



MAP Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 23, 2020 - 9:30AM – 11:30AM

An online meeting: “Getting Through It”

Attendees: Richard Belcham (inasmuch), Alissa Cook (inasmuch), Tammy Johnson (inasmuch), Mariana Martinez Vieyra (VAST), Sarah Lopez (VAST), Jhevoi Melville (VAST), Maria Fernanda (VAST), Diana Barry (Vancity), Bridget Bell (IRB), Negar Azmudeh (IRB), Kalliopi Kefalas (IRB), John Bethell (MSDPR), Claudia Buendia (MSDPR), Valentina Stanciu (MSDPR), Azadeh Tamjeedi (UNHCR), Kathleen Cashin (Covenant House), Melissa Johnstone (IRCC), Fran Gallo (Kinbrace), Derek Chu (Kinbrace), Ryan Reid (Kinbrace), Loren Balisky (Kinbrace), Adriana Zepeda (Kinbrace), Masha Rademaker (NSMS), Ann Barnard Ball (New Hope CS), Maysa Zahran (Froghollow NH), Sabrina Dumitra (AMSSA), Teresa Fuller (MCC/FUSMC), Koyali Burman (SVNH), Wazhma Wakil (Umbrella MH Co-op), Alexander Kang (MJEDC), Joni Rose (MJEDC), Imtiaz Popat (Independent), Dustin Lupick (HSABC), Katherine Griffin (MOSAIC), Salih A (MOSAIC), Parisa Roofigari (MOSAIC), Alexandra Dawley (MOSAIC), Saleem Spindari (MOSAIC), James Grunau (Journey Home Community), Brad Kinnie (Journey Home Community); Vanessa Roth (JHC), Jessica Dailly (JHC), Yulia Khamzima (JHC), Barry Growe (JHC), Julia Wu (bc2II); Raminder Kang (PICS), Devinder Chattha (PICS), Sharalyn Jordan (Rainbow Refugee), Nazanin Moghadami (Rainbow Refugee), Laura Mannix (DIVERSEcity), Adrienne Bale (DIVERSEcity), Jenny Lam (Options), Iris Solorzano (Options), Sireen El-Nashar (Zaytuna), Meaad Alharbi (SOS), maher Kutlieh (SOS), Mojgan Radfar (SOS), Elizabeth Galvez (SOS), Muna Amir (SOS), Gaston Ntabaza (SOS), Maryam Forouhar (SOS), Ewa Karezewska (ISSofBC Surrey), Bahar Taheri (BC Refugee Hub), Maria Cervino (Kiwassa NH), Angela Kim (SUCCESS), Samuel Chan (SUCCESS), Melissa Giles (BC Rent Bank), Ali Mustafa (Independent), Masa Kateb (JumpStart Refugee Talent), Richard Soo (East Catholic Church), Jenny Moss (MAP), Moe Z (MAP Volunteer), Maria Medrano

The meeting was called to order by **MAP Co-Chair: Richard Belcham (inasmuch)**

- Richard acknowledged he was speaking from the traditional territory of the Stó:lō Nation, but also recognized the territories of the Coast Salish Nations of Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish nations where we do much of our work.

Thanks were also expressed to the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness for the funding that supports MAP.

Welcome: there were 73 participants, so Richard recognized the many agencies who were present individually and everyone called in a greeting. The meeting theme was “**Getting Through It**”

Richard requested members observe a moment of silence for the victims of the Nova Scotia shooting, and all those around the world who are suffering during this crisis.

Quote: Captain Tom Moore who has raised over £28 million for the British National Health Service at this time and who is 99 years old and a former Army Vet: “For all those finding it difficult at this time: the sun will shine on you again and the clouds will go away.”

Richard described the way the meeting would function with Zoom technology and that the meeting was being recorded for the Minutes only.

- **The agenda** was reviewed and approved.

- Review of **February 27, 2020 Minutes** – because of the format Richard assumed approval and members were encouraged to contact MAP if there were any issues. There was no MAP meeting in March due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Jenny:

- all recent COVID-19 updates have been uploaded to the Members' section of the MAP website if you want to see back issues.
- **World Refugee Day (June 20)**
Vancouver Public Library has informed MAP that all public events have been cancelled until September. However, MAP would like to take celebrate this special day virtually and asks MAP members to send in ideas for activities that could be organized online during the day. The actual celebrations will be moved to June 18 (Thursday) as June 20 is a Saturday. Jenny is also inviting MAP members to volunteer to help with the organization of events. Please email info@mapbc.org with your ideas. Thank you!

