Latin American Young Mothers' Program fills the gap

by Kate Bernhard

If you are a refugee claimant you have limited access to programs that help you understand life in Canada.

MOSAIC's Latin American Young Mothers' program is one of the few programs in Vancouver that fills the gap between life in Latin America and life in Canada. It's for Spanish-speaking new moms, many of who are refugee applicants.

"The program is for all Latin American mothers - landed immigrants and refugees. But 80 per cent of the women in the support group are refugees operating on a low income level," explains program coordinator Miriam Maurer.

Maurer, a bilingual counsellor at MOSAIC, has been running the program since its inception in January of 1989.

As a Spanish-speaking counsellor for 10 years, she noticed that there were a lot of young Latin American mothers in her area.

"I approached the Health Department about setting up prenatal and post partum classes in Spanish," Maurer said.

And she was successful.

"But there were so many young Latin American mothers with small children not able to participate in programs because day care was not available," she explained.

The program's focus is on parenting (on-site daycare is provided), self esteem, resettlement, health issues and recreational activities. Speakers are brought in to talk about the different subjects, depending on the needs of the group.

Maurer explained that many of these women fled Central America because their relatives or their husbands fear persecution from the government or the guerrillas.

Most arrive as refugees and have a difficult time understanding Canadian society and adjusting.

"At the same time they have a lot of motivation and want their families to succeed," said Maurer.

The age of the women ranges between 18 and 32. They meet at Britannia Centre or the Health Department twice weekly, Monday mornings and Thursday afternoons. The women participate as much or as little as they want.

"It's a support group. They do not have to come all the time but we like to encourage it. The mothers gain more confidence in their new country, knowledge of community services and resources, plus they learn the rights and obligations of society," Maurer explained.

The program is presently funded by a grant provided by the Ministry of Social Services and Housing. Britannia Community Centre and the North Health Unit are providing facilities. Britannia also provides the pre-school teacher as well as the art supplies. Transportation and day care is provided by MOSAIC.
Closing the doors' opens refugee issues

by Vera Radlo

Written by Canadian immigration and refugee lawyer David Matas and co-authored by Ilana Simon, 'Closing the Doors: The Failure of Refugee Protection' is a new book that criticizes Canada's, the United States', and Europe's response to the refugee crisis. It's a must to read for anyone interested in the field.

As a lawyer in private practice in Winnipeg since 1973, Matas handled cases in a wide variety of legal fields. From the very first refugee case he took, the problems facing refugees both dismayed and bewildered him. He was dismayed that people who faced possible death or torture back home if their claim was rejected in Canada were given fewer procedural protections than someone questioning a parking ticket. Why?

This recently released book sets out to answer this puzzle. It describes some cases he handled on behalf of refugee claimants. It presents a history and explanation of recent legislative changes in Canada. It discusses the legal systems in Europe, the U.S., and the international system of protection for refugees. It puts it in a context he has developed about what is happening to refugees and why. The world-wide refugee population has grown to a staggering total of approximately 14 million, and continues to increase at a rate of 2,000 per day. No corner of the globe has been left untouched by this tide of human misery. While the situation in Eastern Europe has improved dramatically in recent months, the situation in Central America has worsened. In his final chapter 'Why protect refugees?', Matas makes it clear that it is Canada's responsibility to assist refugees, both morally and legally.

He'll be giving a talk about his book at the Vancouver Refugee Council's Annual General Meeting 7 p.m., January 25, 1990, at MOSAIC following a short business meeting.

Latin American Network Project servicing the future

by Michael Murphy

Despite being hemispheric neighbours for over 200 years, Latin Americans have not migrated this far north in significant numbers until the 1980's.

Canadians know very little about Latin Americans - their different cultures, dialects, social and ethnic composition, history and politics.

Recently, Canada joined the Organization of American States. This will undoubtedly change the relationship between Canada and Latin American countries.

