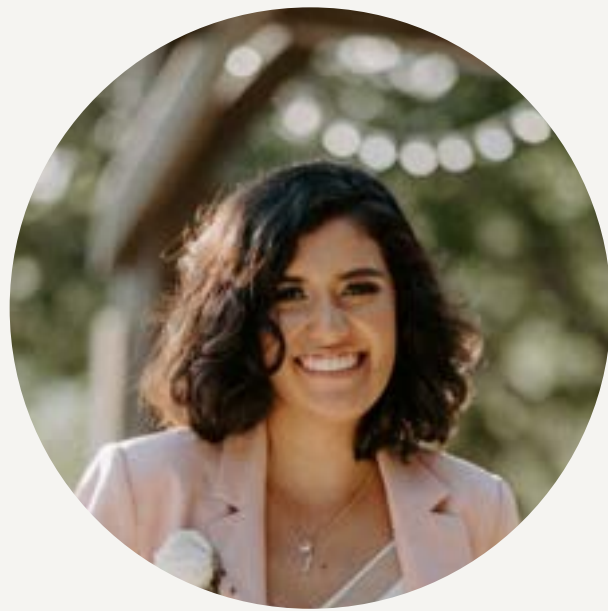


# GROWING ROOTS

Reimagining Housing through Art for  
Refugees in Surrey



# ABOUT US



MARGARITA TELLEZ  
ESPAÑA

Manager, Refugee and  
Specialized Programs,  
Settlement &  
Community  
Development at  
DIVERSEcity and Advisor



FIGRELLA PINILLOS

City in Colour -Co Director  
and Lead Researcher



NATALIA BOTERO

Colombian Photo-  
Journalist and Lived-  
Experience Spanish  
Speaking Co-Researcher

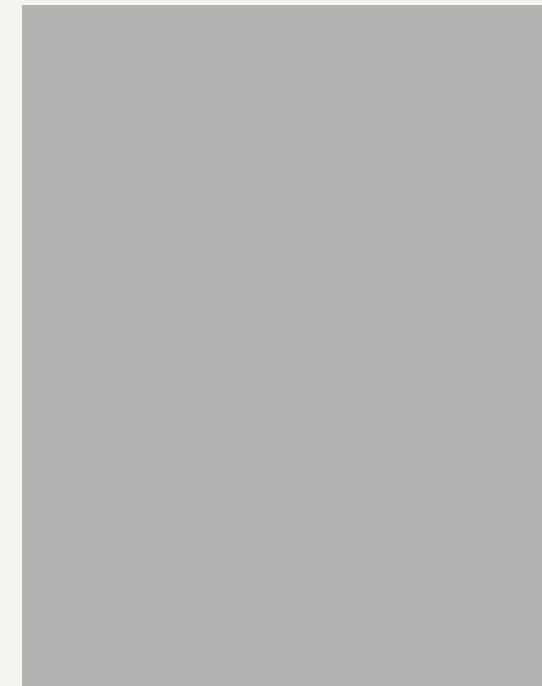
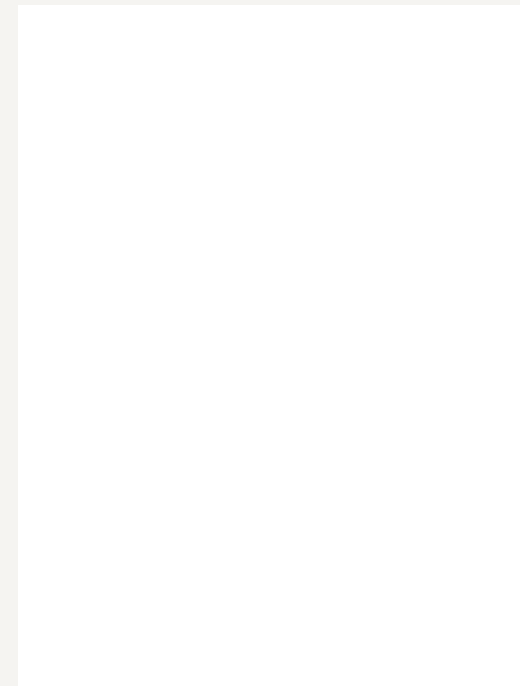
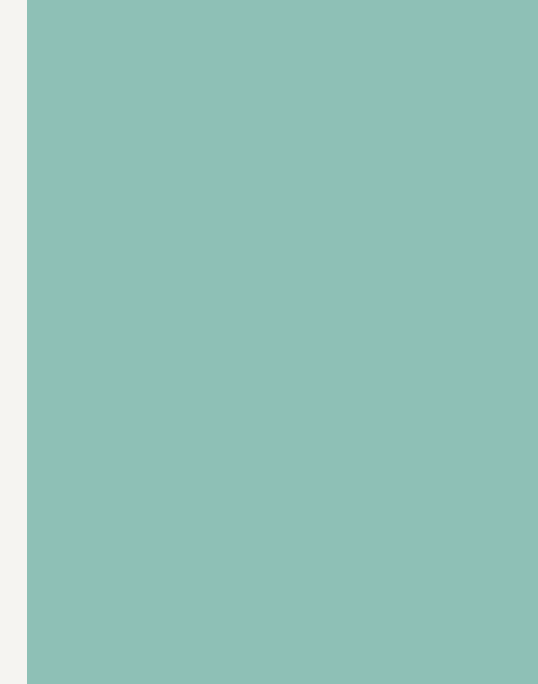