Consult the experts:

Speaker 1: Azadeh Tamjeedi, Protection officer – UNHCR Canada in Ottawa.

Response of the UN High Commission for Refugees to the Covid-19 pandemic: Risks Challenges and Measures

Please see the presentation attached. Questions followed:

Q: *What is STCA?*

Response: Safe Third Country Agreement- since April 21st claimants who qualify under STCA may enter Canada.

Q: *Please clarify the number of countries that are still admitting asylum seekers?*

Response: 167 countries have closed their borders completely, and 57 of these provide limited accession.

Q: *What is the situation for asylum seekers who arrive by aeroplane to Canada?*

Response: IF they can get to Canada claimants are not being returned - will be able to do an eligibility interview.

Q: *Is STCA condition only applicable to refugee claims at an official US Canada border or can other irregular border crossers make a claim too?*

Response: No, the STCA only applies to official border crossings. Irregular border crossers will be re-directed to official posts and unless they fulfill STCA requirements they will be turned back to the USA. But UNHCR are not expecting many irregular crossers – so far only 8 claims: 2 in BC and 6 in Ontario.

Q: *Do you see a flood of claims after the borders are opened?*

Response: No, because of limited travel and restrictions then claims will be low.

Q: *If people can arrive, which countries are we expecting them from?*

Response: It would only be people who have the means to enter Canada with the current restrictions: possibly Mexico and India. Not sure what the situation will be like post-COVID-19.

Q: If we have concerns about someone in Detention can we raise this with UNHCR Canada?

Response: Yes, please do so, we are continually meeting with IRCC, CBSA to discuss and we are being updated. We are very encouraged by the increased use of ATD's and commensurate drop in detentions. Only 10 in IHC in Montreal currently – hopefully this will lead to a permanent change in the use of ATD's.

Q: If an irregular border crossing happens without interception could an inland refugee claim still be made?

Response: currently trying to clarify with authorities – as yet unknown. Probably not being turned back as we are trying to limit the spread of COVID-19 so it would not make sense to send them back. They need to do their 14 days quarantine and they can make an Inland claim via email, though eligibility hearings are stalled right now. They would however receive an Acknowledgement of Claim which would qualify them to apply for Income Assistance and receive Interim Federal Healthcare.

Inland claims did drop for a while (March 16 – 22) but since increased to the pre-COVID average of 100 claims daily which may fall for a while, but not experiencing much change currently.

Q: Does that mean claimants would get to keep their ID when doing an online application? Also, are those federal benefits you are mentioning?

If persons make an inland claim they receive an Acknowledgement of Claim form which gives them access to benefits which include federal health and provincial social assistance. If claimants apply for specific COVID-19 benefits like CERB they would need to meet other eligibility qualifications.

Richard thanked Azadeh for her presentation. Please reach her at tamjeedi@unhcr.org if you have further questions.

Speaker 2: Negar Azmudeh & Bridget Bell – IRB – RPD

Refugee Protection Division Update

Richard introduced Negar as Special Advisor to the Deputy Chairperson in the IRB-RPD division.

The last normal day at IRB was March 16. Once national/provincial measures were adopted to deal with COVID-19 the IRB offices closed and there were huge limitations on our ability to conduct our business, especially because the IRB is a paper-based organization, which became problematic in a pandemic.

Please see **Practice Notice** (attached to Minutes) and the [IRB Website](#)

Claimants or their representatives will be given a 30-day notice of a decision once a resumption of services date happens. IRB are aware of everyone's desire to proceed and are discussing every possible way that services can safely be provided.

Special Measures

- Considering options for the most vulnerable and gender-type decision making.
- How to resume operations while working from home- there are many logistical and legal (confidentiality) issues which must be considered in order for us to do our work at our normal standards. We are actively working as explained in the follow-up items below.
- Voicemails are checked daily and will respond, as well as to fa and EPOST.
- The IRB is considering how to help those who are between hearings and decisions. Communicating decisions.