The result will be a new found Latin American interest in Canada that should produce an increase in family reunification between today's refugee claimants and their immediate family members, including elderly parents.

The next wave of immigrants from Latin America should be well served by the growing network of agencies working cooperatively to provide services to Latin Americans.

One way is the Latin American Network project. It has recently come into being with the appointment of Esther Frid as the Latin American family counsellor with Family Services of Greater Vancouver.

The Latin American Network project is made up of a mixture of mainstream community and immigrant agencies.

The Boys and Girls Club, Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, Family Services and MOSAIC have formed a steering committee to co-manage a one year demonstration project. Initially four employees will work under the guidance of the committee.

Each agency applied for funding separately but have pooled their resources to create a focus for programs and services in the Mount Pleasant area. A community development worker, a family counsellor and a youth worker, along with the help of a project coordinator will work with the Latin American community out of a store-front style operation.

The project is being designed as a community centred service. Project workers will be recruited to work closely with all levels of the Latin American community, to develop educational, recreational & preventative programs. As much as possible, the recommendations of the Latin American Youth Symposium will provide the initial direction to the project.

The Vancouver Foundation and Canada Immigration have been unable to promise ongoing funding for the Latin American Network project.

Other funders include the City of Vancouver Social Planning Department and the Secretary of State. Although their support has been invaluable and critical, it remains elusive beyond the initial phase of the project.

The key to this project's success lies in the collaboration of the agencies and funders as well as the involvement of the Latin American community. Intended as a demonstration project, the Latin American Network project will be closely watched to see if it can work not only as an interagency initiative, but more importantly as a real source of change for the community.

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A country of hope

by Kate Bernhard

The first post-war European immigrants arrived in 1945 with hope for a better life in Canada. Most were happy to leave their war-torn countries' politics behind.

In the 1980's with increasing tensions in Central America, Latin Americans are fleeing their countries in droves. Not unlike their European predecessors, they arrive in Canada with hope for a better life.

Most of the Latin Americans are refugee claimants who are either in the backlog or, if they arrived in 1989 under the new refugee determination process, are more commonly known as C55's.

According to Canada Employment and Immigration Centre (CEIC) Refugee Community Liaison Coordinator Gordon Hubley, over 26,000 Latin American refugee claimants entered Canada in 1988, in comparison to the 16,845 who arrived as landed immigrants, making them the largest single group to arrive last year. The majority of these are from El Salvador.

"On top of the poverty, repression and social upheaval, the people of El Salvador are currently facing all-out civil war," said MOSAIC bilingual counsellor Roger Barany.

In November of 1989 over 2,000 Salvadoran's have died in the cross fire between the El Salvadoran government and the guerrillas.

Let's say you're a Salvadoran trying to escape the conflict. You consider going to the United States, but you soon learn that American 'strategic political and military interests' in Central American mean that only 3 percent of Salvadorans claiming refugee status are successful and that thousands of Central Americans are deported each year.

You rule out the U.S. as unsafe and consider Canada.

Your first option is to apply for an immigrant visa through a Canadian post abroad. If accepted, as a government sponsored refugee, you will benefit from a year of adjustment assistance from the federal government after arriving in Canada.

"This includes a survival income, household furnishings, and five months intensive English language training," Barany explained.

But it is more likely that you have had to choose the second option, flee the desperate situation and make your way overland to Canada.

If you reached the border you will be in one of two categories as a refugee claimant: the backlog, (arrived before January 1, 1989), or under the new refugee determination process, Bill C55 (arrived after January 1, 1989).

As a refugee claimant in the backlog, you should have received a work permit. However, you are not able to partake in any government-sponsored training such as English language or employment training.

If you are under C55, you begin your search for permanent residence status by establishing yourself as a Convention refugee.

In the meantime, you can receive Ministry of Social Services and housing hardship assistance if you have no other source of income until your initial hearing. If you have a written job offer after your initial hearing, a work permit can be issued in some circumstances.

