



## **2025 ANNUAL REPORT: Quaker Committee for Refugees**

**(Prepared by QCR staff-person Eusebio Garcia Paz, April 2026)**

In 2025, I marked 35 years of service with the Toronto Monthly Meeting's Quaker Committee for Refugees (QCR), supporting newcomers, refugees, and individuals in detention. It has been an incredibly rewarding journey, offering me the opportunity to work alongside many remarkable individuals who have joined the committee over the years — Resident Friends, their substitutes, and hundreds of others through our networks with organizations such as the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) and the Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), and the Toronto Refugee Affairs Committee (TRAC) Over these 35 years, I have kept up with evolving immigration regulations, transitioned from paper to digital work, adapted to working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, and taken part in nearly every event possible related to refugee rights and protection. All of this has been made possible thanks to the generous support and financial commitment of the Samuel Rogers Trust, the Nancy's Very Own Foundation, the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), Kitchener Monthly Meeting, numerous individual donors, and—last but by no means least—Toronto Monthly Meeting, for providing office and community activity space within the Meeting House. We are deeply grateful for all the support we have received over the years.

Unfortunately, when it comes to immigration regulations, we have witnessed a significant deterioration in refugee rights. This began with the infamous Safe Third Country Agreement, which effectively closes the door to individuals attempting to enter Canada by land. More recently, Bill C-12 has introduced further restrictions by preventing people who have been in Canada for more than a year from making an inland refugee claim. These are just two examples

of the many changes affecting both individuals already in Canada and those from abroad trying to reach safety here.

We know there have always been challenges, but we can reassure our donors and all individuals who support us that we have consistently resisted and persisted in keeping our doors open to assist those in need. This is not the first-time migrant rights have been threatened in Canada, and it will certainly not be the last time that we respond to such challenges with determination and commitment.

Although we may be small, we are part of a national network that works to ensure our voice is heard by the government. Our commitment to strengthening our work remains strong, thanks to the continued support we receive.

### **A Journey Towards Reunion**

I would like to share the story of a family sponsorship application I worked on last year. One of the reasons I am sharing this story is that it was processed in less than a year and had a happy ending.

The story begins with the sponsor's father. He came to Canada about twelve years ago and made a refugee claim that was later refused. He then applied for a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA), which was also refused, along with his appeal. All of this took place while he was living in Fort Erie, Ontario. As time went by, and for reasons that could only be described as fortunate, he was never given an appointment to start his removal, which allowed him to submit a humanitarian and compassionate grounds application (H&C).

This was a man who had left his two children behind in his home country. By the time he submitted his H&C application, his older child had already married. A couple of years after submitting the H&C application, he received an appointment for removal. He attended the appointment and was advised to obtain a new passport so that the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) could begin the removal process.

However, his country's consulate in Toronto took longer than usual to process the passport—so long that the CBSA officer eventually decided to visit the consulate personally to collect the document. Once the passport was in CBSA's hands, a removal order was issued against my client.

Fortunately, one week before the scheduled removal date, he received a letter from the office processing his H&C application informing him that his application had been approved. It then took about a year for him to receive his landing document. As soon as he obtained it, he applied to bring his daughter to Canada.

While her application was being processed, she became pregnant by her boyfriend. This was a situation we had to report to the immigration section of the overseas office handling her application once the baby was born. Fortunately for the single mother, her daughter was added

to the application for permanent residence. Two years ago, she was able to enter Canada and reunite with her father.

While in Canada, she spent most of her time caring for her baby, while her father provided financial support for both of them. During this period, she remained in constant communication with the baby's father. Eventually, they both realized that they wanted to be together and that forming a family was the best path forward.

Around May of last year, she visited Friends House with her father to ask for assistance in submitting an overseas spousal sponsorship application. By that time, she had returned to her home country and married the father of her child. We submitted the application at the end of May. Shortly afterward, her husband received instructions to provide his biometrics, and a few months later he received a letter authorizing him to complete his medical examination.

The processing of the application was progressing well until last December, when they received a letter stating that, after carefully reviewing their application and supporting documents, the officer had concerns that they might not meet the requirements under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and its Regulations. Specifically, the officer questioned whether their relationship might be one of convenience. Before making a final decision, however, the officer gave them the opportunity to provide additional information.

The officer requested more evidence demonstrating the development of their relationship, such as photographs showing them together at different moments in time (for example, at family gatherings), as well as documents showing a shared address, including utility bills, residential leases, or bank account statements.

We responded by thanking the officer for the opportunity to provide further information and explained that the electronic immigration application system is quite complex and offers limited space to upload documents and explanations. This had restricted the amount of information they were able to include in the original submission. We also explained that they could not provide utility bills or similar documents because they had lived at separate addresses while dating, and the household bills were paid by their mothers. In addition, they both came from the same rural area where houses do not have numbered addresses.