Questions:

Q: If different provinces end up in different situations or timelines in terms of "re-opening", would the IRB potentially have different procedures across the country? Or for example, if in-person hearings could resume in BC but not Ontario/Quebec, then even BC would not resume?

Response: At this time, we don't know.

Q: Please clarify - for completed hearings where decisions have not been rendered, is work continuing on making those decisions or is this also on pause?

Response: Members are still working – but it's a challenge to communicate decisions. We are currently looking at procedures as to how we can communicate decisions and we will provide updates as they are available

Q: Am I correct that people seeking refugee protection post lock-down who have received an acknowledgment of claim are not being referred to IRB-RPD?

On a case-by-case basis – very few cases being referred. (Azadeh – agreed. Since eligibility cases are not being heard a claim cannot go forward.)

Q: Since In-person hearings have been suspended is the file review process impacted as well?

Response: To some extent since we cannot access files at this time.

Q: Are we expecting a substantial backlog in eligibility interviews?

Referred to Azadeh - anticipating a small backlog though there may be a drop off in inland claims soon. IRCC is also investigating new ways to do eligibility interviews long term.

MAP Member added a FYI: There are websites that provide a way to fax in documents. (Some of them are for free but you need to sign up for an account), so no fax machine is needed.

Please send extra questions to Jenny to forward to the right people for answers.

Follow up material kindly provided by the IRB For the Minutes:

- NGOs and claimants can use the following number for their questions 604-666-9103.

Registry representatives check the messages on this phone line daily and depending on volume we will try to return all calls within 2 business days.

- Note that a Case Management Officer cannot provide claimant specific information to an NGO representative, however we can accept the information and then call the claimants to verify. We are also available to answer any general questions. At this time, I ask that you do not distribute this information beyond this group.
- At this time we would encourage parties to submit documents via FAX or EPOST. In the RPD we have systems in place where we can review these documents digitally and in many cases complete various follow-up actions (for example if a request is made). We also have the capability to fax a response to Counsel from our desktops.
- Please be advised that at this time we cannot receive/send protected information by email, but our IT group are actively working on finding solutions. We will keep you informed on any updates to our technical capability.

Speaker 3: Provincial economic help: John Bethell & Claudia Buendia: MSDPR

Provincial economic help

Richard introduced John Bethell and Claudia Buendia to the meeting and invited them to share information from the Ministry.

John provided a **PowerPoint presentation** (attached with **2 useful letters** as adjuncts)

Claudia: volume of applications has increased significantly so response rate has slowed. Please help clients apply online as this is a much quicker process – though the line is always open to those who prefer the phone and Claudia can help personally.

Less documents are requested now, and each case is evaluated individually.

The Ministry can accept cell phone pictures of documents.

Questions:

Q: Is there any support for youth?

Response: If the youth is on their parents' file then there is no separate top-up for them. If they are not on their parents' file MCFD are looking into providing additional help, but in terms of MSDPR there are no extra funds available.

Q: For Refugee Claimants, they aren't usually able to create a Self-Serve account without a PHN or SIN, is that still the case?

Response: It is still the case – call Claudia or Valentina and they can help get around this.

Claudia: PLEASE NOTE: A settlement worker can always call on behalf of a client or arrange a 3-way call via 1-866-8000. The staff person will set up an intake appointment, with interpreter if needed.

Q: If someone is under income assistance is it correct that there is an exemption that can make them eligible for CERB?

Response: Yes, correct – for that 3-month benefit program.

Q: Can folks apply for both the emergency adjustment and a clothing supplement?

Response: Yes

Q: How do we reach out to Claudia and Valentina? They will pass any questions along to me that I can help with

Claudia: Claudia.Buendia@gov.bc.ca

Valentina: Valentina.Stanciu@gov.bc.ca

Q: *Is the \$300 only for adults. How about a family with kids who are not receiving any other federal support like child tax benefit because they are refugee claimants and not eligible?*

Response: Family bonus top up remains the same.

Additional: re: child tax bonus - our system is only set up for 4 months – if client notices their cheque drops then get in touch as probably the file needs renewing. The system works on 4-month cycles, but clients are eligible to receive this bonus for 18 months, after which they can apply for it directly themselves.

