



DURHAM REGION RESETTLEMENT
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (RAP)

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

NOVEMBER 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our funder, the City of Toronto, for funding the Durham Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) through the cross-regional initiative. We especially want to thank the City of Toronto's Housing Department for their support and guidance at the initial stage of the project execution.

We would also like to thank Ontario Works Durham Region, who served as a critical player in the delivery of the RAP program in Durham Region.

We extend our special thanks to our community partners:

- Achev Language Assessment Centre (formerly known as Centre for Education and Training) for English language assessment support
- Ajax and Pickering Welcome Centre Immigrant Services for information and referrals to available services
- City of Pickering for library and recreational services
- Community Development Council Durham – Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) for settlement services to newcomer families with school-aged children to navigate the Ontario school system and local school resources; and the Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) for settlement support to refugees as they adjust and contribute to life in Canada and Durham
- Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB) and Durham District School Board (DDSB) for enrolment of a large number of elementary and secondary school-aged children from the RAP program; as well as the school board's Continuing Education for enrolment of RAP adults into English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and other short-term training programs
- Durham Children's Aid Society for parenting information
- Durham Mental Health Services for group-based and individual counselling sessions
- Durham Public Health Department for health-related consultations, information sessions, and flu clinics for the parents and their children
- Durham Local Immigration Partnership for your strong partnership with CDCD
- Durham Region Unemployed Help Centre (DRUHC) for employment workshops and on-going employment supports to the RAP clients
- Herizon House for advice during the early stages of setting up RAP
- IRCC Panel Physician Dr. Suliman Formuly for workshops delivered on Interim Federal Health Program
- Salvation Army for information on your services and voucher support to the clients
- YMCA Family and Community Action Program (FCAP) for Early Childhood Education for the parents and their children

With a great sense of gratitude and collaboration, we successfully assisted the RAP families to meet their housing and resettlement needs. We hope this report will showcase the RAP program's highlights, achievements, challenges and lessons learned.

PROJECT SUMMARY

In 2019, the City of Toronto received funding from the federal government to lead and implement a Greater Toronto Refugee Resettlement and Regional Housing Strategy for asylum-seeking families. In addition to the municipalities of Peel and Hamilton, Durham was also selected to spearhead this initiative.

A new partnership and a regional response with the City of Toronto was formed to support asylum-seeking families arriving in the Greater Toronto Area. The project was initially funded from October 2019 to March 2020 and then, with the support of our funder, it was extended to the end of October 2020. The program's mandate is to help the asylum-seeking families become resettled and housed in the Region of Durham and surrounding communities.

The initial RAP project goal was to provide resettlement and housing support to 25 families at Comfort Inn Pickering, through a staff complement of five full-time Case Managers, two Housing Support Workers and one Team Lead, over the duration of 6 months, October 2019 to March 2020. With the extension of seven additional months, our accomplishments included:

- Accommodating 65 RAP families at the Comfort Inn shelter
- Providing settlement and other community support for 244 individuals, including 108 adults, 107 school-aged children and 29 children under the age of 4
- Finding and securing housing for 65 families within 2 to 3 months after their arrival, in communities of their choosing

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- The majority of RAP clients attended RAP on-site workshops and information sessions; many clients joined short training programs offered at Ajax and Pickering Welcome Centres and Ontario Works Ajax office
- All school-age children enrolled in primary/secondary schools
- All children under age 4 participated in the YMCA early-on programs with their parent
- 35 job-ready clients found either part-time or full-time jobs, with many currently working in the healthcare field as Personal Support Workers (PSWs)
- During March and April, 2020 RAP families were without active housing search due to the pandemic, but virtual showing continued.
- 65 RAP families were successfully housed and resettled

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

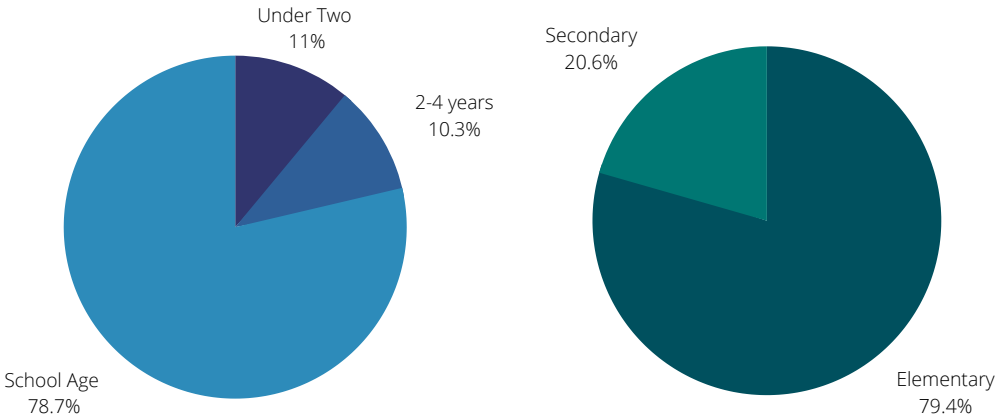
Despite the ever-evolving COVID-19 pandemic situation, the RAP offices remained open with staff on-site to provide critical resettlement services via phone or email, and remained available to respond to urgent matters. RAP staff carefully followed CDCD's Pandemic, Health and Safety Procedures to ensure that we did our part to help contain the spread of the virus.

