ROOTS at the let Reimagining Housing through Art for **Refugees in Surrey**

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ABOUT US







MARGARITA TELLEZ ESPAÑA

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

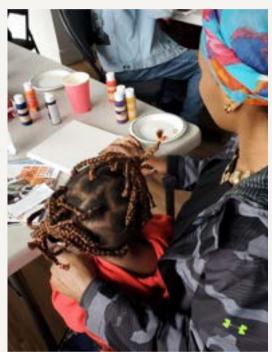
The housing crisis is a national issue facing all Canadians. Lack of available units, high rate of evictions and increasing rent prices make it impossible for renters to find a suitable and affordable home. Further, this ongoing crisis breeds the ground for abusive landlords. BC is in a unique position 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.

















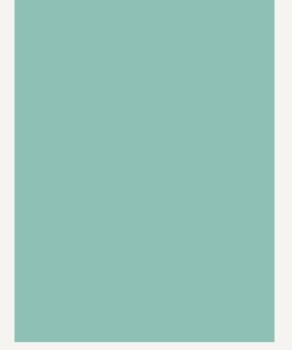
HOUSING & REFUGEES

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

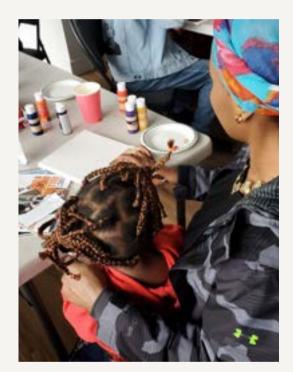


















ABOUT THE PROJECT

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



GROWING ROOTS

Understanding Housing Experiences for Refugee Populations in Surrey

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DEPICTIONS OF AN IDEAL HOME

DEPICTIONS OF CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION

IDEAL HOME

"I draw the heart at the center, because I feel that love connect us in life. For me, home is the four of us, it is me as the pillar, and my three children. The red lines around it, is the close family circle, my sisters, my mother, my nephews, my brothers-in-law, it is not a very big family. (...) Love is what has to keep us together, to build the home, no matter where we are."



"I want to live in an area that has many trees, and wild animals. My ideal home is a place where I can shelter my children, an ideal home is to be able to be The tree. The tree cares, the tree protects, and in The tree is where they come to take refuge. Where there is no vegetation, where there is no tree there is no life, there is no water there is no oxygen, and that is the context where I come from, a civil war, a war against its people"



"This is my ideal place. It's where we have our own house, a space to shout, run, jump, play music, and for my son to have his space. It's a place to share with friends, easing the loneliness we sometimes feel. It's a united family home, with God present, filled with light, and where we can have a pet cat. This is all I want for my home."

"I keep my life simple and focus on peace. I miss my family and my city; here, it's just my daughter and me. I long for a quiet place without violence, unlike where we come from that every day someone is murdered' every day there is a problem. One cannot go out with bags, be psychologically well, calm, without having to be afraid. The most important thing is to feel safe and calm."





CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION

"I wrote the word abuse because as there is no housing, there is a low supply of housing, the owners are literally abusing us with the price, and the conditions. It is quite the opposite of the ideal home, because despite that we are covered with a roof, the owner does not let you be free in the space that you are renting, it is as if we were begging for what we are paying."





"I have been in a basement for 9 months now and I feel like I am in a fish tank, it is uncomfortable, difficult and sad too. It is not just the space, but

to be forced to be in that space because

there are no other possibilities. (...)

It is very frustrating, to think that I

had to leave my country (...) and (now)

feeling in prison inside my own home,

feel that there is a certain implicit

violence because I feel that they take

advantage of me, they abuse me. The

way contracts are made is irregular

because one does not know the

legislation"

because the landlord is an oppressor. I

"I drew a golden house because housing prices here make owning a home seem like an unattainable dream. I have a good landlord, but as a single mother, managing is tough. I can't work until September when my daughter starts school. Paying \$1200 for rent and \$200 for utilities leaves us with only \$300 from welfare each month for the three of us, so we rely on food banks. I'm constantly worried about utility costs.



"This represents me at the moment. I arrived two months ago, only with my daughter. We live in a room, I pay 1200 and I recieve 1280 in assistance. I don't have a work permit. I am living with a person who is from where I come from but has been there for many years. This person treats me as his servant, I have to take out the trash, wash the dishes, and if I don't he doesn't take it well, he humiliates me. since he knows that I can't move anywhere else. The truth is (...) I don't know where to go, I don't know who to talk to about this, when I go out sometimes with my daughter, I feel disoriented about everything, it's just the two of us"



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



"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."

