



## Vancouver Foundation's Fresh Voices Initiative

### Submission to the 2018 Pre-Budget Consultations

Pre-budget submission to The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance  
August 4, 2017

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## About Vancouver Foundation

As Canada's largest community foundation, with a province-wide mandate to create healthy, vibrant and liveable communities, we work with individuals, corporations and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Although Vancouver Foundation is a broad funder, we also work to convene partnerships and conversations around emerging issues such as addressing the needs of immigrant and refugee youth.

## Executive Summary

Through our Fresh Voices Initiative, we work alongside immigrants and refugees who are between the ages of 14 to 24 to amplify their voices and provide a necessary channel for policy engagement, leadership, and community contribution. Since 2011, Vancouver Foundation's Fresh Voices Initiative has been working closely with settlement organizations, grassroots efforts, school districts and various levels of government and has dedicated nearly \$1.1 million to this cause.

In these times of global turmoil and a narrowing of perspective on who belongs, the voices and experiences of immigrant and refugee youth need to be heard and factored into federal priorities now more so than ever.

Vancouver Foundation's Fresh Voices Initiative seeks to provide budget recommendations to the Committee in response to the following question: ***What federal measures would help Canadians to be more productive?***

Overall, we believe that investing in social infrastructure and creating the conditions for a policy environment at a national level that directly engages with immigrant and refugee youth can result in outcomes of personal and community productivity, with long-term effects of belonging and engagement. This helps to build a more equitable and inclusive Canada and a strengthened middle class. More specifically, these recommendations include:

1. **Family Reunification – Investment and supports for unaccompanied minors and separated refugee children.**
2. **Following through on the Government's 2016 campaign promise & platform to implement a National Children's Commissioner.**
3. **Strengthened engagement of the charitable sector and newcomer youth in long-term social infrastructure planning.**

## Recommendations

### 1. Family Reunification – Investment and supports for unaccompanied minors and separated refugee children

**Recommendation:** Vancouver Foundation asks the government to continue its investment of \$690 million in the settlement efforts and needs of newcomer communities. However, of interest and importance to the Fresh Voices Initiative, is to ask the government to dedicate resources and attention to supporting family reunification efforts for unaccompanied minors and separated refugee children and youth.

**Context:** Providing protection to refugees is part of Canada's international humanitarian commitment. Over the years, Canada has welcomed thousands of immigrants and refugees. The Canadian Government's commitment towards the key objectives for immigration as outlined by the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* presents opportunities to think about ways in which to invest in and engage one of the most vulnerable populations.



Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's mandate includes working to reduce application processing times and improve the department's service delivery. This mandate and goal is consistent with a recommendation from the Fresh Voices Report, published by Vancouver Foundation and based on consultation with over 200 immigrant and refugee youth in British Columbia. The report identified the need to speed up family reunification processes and to address bureaucratic inefficiencies experienced by families eager to be reunited and eager to start building roots in their new home as productive and engaged citizens.

**Rationale:**

- The concerns and recommendations identified by the two reports of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Canada in relation to unaccompanied minors and separated refugee children have yet to be realized. An explicit commitment to unaccompanied minors and separated refugee children in the federal budget would address the UN Committee's recommendation that: *"The State pay particular attention to the full implementation of article 4 of the Convention by prioritizing budgetary allocations so as to ensure implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights of children, in particular those belonging to marginalized and economically disadvantaged groups to the maximum extent of available resources."*<sup>i</sup>
- Unaccompanied and separated minors are required to navigate the immigration system and present themselves as claimants before the Immigration and Refugee Board. Even if they are granted asylum, this does not include their siblings or parents and, while they remain minors, are unable to formally sponsor family members.<sup>ii</sup>
- Once minors become adults, it is still increasingly difficult to show that they are earning sufficient income to support and sponsor families. As they transition into adulthood, the legal fees and costs associated with submitting and processing paperwork for family reunification is a significant financial burden on this population. This affects their productivity in obtaining educational goals as well as developing skills for meaningful employment in order to reduce their risk of social isolation.
- The recent extension of federal funding for legal aid services for refugees in provinces such as B.C. is welcomed. We ask the government again to consider not only extending the funding but to make a commitment to funding legal aid services for young adult refugees who have arrived in Canada as minors, as they embark on the process of reuniting with their families.

## 2. Follow through on the Government's 2016 campaign promise & platform to implement a National Children's Commissioner

**Recommendation:** Vancouver Foundation requests an investment in the 2018 budget that will see the successful establishment of the "Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young Persons in Canada."

**Context:** As a community foundation, we have been working to meaningfully engage marginalized youth in shared decision-making processes, policy solutions and advocacy. We were energized and inspired to see the Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau create a Prime Minister's Youth Council. This infrastructure provides a well aligned opportunity to establish a National Children's Commissioner that would work alongside the Ministry to ensure young people have full participation in shaping the policies that impact their well-being, while also ensuring accountability to those who are considered most vulnerable.