The safety and well-being of RAP families and RAP staff were always our top priority during this difficult period. All group activities and workshop sessions were offered virtually during this time. Our settlement and housing services were never interrupted and remained operational during this pandemic. It was a challenging time for RAP parents and children due to the limited space available within the hotel/shelter environment. RAP staff and families, however, worked together to ensure that health and safety rules were implemented and followed.

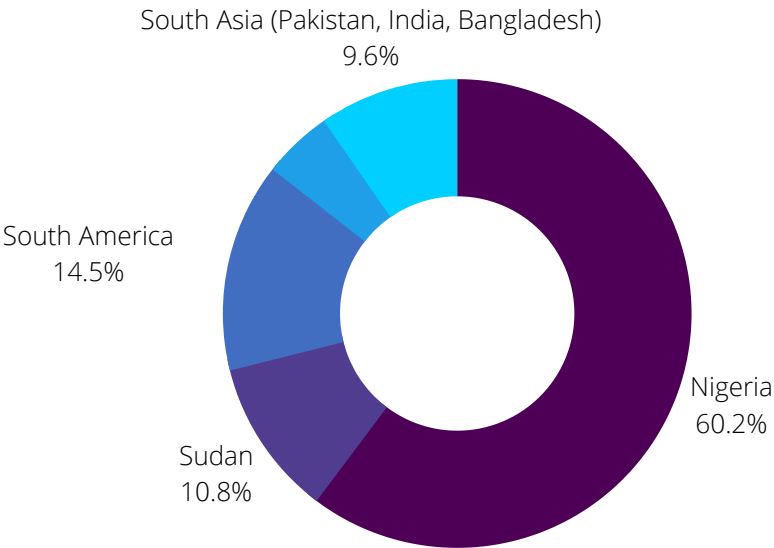
RAP PROGRAM STATISTICS

Statistics (October 2019 – October 2020)	October 2019 to March 2020	April 2020 to October 2020	Original Project Target	Total for 13 months
Total No. of Families Served (arrived at Comfort Inn)	54	11	25	65
Total No. of Individuals Served	194	50	100	244
Total No. of Families Housed (discharged)	35	30	25	65
Total No. of Children enrolled in schools	60	47	N/A	107
Total No. of adult clients accessed the ESL program and other training programs	23	11	N/A	33
Total No. of Clients Employed	11	14	N/A	35
Total No. of Clients participated in Employment Support or Academic Programs	74	58	N/A	132
Total No. of Clients Registered with Ontario Works	194	50	N/A	244
Total number of clients obtained work/Study permit	65	42	N/A	107
Total number of clients accessed Newcomer Settlement Program	194	50	N/A	244