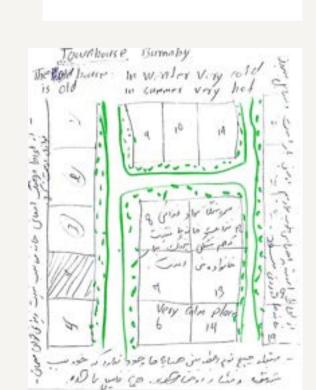


"My home in Afghanistan was close to a mountain, I used to enjoy fishing at sunset while being mesmerized by the beautiful scenery around me. I love mountains, I love nature. I hope one day I can have a home close to a mountain and recreate that peaceful life I had."



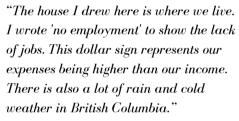
"This picture reminds me of home. It brings back memories of the farm. I go and look at my farm... this is the sun, and here is a nice house."

weather in British Columbia."



"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."



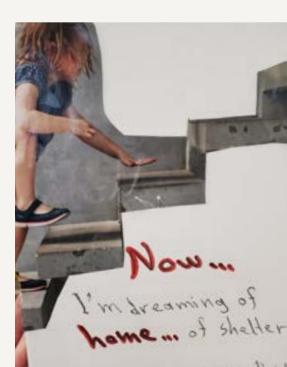




"We struggled to find housing. The organizations were showing us houses that were not suitable for living. They were old houses, with insects problem. In the end, we had to search for housing through Marketplace. We suffered of the distances, we struggled with the language. I mean, we know a bit of English 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."

'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

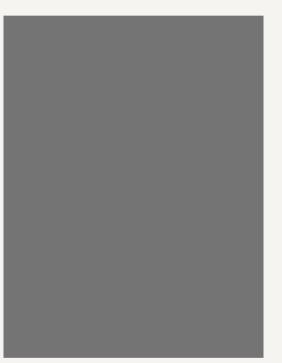
- Limited support upon arrival for refugee claimants
- Limited support to navigate the housing system
- Limited Access to Social Housing and Long Waitlists
- Challenges with Traditional Family Definitions in Social Housing
- Affordability
- Lack of Freedom and Abuse of Power by Landlords
- Unsuitable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

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY LED SOLUTIONS

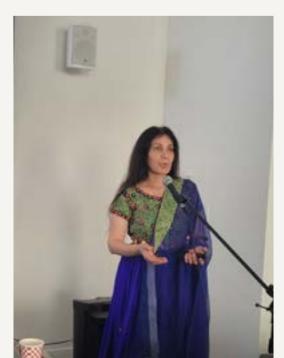
- RENT 101: A Peer-led Housing Rights and Navigation Workshop for Spanish-Speaking Refugee Claimants
 - Designed by Spanish-speaking co-researchers
 - 2-hour barrier free workshop in Spanish
 - Provided experience in Canada for co-researchers
 - Provided a safe space for refugee claimants to connect, 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 coresearchers
 - Provided event planning experience for coresearchers
 - Through this event, a community communication channel was created.









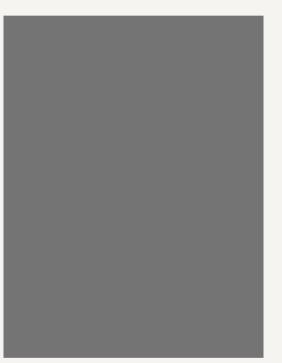


HOPES AND DREAMS AND NEXT STEPS

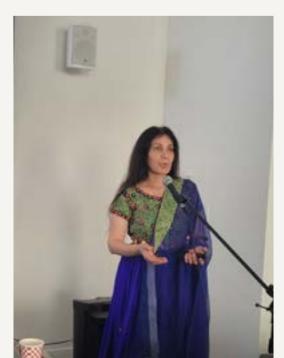
- Expansion of Housing Support:
 - 1-1 support for all newcomers regardless of status
 - A bigger team
- Financial Support for Housing Needs:
 - Rental Assistance
 - Support with damage deposit
 - Financial support to buy furniture/ other essentials
- Advocacy
 - Continue to support community-led solutions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











NEXT STEPS

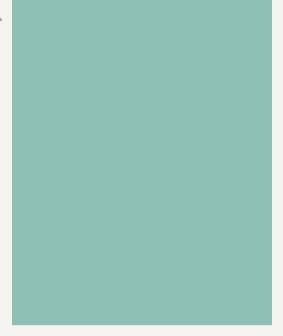
Currently undertaking the next phase of the study titled "Growing Roots: Refugee-Centric Housing Solutions in Metro Vancouver," funded by the Real Estate Foundation of BC.

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.



















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