And you cannot participate in any of the federally-sponsored programs specifically designed to help ease the transition of arriving in Canada.

NOR does either group have access to the job finding services available at Canada Employment Centers.

"Once you have been accepted as a Convention Refugee, which now takes months instead of years, the doors begin to open for you," said Barany.

However, in order to benefit fully from all services available to Canadians, you must first receive permanent residence status.

"This can take up to 18 months after you have been accepted as a Convention Refugee," he added.

According to Barany, the new refugee determination process is relatively fast and efficient.

"But it has already reached its saturation point and is now forming its own backlog," he said.

Vancouver refugee counsellors and street workers dealing with the refugee population say these people have their own special set of problems and have been falling between the cracks of a system which was not designed to receive them in large numbers.

According to Barany, inland refugee claimants and C55's have had to adapt the hard way.

"They rely on their own survival skills and non-profit agencies and churches who have bent over backwards to help them," he said.

Vancouver non-profit agencies such as MOSAIC and the Inland Refugee Society assist refugees in obtaining information on where they can receive food, shelter, medical and legal assistance. MOSAIC and Pacific Immigrant Services teach basic English language skills to refugees in Vancouver. But due to a lack of funding, even these services are limited.
Vancouver’s street scene

by Kate Bernhardt

From 5 p.m. to midnight, whatever the weather, he is there, walking the streets between Main and Victoria. He goes only by Pablo, is from Argentina, and used to be a MOSAIC client.

Some say he has done incredible work with the Latin American street people. According to Pablo his mandate is Child Protection, "...but we have no distinction of age."

When he talks of he means the staff of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside Youth Project, where he’s been working as a street worker for the past seven years.

Pablo’s work with Latin American street people spans two continents; from the cities and towns of his native Argentina, to Mexico, Columbia, Peru and Canada.

In Vancouver, his job is to help move the street population into society. He deals with a specific street population—refugees—many of whom are C55 and cannot work.

"They are survivors. Part of that survival is the violence they learn in their country of origin. Many experience postwar distress disorder, traumas, feel frustration and have fear of being deported," Pablo said.

Street refugees are deemed service resistant and face high levels of stress because of unemployment.

"Drug and alcohol addiction is used as self medication to cure this stress. No work, no production, no money," he added.

And, if they are C55 refugee claimants (arrived after January 1, 1989), it is illegal for them to work before their initial hearing. Those who do face a jail sentence.

"With no money they resort to other means to survive. Being service resistant we cannot help them until they come to us," Pablo explains.

The youth center is considered a referral agency.

"When they are ready, we provide them with the elements for change: the first stages of drug and alcohol counselling, mental health counselling, family counselling, sexual abuse counselling, and then they are referred to other community services. The Eastside Youth Project supplies condoms for prostitutes, sexual awareness education through provincial nurses, AIDS testing, and needles to IV drug users," he adds.

From Pablo’s experience, Vancouver is a violent city. But he says that drug pushers made their mark in the city long before the Latin Americans arrived.

"The media tends to centralize the problems to the Latin American community. When people see Latino youth on the corner they tend to think that because they are Latin American they are pushing drugs. That is racism," Pablo said.

He sees many solutions to the problems facing refugee street people. Offering temporary work permits to refugees waiting for status is one.

"Permits should be granted as soon as they arrive, to keep them busy and help them stay out of trouble," he explained.

In addition, Pablo suggests a drug and alcohol outreach and a mental health outreach should be set up in their language of origin.

"And we shouldn’t put them in jail for working," he added.

Inland Refugee Society of B.C.

The Inland Refugee Society is a non-profit agency assisting refugee claimants (or inland refugees) who flee to Canada from Latin America, Afghanistan, Poland, Sri Lanka, Iran and other countries to escape political persecution. Many have been tortured, jailed or have seen their family members and friends murdered. They come because they believe their own lives are in danger and arrive in Canada after having made long and arduous journeys.