MOQADAS HASHIMI

Afgan Journalist and  
Lived-Experience Dari  
Speaking Co-Researcher

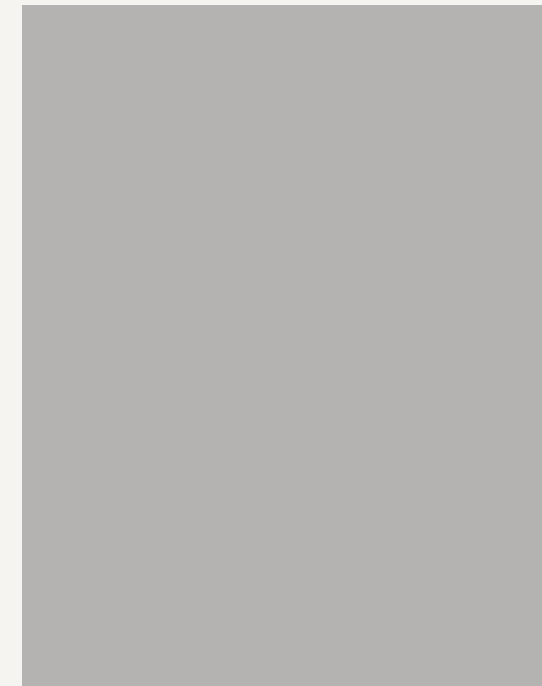
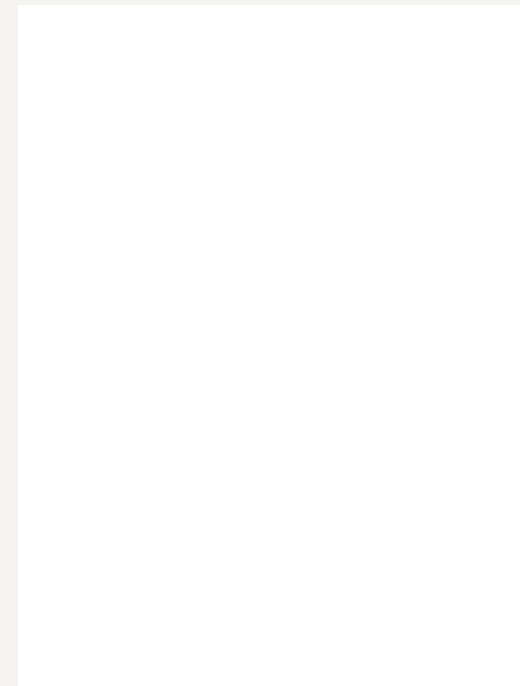
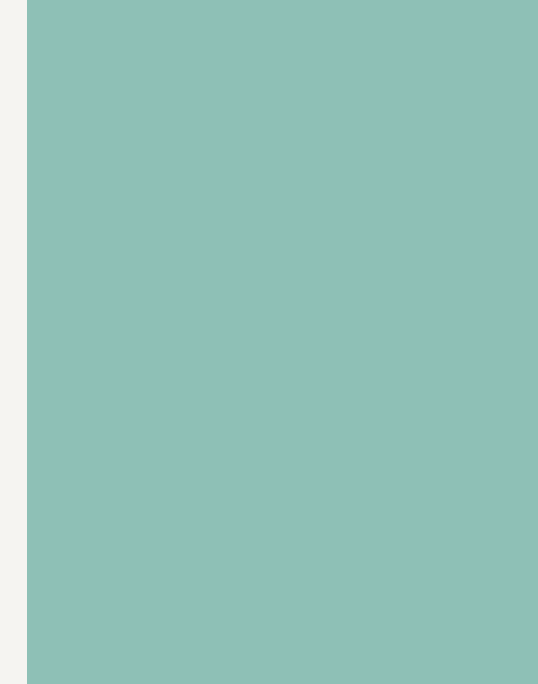
# THE HOUSING CRISIS

The housing crisis is a national issue facing all Canadians. Lack of available units, high rate of evictions and increasing rent prices make it impossible for renters to find a suitable and affordable home. Further, this ongoing crisis breeds the ground for abusive landlords. BC is in a unique position as the leading province on evictions and the leading province in housing construction. This issue facing all BC residents intersects with refugees unique experiences of race, class, mobility, and gender.



