

# Family Safety and Integration in Canada: A Community Based Approach and its Structural Preconditions

---

NINA SIEMER

*In the context of increasing numbers of migrants and refugees globally, their successful integration is an important topic for politics and society. Canada is often portrayed as a particularly immigrant-friendly country, not least because of its official Multiculturalism. However, the Canadian migration and integration system is quite distinct in its setup and structures, giving local immigrant-serving organizations a particular framework to operate in. One such initiative is the MRCSSI in London, Ontario. It provides psychological support and networks for Arab Muslim newcomers in order to foster integration and family safety through a culturally integrative approach. Over the past years, the MRCSSI has been very successful in this field, making it an interesting case to be studied as a model of best practice. In order to understand its interrelation with the surrounding system, and thus its adaptability into other contexts, the research question to be answered in this paper is: “How is the MRCSSI in London, ON located in the Canadian migration and integration system?”*

*This is getting answered through literature review, participation and observation at the agency, and expert interviews. The results show that the Canadian federal, provincial and local structures influence the work of the MRCSSI in very particular ways, enabling them in many practical aspects. However, concrete policies in this regard are rather rare and small organizations like the MRCSSI also have to overcome a number of challenges. The research and its outcomes are further contextualized through the theoretical concepts of Multiculturalism, Social Justice, and integration frameworks. In all, the aim of this paper is to look at the work of the MRCSSI from a system and policy point of view. It may help care providers in other countries to understand its setting and develop their own adaptations of the MRCSSI's approach.*

## Introduction

In face of increased numbers of immigrants, and particularly refugees, in many Western countries, the topic of integration receives a prominent role in public

discussion and among experts. Often enough, there are not sufficient structures in place to support these individuals which are often traumatized and have barely more than basic knowledge of the language of the receiving country. Struggles in providing conclusive integration structures not only hinder newcomers from equal participation and living up to their full potential, but also have the often aging and shrinking receiving societies miss out on valuable contributors to the labor market. In that, Canada is often perceived as a particularly successful country with low levels of discrimination, and plenty of support and opportunities for everyone. However, considering the restrictive immigration policies and the geographical remoteness of this sparsely populated North American country, a more differentiated picture needs to be painted. In order to identify models of best practice in Canada, the specific structural and political preconditions need to be considered in the adaptability to other contexts.

One particularly successful refugee integration project in Canada – which will be used as a case study in this paper – is the Muslim Resource Center for Social Support (MRCSSI) in London, Ontario. It focusses on providing psychological support and cross-agency communication for Arab Muslim newcomers in the area through an innovative culturally integrative approach in order to prevent domestic violence and other struggles. It makes the mainstream social service system accessible to them and fosters successful integration. In fact, to the knowledge of this author, the concept is not only within Canada, but generally rather unique. The combination of a culturally sensitive approach with a community based support system that includes both prevention as well as intervention programs is one of a kind. Based on thorough research in the fields of psychology and domestic violence in a migration context, the success of the MRCSSI is not only due to their professional expertise but also due to a lot of personal effort and commitment of the heads of the organization and their employees. The psychological basis of the approach has already been analyzed and explained through scholarly work, which will be introduced later on. Yet in order to understand which factors are crucial pre-conditions for the success of the project, it also seems important to take a close look at the structural elements and policy backgrounds influencing its work.

### **Canadian Integration between Multiculturalism and Social Justice**

The work of the MRCSSI in London, ON is embedded in the specific context of Canadian federal and local social structures. In Canada, Multiculturalism is official state policy that is supposed to be providing a tolerant, fair and welcoming environment for all newcomers.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, looking at the structures that shape the preconditions for the MRCSSI through a multicultural lens can be seen as a good starting point. However, this is a very specific case and the theoretical framework

1 CHRÉTIEN, Jean (2003): Immigration and Multiculturalism – Lessons from Canada. *Progressive Politics*, Vol 2.2. 22–29.

cannot be applied to many other countries. A theoretical approach that is connecting the Canadian system to the bigger picture, and in which the work of the MRCSSI also makes sense, is Social Justice Theory. Equal opportunities of participation in a state for all its inhabitants is an ideal that democratic countries are supposed to be striving for. Also, the concept of Multiculturalism can be placed within it to provide a connecting framework.