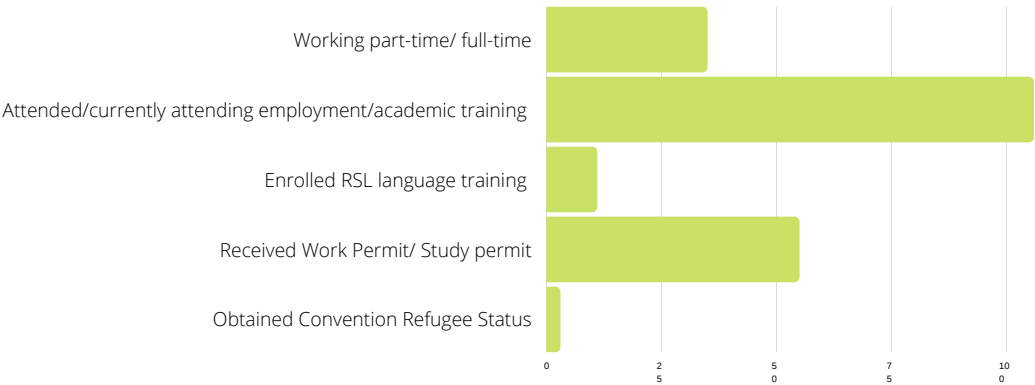
CHILDREN
AGE AND
EDUCATION
LEVEL



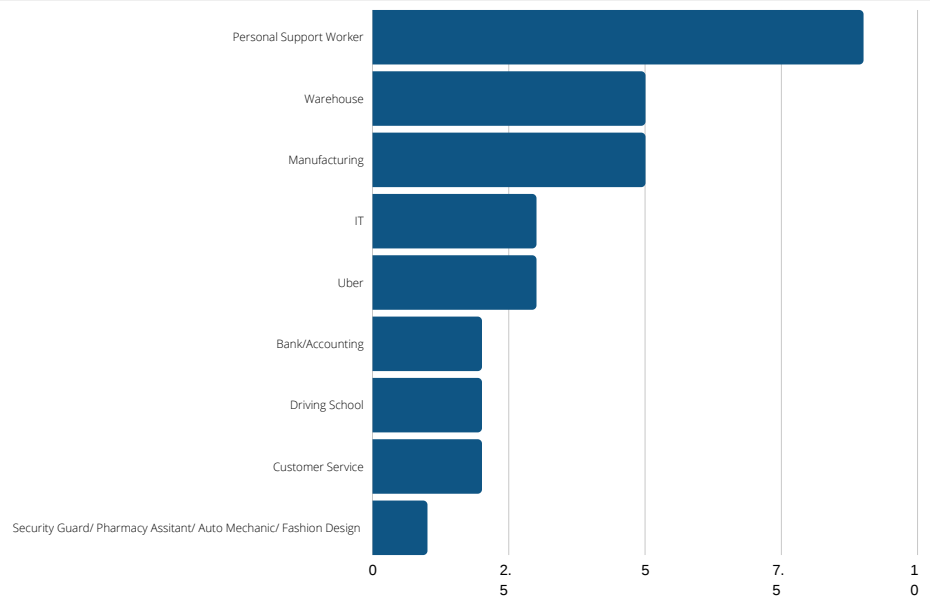
COUNTRY
OF ORIGIN



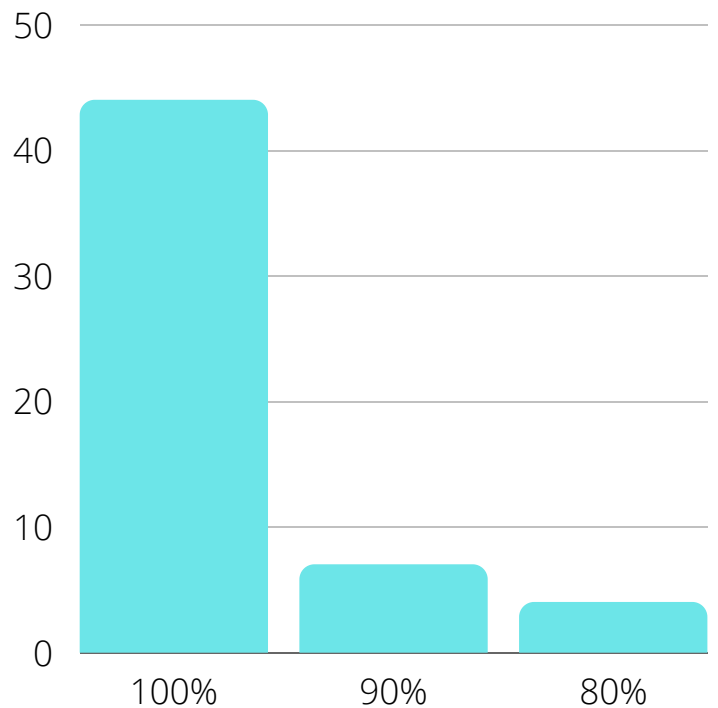
EXIT SURVEY
DATA



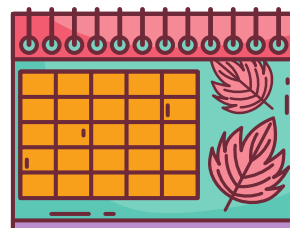
EMPLOYMENT



CLIENT SATISFACTION



AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY




The average length of stay was 3 months.

SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND REFERRALS

The RAP team worked collaboratively to support and guide RAP families to settle into their new temporary residences in Durham. Newly-arrived families at the RAP site received initial welcome orientation and informative packages to help them understand our services and surrounding areas. RAP case managers and housing workers offered individualized case management and housing support appointments during their stay at the RAP program.

RESETTLEMENT CASE MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

1. From the first to the third week of October, a total of five groups of families were registered into the Durham RAP program. Within three weeks of operation, the 25 reserved rooms were fully occupied by 22 families, totaling 37 adults and 50 children.
2. Initial orientation was conducted with the newly-arrived individuals to help them become familiar with the hotel environment and the Region of Durham. At the orientation, we introduced our staff, hotel safety, housekeeping rules, and provided an overview of the RAP program's services.
3. Case management appointments were arranged for families with our Resettlement staff. Settlement intake and needs assessments were completed with each family to identify their urgent needs, build a rapport with the clients, and prioritize the supports that would be referred to the families.



4. With the client's input and suggestions, their short-term and long-term goals were co-developed into settlement plans to address their identified needs. This enabled clients to have a blueprint (step-by-step guide) on the services they are eligible for. Staff worked diligently to help them become socially engaged and contributing members of society as they integrated into the Durham Region and other communities.

5. Other clients who are self-directed received direct relevant and appropriate information and referrals to community and government-related services.

6. RAP housing support workers were assigned to each RAP family to identify their housing preferences and assess their financial situation to help them start the housing search.