# HOUSING & REFUGEES

- Problems securing housing:
  - Large families
  - Lack of knowledge
  - Racism
  - Ableism
  - Classism
- Problems when housing is secured:
  - Illegal rent increases
  - Lack of receipts
  - Damage Deposits
  - Violation of Tenancy Act



# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## Project Overview

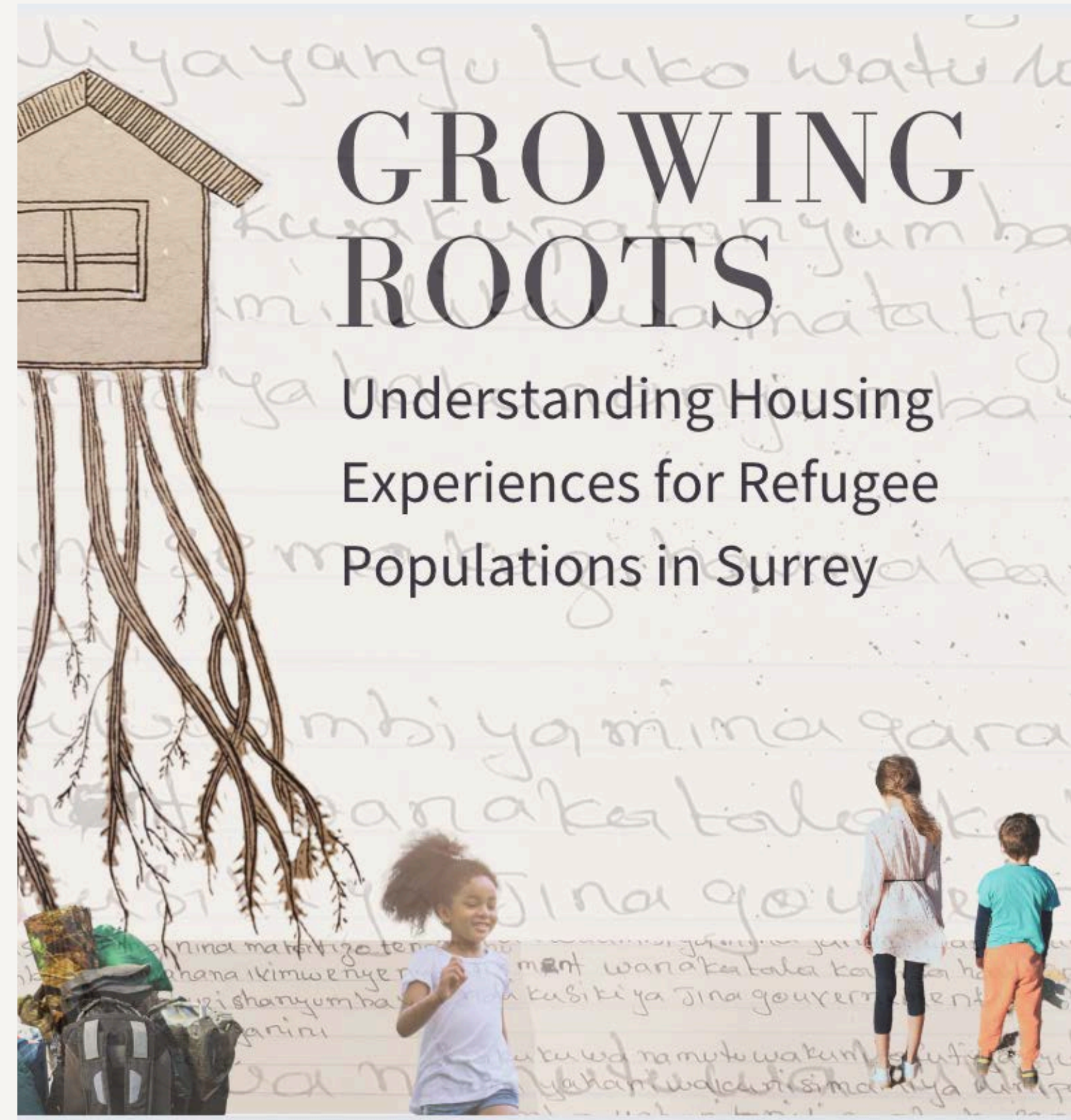
- Four refugee communities documented:
  - Latin American (Spanish-speaking) claimants.
  - Afghan (Dari-speaking) GARs.
  - Congolese (Swahili-speaking) GARs.
  - Syrian/Lebanese (Arabic-speaking) GARs.
- Partnership with City in Colour Cooperative & DIVERSEcity Community Society.