According to Charles Taylor, the appreciation for one's cultural and belief system, and the possibility to express oneself freely in it, is an important contributor to develop a healthy identity. Neglecting this means devaluing parts of a person's identity with severe consequences for the psychological development and self-perception.<sup>2</sup> The instruments of Multiculturalism are policies that enforce cultural sensitivity and positive discrimination, thus enabling citizens from minority groups to equal participation in all fields of society. However, Multiculturalism is far from being undoubted. Some question the implementation in Canada to be truly multicultural, others go further and generally criticize the concept as ignoring the fluidity of culture.<sup>3</sup> Will Kymlicka explains how Multiculturalism has been misinterpreted as merely the celebration of diversity. In this perspective, cultures are essentialized to easy-to-grasp factors such as music, clothing and food, which are perceived as authentic, and which are then preserved and used in festive contexts. Problems deriving from that include stereotyping of cultural groups, reinforcing inequalities within the groups, and neglecting more pressing issues at hand.<sup>4</sup>

The MRCSSI is actively counteracting that. On the one side, they embrace Multiculturalism by providing support in the belief systems that make sense to their clients and by respecting their culture and religion and using it as a resource whenever possible, while staying within the Canadian laws. Yet at the same time, by particularly targeting the most vulnerable within the group, meaning mostly women and children, and by providing support based on the individual needs of their clients they are overcoming this critique of Multiculturalism and navigate the complex context of group rights and individual rights.

This can, then, also be connected to the principle of Social Justice Theory, as described by Nancy Fraser. While it is important to give newcomers the same rights and responsibilities as long-term Canadian residents, it is also necessary to see their individual situation and offer targeted support in order for them to have equal opportunities to access the mainstream system. The MRCSSI is, thus, improving social justice for Muslim Arab newcomers in London, ON and affirmatively closing gaps of the Canadian system for them.

---

2 TAYLOR, Charles (1994): Politics of Recognition. In GUTMANN, Amy ed.: *Multiculturalism*. Princeton, New Jersey–Chichester, West Sussex, Princeton University Press.

3 CUI, Dan (2015): Multiculturalism as an Integrational Policy. In GUO, Shibao – WONG, Lloyd eds.: *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada*. Rotterdam–Boston–Taipei, Sense Publishers. 208.

4 KYMLICKA, Will (2012): *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future*. Migration Policy Institute.

## Qualitative Approaches to Locating the MRCSSI in the Canadian System

In order to understand the relation of the MRCSSI to the Canadian migration and integration structures, new material has to be gathered and analyzed. The model of qualitative content analysis as described by Philipp Mayring seems useful in order to make sense of and connect different kinds of qualitative material.<sup>5</sup> In particular, for this research, three types of texts are included. The basis is a broad literature review, summarizing the theoretical framework as well as migration and integration policies and literature in Canada. Informed by this, observations about the work and structures of the MRCSSI are made through a three-months-period of active participation. This part of the research especially aims at gathering information and contacts to develop an interview structure and identify interviewees for the third step, expert interviews.

Expert interviews are usually concerned with factual knowledge in a case study and rarely include personal information about the interviewee.<sup>6</sup> The interviews related to the research at the MRCSSI are in line with this. As the literature review has revealed: there is a research gap on the position of the MRCSSI in the Canadian migration and integration structures. Both through literature review and observations it could be seen that a variety of factors affect the work of the MRCSSI beyond policies. In addition, some hints could be found in the literature that the MRCSSI also relies on mainstream organizations “stretching the boundaries of agency mandates”<sup>7</sup> in order to successfully work together with them. This indicates that it is not enough to look at the official rules and guidelines but rather that expert knowledge about their interpretation and application is necessary.

With the aim of increasing reliability and conclusiveness of the interviews, key informants are not only chosen from within the organization, but also from the surrounding mainstream actors. Following the definition of an expert being a person who has a certain job position or status within or outside the organization and has certain functional knowledge about the processes,<sup>8</sup> six interviewees have been identified and contacted. From within the organization, two were selected, namely Dr. Mohammed Baobaid as director of the organization and Dr. Sahar Atalla as project coordinator. Additionally, Dr. Lynda Ashbourne, a researcher working closely with the MRCSSI for years, could contribute valuable information. To gain an outside

5 MAYRING, Philipp (2015): *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken. 12., überarbeitete Auflage.* Weinheim und Basel, Beltz.