7. During their initial need's assessment, the following urgent needs were identified by the families:

- Change of address for refugee application and work permit application
- Children's education and school enrollment
- Ontario Works file transfer
- Locating suitable housing
- Adult's language assessment and ESL classes
- Employment support
- Finding a local medical clinic and family doctors/IFHP coverage

8. To assist the families with their urgent needs, CDCD's Management team and the RAP Team Lead initiated meetings with other service providers to form a collaborative service:

- Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB) and Durham District School Board (DDSB) representatives and local school principals
- Ontario Works (OW)
- Various departments of the Region
- City/township of Ajax and Pickering
- Pickering Welcome Centre
- CDCD's Housing Department Manager
- CDCD's Newcomer Settlement Program Services
- TCET Language Assessment
- DCDSB/DDSB Continuing Education and
- Other community services

SECURING HOUSING

One of the RAP program's main goals was to secure housing to help stabilize the asylum-seeking families. RAP Housing Support Worker (HSW)'s role was to help clients secure and retain affordable housing. The RAP HSW assisted each family upon their arrival at the RAP Comfort Inn by:

- Conducting a one-on-one intake to determine the housing needs of the family
- Educating them on their rights and responsibilities
- Sharing up-to-date information on the realities of the housing landscape in Durham and other regions
- Discussing the cost of housing accommodations
- Exploring opportunities to rent from both apartment corporations and private homeowners
- Co-developing draft budgets and educating them on the importance of living within their financial means.

Throughout the project, clients expressed that it would have been difficult to secure housing units independently without the housing support worker's guidance.

During the project, it was reported, clients faced housing discrimination due to several factors, including but not limited to:

- Being Ontario Works (OW) recipients
- Being unemployed and not having established credit in Canada
- Having large families
- Their refugee status in Canada

HOUSING INTAKE

A New RAP client's intake process was completed within the first five days of entry into the RAP program. During the intake appointment, families were asked a series of questions regarding their choices for housing. These questions helped identify the families' housing needs. They provided the worker with relevant information needed to present options for the families to make informed decisions on the best course of action to meet their housing needs. The most critical questions required to move forward with housing the families included:

- The number of people in the household
- Total household income
- Number of children, gender and their ages
- Clients' housing preferences

This information gathered helped the worker and family determine the range of rental properties that the family could afford.

During the intake process, families were provided with information on the housing market in Durham Region and outside the Region as well as the average cost of rental units.

HOUSING SEARCH SUPPORT

The HSWs provided families with a list of the various websites to search for housing. They also educated them on how to independently browse the sites to view housing units, provided tips on what to look for in rental ads, and how to contact the property owner.

The list of housing search websites includes:

- Kijiji.ca
- Marketplace.ca
- Viewit.ca
- Craigslist.ca

INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION ON TENANT POLICIES

Families were provided pertinent information on the Landlord Tenancy Act. Workers used the government website [Renting in Ontario: Your rights (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/renting-ontario-your-rights>)] to help families understand the laws that affect tenants and landlords in Ontario.

Workers provided in-depth explanations of the following:


- Eviction rules
- Protection against wrongful evictions
- Eviction for personal use
- Reno-evictions
- Bad faith evictions
- Formal repayment agreement
- Informal repayment agreement
- Mediation
- Rent increase limits

HSWs also helped families understand the Ontario Standard Lease using <https://www.ontario.ca/page/guide-ontarios-standard-lease-newcomers>, which provides the information in multiple languages.

This guide also includes information about rights and responsibilities under the act and helps landlords and tenants understand and complete the lease agreement.

HSWs gave families information about financial assistance that was available through RAP financial support after a unit was secured. The RAP program's financial package included last month's rental deposit, startup cost, furniture allowance and moving costs.

Families were also made aware of financial support provided by Ontario Works upon securing a unit. Their OW caseworker was contacted when the proof of a secure unit was available such as a lease agreement or RAP's intent to rent form.



Once all the documents were verified, OWs would release a shelter portion benefit to clients, effectively paying their first month's rent. In Durham Region, clients were also eligible to request financial support for beds from the OWs caseworker. Additionally, families who found housing in other communities outside Durham were advised to contact the Ontario Works in the Region where they relocated to for additional relocation support funds, which they were eligible for.


HOUSING PRESENTATIONS

HSWs conducted housing presentations to the families as a whole. The presentations reiterated all the information provided during the intake and provided an open forum for questions, generating discussions on housing search challenges. During these presentations, families were interested in getting information about rental places throughout Canada, including areas such as London, Hamilton, Sudbury, St Catherine and Alberta etc., where the rental market is much cheaper and is likely to have apartment buildings.

BARRIERS

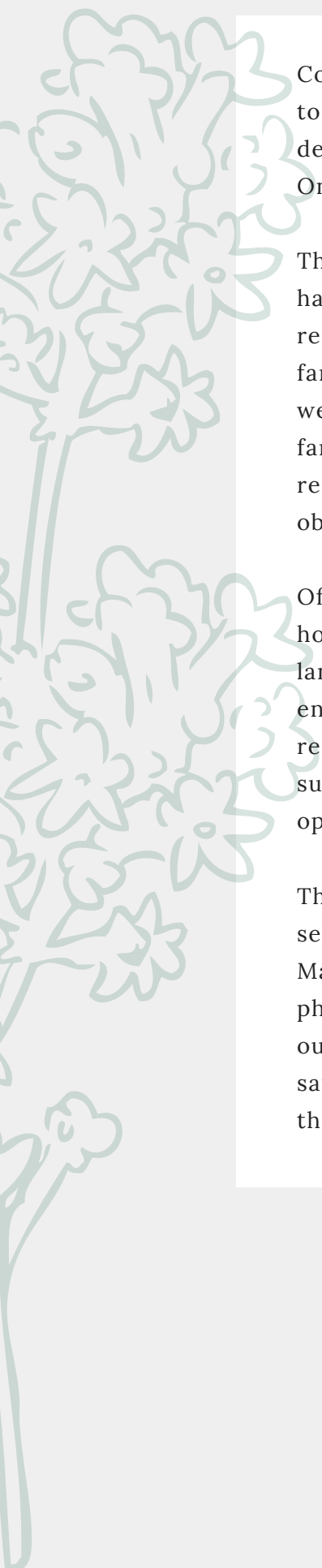
During the process of house searching, families faced several barriers:

- Rent within the GTA is often not affordable in relation to total household income
- Landlords often are not interested in renting to newcomers, Ontario Work recipients, individuals without credit history or job letters
- There is a stigma associated with being a refugee
- Language is often a barrier for non-English or French-speaking households – families were not able to communicate effectively with landlords

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- The desire to move to places where jobs are more readily available becomes difficult as families seek affordable housing. Therefore, clients often decided to stay in less desirable units, choosing to secure employment over more suitable accommodation. While many families choose this option, others who chose to have more desirable housing over employment often moved to locations outside of the GTA.
 - While more affordable housing is available with fewer barriers outside of the GTA, clients may take longer to secure employment.
 - The process for obtaining a unit for RAP families in a high-rise building within the GTA is very time consuming, and the result is rarely favourable. The property management office receives the application. Most property management offices were happy with the families who viewed the units. Unfortunately, the management staff do not get to make the final decision. Decisions are typically made by the building's head office, who do not have a connection with the family. Instead, decisions are based solely on the paperwork submitted, which often leads to the decline of the application for reasons such as no credit report, no income support, etc.

ROLE OF HOUSING SUPPORT WORKERS

The Housing Support Workers often provided clients with landlord listings and other rental listings from various property managers, realtors, and word of mouth. Workers also taught families how to advocate for themselves throughout the process of finding housing. Families were often very proactive in their searches, but they needed intervention from a HSW to advocate with the landlord on their behalf to secure the unit. Landlords who showed interest in renting units to RAP families were generally satisfied with the individual families upon viewing but were hesitant to rent to refugees. HSWs advocated by explaining the RAP program and expanded on the benefits of renting to newcomers. HSW also provided interpretation support for families who required language support.



Convincing landlords to rent to families sometimes required workers to negotiate with the landlord by suggesting that pre-authorized debits payments or rental payments could be made directly through Ontario Work.

The HSWs helped minimize some of the concerns the landlord may have about renting for newcomers and refugees. In the absence of the required documents, HSWs acted as a reference for the refugee families and liaised with landlords, assuring them that newcomers were good renters. Landlords were often more inclined to work with families who had a supportive worker, even outside the GTA, where rent is more affordable, and there are fewer barriers and challenges to obtaining housing.

Often, newcomers wanted to secure a unit in an apartment building; however, there was a higher success rate with privately-owned landlords, who typically rent basement units. It became necessary to encourage families to explore basement apartments as starter residences. The prospect of securing such a unit was higher because support workers and clients were able to talk to landlords directly as opposed to negotiating with property managers.

Throughout the length of the RAP program, housing was successfully secured for 65 families. RAP Housing Support Worker and Case Managers provided continuing support through monthly follow-up phone calls to discharged families. Before our project's completion, our final follow-up calls showed that over 90% of the families were satisfied with their housing arrangements and felt comfortable with their relocation.

INSIGHTS AND BEST PRACTICES

Integrating local programs, services and support

To further support the RAP families with their settlement needs, RAP initiated and coordinated many on-site services and activities with Durham partner organizations:


a. Ontario Works

Financial security was the primary concern of all RAP families. To accommodate the families at the RAP residence and speed up the process, OW case managers were onsite to interview each family. They helped transfer their OW files from Toronto to Durham Region. RAP case managers coordinated the appointments with the OW caseworkers and informed clients of their appointment date/time. They ensured all the documents needed were prepared in advance of the appointment. The OWs staff successfully transferred clients' files to the Durham Region for all RAP families.

b. Enrollment in Schools

A CDCD Settlement Worker in School (SWIS) staff was onsite to help with all school-aged children's online registration. Thanks to the collaborative effort of SWIS, the RAP team, the Boards of Education (DCDSB and DDSB) and school administration, all children started school within two weeks of their arrival in Durham Region. Parents were grateful for the support and quick enrollment of their children into the neighboring schools.

During the first month of operation, RAP was faced with the challenge of enrolling over 30 children within two weeks. To accommodate the school enrollment of over 30 children within two weeks is not easy due to space limitation, as many of the children are either in kindergarten or primary age. Strategically, the DDSB Board of Education divided the children and enrolled them in two elementary schools close by. Uninterrupted schooling for the children in the program encouraged a sense of normalcy in a potential unsettling environment.



Families expressed delight and gratitude when there was minimal to no interruption of their children's education throughout the families' asylum-seeking process.

Throughout the length of the project, RAP case managers continued to work with CDCD's SWIS worker to assist newly-arrived families in enrolling their children at nearby schools. All school-aged children were registered and attended school while they resided at RAP Comfort Inn. After the families exited the program, their children transferred to schools near their new place of residence.