## Goals

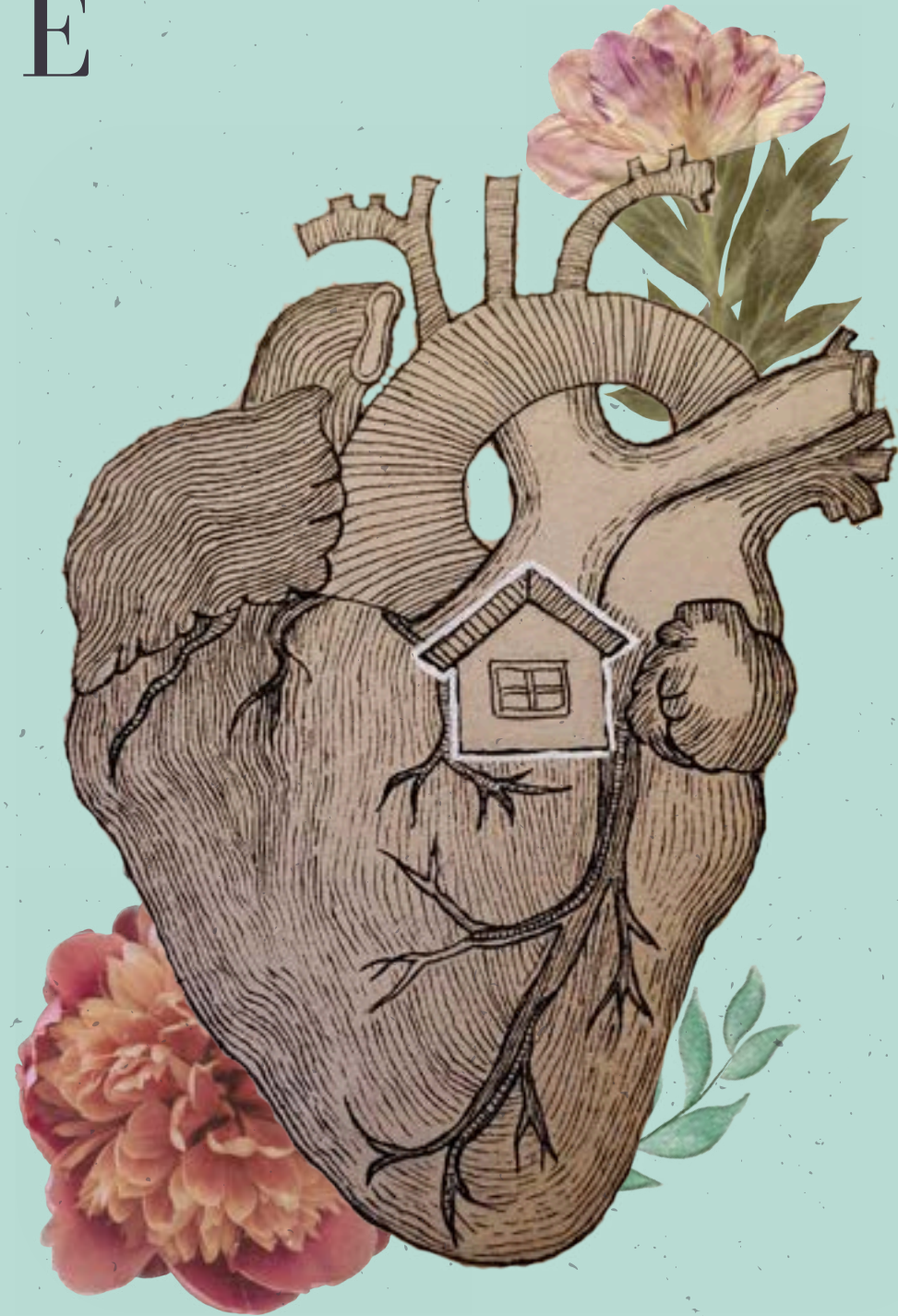
- Identify barriers to adequate, affordable housing.
- Raise awareness of refugees' housing situations.

## Methods

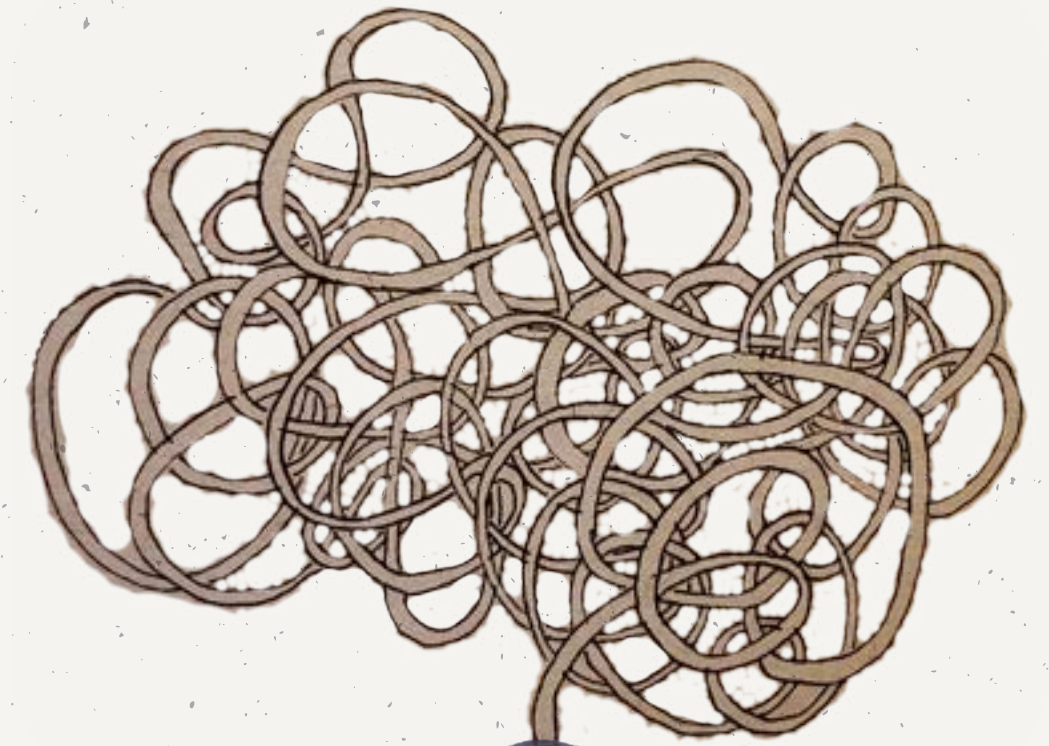
- Arts-Based: Workshops for creative housing expressions; public exhibition planned.
- Trauma-Informed: Safe, supportive sessions, guided by mental health experts.
- Participatory: 43 participants (incl. 9 co-researchers) sharing in-depth stories