6 KAISER, Robert (2014): *Qualitative Experteninterviews. Elemente der Politik.* Wiesbaden, Springer Fachmedien. 1.

7 BAOBAID, Mohammed – KOVACS, Nicole – MACDIARMID, Laura – TREMBLAY, Eugene (2014): A Culturally Integrative Model of Domestic Violence Response for Immigrant and Newcomer Families of Collectivist Backgrounds. In JOHNSON, Holly – FISHER, Bonnie S. – JAQUIER, Veronique eds.: *Critical Issues on Violence Against Women: International Perspectives and Promising Strategies.* London–New York, Routledge. 154.

8 KAISER (2014): *op. cit.* 35–41.

perspective, three mainstream service providers were interviewed as well, with two of them being social workers in close cooperation with the MRCSSI and one of them being a team leader that helped to establish the cooperation between the agencies.

The information gathered in the different steps of the research process corresponded well with each other. Especially using the expert interviews in order to re-confirm and deepen knowledge gained in the participation and observation stage of the research proved to be very fruitful. Both the interviews and the participation at the MRCSSI led to a reevaluation of the literature review and new sources were added based on suggestions by participants and new insights.

## **Results: The Canadian Migration and Integration System and the MRCSSI**

### *Introducing the MRCSSI*

The Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI) is a non-profit civil society organization, located in London, ON, Canada. Founded in 2009 by Dr. Mohammed Baobaid, it has been steadily growing in services offered, clients reached, funds secured and staff employed. Still, with currently 15 employees, it is rather small and benefits greatly from teamwork, individual initiative, low hierarchies and an almost family-like environment. Major sources of funding are “Status of Women Canada”, a Canadian ministry, and the Ontario government.<sup>9</sup> The work of the MRCSSI is focused on the specific needs of newcomer families, impacted by pre-and-post migration stressors. Also, mainstream service providers are supported in their work with immigrant communities.<sup>10</sup> While the starting point of Baobaid’s work was concerned with domestic violence in Muslim Arab families,<sup>11</sup> the scope of the MRCSSI’s work includes all kinds of integration issues, providing public education and empowerment, as much as counseling and coaching, in a safe space for the diverse London communities.<sup>12</sup>

Through practice and research, the MRCSSI established a unique conceptual framework for their work, the Culturally Integrative Family Safety Response (CIFSR) model.<sup>13</sup> In this, the concept is going beyond established strategies like cultural trainings for service providers to foster sensitivity. It aims for partnerships in mutual understanding between mainstream agencies and diverse communities. Projects and programs range from prevention to intervention, and are informed by research, while

---

9 MRCSSI (2015): Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. Annual Report, London, Ontario.

10 Ibid.

11 BAOBAID, Mohammed (2002): *Access to Women Abuse Services by Arab-Speaking Muslim Women in London, Ontario. Background Investigation and Recommendations for Further Research and Community Outreach*. Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children.

12 MRCSSI 2015

13 BAOBAID, Mohammed – ASHBOURNE, Lynda M. (2017): *Enhancing Culturally Integrative Family Safety Response in Muslim Communities*. London–New York, Routledge. 8.

also trying to establish models of best practice that allow for capacity building in other communities. By slowing down the established process to see the unique situation of a family and basing responses on their strengths and needs, sustainable solutions can be found and escalation prevented.<sup>14</sup>

For situations ranging from early intervention to full intervention, the MRCSSI has developed the Four Aspects Screening Tool (FAST) to assess the situations of families of concern. The four aspects under observation are Migration, Religion/Faith, Ethno-Cultural, and Universal Aspects. The latter refers to a general basic information about the family, its structure and members. The others are used to determine which kind of conflicts but also strengths may derive from each field of aspects.<sup>15</sup> As part of the assessment, the MRCSSI tries to determine which parties are needed in the consultation process or could be of support to build trust and guidance, both in the private environment of the client, as well as in the organizational structures. If a critical status is reached, where the safety of family members may be jeopardized, the involvement of mandated service providers is necessary and may lead the course of the intervention.<sup>16</sup>