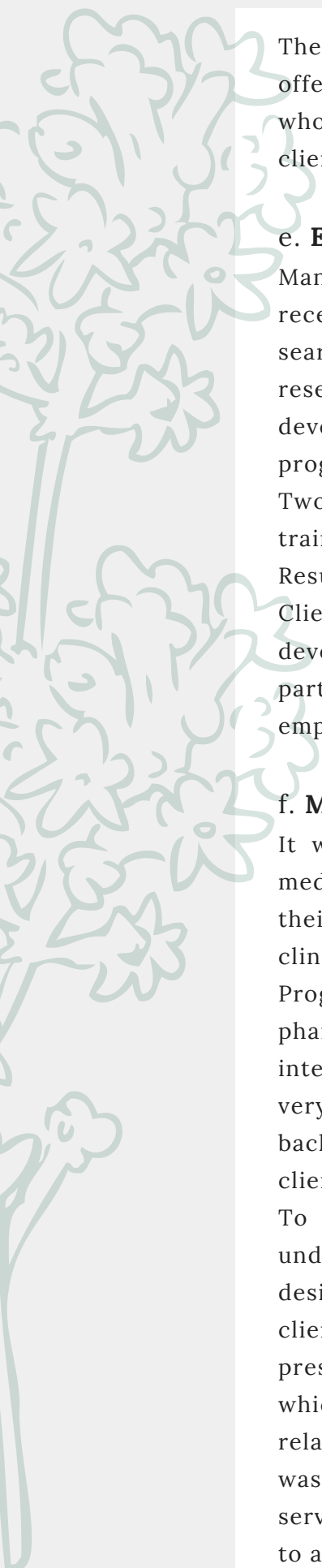
c. Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) Services

Another major factor that RAP families shared concerning their refugee status, was the need to keep their claimant documents up-to-date and to submit their work permit applications.

As a leading settlement agency in Durham Region, CDCD has been providing settlement services for over 30 years. The Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) assists many refugee claimants at the Ajax and Pickering Welcome Centres and other itinerant sites in Oshawa and Whitby. In collaboration with the RAP staff, CDCD's NSP team assisted RAP clients through individual appointments. The NSP team is highly knowledgeable and familiar with the refugee claimant process, including required documentation for the refugee board. Families were assisted with submitting address changes and work permit applications. Other settlement needs were addressed through referrals to local community agencies. Now that the RAP project has ended, the NSP team remains connected to the families and conduct follow-up appointments as needed.

d. English Language Support

Many families at the RAP Comfort Inn site faced language barriers. Clients were encouraged to take English language assessment and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. At the beginning of the program, both the Ajax and Pickering language assessment sites were fully booked. Without assessments, the clients were unable to enroll in ESL classes. To expedite the process, meetings were set up with the Achev (formally TCET) language assessment program, DCDSB/DDSB ESL providers and Pickering Welcome Centre.



The language assessment centre agreed to make special arrangements to offer onsite assessment services for RAP clients. Within two weeks, clients who required English language training were assessed, and most of the clients took ESL classes.

e. Employment supports

Many clients expressed interest in searching for employment after they received their work permits. Clients actively searched for jobs while they searched for housing. During regular case management meetings, the resettlement workers assisted clients with job search and resume development. The Durham Region Unemployed Help Centre (DRUHC) program in Pickering was engaged for additional employment resources. Two DRUHC Employment Specialists delivered a series of workshops and training sessions on Job Search Strategies, Labour Market Information, and Resume Development every month.

Clients attended the activities and started job searching with newly developed resumes. Many clients successfully secured either full-time or part-time jobs applying the job search strategies they learned at the employment workshops.

f. Medical supports

It was brought to staff's attention that some clients needed immediate medical service, which included either finding a family physician or having their prescription filled by a local pharmacy. Unfortunately, some local clinics and pharmacies were not familiar with the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) coverage. RAP staff visited health practitioners and pharmacies to explain how IFHP works and what it covers. RAP staff's intervention, assistance and advocacy on behalf of the RAP clients proved very beneficial. After learning about the IFHP and RAP program's background and coverage, medical staff became very supportive of RAP clients.

To further assist clients with their medical needs and to help them understand and access all the health benefits and services available, an IRCC designated Panel of Physicians and his staff, presented to RAP staff and clients on IFHP coverage and how the medical system works in Canada. The presentation was interactive, informative and included lived experiences, which allowed the clients to clarify their doubts and ask questions directly related to refugee medical checks. The medical staff are multilingual and was able to assist RAP clients with accessing local refugee medical exam service. With such great collaborative effort, adults and children were able to access medical service when needed.

OTHER ACTIVITIES DELIVERED ONLINE

Health-related services and early childhood education

From October 2019 to October 2020, RAP assisted a total of 65 families, consisting of over 100 children over the age of four. A total of 15 children were not of school-age (less than four years old). To support these younger children's parents, Durham Region's Public Health Department and the YMCA's Family and Community Action Program (FCAP) were engaged to teach parents practical parenting skills, child development, and healthcare knowledge. Fortunately, through full support from these entities, early childhood family programs were held at the RAP Comfort Inn site every Friday. These programs were lively, fun, and informative for children and their parents. During these exciting sessions, childcare specialists run short sessions for parents on topics such as "Positive Parenting", "Safety of Children", "Child Development", and "Healthy Eating and Diet". Simultaneously, nurses from the Durham Region Health Department provided one-on-one support to parents and small group sessions to address the families' medical concerns and issues.

