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# Yazidi Resettlement in London, ON

**London Cross Cultural's Submission to the House of Commons  
Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration regarding briefing on resettlement issues  
related to Yazidi women and girls**

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## About London Cross Cultural Learner Centre

The London Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC) is a community organization that exists to provide integration services and support to newcomers and to promote intercultural awareness and understanding. Our vision is to build a more welcoming community where newcomers can succeed based on our values of Accountability, Advocacy, Compassion, Diversity, Empowerment and Ethics.

CCLC has been operating in London since 1968. During the first 12 years, the CCLC was part of the University of Western Ontario and services focused primarily on providing education and information to the community on global and international development issues. The CCLC was the first Global Education Centre in Canada, funded through the Public Participation Program of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

During the movement of Vietnamese refugees to London in the mid-70's, the CCLC extended its support and linkages in the community to assist with refugee needs. Having provided education to the community on global issues, the CCLC was able to connect the refugees with an informed community, ready and willing to provide a helping hand. With tremendous support from the faith communities, London began to build its strengths as a refugee reception centre and the CCLC began its expansion into settlement services.

In 1980, the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre incorporated as a non-profit, charitable organization. CCLC is now well known locally and nationally as a one-stop, multi-service support network for newcomers yet still maintains its reputation in the global education field.

## Yazidi Resettlement Perspective in London, ON

As of Nov. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017, London has become home to 170 individuals (68 families) who identify themselves as Survivors of Daesh, among this group; 143 individuals (53 families) identify themselves as members of the Yazidi community. Based on the 170 individuals, we have seen a *tendency* of singles (30 individuals), young (adult ages of 18-30 & 31-40 years of age) and smaller families (75 children; 40 children <5 years of age, ranging from 1-4 children in family unit) being resettled in London. Regarding adult education levels, there is a *tendency* of no formal (34 individuals) or limited education; Grade 1-6 (30), Grade 7-12 (23) and Post-Secondary Education (4).

CCLC has been providing a continuum of settlement and integration supports to Survivors of Daesh/Yazidi community. CCLC is uniquely situated to support the specialized needs of the Yazidi community, given its history, proximity to the Yazidi diaspora and being a Resettlement Assistance Program SPO. Through their initial settlement into the London community, CCLC has been working with the Yazidi diaspora and community partners to support initial integration, this includes, for example: short-term/initial accommodation, permanent accommodation, facilitation of needed documents (for example, permanent residence cards, OHIP, child tax benefits, interim federal health), life skills support, access to information, orientation and education sessions, access to on-site medical care in partnership with our local community health centre, intensive, time sensitive and specialized case management (needs assessment, referrals, case coordination, home visits, accompaniment etc.), referrals to many agencies, settlement counselling, access to short-term on-site counselling, pre-employment workshop sessions for clients both below and above CLB 4, on-site childminding, language assessment and referrals to LINC/ESL programs, participation in social, therapeutic, language and skill based groups and matching families with volunteers in the community.

Despite incredible internal resilience and tenacity, what is emerging are unique features to this community marked by well-documented pre-migration accounts of gender based violence, sexual enslavement, genocide, child soldiers/forced participation in Daesh, forced emigration and cultural destruction to name a few. This has required specialized attention, innovation, support and resource allocation; and ultimately the need to support the community both short and long term, utilizing holistic frameworks to support their settlement and integration processes. Below indicate some of these reflections as we have embraced and continue to support their long-term integration success and foster their contributions to our local community.

We have initially experienced, typical features of new migrations, constraints due to enough language supports, building up of Knowledge Transfer Exchange resources of community and access to adequate and permanent housing due to location requirements (near Yazidi diaspora; especially for larger families). We continue to recruit and train language support staff and interpreters, connect and foster relationships with local Yazidi community and build connections with local agencies and landlords, but at times does prove challenging given the influx and specific needs. We have identified some single mothers with children that face additional settlement challenges and in need of longer-term supports. Our RAP team has submitted multiple JAS applications, with two families being recently matched. Furthermore, the London community has experienced an influx of government assisted refugees that have transferred from Toronto due to connection to local community, affordability etc. We have been supporting 12 transferred families, with 46 members.