Q: *If people have a work permit but not social insurance can you activate MSP?*

Response: If they are clients of MSDPR then yes, the Ministry can activate MSP for them.

Claudia: NEWS! Refugee claimants may now be able to open bank accounts at [Pigeon Park Savings](#) operated by the Portland Hotel Society.

Richard thanked John and Claudia for their presentation and their help to MAP members.

BREAK: The participants broke into 4 Breakout groups based on the following themes: Settlement, Income Assistance, Housing & Mental Health.

Quantitative and qualitative update on Refugee Claimants in the Lower Mainland

Bahar Taheri: BC Refugee Hub – funded through MJEDC Stream B

- Regularly updates website (www.bcrefugeehub.ca) and most recent updates were to:
 - Interim Federal Health for refugee Claimants
 - Free English Conversation CirclesPlease send details about online circles or classes to: refugeehub@issbc.org
- Created a COVID-19 webpage updated regularly for refugees and claimants.
- Also posts MAP bulletins.
- Updating What's New Section with new resources and services:
 - Refugee Claimant Statistical Bulletin will be provided by end of April: statistics for the first quarter gathered from SOS-ISSofBC and MOSAIC and their Stream B partners.
- Also working on a Resource Bulletin of services available for Refugee Claimants during the COVID-19 crisis. Please pass me anything you want to see included or created online.
- Please join our mailing list – subscribe via box on front page.

Getting Through It and Agency updates: refugee claimant specific:

How are you getting through it? What's working? What's not? How are you and your team doing?

Questions and suggestions led by **MAP Co-Chair Mariana Martinez Vieyra (VAST)**

Welcome everyone –

Mariana (VAST)

'Move & Relax' sessions daily via Zoom at 4:30 pm – open to clients and anyone at MAP.

Sara (VAST)

if you want to get more info regarding VAST Services you can email: saramaria@vast-vancouver.ca

Jhevoi (VAST)

Our **Getting Through It VAST Refugee Claimant Support Group**:

- Meets Wednesdays 10am-12pm on Zoom here is the link to share with clients.

<https://zoom.us/j/348977172>

More information: email me at jhevoi@vast-vancouver.ca

Alex Kang (MJEDC)

Staying in contact with all BCSIS Stream A & B contract holders across the province to assure them their contracts are maintained and trying to find information where needed.

Introducing **Joni Rose** (MJEDC) who has joined the team to manage the Housing Referral Project. She worked at Refugee Readiness before, but now has shifted her focus and will now be involved with the Housing project.

Brad (Journey Home Community)

JHC is supporting families during COVID-19 to move out of shelters to a safe place where they can practice social distancing. JHC had four or five intakes in the last month with various families and the families are moving out. Also trying to meet families' basic needs by searching for funding to support them with food and help them with referrals for social assistance. JHC are still receiving referrals. So if you are aware of families with children or couples or singles that that needs space, email Vanessa Roth at

Vanessa@journeyhomecommunity.ca

Vanessa added: Currently one spot left, but if families move out we will happily take other referrals.

Katherine (MOSAIC)

Refugees Settlement Integration program has:

Now providing fully remote services for clients that are both one on one services and group training sessions or information sessions that are running on zoom:

- Completed LinkedIn training in partnership with **inasmuch** last month and another 3 coming up. Salih will be providing webinars on **Job searching** which have been posted on the MAP bulletin.
- Monday April 27 and Tuesday 28th in partnership with **Options and Kinbrace Ready Tours**, providing an **Overview for refugee claimants on benefits, how to access services right now**. And an update on the situation in terms of the IRB and how the claim process is affected. See details in MAP bulletin (April 22) - there will be four sessions in English, Spanish, Kurdish, and Farsi.
- Conversation Circles with Parisa

Derek (Kinbrace)

Also trying hard to provide support in a new way to our residents.

Available May 1st one housing spot for either a single person or a couple. If any referrals, send them to

Ryan Reed; ryan@kinbrace.ca

Fran (Ready Tour)

Ready Tours – have been suspended as the IRB closed. No replacement yet but settlement workers can be referring clients to the [Refugee Hearing Preparation Guide](#) as a great resource to read as they prepare for their hearing.