- In December, the Durham Region's Public Health Department conducted a Flu Clinic and Immunization sessions for adults and children who received their shots.
- Both parents and children enjoyed the children's activities, especially during winter break. Due to the sessions' success, the activities were increased to two times per week to host Family Group Sessions.
- The Family Fun time was very well received by RAP families. During the COVID-19, this program continued to be offered twice a week, virtually.

Social/Community events:

- RAP staff initiated various activities for parents and children, including a Homework Club, Youth Board Game Club, Youth Drop-in Program, Movie Nights for all children, Reading Circle, Reading Buddies, Family Time for both parents and children, and Adult Social.

- 
- During the holiday season, the RAP team organized a Toy Drive with Santa, a Holiday Dinner, a New Year's Eve celebration, Eid Celebration and other recreational activities – all of which were extremely well-received.
 - A monthly event and workshop schedule was posted at the RAP site to promote activities and learning opportunities that many clients attended.
 - Workshop sessions were delivered either by RAP staff or partner organizations. Workshop topics included:
 - Monthly orientation for new families
 - Employment-related workshops
 - Living on a Limited Budget and Financial Literacy
 - Housing Support and Tenant Rights
 - Ontario Education System
 - Healthy Parenting
 - Health and Medical Services
 - Dressing for the Winter
 - Winter Break Recreational Activities
 - Banking System in Canada
 - Information on Local Food Banks, Thrift Store and Salvation Army
 - ELT/LTA Information Session
 - Mental Health Support
 - Immigration and Legal Support
 - Dental/Flu Clinic Information
 - The RAP team encouraged clients to visit Pickering or Ajax community centres, OW offices and libraries to attend workshops and services offered by other service providers.
 - Many clients attended training at the Ontario Works Ajax office, workshops on Financial Literacy organized by Ajax and Pickering Welcome Centres, and a Small Business Forum hosted by Durham Region Business Bureau. Clients explored more services and volunteer opportunities within the Region of Durham or the communities they moved to.

SUMMARY

1. Capacity Building Opportunity:

At the RAP program's initial execution, a few large families were transferred to the RAP site immediately. It was a challenge for the RAP team to resettle these large groups of families while still setting up the offices and completing the staff recruitment process. Over the months, our knowledge about residence/shelter operations broadened and eased the program's ability to welcome and house families of varying sizes and compositions.

2. Support from the City of Toronto

The RAP project was a brand new program for CDCD and Durham Region. When the project was first initiated, CDCD worked tirelessly to establish a full roster of RAP employees, offer access to training, sought after shelter operational procedures and other shelter-related guidelines. The project was at capacity upon receiving 25 families within the first three weeks of operation. To quickly and efficiently obtain and provide resettlement services to the RAP families, the City of Toronto and other shelters were contacted to provide support.

The City of Toronto Housing Support team provided much-needed onsite assistance to RAP's Team Lead and staff around documentation, shelter operational guidelines and best practices. This strategy effectively enabled RAP employees to quickly learn and adapt to a shelter operation and develop our own unique, client-centred approach to delivering resettlement assistance to RAP families in Durham.

Through their much-appreciated support and shared resources, the RAP program created a New Family Orientation Manual, Shelter procedures and guidelines, as well as case management procedures for the resettlement and housing of asylum-seeking families.

3. Strong Partnerships and Collaborations

Strong partnerships and collaborations with vital local stakeholders significantly improved and broadened clients' experience. Our partnerships with OW Durham, the local Catholic and Public school boards, YMCA, Durham Public Health Department, Ajax and Pickering Public Libraries, Durham Mental Health Services, Durham Region Unemployed Help Centre, CDCD's Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), Newcomer Settlement Programs (NSP) and other social and recreational services, the RAP program successfully delivered onsite and personalized services to clients. The RAP families' housing and settlement needs were thoroughly supported and met within their short stay at the RAP program.


4. Housing Support Strategy

Establishing a fully-developed housing strategy that included landlord advocacy, landlord referral systems, and supplemental rental housing supports contributed to participants' overall success in obtaining and retaining housing in the competitive markets in Durham, other cities in Ontario and provinces like Edmonton.

5. Resettlement Services

Assessing clients' needs is key to providing relevant information and referring them to appropriate services. Interviews, intakes, need assessments, and a case management approach using a standardized tool proved to be most effective when engaging the clients. Additionally, age-appropriate forms are used, inclusive language and cultural appropriateness were maintained, with culturally sensitive services were delivered to the diverse clientele.

During the resettlement appointments, staff co-developed settlement plans with clients' input, which helped them identify their emerging priorities; this was done in a timely and client-centred manner. The case management approach further provided families with ongoing and individualized on-site support. Families were able to connect to critical services that served to improve their overall experience in Canada.



Follow-up appointments were conducted weekly by the Resettlement workers to maintain relationships with clients as they went through their settlement and integration process and or address the challenges they faced.

