REFUGEE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

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It has been two years since Canada re-entered the world stage as a major player in refugee settlement. The country was mobilized to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, boldly declaring that Canada has a place on the world stage again. At the same time, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada reoriented its immigration policy towards a greater focus on the needs of families and resettlement of the most vulnerable populations drawn from around the world. All of these changes are timely, especially given the fact that United Nations statistics show that over half of the world's refugees are children, which means that refugee resettlement is ultimately about families.

Over the last two years Canadians mobilized quickly to support refugees, as have the academic community and service providers. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for example, created a targeted competition on Syrian Refugee Arrival and Resettlement and Integration, and academics across the country rose to the call, committing themselves to understanding how to better accommodate refugees within the Canadian mosaic. Networks were also formed, such as the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC)—led by Michael Ungar and a dozen academics and service provider as co-leads from across Canada. With over a hundred members, the CYRRC is focused on how academics, service providers and policy makers can work together to design and deliver interventions and conduct timely research to help facilitate the settlement of refugee children and their families in both rural and urban communities.

This issue of *Canadian Diversity / Diversité Canadienne* is dedicated to examining refugee, child, youth and family issues and presenting the research that has emerged over the last two years as part of these and other efforts. As you will see in this issue, in many respects Canadian academics and service providers, along with the Canadian population as a whole, have learned to work quickly, think differently, and explore new methods to help refugees resettle in Canada. Our efforts have garnered us attention from around the world.

Given that so many recent refugees to Canada are children and youth, education and language learning have become a special focus for resettlement. Both aspects of a child's life are key to their successful integration. Yan Guo, Srabani Maitra, and Shibao Guo explore these issues through interviews with parents and children in Calgary, showing how refugees look to schools as institutions to help children and families form friendship and social networks. At the same time, and unfortunately, schools are far too often the first place where children and youth experience bullying, discrimination and other setbacks. James Baker explores these issue through interviews with youth in St. John's and Hamilton, looking at the micro-aggressions they face in their day-to-day lives. Mazen El-Baba, Redab al Janaideh and Xi Chen also look at education and language but examine instead how learning can occur outside the classroom through summer camps. They show the power of working across academic and service sectors to create programs that enhance the lives of the young people who participate.

Refugee families clearly face struggles in their new homes and adapting to a new life. Many also wrestle with memories of traumatic and stressful events. These experiences can lead to anxiety and other mental health challenges among children and their caregivers. E. Anne Marshall examines best practices in counseling refugee youth and considers the factors that influence their mental health outcomes. She cautions that well-intentioned programs can fail to recognize and build on refugees' strengths. Patrick McGrath also explores issues of mental health, but focuses on supporting not only children and youth but refugee families as a whole. He shows how governments and communities can mobilize new technologies to offer better and more affordable access to mental health supports.

When educational opportunities are not present and children and youth's challenges are exacerbated by discrimination, unmet expectations, and poverty, we know that youth can be led astray. In Europe and other regions of the world a number of refugees and asylum seekers have been linked to terrorism and violence. Amarnath Amarasingam critically examines whether Syrian refugees pose such a threat in Canada. He explores the myths and realities of this potential for violence as well as how such beliefs influence public opinion towards refugees.

Public opinion and discourse is also examined by Jessica Anne Déry and Elke Winter who look at Québec and English Canadian media coverage of Syrian refugees. They show how identities such as "us" and "them" are created and how labels become obstacles for newcomers to overcome. These issues are also analyzed by Reza Nakhaie in his contribution to this issue. He discusses the xenophobia of dominant groups in Canada and challenges it by showing that despite obstacles, access to and incentives for free access to Official Language schooling for newcomers mitigates against mental health struggles and better integrates young people and their families into communities and the broader economy.

The arrival of a large number of Syrian refugees offered many opportunities for Canadians to show their best and most welcoming qualities. Many did so by forming community partnerships and refugee sponsorship groups. Norine Verberg and Joseph Khoury chronicle how the town of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, banded together to create SAFE (Syria-Antigonish Families Embrace) to support four families. Their piece highlights how people worked across academic, service, and other sectors to support refugees over the past two years. They also illustrate how Canadians learned to welcome newcomers differently as a result of the Syrian cohort of refugees — that is they learned to work more quickly and think outside the box when looking for settlement solutions.

The arrival or Syrian refugees also shone a light on social problems native-born Canadians face, such as access to a living wage and affordable housing. The arrival of large families showed how Canada's housing stock is designed for older and single people rather than young and large families. Issues like these are explored by Lori Wilkinson and her colleagues, who interviewed refugee families arriving to the Prairies. Damaris Rose and Alexandra Charette also engage with these issues looking at Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Windsor, Hamilton, Toronto, Peterborough, Ottawa, Gatineau, Montréal, St. John, and Halifax. Like Wilkinson's team, they found a lack of information for settlement providers and impediments to affordable housing required for the settlement of refugees across the country.

Despite the challenges, refugees have landed across all parts of Canada. For the Atlantic region their arrival reversed population trends in Nova Scotia from a net loss to a gain. This has led many to ask whether family based migration and non-economic immigration might be a solution to population woes in the country's secondary cities and regions where outmigration compounds aging. Fernando Matta explores whether refugees are likely to stay where they landed looking at administrative data of recent refugees. He finds that many will move on and they most likely will move to where jobs can be found and larger population centres. If communities want to retain newcomers they will need to be proactive.

Part of being proactive means collecting data and tracking whether policy and other interventions are working. Despite enormous mobilization of resources, in the fall of 2017 the Auditor General of Canada cautioned that the federal government is struggling to track the impact of its effort to resettle Syrian refugees. In this issue we offer some insight on the research being done, but also recognize that the work is far from complete. The more we learn, the better prepared Canada will be for the next cohort of refugee newcomers. Not only are we back as a nation on the world stage, the research presented in this special issue shows that our country has great potential to sustain its position as a world leader in refugee research and settlement.