daily or weekly newspaper or contact their community centre.

ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES

- To make newcomers aware of challenges they may face in adjusting to the new society.
- To outline emotions and problems newcomers may encounter at each stage of the adaptation process.
- To emphasize that all newcomers have similar reactions while adapting, and that they are not alone.
- To discuss newcomers' feelings as they adapt to the new culture.
- To discuss the effect that migrating has had on the individual, the couple, and the family.
- To help newcomers understand why problems may be arising and suggest ways to cope with them.
- To explain how recreation can help newcomers adjust to the new country and outline the recreational activities that may be available in their community.
- To explore cultural bias.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Introduce Newcomers to a Host or Volunteer Befriending Programme

There may be programmes in your area designed to bring recent newcomers and Canadians together one-on-one. Volunteers offer their friendship and the emotional and practical support that goes with it. They can be a valuable connection to the community and to local resources. The atmosphere of trust and friendship they provide can greatly help newcomers adjust to the new society. In turn, they educate the host society about the experiences of newcomers. Some programmes may also offer group activities that can help newcomers to build a social support network for themselves.

Put Newcomers in Touch with Ethno-specific Associations and Community and Government Social Services

Many immigrants lose their traditional support system of family and community when they migrate to Canada. Yet now is when they most need support in adapting to the new culture and coping with practical problems. Therefore you may want to encourage newcomers to access social services in their community. Because accessing support outside the network of friends and family is a foreign concept to many, you may want to discuss the idea with newcomers. Outline the kinds of social services that are available. You might mention support services for women, such as employment programmes and rape crisis centres, services for refugees and immigrants such as escorting, ESL, counselling and ethno-specific organizations, emergency services such as food banks and shelters, mental health and counselling services, and employment services. Point out ways to access these services, such as community information centres in some municipalities, community centres, libraries, friends, and the blue and white pages of the telephone book. Provide a list of appropriate services in your area and/or recommend services that fit that newcomer's needs. Investigate each agency you recommend to be sure that it is equipped to handle a multicultural clientele.

Organize a Support Group or Discussion Circle for Newcomers

Support groups offer psychological and practical support which can enable newcomers to develop a sense of community. Group work reduces newcomers' sense of isolation and allows them to discuss common problems. Depending on the needs, language ability, and composition of your clientele, you may choose to group newcomers of the same cultural and linguistic background together. You may find that having more than one interpreter hinders the flow of discussion and the unity of the group. Grouping men and women separately may allow people to express themselves more freely, particularly on certain sensitive subjects such as woman assault or health-related matters.

Keep in mind that the structured format often used in support groups may seem very foreign to some. The group should guide the process. In one case, for instance, a women's support group always began with participants dumping out the contents of their purses. The group would focus on dealing with the problems that those purses contained in the form of job applications or OHIP forms, for instance.

When this very concrete approach was abandoned for a more structured one, the participants all left the group.

Topics for discussion might include cultural adjustment, stress management, sex roles, changing roles within the family, parenting within dual cultures, dating, family planning, AIDS and STDs, safer sex harassment, woman assault and abuse, healthcare, education or employment.

Tour Your Community

Depending on the size of the group and available resources, you may decide to tour your community on foot, by public transportation, by car or by van. Highlight the recreational activities available in the community. For example, you might visit local parks or a beach and point out the local community centre, museum, library, concert halls, stadiums, theatres, etc. Mention that many of these facilities (parks and libraries, for instance) are free and can provide a space for individuals and families to relax and relieve stress. While you are out with the group, you may want to point out other services you might have discussed previously, such as banks, cheap stores and shops to avoid, a typical secondary school, and a police station. Before or after the trip, you may want to hand out a list of free or inexpensive places where people can go to relax and enjoy themselves, such as parks, gardens, beaches, community centres, sites of interest, ethno-specific agencies with recreation programmes, and museums and art galleries (check whether admission is free or reduced at certain times).

Tour a Community Centre

Explain the role of community centres and the types of activities they can offer. This visit can easily be combined with a trip to the library if they are close to each other. (See section on community centres in this chapter.)

Visit a Public Library

Ask your local library to give your group a tour. Make sure the following issues are discussed: how to get a library card, borrowing procedures, types of resources available at the library (books in several languages, magazines, cassettes, videos, etc.), and programmes offered (for parents and young children, for instance). Emphasize that the library can be a valuable resource centre with information on a broad range of topics. Give participants the opportunity to get their library cards at the end of the tour. (See section on public libraries in this chapter.)