Over time, the MRCSSI has developed very good working relationships with a number of organizations in London, ON. Most prominent are the police and local child welfare agency, where partnership agreements were made that ensure a “call MRCSSI first” approach.<sup>17</sup> At the local settlement agency, the MRCSSI tries to engage with every new family by being present during their first steps in Canada as well as providing orientation workshops and other forms of help, if needed. Apart from that, women shelters, schools, doctors, cultural organizations and others turn to the MRCSSI if they see newcomer families at risk or wish for support in specific matters.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the practical work on the prevention-intervention continuum, the MRCSSI also engages in several research and capacity building activities. Topics include the effects of migration on family structures, domestic violence prevention, safe integration paths for Syrian refugees and the role of faith in integration processes. Capacity building links in with research as well as public education and awareness elements, providing community leaders and service providers with knowledge and resources to operate in a culturally integrative way.<sup>19</sup>

With regards to the target group, the MRCSSI is generally quite open, yet in practice some groups are reached more than others. The focus is on newly arrived immigrants with Arab Muslim background. Mostly, they are refugees, who are still

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid. 45.

16 Interview with A. Wilkinson, 17 March 2017.

17 Informal conversation with M. Baobaid, March 2017.

18 MRCSSI (2012–2013): Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. Annual Report, London, Ontario.

19 mrcssi.com. Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. 2016. Available: [www.mrcssi.com/](http://www.mrcssi.com/) (Downloaded: 21.04.2017.)

struggling with the language and cannot rely on informal support structures to navigate the system.<sup>20</sup> However, main languages spoken among the MRCSSI staff are English and Arabic, making their services most accessible for people who are confident communicating in either of them.

At this point, it seems important to stress that the MRCSSI is not a faith based, i.e. in this case: Muslim organization. They do not provide support through religious teachings or Sharia law. Rather, they work within the Canadian system, side-by-side with mainstream service providers and religious and cultural communities.<sup>21</sup>

### *Policies and structures in Canada*

Refugees in Canada are eligible for permanent residency, and eventually citizenship, covered under the “Immigration and Refugee Protection Act”<sup>22</sup> Most commonly, the mode of arrival to Canada is resettlement for them. That is, persons who have been granted refugee status by an acknowledged organization, such as UNHCR, are moved to Canada in order to start a new life. Due to the geographical location of Canada, enclosed by sea and only bordering with the US, numbers of in-country refugee claimants are rather small. Refugee resettlement happens through two schemes: Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) or Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). In the former category, groups of private individuals within Canada facilitate and afford the resettlement of refugees.<sup>23</sup> GARs, on the other hand, receive their support from the Government of Canada for up to one year. For them, free initial housing, integration and language courses, and other means of support are provided by local public service provider organizations.<sup>24</sup> The exact conditions of support depend on the provincial and local legislations.

In face of the ongoing war in Syria, the Canadian Government decided in November 2015 to resettle an additional amount of 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016, significantly raising the amount of admitted GARs in order to meet the target.<sup>25</sup> By the end of 2016, a total of 36,000 Syrians have been resettled under

---

20 MRCSSI 2012–2013

21 Interview with M. Baobaid, 06 April 2017.

22 Minister of Justice (2017): Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (S.C. 2001, c. 27). 31 January 2017. Available: <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-2.5/index.html> (Downloaded: 13.02.2017.)

23 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2014b): *Privately Sponsored Refugee Resettlement in Canada*. Information Bulletin. Government of Canada. Refugees and Asylum. Available: [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp) (Downloaded: 13.02.2017.)

24 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2014a): *Government-Assisted Refugee Resettlement in Canada*. Information Bulletin, Government of Canada. Refugees and Asylum. Available: [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp) (Downloaded: 12.02.2017.)

25 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (2015): Canada Offers Leadership on the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Available: [http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1021919&\\_ga=1.181582946.439394158.1485991040](http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1021919&_ga=1.181582946.439394158.1485991040) (Downloaded: 12.02.2017.)

this initiative all over Canada, demographically balanced between male and female, adults and minors.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from measures targeted especially at facilitating integration, such as settlement services and language courses, integration also depends on rights and barriers with regards to the accessibility of mainstream services. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)<sup>27</sup> analyzed in detail the immigrant-friendliness of policies in 38 countries, including all European countries as well as North America, and a few others. In 2015, Canada reached rank six, losing one rank compared to the previous study from 2010. Dimensions of analyses are: Labor Market Mobility, Family Reunion, Education, Health, Political Participation, Permanent Residence, Access to Nationality and Anti-discrimination. Canada shows strength in anti-discrimination, family reunion and labor market mobility, yet only has a slightly favorable outcome in health and political participation. The population targeted by the MRCSSI, i.e. permanent residents, and new Canadians, as well as Canadian born children of immigrants, mostly enjoys equal legal access to the Canadian system.