Iris (Options)

Many of our RC clients have been laid off work so via Zoom meetings we try to help them apply for new benefits, and provincial social assistance. Initiated needed information sessions: e.g. partnered with TRAC to provide 2 Zoom meetings to advise re: **Tenants' rights during the pandemic**, evictions, rent increases, supplements to benefits.

Staff updating their information constantly to be current in this crisis.

Providing the workshops mentioned with MOSAIC & Kinbrace soon (see MAP bulletin)
Also Options will soon be providing an orientation to **H&C Applications**.

Masa (JumpStart Refugee Project)

Altering program to be more online including the mentorship program.

Jumpstart Refugee Talent is launching a newsletter that will focus on employment, the economical response and educational resources to support the growth of the refugee's talent during this time. To receive this, please email: masa.kateb@jumpstartrefugee.ca

Angela Kim (SUCCESS)

English conversation groups coming up online with more details to be sent out to Jenny to share. Also, LinkedIn, E.I. trainings and other workshops online. Please check the website for more at SUCCESS BCSIS - www.successbcsis.com

Introducing Samuel Chan – new member of the team at SUCCESS:
Online workshops available till end of May.

Meaad (ISSofBC)

Have been continuing their work and especially thankful to transition houses to host families moving out. Series of **Multilingual Settlement and Housing Workshops available in Spanish, Arabic and Farsi**.

Schedule:

Wednesday 29th 1 – 3pm – Spanish

Thursday April 30 – Farsi

Wednesday May 6 – Arabic

Thursday May 7 – English and more info soon via MAP Bulletin

Sharalyn Jordan (Rainbow Refugee)

All supports now online - 2 virtual drop-ins per week for LGBT2QI Refugee Claimants and Refugees:

- Wednesdays 7-8:30 and Sundays 2-3:30. Contact: community@rainbowrefugee.ca for invitations.
- Farsi, Spanish and often Arabic and Bahasa Indonesian peer interpretation on stand-by at this time.
- New Case Manager: Nazanin Moghadami: support@rainbowrefugee.ca to assist people with accessing food, health, social service, income support etc.
- Will be marking IDAHOT on May 17th virtually and will share details with MAP.

Alissa Cook (inasmuch)

Available space for a couple or mom with a baby. On May 11th we will have space for a family of four - would work best with 2 small children. Refugee claimants will need to have their refugee claimant documents (though if they have acknowledgement papers and a bank account then that will work too - need access to income assistance at this time). Please feel free to email: Alissa@inasmuch.ca and I will send you our application form.

Laura (DIVERSEcity)

All support services now online. And increasing some like food security services which include many claimants.

DIVERSEcity received funds to continue 'Together Now' a program for LGBTQ+ migrant support which is predominantly refugee claimants as well. That group has been meeting online and one to one.

(Covenant House)

Currently has 50 folks who are in Covenant House for their security currently. Working closely with VCH to put in place their protocols regarding health and safety for residents. E.g. Anyone at the house must wear a

mask. Providing rooms to self-isolate for 14 days whenever anyone new does come into Covenant House. But if they do not have a phone or a tablet or other needs, they are provided to guard against isolation. Working closely with the MSDPR to get new residents organized with social assistance, also CERB. Still providing limited outreach services and making food hampers for people that are in community that are within client reach. We have also worked closely with the spiritual care team who was able to provide prayer mats, Qurans and Halal food for Muslim folks to celebrate Ramadan during this time. Also learning more about safe supply when it comes to drug use. Preparing to receive TFW, unaccompanied minors or students who may be stranded here as a current priority.

Raminder Kang) PICS

Also working remotely and trying to meet the needs of our most vulnerable clients especially those clients who do not have access to a computer or are not digitally trained.

Currently working with some refugee claimant families who arrived just in the beginning of the year from Afghanistan.

Settlement services: have the capacity to serve clients in eight different languages.

12:00 pm: Feedback forms and adjournment

Next Meeting: May 28, 2020 via ZOOM

MAP gratefully acknowledges the funding provided by Ministry of Jobs, Employment Development and Competitiveness, without whom our work would not be possible.