The society provides direct assistance to refugee claimants until they can obtain a hardship allowance from the Ministry of Social Services and Housing. "We are the only organization in Vancouver that gives direct assistance (money). There are others who give food and clothing," said coordinator Lucia Silva-Zarate.

This assistance includes food, a small allowance for bus fare, clothing, prescription drugs and other necessities.

The Inland Refugee Society also provides continuing assistance to help refugees adapt to a new life in Canada, English classes, a job search program and a housing location service.

"People that have been here for five years still come here. If you fill the definition of a convention refugee, you are welcome," said Silva-Zarate.

The society works closely with MOSAIC and is funded by donations and the City of Vancouver.

"We are always looking for donations. Right now we need pots and pans and dishes, household items, and we are always looking for clothing," she added.

Anyone wishing to donate to the Inland Refugee Society or find out more about the organization please call 251-3360.
Where no children play

by Kate Bernhard

Violence at an early age is what most Salvadoran children experience. Survival is the name of the game as they grow up in the civil war zone of El Salvador.

"I was nine when I saw them (the army) kill my father. They said he was a drug dealer," Orlando says, without flinching. He says it doesn't bother him to talk about it. In an inflected tone he explains to me that if they think you are a guerrilla, the government's army will kill you.

Orlando and Jose

Orlando came to Vancouver four years ago as a landed immigrant. At 16 he is attending secondary school. His friend Jose, 14, is also a landed immigrant from El Salvador and has been in Vancouver for six years.

Orlando's family came here to escape the war and Jose's family left El Salvador for economic reasons. Jose, too, is glad to be out of the war zone. He remembers trying to get home before the 7 p.m. curfew. He remembers the guerrillas, the killing in the street.

"Canada is a bigger country. Here there is no martial law. It is safer, there is no war. There is more opportunity for success. You can make a better living and get a good job," Jose said.

He's noticed that since he has been here, many other Latin Americans have arrived, some with bad intentions.

"Some bad people have come from Latin America. They do bad stuff, then we are put down. We only think to make a better living. They are treated badly by their parents and can't get good clothes so they deal drugs for money."

But Orlando and Jose say they keep their distance from what they call "...the real street people."

"We will go along with them, but we know the difference between right and wrong."

Ernesto

"I like it here but I don't like the weather. It's too cold. I was accustomed to hot weather. But it's safer here," 16-year-old Ernesto (not his real name) tells me in the Teen Centre office at Britannia Community Centre.

There is a weariness about his spirit uncommon for kids his age, and a deep sadness in his eyes. He smiles politely as I start to ask him questions about his life but is hesitant in responding, saying he is concerned about placing lives in danger with the written word. Assurances are not easily made but we negotiate.

In broken English, he quietly begins.

"We decided to come here because the situation in El Salvador is not good. There is a war, you cannot study or go to school. And we were unsafe - you think about it all the time - what might happen to you because you can get killed," he slowly explained.

Ernesto's father was already in Vancouver, so he and his brother applied for landed immigrant status. They were accepted 18 months later.

Together with his brother, they left the city of Santa ana, their mother and two brothers behind. They flew via Belize, Miami, Toronto and finally joined their father in Vancouver.

Ernesto has a productive life here, attending secondary school and working parttime. He knows some of the kids in the gangs, but doesn't get too close. That, he says, is from the advice of his mother, who is still a voice in his heart even though she is over 2500 miles away.

"I miss my mother very much, too much," he says quietly looking down at his hands. "In El Salvador, it's scary - you must obey. If you don't ......" his said as his voice trails away.

"I would return if it was safe," he adds.

Ernesto tells me he has never been close to death. But he has seen people shooting each other in the streets. Ernesto did not feel safe answering any political questions. He felt that by stating which side he was on, either guerrilla or government, the life of his family still living in El Salvador would be endangered.