Ontario is the province that receives most immigrants in Canada. About half of all immigrants to Canada settle in Ontario, making it the most diverse part of the country.<sup>28</sup> In order to facilitate the smooth integration of newcomers, a wide range of services are offered, including settlement services, language training, assistance to enter the qualified job market and aid to get foreign credentials recognized.<sup>29</sup>

London, Ontario, is one out of six cities in the province, where specialized resettlement services are offered. This happens mainly through the Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC), an organization uniting a multitude of services under its roof: providing trainings and courses, connecting with other agencies and mainstream organizations, helping with Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), as well as offering first housing for GARs until a more permanent accommodation can be found.<sup>30</sup> London is a city in Southwestern Ontario, Canada with a population of 383,822 according to the 2016 Canadian census. In 2016, London welcomed 1,195 Syrian GARs and 166 GARs with other countries of origin. Out of the Syrians, most arrived as families with two or more children, and, in total, slightly more males than females.<sup>31</sup>

26 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (2017): Syrian Refugee Resettlement. Available: <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/ca243c40-a6d3-4a46-a578-b4fad4369df0> (Downloaded: 13.02.2017.)

27 HUDDLESTON, Thomas – BILGILI, Özge – JOKI, Anne-Linde – VANIKOVA, Zvezda (2015): *MIPEX*. Barcelona–Brussels, CIDOB and MPG.

28 Queen's Printer for Ontario (2015): Services for Newcomers to Ontario. Available: [www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/newcomers/nc\\_services.shtml](http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/newcomers/nc_services.shtml) (Downloaded: 16.02.2017.)

29 Ibid.

30 Cross Cultural Learner Centre (2013): London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. Available: <http://lclc.org/> (Downloaded: 12.02.2017.)

31 IVANOV, G. – EL-SAYEGH, I. – DAM T. (2017): *2016 Annual Report: Syrian GARs in London, Ontario*. London, Ontario, Cross Cultural Learner Centre.

## *Discussion*

Throughout the research, the importance of cultural and linguistic knowledge became very clear. The majority of facilitators and counsellors at the organization have a Muslim Arab background. Regardless of which side of the prevention-intervention continuum the involvement of the MRCSSI is located at: a common background and communication in the clients' mother tongue fosters mutual understanding and – most importantly – trust. On this basis, therefore, they can address issues and problems of the clients, can help to build the bridge to the Canadian mainstream services and can educate about Canadian laws and customs.

As a policy background for the MRCSSI in Canada, most of the interviewees considered official Multiculturalism to be of importance in the sense that it influences the perspectives of individuals and actions of politicians. It sets the basis for a general openness towards minority sensitive topics and immigrant serving organizations.<sup>32</sup> “Canada is all about immigration, so (...) [Multiculturalism] plays a huge role in defining the responses and even setting the policies.”<sup>33</sup>

Indicators could be found that suggest the general set-up of immigrant intake, and in particular refugee intake, in Canada is beneficial not only for the MRCSSI but all immigrant serving organizations. Interviewee Sahar Atalla explains, for example, a process of systemic organizational meetings prior to the arrival of large numbers of Syrian refugees in 2015–2016.<sup>34</sup> In this it becomes clear that the highly regulated process of refugee resettlement, in which the Canadian Government has full control over the numbers and the background of newcomers, allows for a certain planning period in advance. Furthermore, having limited numbers of family units arriving to central settlement agencies, as it is the case for GARs, allows the MRCSSI to introduce themselves to most of them.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from individual clients, the MRCSSI is mainly interacting with two entities: the local Muslim communities on the one side and the mainstream social service providers on the other. In the perspective of the interviewed experts, both have very particular characteristics in London, ON which enabled the MRCSSI to set roots in this city and operate successfully.