Organize Recreational Outings

Depending on the time and resources available, you may want to organize outings to the theatre, concerts, museums, art galleries, or to a local park for a picnic. Young newcomers may be interested in the local music and dance club scene. Even if you cannot arrange for an outing, point out that museums and galleries often have free admission at certain times and that many concerts, plays and other events are free or require only a small donation. Mention how to access listings of arts and entertainment events in local newspapers.

For a Group of Women: Facilitate a Juggling Exercise

The following exercise can help women to name the many roles they assume in the home and larger community and to examine the roles women have in common. Have the group stand in a circle. Give each participant a small ball and have members throw the ball to each other clockwise in a circle. When they feel comfortable with the exercise they should start throwing the balls faster. At this point, start to call out the different roles and tasks women assume, such as mother, wife, daughter, sister, caregiver, single parent, refugee, friend, worker, nurse, counsellor, house cleaner, cook, etc. Increase the speed at which you call out these names as the women juggle the balls faster and faster.

After the exercise, ask the women if they felt stressed as they tried to juggle so many roles and tasks. Discuss the link between the increased number of tasks they must assume and an increase in stress levels. Introduce some exercises or activities that may help them to relieve stress. These might include neck rolls, breathing exercises, taking a walk, listening to quiet music, or taking a hot bath. This exercise might lead into a discussion about the process of adaptation and the new challenges, roles and tasks that immigrant women must often take on.^v

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A number of factors may have a critical effect on the process of adaptation, such as newcomers' experiences before coming to Canada (e.g. rape, torture, or war experiences), or their family history and current situation (e.g. if they have lost or had to leave members of their family, or if they are waiting for family to arrive). Knowing about such factors is essential when addressing newcomers' needs. Use your best judgement and tact when deciding how to bring up and discuss these deeply personal issues, particularly if you are dealing with a group.

- Why did you come to Canada?
- How long have you been in Canada?
- Who made the decision to come here; you, someone else, or the family as a group?
- What do people in your native country do to relax and have fun?
- What kinds of activities do you enjoy; sports, reading, drawing, listening to music...?
- What helps you to relieve stress?
- How have you coped with difficult situations in the past? Could you use those strategies to cope with present challenges?

RELEVANT VOCABULARY

process of adaptation	homesickness	Recreation
adjustment	isolation	Fun
integration	cultural difference	Library
racism	misunderstanding	drop-in programme
sexism	roles	community centre
post-traumatic stress disorder	status	Park
culture shock	conflict	Festival
stress	barriers	Concert
depression	counselling	Museum
anxiety	support	Relax

Create Handouts:

- Lists of local:
 - Community centres
 - Libraries
 - Community information centres
 - Services for immigrants and refugee groups
 - Women's support services
 - Ethno-specific organizations
 - Religious organizations and places of worship
 - Ethno-specific newspapers, publications, T.V. and radio stations and programmes
 - Mental health and counselling services

- Information on local parks, beaches, museums, galleries, science centres, shopping centres, interesting areas of town and other attractions. Translate into appropriate languages.

- List examples of the types of volunteer activities newcomers can take part in, and provide the addresses and telephone numbers of local volunteer placement centres or postings.

Gather Materials:

- Books on Canada and the local community from the local library or community centre
- A tourist map of the town or city
- Tourist brochures on local attractions

ENDNOTES

- ¹Mulageta Abai, *Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture Volunteer Programme Newsletter*, No. 3, May 1991, p. 2.
- ² Some elements of this table are borrowed from: Ninette Kelly, *Working with Refugee Women: A Practical Guide* (Toronto: Working Group on Refugee Women, 1989), p. 56.
- ³ Summarized from "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", by Nancy C. Andreasen, *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry IV*, 4th Ed. Vol. I., eds. Harold I. Kaplan M.D. and Benjamin J. Sadock M.D. (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1985), pp. 918-924.
- ⁴ *Immigrant Settlement Counselling: A Training Guide*, Janis Galway. Toronto: Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), 1991, pp. 164-165.
- ⁵ Judith McCallum, *Coming Together: Support Group for Immigrant Women* (Toronto: College Montrose Children's Place, N.D.)
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