"It is all so difficult because the U.S. government is helping the El Salvadoran government. Everybody is angry, and sad. I am sad, too. Maybe there is no hope," he says. He is in Canada because of a need, not a desire. Right now, if Ernesto was back in Santa ana, he would be cycling and going out with friends. He says northern El Salvador has a tendency to be more peaceful.
Refugee claims safe haven

by Paul Levine

In October 1986, Jerzy Apanowicz left Poland intent on escaping the oppression and bureaucracy of his native country. An experienced fisherman and electrician, he managed to land a job aboard a boat headed for Canada.

He jumped ship in Vancouver's Ballantine harbour and became a refugee claimant.

"When I arrived in Canada I found myself on the street and I didn't know what to do," Apanowicz explained.

A short time after, he was quickly directed to MOSAIC by somebody he met on the street who sensed he "looked Polish."

Here, his quest for official recognition began.

After three years in Canada, Apanowicz has finally reached the end of the line. He is invited to apply for permanent resident status.

A backlog claimant, he is one of 122 out of approximately 3,500 B.C. backlog cases to be processed this year.

Although the regulations governing acceptance of his application are not yet in place, they assuredly "will be passed any minute," according to CEIC refugee community liaison coordinator Gordon Hubley.

And the moment Apanowicz becomes a landed immigrant he will exercise his right to apply to sponsor his family to emigrate to Canada.

The decision to leave his home, his wife and two sons was based on a combination of increased pressures from authorities and a well timed opportunity.

As an activist for the legalized Solidarity movement, Apanowicz was faced with escalating harassment from "a police circle around me getting smaller and smaller."

Apanowicz found Canada's unoppressed form of government freeing.

But the invariability of government bureaucracy came as no surprise.

"The sight of thirty people lined up at the immigration department was very familiar to me," he mused.

Apanowicz had to wait about three months between each stage of the three-tier refugee determination process: the Initial Interview, the credible basis hearing, and the humanitarian/compassionate review.

He was able to obtain a work permit and supported himself as a carpenter's helper on a construction site.

But soon he learned that his application had been refused.

Undeterred, he immediately appealed.

It was to take another three months before his case was to be heard.

It was at this stage that Apanowicz suffered an accident at work. Deeply concerned about his family and his uncertain future, the injury shifted his attention to more immediate concerns.

"The accident at work gave me strength. I had to concentrate all my energy on my health," he said.

Finally, a full year later the appeal case had been heard, Apanowicz received official notification of his Convention refugee status.

He is frustrated by the process, but at the same time he is relieved to be on his way to becoming a permanent resident of what he calls a "terrific country."

"All I hope for is a peaceful life without the constant pressures and uncertainties I faced in Poland," he said.

It is now just a matter of time before Apanowicz shares his dream with the family he left three long years ago.

Will Canada respond to the people of El Salvador?

by Roger Barany

I feel an urgent need to address the question of how Canadians and their government are going to respond to the consequences of the recent, major escalation of civil war in the Central American country of El Salvador.

Central America is an isthmus south of Mexico comprised of seven small countries extending from Guatemala to Panama. The tiniest of countries, El Salvador, is currently under siege. And there is a shoot-to-kill curfew in effect. Since November 11 close to 2,000 Salvadorans have been slain in the shelling, bombings and cross-fire that continues between the guerrillas and the Salvadoran government.

Most of these victims have been killed by ammunition supplied by the government of the United States. The U.S. pours between $1 - $1.5 million dollars daily to the Salvadoran government, mostly in military aid.

We can expect a significant increase in the numbers of new Salvadoran refugees appearing at Canada's ports of entry in the coming weeks and months. Canadian embassies in Central America are already overwhelmed and the fact that they work with quotas and assess refugees on immigration criteria make them ineffectual under the present circumstances. Fleeing refugees risk physical assault, rape, detention, deportation and sometimes death in their desperate attempt to get to Canada. Most arrive without a cent and have lost all their worldly possesions. The hundreds of Salvadoran refugees I have been assisting at MOSAIC over the past three years have taught me a lot about what is going on in Central America - and about life and death.