Some of these initial experiences by settlement staff and volunteers, were compounded by horrific and traumatic accounts of many young women and children. These experiences, manifesting in the intrinsic and intensive attachment of child to mother, behavioral issues of children, triggering of complex and flooding of emotions and exacerbated pre-existing medical conditions. Many families are living with open wounds; current and complex trauma, as family members whereabouts are unknown, missing and/or presumed dead at the hands of the Islamic State. Therefore, settlement is hard to attain when grieving processes are hard to even entertain let alone endeavor to start. With a partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association, we have piloted a stabilization group for Yazidi Women, focusing on fostering belonging, connection, trust and social cohesion and supporting the women in learning coping tools and strategies to support their resettlement journeys. We have also worked with Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Centre, to collaborate on an art therapy group for Yazidi children. Allowing children spaces to be children and allowing creative expression and focus on recovery and resilience have proven efficacious for children affected by armed conflict. Some of the intensive culturally informed therapeutic supports available in the London community have waitlists for services, thus, there is a need to build targeted and specific interventions, in partnership with local mental health and family centered agencies and the need to support holistically while waiting for specialized services. For that reason, we were fortunate to be funded for two Wellness Counsellors that provide short-term brief counselling and therapeutic group support. However, coping with trauma due to forced displacement and violence requires long-term and holistic supports and interventions.

We have also experienced cultural conflicts and difficulties in managing different associations of individuals from other cultural groups. We have combatted tensions with through comprehensive sessions on racism and diversity; and the need to promote inter-cultural awareness, connection and dialogue in safe and inclusive environments. Helping and engaging communities to break down barriers, and disabuse cultural stereotypes, associations and assumptions is a key feature in promoting equitable and inclusive integration.

Some final thoughts as we reflect on our work with the Yazidi community, are around very specific barriers to integration. Many young families, are young single mothers of young children which pose many barriers to their settlement and integration, for example, transportation, childcare, access to sustainable employment and difficulties attending language classes due to many medical appointments. One of the main barriers which is persistent across the Yazidi community is language acquisition. This is of significance as compounded by experiences of gender based violence and trauma. Long term we will be also looking at focused interventions for employment for this community, to will help with navigation and information with communities with low English language skills. We have also anecdotally experienced the viewpoint of past experiences and trauma, which culturally is believed that these painful experiences should be left in the past and not be discussed. There is also usual adjustment and

adaptation processes, however, we have experienced reconfigurations and reorganizations of some of these family units. For example, many children and youth take a heightened role as navigator, interpreter and decision maker.

### Future Directions

It has been a privilege to learn and work with Survivors of Daesh and the Yazidi community. Despite horrific pre-migration accounts and settlement barriers, the community is courageous and well supported by CCLC, many community partners and the Yazidi diaspora. The community continues to be engaged, access and participate in many ways, they are eager to learn and connect and are incredibly grateful. As an agency it has compelled us to look and address the unique needs of this community, to help build capacity for this migration and for the next. Based on our reflections, there are numerous directives that should be collectively explored and implemented to support the long-term integration of the Yazidi community. For example:

- Support the family reunification of Survivors of Daesh/Yazidi community, by continuing to support JAS applications and private sponsorship communities. In London, as far as we are aware there is only 1 active and awaiting private sponsorship of a Yazidi family.
- Support the long-term integration needs of this community, in understanding that settlement of this special community will require longer term capacity and resources. For example, language acquisition, full economic integration and fully understanding Canadian culture, laws and rights may in some cases take longer to attain and require targeted interventions. There is a need to support long-term settlement supports, like settlement counsellors (in-house and schools) and employment supports. Educational opportunities are very important to the community so continuing to access to language and education will be a key settlement success.
- Support access to community education, to support integration. Capacity and education needs to be built in host communities, especially services that the Yazidi community accesses, i.e. mental health agencies. It's important host communities understand current cultural profiles, experiences and complexities of newly migrating communities. We have had recent requests for education and training on this migration and commitment to resettlement.
- London and CCLC has a long-standing history of resettlement of many refugee communities. There are many Survivors of the Yazidi genocide and sexual enslavement that remain in refugee camps with further displaced that are willing and waiting to be resettled. Many are unwilling or able to return home due to instability in the region, with no local durable solutions. ***We implore you to extend the commitment of this community.***

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- Continue to support mental health supports of survivors. They have experienced unfathomable trauma. Fostering recovery and resilience, especially with sexual abuse often being highly stigmatizing.
- Support Trauma and Violence Informed Care resources and training for the settlement sector. Frameworks, tools and supports to support staff in debriefing and understanding 3<sup>rd</sup> party experiences of traumatic events supports the overall health of the sector. Long-term we need to find ways to help keep Yazidi traditions and culture alive.
- Support the strengthening of the Yazidi community (diaspora) through funding or funneled resources through host agencies. Supporting and funding important events, celebrations or needs that support the community and new wave of migration.