# DEPICTIONS OF AN IDEAL HOME



# DEPICTIONS OF CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION





# IDEAL HOME



"I tried to paint trees and a road here. I used to love watching birds and being in nature. I used to love to herd cows a lot. I used to love to walk a lot with dogs, dogs would I loved a lot to look at the birds that are called Ekord"

# CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION

"We are grateful and thank God that we have a home; however, our home is too old. We came from Calgary to Vancouver and did not know anyone in the city. We had no support. Someone suggested this home around 1.5 years ago. The windows are not standard, resulting in heat loss and increased utility costs. Last winter, we had to pay \$800 for utilities! The landlord does not address the unit's problems and neglects the required repairs. He keeps increasing the rent unreasonably and now wants to raise it by \$500, from \$3800 to \$4300!



We want to leave this home but cannot find a proper alternative. Finding jobs is also hard and has negatively impacted all aspects of our life."



"My father was a farmer. I want to grow food like him. Home does not have a meaning without family. Home is not home without food, love, and music. I don't need a big home, a home feels like being spacious through sharing and being with your loved ones. We lost the life we had in our homeland, but my mantra is that I will blossom again."



"The house I drew here is where we live. I wrote 'no employment' to show the lack of jobs. This dollar sign represents our expenses being higher than our income. There is also a lot of rain and cold weather in British Columbia."



"We struggled to find housing. The organizations were showing us houses that were not suitable for living. They were old houses, with insects problem. In the end, we had to search for housing through Marketplace. We suffered of the distances, we struggled with the language. I mean, we know a bit of English from our school days. We struggled a lot to find housing. It took us 4 months to find adequate housing. We have a phobia of insects and a priority on safety. It is difficult for us to live on the ground floor. In the end, we relied on ourselves."

"My home in Afghanistan was close to a mountain, I used to enjoy fishing at sunset while being mesmerized by the beautiful scenery around me. I love mountains, I love nature. I hope one day I can have a home close to a mountain and recreate that peaceful life I had."

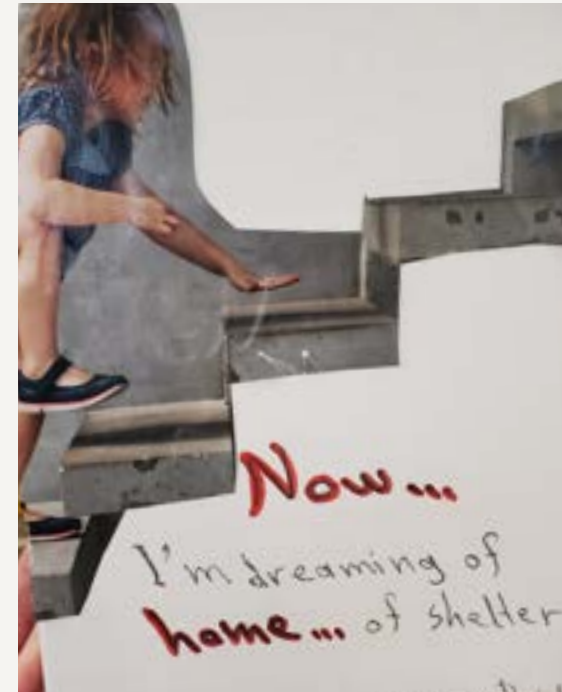


"This picture reminds me of home. It brings back memories of the farm. I go and look at my farm... this is the sun, and here is a nice house."



"We have been living in townhouse number 4, part of a series of 20 townhouses, for the past 2 years. This old building does not meet our cultural needs, making hospitality difficult. It gets too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. Safety is a concern as four of our bicycles were stolen within three weeks.