**Rationale:**

- The Honourable Marc Garneau had previously tabled private member's bills in 2009 and 2012 to establish an "Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young Persons in Canada."
- A national children's commissioner is synergistic with one of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's key mandates to work with provinces and territories to "ensure the successful arrival of new Canadians... and will require a rigorous approach to data in order to accurately measure outcomes."<sup>iii</sup>
- Connected to our first recommendation above,, there is currently no national policy in place that is specific to separated children claimants, despite the encouragement by the 2003 Report on the UN



Committee on the Rights of the Child in Canada. The development of a national policy for this population and the creation of a National Children's Commissioner are mutually beneficial.

- Research by the Canadian Council for Refugees corroborates the lack of data, statistics and metrics available to fully understand the number of unaccompanied minors and separated refugee children across Canada. A lack of a national policy on this front has resulted in inconsistent service delivery and data collection practices.<sup>iv</sup>
- The establishment of an office for a National Children's Commissioner is a key federal measure that would only serve to strengthen accountability and supports for the most vulnerable children and youth.
- Currently in Canada, all provinces and territories except for Prince Edward Island and the Northwest Territories, have a child advocate. While the role of child advocates in each province and territory is to ensure the rights of children and youth and make recommendations to the legislative assembly, issues impacting refugee children and youth are connected to federal immigration policies, which are beyond the mandate and jurisdiction of most if not all, child advocates in Canada.
- Youth make up a significant portion of newcomers to Canada. The youth cohort is a critical period of social and economic integration into society through the completion of formal education and the transition to adulthood and work life.

### 3. Strengthened engagement of the charitable sector and newcomer youth in long-term social infrastructure planning

**Recommendation (i):** Vancouver Foundation encourages the federal government to designate financial resources that explicitly support immigrant and refugee children and youth, within its commitment to invest in social infrastructure.

**Recommendation (ii):** Vancouver Foundation also encourages the government to commit to the engagement of the charitable sector (which includes community foundations) as stakeholders who are well positioned to support and engage individuals and communities in becoming more productive and engaged.

**Context:** Diversity has always been considered one of Canada's strengths and the government has recognized that immigration plays a valuable role in contributing to Canada's economic prosperity and social cohesion. As immigration continues to be an important source of population and labour growth, dedicated financial resources will be required to build and maintain a robust and welcoming social infrastructure that enables immigrant youth and their families to be productive and successful citizens. Immigration policy in Canada is inherently situated and understood as a national matter and shaped by federal policies, however, the actual process of immigration and matters of refugee resettlement is very much localized. Much of the integration support work is led at the local level with cities and charitable organizations, however, community organizations and young newcomers and their families have limited capacity in shaping how financial resources are allocated.

#### Rationale:

- In his remarks to the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce in May of 2017, the Honourable Bill Morneau acknowledged that no level of government can fill any form of infrastructure gaps alone and that this requires new solutions and new partnerships.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada currently works closely with provinces, territories and municipalities to ensure complimentary programming for resettlement. In particular, 68 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada-funded local immigration partnerships are led by municipal governments.<sup>v</sup> Through the Fresh Voices Initiative, Vancouver Foundation has worked closely with several municipal immigration partnerships to convene additional partners. In addition, the Fresh Voices Initiative has worked to centre the experiences and voices of immigrant and refugee youth in shaping key investments and policy-decisions that affect their ability to thrive in Canada.
- The process of refugee resettlement does not exist in isolation from other social and community challenges. Community foundations are often broad-based funders who have a window into many social issues that connect local needs to federal policies.



- Community foundations are embedded within the charitable sector, and offer a unique role in the engagement and convening of diverse stakeholders. Community foundations can leverage financial resources, incubate innovative projects and invest in research and learning, which can contribute to the overall social infrastructure that would enable a strengthened middle class.

## Conclusion

Vancouver Foundation wishes to express our appreciation for this opportunity to participate in the 2018 pre-budget consultation process and to bring the voices and experiences of the immigrant and refugee youth population we engage with. We sincerely hope these comments are useful to the Select Standing Committee in shaping a Canada that is inclusive, equitable and allows for meaningful and productive contributions by all. Finally, we acknowledge the partnership and inclusion of young people, settlement organizations, grassroots efforts and various levels of government, as allies working alongside Vancouver Foundation and the Fresh Voices Initiative, in strengthening our collective commitment and shared goals for economic prosperity and social cohesion.

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### References

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  - <sup>iii</sup> <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-immigration-refugees-and-citizenship-mandate-letter>
  - <sup>iv</sup> Canadian Council for Refugees. <http://ccrweb.ca/en/content/unaccompanied-minors>
  - <sup>v</sup> Canada. Information for Immigration Levels, Settlement and Integration Consultation 2017. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.