While London, ON used to be a predominantly European–Canadian middle-class community, its diversity has been growing since the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the Muslim community has been extending for quite some time, including a number of financially and politically successful Muslims in various capacities.<sup>36</sup> During rising Islamophobia after the terror attacks of 9/11, these well-established

---

32 Interview with L. Ashbourne, 07 April 2017.

33 Interview with S. Atalla, 06 April 2017.

34 Interview with S. Atalla, 06 April 2017.

35 Interview with M. Baobaid, 06 April 2017.

36 Interview with L. Ashbourne, 07 April 2017.

Muslims found a public voice to speak out against violence, which led to great community support for Baobaid's early ideas, resulting in the MRCSSI.<sup>37</sup> Not only in the early stages, but still ongoing, have they also provided significant financial and social support for the organization.<sup>38</sup>

Interviewees also explained that the city, compared to other places in Canada, is very well equipped in terms of social support agencies.<sup>39</sup> In particular in the field of mental health, as well as women and children protection, they are provided with enough funding but also have strong community support.<sup>40</sup> The MRCSSI benefits from this infrastructure, in which many basic mental health needs are covered and small, targeted agencies are needed to fill the gaps that cannot be covered by the established larger ones.

The 2016 Annual Report of the MRCSSI mentions a list of 26 community partners that interact with the organization on a regular basis. Among them are several kinds of organizations, including faith-based Muslim partners, community research centers, mandated service providers, and several kinds of non-profit child protection, health care and community service agencies.<sup>41</sup> When asked about the most important partners of the MRCSSI, the responses of the interviewees mostly came down to: those who provide access to potential clients or do referrals.<sup>42</sup> Mandated partners are particularly important as they are powerful actors with much responsibility and little flexibility, especially when it comes to high-risk cases. The police and the local child care agency have very successfully been working with the MRCSSI for an extended period of time already.

Other kinds of public institutions with important structural impact for the MRCSSI are schools. They provide access to newcomer children and youths for prevention and early intervention activities, especially through SWIS workers. Settlement Workers in School (SWIS) is a government-funded program that places social workers from local settlement agencies in elementary and secondary schools that have high numbers of newcomer students. Their support includes help and navigation with all kinds of settlement issues, regardless of the immigration status.<sup>43</sup> Much of the youth-work is school-based, with MRCSSI staff and volunteers coming in to facilitate different kinds of social groups during lunch breaks or after school.

In 2016, the MRCSSI had more than 30 university students involved in their work: as volunteers, as part of their studies, or through government or university funded

37 Interview with M. Baobaid, 06 April 2017.

38 Interview with S. Atalla, 06 April 2017.

39 Interview with C. Harper, 20 March 2017.

40 Interview with L. Ashbourne, 07 April 2017.

41 MRCSSI (2016): Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. Annual Report, London, Ontario. 11.

42 Interview with S. Atalla, 06 April 2017.

43 Thames Valley District School Board (2017): The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program. Available: [www.tvdsb.ca/programs.cfm?subpage=123449](http://www.tvdsb.ca/programs.cfm?subpage=123449) (Downloaded: 21.04.2017.)

short-term jobs.<sup>44</sup> Many of the students have an Arabic-speaking, immigrant-family background themselves. The effects of the student involvement at the MRCSSI are diverse and all perceived as positive. Their work is a relief in the day-to-day workload at a very low cost for the organization, while also being a great asset for new ideas and “fresh blood” in the team. At the same time, interviewee Atalla notices that many students also spread their knowledge about the organization in their environment, making it better known in the city and beyond: “I feel it’s a good promotion to the work that is done.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the diverse backgrounds, distinct knowledge, and specific perspectives each local and international student and researcher is bringing to the table with their work at the MRCSSI appears to Ashbourne<sup>46</sup> as a source of strength and progress. These statements are in line with the observations made during the research period and demonstrate the importance of structural support for young minds.

## Conclusion

The different strands of the research process with regards to the MRCSSI in the Canadian system support each other in a very clear manner. Literature review, observations and interviews were able to shed light on different aspects of the research. The interviews with Atalla, Ashbourne, and Baobaid turned out to be more insightful in terms of structural factors influencing the work of the MRCSSI. However, including mainstream service providers in the research complemented the work by showing the ways in which Canadian social structures operate, and by validating views and opinions about the MRCSSI. All interviews and informal conversations have in common that participants assign major importance in the success of the agency to personal rather than structural factors. In particular, the educated and cooperative approach of the staff, and Baobaid’s significant abilities to build relationships on a personal, yet professional basis are seen as essential.