There are no nearby grocery stores, and my wife struggles with daily tasks like grocery shopping while I am at work. Our neighbors, mostly white Canadians, do not interact with us, and my family cannot communicate in English. This isolation has led to depression, and my family constantly expresses a desire to return to Afghanistan despite the dangers there. They do not feel like they belong here."





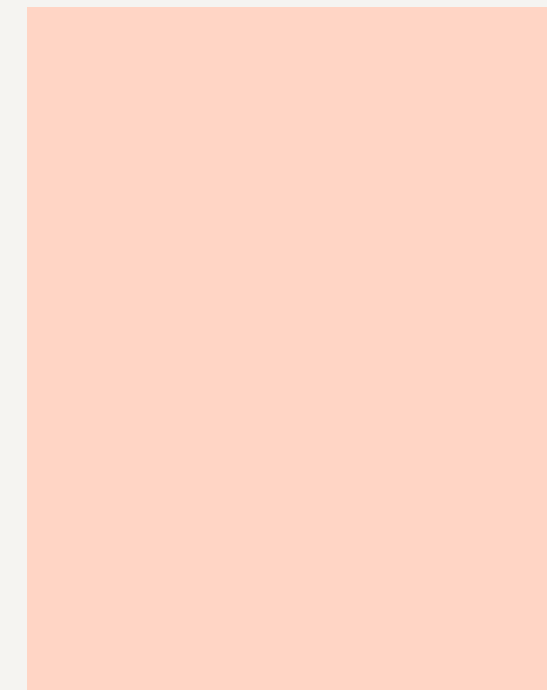
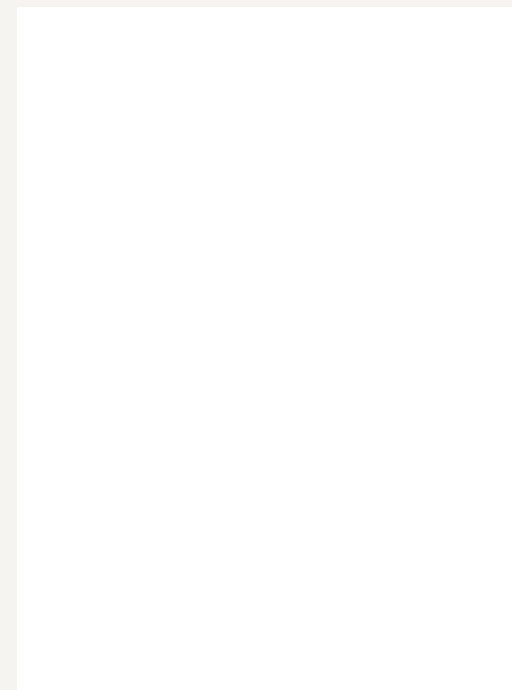
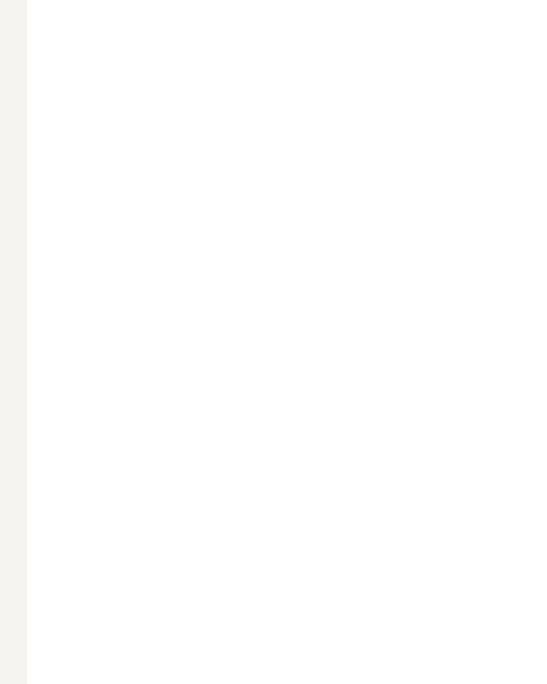
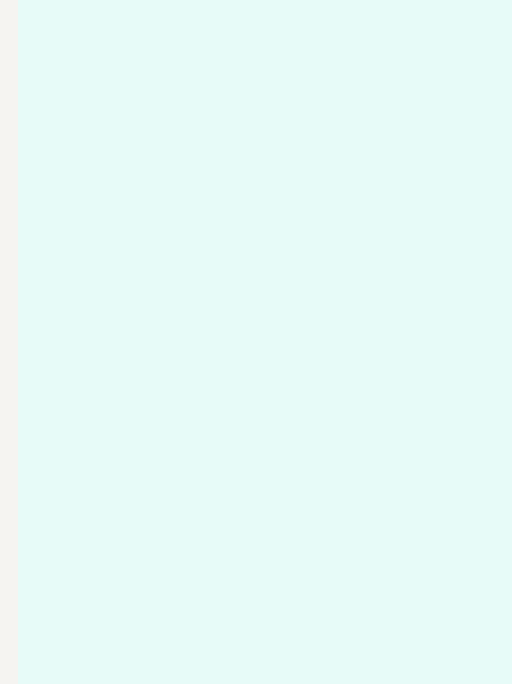
# FINDINGS