To strengthen the response, we submitted letters from neighbors confirming that their relationship was genuine. We also included ten pages of text message exchanges and many photographs documenting their relationship over time.

At that point, I advised the family that if they received a negative decision, they would likely need to hire a lawyer to appeal the case. However, about a month later they received a letter from the Canadian Immigration Section requesting the husband's passport. He submitted it immediately and was later able to travel to Canada, where he finally received his Confirmation of Permanent Residence at Pearson Airport.

It was a long process to reunite all the members of this family. It involved many meetings to gather information and complete very complex forms, but in the end, it resulted in a happy outcome for a family that truly deserved to be together.

These tables below provide some statistical and demographic information about the people who have received assistance from the Quaker Committee office in Toronto.

**Table A**

**Nationality of People served**

Algeria	3
Angola	1
Antigua	2
Argentina	5
Bolivia	6
Cameroon	2
Chile	5
Colombia	25
Costa Rica	3
Cuba	15
Djibouti	2
Dominican Republic	11
Ecuador	17
El Salvador	13
Eritrea	5
Gambia	1
Grenada	3
Guatemala	16
Guyana	4
Honduras	14
India	5

**Table B**

**Types of Services provided to Refugees at Friends House**

Application forms	150
Basis of Claim Form (BOC)	15
Christmas Party Intake Forms	32
Committee and NGO's Meetings	24
Furniture Bank Appointments	3
Income Taxes	8
Phone Oral Interpretation	150
Letters to Government Offices	33
Referrals	27
Short Term Housing (Shelter)	18
Telephone Calls	1,400
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,860</b>

Iran	8
Israel	1
Iraq	7
Ivory Coast	1
Jamaica	9
Mexico	39
Namibia	3
Nicaragua	8
Pakistan	4
Panama	5
Paraguay	3
Peru	9
Sierra Leone	3
Somalia	4
ST. Lucia	3
St. Vincent	7
Sudan	4
Venezuela	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>

**Table C**

**Immigration Status of People Assisted**

Convention Refugees	60
Caregivers	3
Failed Refugee Claimants	45
Landed Immigrants	70
Persons Without Status	30
Refugee Claimants	65
Temporary Residents	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>



**Immigration Holding Centre** Our five-day-a-week team present at the Immigration Holding Centre—including the FCJ Refugee Centre, the Refugee Law Office, and our organization—completed another year of service supporting individuals detained for immigration purposes. Despite deportation threats, a significant increase in removals, and at times gaps in legal aid, our team did everything possible to represent and serve those in need.

We advocated on their behalf, pushing back against unjust removals whenever possible. We also provided support by completing forms, exchanging money upon request, purchasing money orders when needed, offering phone interpretation services, assisting individuals in obtaining identification, and making referrals to local shelters when necessary.

The Holding Centre is filled with difficult stories that reflect the remarkable resilience of individuals facing immense challenges. One such case is that of Obiakor, a man from an African country who came to the TRAC office last October seeking assistance. He had originally flown from Ghana nine years earlier, traveling first to Brazil and then making his way through Ecuador, Colombia, the Darién Gap, several Central American countries, Mexico, and the United States before finally arriving in Canada, where he made a refugee claim.

By the time I met him at the holding centre, his refugee claim had been denied and all legal avenues had been exhausted. At the time of his arrest, he was already married to a Canadian citizen who had submitted a sponsorship application on his behalf.

He shared both the traumatic experiences he endured while crossing the Darién Gap and the acts of kindness he encountered along the way—people throughout the region who offered him food and shelter during his long and difficult journey.

He also shared that he had a wife and a Canadian child with special needs, and that an inland sponsorship application had been submitted a year prior to his arrest. I ensured that he obtained a Legal Aid certificate to request a stay of removal and contacted the Refugee Law Office to confirm that he was included on the list of individuals to be interviewed that day.

The Legal Aid lawyer was successful in securing a stay of deportation, while the lawyer assigned by the Refugee Law Office was able to obtain his release with the support of a dedicated bondsperson. Not all cases like his have a positive outcome when it comes to release from the holding centre, but this case illustrates the benefits of coordinated efforts to provide meaningful support to those in desperate need of help.

These tables, reflect the number of individuals who received assistance at the holding centre on Thursdays, which is the day I am scheduled to visit the facility.

**Table D**

**Nationalities**

Afghanistan	3
Argentina	5
Brazil	5
Colombia	17
Cuba	5
El Salvador	7
Guatemala	3
Honduras	3
India	18
Jamaica	8
Mexico	29
Nigeria	13
Pakistan	5
Philippines	8
Portugal	3
Peru	7
St. Lucia	4
St. Vincent	6
Uganda	1
Uruguay	4
Venezuela	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>

**Table E**

**Number of People by Immigration Status**

Failed Refugee Claimants	43
Live-in Caregivers	2
Overstayed Farm Workers	22
Overstayed Student Visas	20
Overstayed Visitors	45
Refugee Claimants	20
Sponsorship Breakdowns	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>155</b>



The Quaker Committee for Refugees organized a special public panel at Friends House to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Singh Decision, titled *“Advocating for Refugee Rights.”* The event featured an engaging dialogue with experts who examined the current state of refugee rights, including a nuanced discussion of the (un)Safe Third Country Agreement between Canada and the United States and the increasing risks faced by refugees.