The Canadian immigration, integration and social system are important for the MRCSSI in several ways. Firstly, federal policies deal with integration measures only to a limited extent. Rather, as it is common for federal democracies, much authority is given to the provinces and territories. However, the Canadian Government does regulate most of the immigration structures and quotas. This influences the clients that the MRCSSI is dealing with: controllable amounts of refugee families are admitted to Canada, leaving the MRCSSI with the opportunity to actually get in touch with most of the GARs coming to London, ON. The 2015–2016 intake of increased numbers of Syrian refugees is also reflected in the client statistics and program developments of the MRCSSI. The official Multiculturalism in Canada builds an important ideological basis for the work of the MRCSSI. It may not be

---

44 MRCSSI 2016

45 Interview with S. Atalla, 06 April 2017.

46 Interview with L. Ashbourne, 07 April 2017.

reflected in practical policies as much as some might wish, yet, it does achieve a certain openness for communities and political leaders to foster minority support. Furthermore, the long tradition of Canada as an immigration country, and their support for these newcomers, are also beneficial in the sense that health and social service professionals with the appropriate linguistic, cultural, and religious background are available to work with the MRCSSI.

Integration measures, and in fact most social services, are regulated in a bottom-up approach, where funding and support is provided based on the local needs. In the province of Ontario, integration measures are well-established and accessible for many. The MRCSSI went through some serious struggle in terms of funding, yet finally managed with the support of the community, and by proving their successes, to access provincial and federal government funds. In addition, structurally supported continuous involvement of university students is a great asset for the MRCSSI, intellectually, practically and financially. Apart from that, the specific setting of a strong Muslim community and great service infrastructure in London, ON could also be identified as particularly beneficial for the MRCSSI.

Going back to the theoretical framework of this thesis, it could also be shown that the MRCSSI is improving social justice for their clients in the city and beyond, by elevating equal access to services from a legal level to a practical one. They take the individual needs of their community members seriously and believe in helping them to reach their full potential and to integrate safely. On the long run, research and reported experiences are envisioned to influence and transform policy making, which might be closer to Fraser's idea of deconstructing social norms. With their work, they also re-define integration as not just covering basic rights and needs – which they leave to settlement agencies – but they see it as an ongoing process of finding personal stability in the Canadian environment. With regards to Multiculturalism, Baobaid and his team focus strongly on employing it in its best possible definition. Group belonging and cultural background are seen as strength and asset. Canadian mainstream services are encouraged to learn and fulfill their part of the integration process, so that every individual has the chance to find happiness in their own framework of defining right or wrong, without stereotyping presumptions about their aspirations and beliefs.

In conclusion it becomes clear that the Canadian and local structures do have an impact on the success of the MRCSSI. Certainly, the factors mentioned in this research are not all-encompassing and certainly especially the challenges in Canada could be explored in much more detail. Rather, they represent the perspective of the most significant aspects for on-the-ground workers. Other actors, such as policy makers, funders, or government employees may have a different evaluation. In all, the MRCSSI is respecting every individual and their human dignity by offering assistance for everyone to reach their full potential. To them, it means looking at the strengths and needs of each person, regardless of their country of birth or citizenship status.