- **Limited support upon arrival for refugee claimants**
- **Limited support to navigate the housing system**
- **Limited Access to Social Housing and Long Waitlists**
- **Challenges with Traditional Family Definitions in Social Housing**
- **Affordability**
- **Lack of Freedom and Abuse of Power by Landlords**
- **Unsuitable suites**
- **Employment**

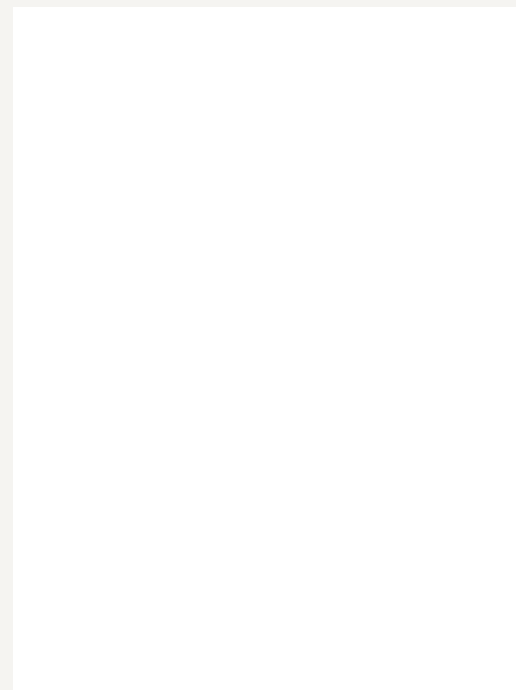
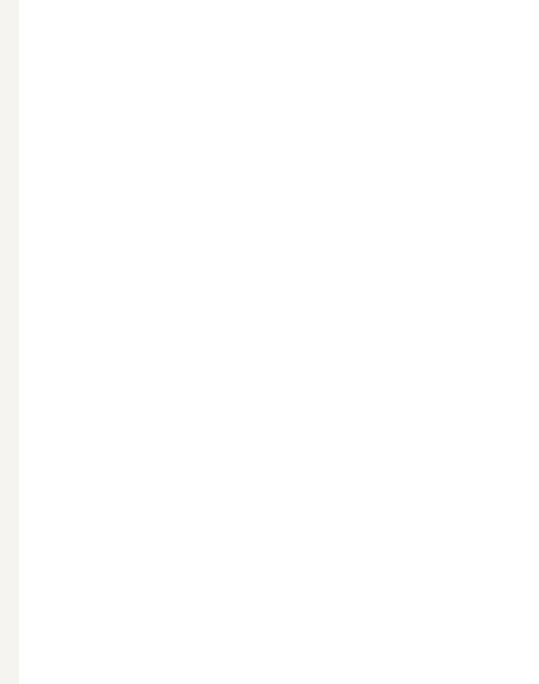
# HOPE AND DREAMS FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY LED SOLUTIONS

- RENT 101: A Peer-led Housing Rights and Navigation Workshop for Spanish-Speaking Refugee Claimants
  - Designed by Spanish-speaking co-researchers
  - 2-hour barrier free workshop in Spanish
  - Provided experience in Canada for co-researchers
  - Provided a safe space for refugee claimants to connect, learn and ask housing related questions to their peers.
- AFGAN SPRING EVENT: A celebration to connect the community and combat social isolation
  - Social gathering organized by Dari speaking co-researchers
  - Provided event planning experience for co-researchers
  - Through this event, a community communication channel was created.



# HOPE AND DREAMS AND NEXT STEPS

- Expansion of Housing Support:
  - 1-1 support for all newcomers regardless of status
  - A bigger team
- Financial Support for Housing Needs:
  - Rental Assistance
  - Support with damage deposit
  - Financial support to buy furniture/ other essentials
- Advocacy
  - Continue to support community-led solutions and advocate to funders for institutional change
- Continue Collaboration with City in Colour Co-op