This hybrid event offered an inspiring evening of dialogue and community engagement, both in person and online, with participants joining from as far away as Nova Scotia and the United States. We were honoured to host a panel of knowledgeable speakers, including:

- Kristin Marshall, Toronto lawyer, who spoke about the work of the Canada–US Border Rights Clinic
- Juan Espinel, Red Cross representative, who presented on contemporary housing challenges
- Joyeuse Senga, a TMM Quaker and public health researcher, who addressed equitable healthcare access for refugees

The evening was further enriched by a special musical performance by Elizabeth Block, a Toronto Quaker, whose contribution enhanced the spirit of the gathering. For those who were unable to attend the event, we invite you to watch the three panel presentations through the following link:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18MELdJCJlpyoST2N7eTfy60n1luSfPJE?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18MELdJCJlpyoST2N7eTfy60n1luSfPJE?usp=drive_link)



**REFUGEE CAMP: LABOUR DAY WEEKEND 2025** Refugee Camp consistently offers a powerful reminder of how fortunate we are to live in Canada, and of the difficult circumstances from which many refugees are fleeing. The first day's activities were shaped by the staggered arrival of campers and unexpectedly warm weather, resulting in a relaxed atmosphere by the waterfront, with time spent wading and swimming. As always, the first evening brought everyone together in the Meeting Centre for introductions, sharing talents and stories, and the joyful realization that karaoke is practically a national pastime in many countries.

Attendance at the camp was lower than in previous years, due to several factors—most notably, the challenges of transportation. In the past, a bus was chartered from Toronto to the camp and back, but rising costs have made this option no longer feasible, and no fully effective alternative has emerged. While some campers were able to arrange carpools, others traveled by FlixBus to Waubashene and required additional transportation to reach the camp.

As in previous years, the statistics provide insight into the camp's composition and impact:

- Number of campers: 53, Age range: 6 to 71 years. Countries represented: Afghanistan, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda

Special thanks go to Noemí and Agustín García from the Salvadoran Canadian Association (ASALCA) for their ongoing support in organizing this meaningful event each year. We also extend our gratitude to Rae and Ken Mevor, our dedicated directors who consistently lend their support in the kitchen and throughout the camp; to Kathy Bickmore from the Friends' Refugee Committee, whose cheerful and tireless contributions ranged from assisting with meals to

tending the camp's gardens and engaging with campers at the waterfront; and finally, to the Camp Nee-kau-nis Committee for generously allowing the use of their facilities over the past 35 years.



In 2025, our wonderful community partners, CHUM Christmas Wish, once again came through with a generous donation and toys for a hundred children registered through our Direct program, allowing them to celebrate this special activity just before Christmas Eve.

The children and their parents had a fantastic time, enjoying beautiful artistic performances by William, Veronica, Elizabeth, and the children Naomi and Zack, as well as a folk dance group. Their contributions helped create a joyful and memorable evening for everyone in attendance.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to all the other volunteers—from those who wrapped presents the day before the event to those who assisted with food distribution and cleanup—whose efforts made the event truly special.

**We gratefully acknowledge our dedicated volunteers and generous financial donors, whose support makes our work possible.**

The Quaker Committee for Refugees is delighted to share the good news that our 2025 fundraising campaign was a success. This strong support helps sustain our settlement program, allowing us to continue responding to those who come to our door, those seeking guidance from outside Canada, and the weekly support we provide to the team assisting individuals in detention. We are deeply grateful for your generosity, which helps foster long-term community investment and, most importantly, demonstrates solidarity with those seeking belonging, acceptance, and safety in a new land.

As always, special thanks go to Toronto Monthly Meeting, our Resident Friend-Manager, and all on-duty friends for supporting the committee's work within the house. We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated volunteers for their incredible support, dedication, and compassion. Your time, care, and energy make a tangible difference in people's lives and serve as a powerful reminder that solidarity is built through our actions.

Financial donors:

- Canadian Friends Service Committee
- CHUM Charitable Foundation
- Kitchener Monthly Meeting
- Nancy's Very Own Foundation
- Samuel Rogers Memorial Trust
- Many compassionate individuals and volunteers

The 2025 Refugee Committee members included: Judy Pocock, Brydon Gombay, Charlie Diamond, Kathy Bickmore, Joyeuse Senga, and Eusebio Garcia.

Last but not least, we would like to share our new email address:  
**[quakercommittee4refugees@gmail.com](mailto:quakercommittee4refugees@gmail.com)**