## References

- BAOBAID, Mohammed (2002): *Access to Women Abuse Services by Arab-Speaking Muslim Women in London, Ontario. Background Investigation and Recommendations for Further Research and Community Outreach*. Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children.
- BAOBAID, Mohammed – KOVACS, Nicole – MACDIARMID, Laura – TREMBLAY, Eugene (2014): A Culturally Integrative Model of Domestic Violence Response for Immigrant and Newcomer Families of Collectivist Backgrounds. In JOHNSON, Holly – FISHER, Bonnie S. – JAQUIER, Veronique eds.: *Critical Issues on Violence Against Women: International Perspectives and Promising Strategies*. London–New York, Routledge. 154–165.
- BAOBAID, Mohammed – ASHBOURNE, Lynda M. (2017): *Enhancing Culturally Integrative Family Safety Response in Muslim Communities*. London–New York, Routledge.
- CHRÉTIEN, Jean (2003): Immigration and Multiculturalism – Lessons from Canada. *Progressive Politics*, Vol 2.2. 22–29.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2014a): *Government-Assisted Refugee Resettlement in Canada*. Information Bulletin, Government of Canada. Refugees and Asylum. Available: [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp) (Downloaded: 12.02.2017.)
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2014b): *Privately Sponsored Refugee Resettlement in Canada*. Information Bulletin. Government of Canada. Refugees and Asylum. Available: [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/index.asp) (Downloaded: 13.02.2017.)
- City of London (s. a.): The official website of the City of London. Available: [www.london.ca/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.london.ca/Pages/default.aspx) (Downloaded: 08.03.2017.)
- Cross Cultural Learner Centre (2013): London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. Available: <http://lcllc.org/> (Downloaded: 12.02.2017.)
- CUI, Dan (2015): Multiculturalism as an Integrational Policy. In GUO, Shibao – WONG, Lloyd eds.: *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada*. Rotterdam–Boston–Taipei, Sense Publishers. 207–220.
- FRASER, Nancy (1998): From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemma of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age. In WILLETT, Cynthia ed.: *Theorizing Multiculturalism: A Guide to the Current Debate*. Malden, Massachusetts, John Wiley & Sons. 68–93.
- Government of Canada (2016): #WelcomeRefugees: The first 25,000 – Phase 1. Available: [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/phase1.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/phase1.asp) (Downloaded: 21.04.2017.)
- HUDDLESTON, Thomas – BILGILI, Özge – JOKI, Anne-Linde – VANIKOVA, Zvezda (2015): *MIPEX*. Barcelona–Brussels, CIDOB and MPG.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (2015): Canada Offers Leadership on the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Available: [http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1021919&\\_ga=1.181582946.439394158.1485991040](http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1021919&_ga=1.181582946.439394158.1485991040) (Downloaded: 12.02.2017.)
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (2017): Syrian Refugee Resettlement. Available: <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/ca243c40-a6d3-4a46-a578-b4fad4369df0> (Downloaded: 13.02.2017.)
- IVANOV, G. – EL-SAYEGH, I. – DAM T. (2017): *2016 Annual Report: Syrian GARs in London, Ontario*. London, Ontario, Cross Cultural Learner Centre.
- KAISER, Robert (2014): *Qualitative Experteninterviews. Elemente der Politik*. Wiesbaden, Springer Fachmedien.
- KYMLICKA, Will (2012): *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future*. Migration Policy Institute.
- MAYRING, Philipp (2015): *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken. 12., überarbeitete Auflage*. Weinheim und Basel, Beltz.

- Minister of Justice (2017): Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (S.C. 2001, c. 27). 31 January 2017. Available: <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-2.5/index.html> (Downloaded: 13.02.2017.)
- MRCSSI (2012–2013): Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. Annual Report, London, Ontario.
- MRCSSI (2015): Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. Annual Report, London, Ontario.
- MRCSSI (2016): Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. Annual Report, London, Ontario.
- mrcssi.com. Muslim Resource Center for Social Support and Integration. 2016. Available: [www.mrcssi.com/](http://www.mrcssi.com/) (Downloaded: 21.04.2017.)
- Queen's Printer for Ontario (2015): Services for Newcomers to Ontario. Available: [www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/newcomers/nc\\_services.shtml](http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/newcomers/nc_services.shtml) (Downloaded: 16.02.2017.)
- SCHÖNWÄLDER, Karen (2010): Germany. Integration policy and pluralism in a self-conscious country of immigration. In VERTOVEC, Steven – WESSENDORF, Susanne eds.: *Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*. London–New York, Routledge. 152–169.
- TAYLOR, Charles (1994): Politics of Recognition. In GUTMANN, Amy ed.: *Multiculturalism*. Princeton, New Jersey–Chichester, West Sussex, Princeton University Press. 25–73.
- Thames Valley District School Board (2017): The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program. Available: [www.tvdsb.ca/programs.cfm?subpage=123449](http://www.tvdsb.ca/programs.cfm?subpage=123449) (Downloaded: 21.04.2017.)