6. Financial support

The efficient transfer of RAP clients' OW files was crucial to meet clients' financial needs. With strong partnerships and collaboration with Durham OW, all RAP families were supported financially through Durham OW. In addition to Ontario Works, RAP program provided the following additional financial support to the RAP families:

- Housing rental support for last month rent and start-up funds
- Durham Transportation support
- Meal plan with catered lunch and dinner
- Emergency transportation funds

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

One of the key lessons learned from this program is that refugee clients come with certain complexities. Adequate time is needed to prepare and to implement supports for asylum-seeking families. Additionally, more staff training on shelter operation procedures and guidelines would have made it easier for staff to direct clients on the onset. With on-hand training and consultation with existing shelters, this knowledge was acquired.

Lastly, having a larger space and dedicated staff for children's programs and activities would have allowed the program to offer more services and training for parents and children.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the efforts of the Durham RAP Team resulted in outstanding successes. Families received a full array of supports throughout their stay at the Comfort Inn. Those that secured permanent housing continued to be supported through bi-weekly check-ins from RAP staff via email or telephone. Resettled clients were invited to attend relevant workshops and events at the RAP site and then virtually due to the pandemic. Moreover, before families transitioned from the RAP Comfort Inn to permanent housing, an exit package was provided containing relevant localized resources on settlement, employment, educational services and training opportunities that were available near their new permanent residence. Families openly expressed their appreciation for the continuous support from the RAP Team



CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

Throughout the project, the RAP team received many testimonials and Thank You letters and cards from the families. Some of these testimonials are shared below:

"While we are faced with a dicey and near hopeless situation when we came from Comfort Inn, Etobicoke on 3/10/2019 your program tried as much as possible to alleviate our built-up tensions with many briefs and one-on-one discussion. Despite the teething challenges encountered on serving meals, snacks and drinks for all the families we felt welcome and was treated with respect and dignity. Our children got enrolled in nearby schools and colleges which gave us a soothing relief then. I must mention the clothing and all necessities provided to families shortly before winter."

"Words cannot fully express the depth of our appreciation and gratitude to you, the entire team of dedicated care givers to the resettlement and assistance of refugees."

"Without mincing words, your assistance, workshops and briefs has yielded a good outcome. My family was able to get a rented accommodation and work to cater for our needs. We very much appreciate some team members working behind the scenes and tirelessly ensuring that we lack nothing during our period of stay at Comfort Inn, Pickering ON. Thank you very much, we hope to reciprocate the kindness towards us in nearest future."

"It's been such a humbling experience, something beyond the grasp and understanding of anyone that have not experienced it, so surreal that sometimes I and my family will pinch ourselves to be convinced we are not living in outer space and therefore cry ourselves to sleep with sheer gratitude... We came in battered, beaten, down and confused but over the months through reassuring words and dedicated service, you picked us up and packaged us to the tenets and ideals that this great country Canada is built on.....Service to Humanity! As we leave you to journey on in our new life in Canada, we assure you that the lessons are ingrained and etched in our consciousness and we pray that we be given the opportunity to contribute to our shared humanity! Whatever tomorrow brings our way, we are leaving with fond memories of our stay here and rest assured that your faces, collective and individual contributions to our lives are written in our hearts!"

SUCCESS STORY

N. came to the RAP program along with his two year old daughter and his three months pregnant wife. He looked very worried and didn't know what future lies ahead of him. The first day Newton met the case counsellor, he stated, "I and my family came to Canada without knowing anyone and for sure like any other refugee, life has to be hard you like it or not".

After a couple of weeks of his arrival at the RAP – Comfort Inn Hotel, he and his wife started to volunteer during lunch and dinner. Meanwhile, both N. and his wife attended various workshops, including Job Search Sessions.

Below is N.'s Story:

"The reception, love, care and comfort the RAP team provided gave us a sense of belonging and we felt at home. You have been able to provide shelter to us, breakfast, lunch, dinner, employment workshops, mental health workshops, housing workshops, Kids classes and above all you have mentored us to be who we are now.

I take this opportunity to say that the volunteering work you allowed me to do and the employment (Resume) workshop you provided, gave me a chance to become an outstanding candidate both with National Bank of Canada and RBC Royal Bank hence pulling up one of the best Resume thanks to my employment counsellor who helped me to build it. I can absolutely testify to the amazing job well done not only with me and my family, but with all the other families that have passed through this program.

I rejoice with joy and blessings today that I am now employed with Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) as a Banking Advisor thanks to the efforts of everyone in the RAP office and the Program at large. This program has given us a future in Canada and wherever I go, I won't speak less of the great things I was able to attain through all your programs not forgetting how developed my child became with the weekly classes that are provided. We owe that to the region because my child couldn't speak a word when we came here and now she's the smile I keep on every day.

As we leave to explore independence, we trust that God be with you all and make you to help as many more families as possible through the Resettlement Assistance Program of Durham. Thanks a lot and as I said in the beginning, words can and will never express our deepest appreciation and gratefulness to the entire team of RAP not forgetting Durham Social Services, Welcome Centre, RAP and all the other services we received. We wish you the best and stay safe."