Many may have lied to visa officers and immigration authorities in order to get here. But their personal accounts of...
the repression, disappearances, killings and torture, either as witnesses or victims, do not lie. I have been deeply affected by my work with these human beings and I feel an urgent need for action now in response to the Salvadoran crisis. Canada's refugee determination system may be one of the best in the world, but it is not enough.

More front-line refugee workers, lawyers and mental health workers are needed to help these people after they arrive.

Implementing interim emergency measures with respect to Salvadorans would go a long way in terms of Canada's response. Special programs have been used in the past in dealing with critical situations in countries throughout the world. Following the massacre in Tiananmen square, all Chinese nationals in Canada have been able to apply directly for permanent residence. Refugees currently in Canada are frantically trying to find ways of helping family members back home in El Salvador.

Currently, permanent residents of Canada must meet stiff financial criteria in order to sponsor family members (parents, children over 21, or common-law spouses). Siblings can't be sponsored at all. Also, group sponsorship is only possible if the refugee is outside of Canada. So why not let concerned groups take on this burden for refugees within Canada, especially for those who may not qualify as 'Convention' refugees but who nevertheless have fled for their lives. Relaxing these criteria as well as allowing inland sponsorships to go through, would help alleviate the legal and technical obstacles to family reunification. It would also avoid the necessity of sending everyone through the costly and bogged down refugee determination process.

We must all open our eyes to the refugee reality because no systems or fences are going to keep out people fleeing situations like that of El Salvador.

Roger Barany is a Latin American Counsellor at MOSAIC

These former graduates of the MOSAIC Employment Programs’ Job Corps program walked right into a beautiful custom build house that they won at last year’s PNE. Max Yi-Zheng Wang, his wife Monica and their son Chris will be moving into their new Surrey home in December.

Take Notice

- Vancouver Refugee Council Annual General Meeting on Thursday, January 25, 1990, 7 p.m., at MOSAIC, 1720 Grant Street, Vancouver. A short business meeting will be followed by keynote Speaker David Matas, author of ‘Closing the Doors; the Failure of Refugee Protection.’

- MOSAIC Employment Programs Open information sessions on all MOSAIC Employment Programs held every Friday at 3 p.m. Assistance in filling out applications is available at the time. For further information call 254-0244.

- Immigrant Women: Do you want to work? What are you good at? Register you skills & hourly rate with our computerized JOB SKILLS DIRECTORY. Phone 731-9108 after 4 p.m. VANCOUVER SOCIETY ON IMMIGRANT WOMEN.

THE STAFF AT MOSAIC WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WISH YOU AND YOUR FAMILY A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND ALL THE BEST IN THE NEW YEAR!
1000 Thanks for 100 Dinners

by Marlon Bollhorst

1000 and one Thanks. Thanks to everyone who helped make MOSAIC’s Second Annual Night of 100 Dinners a culinary, cultural and fundraising success!

On October 14th hundreds of guests attended dinner parties at restaurants and private homes. Guests donated $10-$100 to MOSAIC for meals prepared by some of Vancouver’s finest amateur and professional chefs. From the exotic to the basic, these dinner parties raised $11,000, a $3000 increase over last year.

Multipurpose, multilingual, multicultural - this was truly an enriching event for all. Each contribution helped to create awareness and increase education; to develop and strengthen support; to raise funds for MOSAIC programs that provide essential services to new Canadians.

Every individual and corporate friend of MOSAIC is appreciated. Your gift helps us to help others. Together we create a happier, healthier and more harmonious community.

MOSAIC’s Second Annual NIGHT OF 100 DINNERS ’89

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Cafe Norte
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