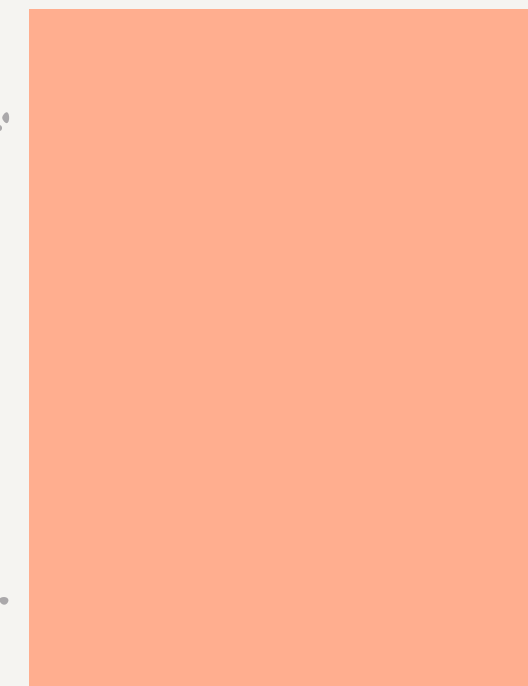
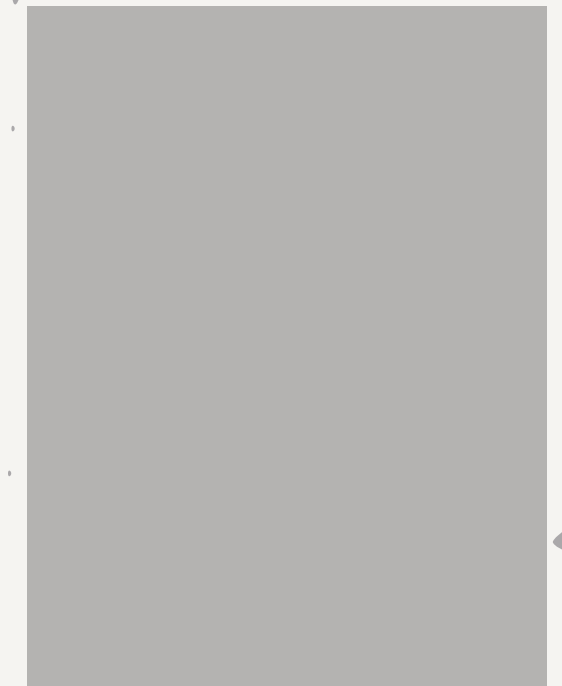
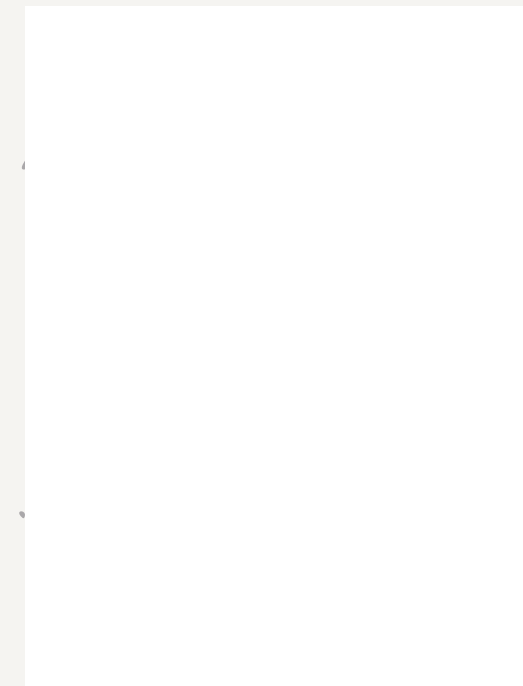
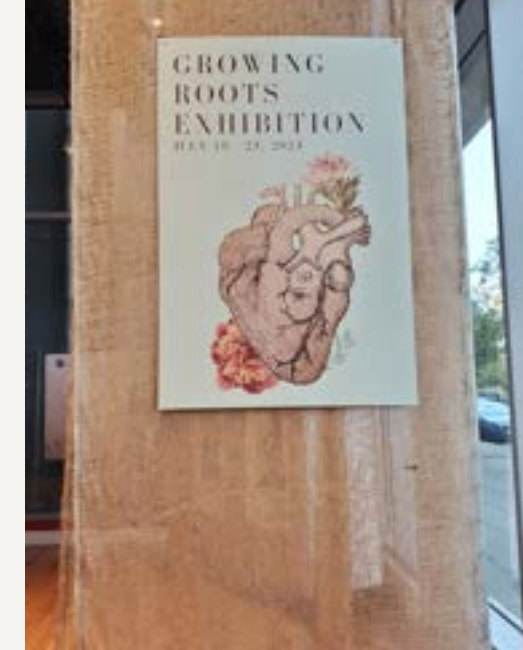


# NEXT STEPS

Currently undertaking the next phase of the study titled "Growing Roots: Refugee-Centric Housing Solutions in Metro Vancouver," funded by the Real Estate Foundation of BC.

The project builds upon the insights, methodologies, and collaborative model developed in our previous initiative, "Growing Roots: Understanding Refugee Housing Needs in Surrey, B.C."

The primary goal of this phase is to collaborate with refugee co-researchers to review national and international affordable housing case studies, formulate policy recommendations, and develop Refugee-Centric Design Guidelines for Housing. These guidelines will include recommendations and solutions for policy changes that address the specific housing needs of refugees and refugee claimants.



**GET IN TOUCH!**

[team@cityincolourcoop.com](mailto:team@cityincolourcoop.com)

[WWW.CITYINCOLOURCOOP.COM/GROWINGROOTS](http://WWW.CITYINCOLOURCOOP.COM/GROWINGROOTS)

