

# Mennonite NEW LIFE CENTRE of Toronto

# NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 32, Spring 2007

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## Visioning process

*“Successful integration for a newcomer to Canada is about the ability to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life – economic, social, cultural, and political.”*

The Mennonite New Life Centre is currently engaged in a visioning process for the future, reaffirming our commitment to newcomer settlement and integration, while exploring new ways to strengthen and extend our work. In this process, we are seeking input from a variety of actors, including clients, staff and board members, as well as community partners and supporting churches. We have been encouraged by the active and thoughtful participation of many friends and supporters.

As a result of our consultations so far, we have developed a draft work model based on three key priorities:

- Practical support, to help newcomers overcome the individual barriers they face
- Mental health supports, to help newcomers maintain or regain hope
- Advocacy, to work with newcomer communities to address systemic barriers to integration

Our work in each of these three areas will continue to be grounded in personal relationships of compassion, cooperation and solidarity.

**We look forward to continuing to develop our vision for the Mennonite New Life Centre. For more information about our visioning process, or to offer your input, call Tanya Chute Molina at 416-699-4527 X228.**



**3 O'clock Tea and Cake  
Senior's Cultural Event at  
The New Life Centre.  
February 2007**



“You know, Papa left us with Mama. He won’t be coming back. I’ve prayed a lot for him to come, but he won’t. Now I have to look for another Papa.”

*(Child separated from father by slow processing of family reunification)*

Refugee and immigrant families are often separated for long periods of time, due to immigration policies and practices which delay or block family reunification. Among the many barriers are: the narrow definition of family members eligible for sponsorship, bars to sponsorship by newcomers receiving social assistance, and administrative delays.

Every week, the Mennonite New Life Centre receives requests for assistance with family reunification. A tradesman is concerned to hear about his brother’s struggle to support his family back home in Kosovo. He would like to sponsor his brother to work with him in Canada, but brothers can’t be sponsored. A single mother, struggling to establish herself in Canada, needs her mother’s help babysitting so that she can go out and find a job. She would like to sponsor her mother to come from Mexico, but she doesn’t meet the income requirements. An Iraqi mother, separated from her two sons for over a decade, is wracked by anxiety when a bomb hits their home city. She wants to sponsor them to come to Canada, but they are no longer dependent children.

Too often, obstacles stand in the way of family reunification. Isolated and anxious, family members already in Canada find it difficult to get on with their lives, while those left behind are denied access to security and an opportunity to contribute their skills to Canada. Sometimes there are creative solutions for bringing family members together – the Kosovar tradesman was able to extend an offer of employment to help his brother apply as an independent immigrant. For others, there is no immediate solution...

For this reason, the Mennonite New Life Centre has joined with the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) to call on the Canadian government to make policy changes that would promote speedy family reunification. Last month, the Board of the Mennonite New Life Centre voted to sign on to the CCR Family Reunification Manifesto (printed below). This document includes a special plea that the processing of family members of refugees, especially separated children, be done in Canada.

You can help make a difference for refugees and other newcomers separated from their families! Join the Family Reunification Campaign by:

- Creating a welcoming and supportive church family for newcomers separated from loved ones
  - Asking your church to sign on to the Family Reunification Manifesto
  - Visiting your MP to express your concern for speedy family reunification
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## CCR FAMILY REUNIFICATION MANIFESTO

We recognize that all refugees and immigrants contribute to society and that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, which governments have an obligation to protect, under international human rights law.

We affirm as central the need to respect the integrity of the family unit and ensure that families are not separated for any longer than is absolutely necessary. We further recognize that the notion of ‘family’ has different meanings in different cultural contexts, and encourage a definition of ‘family’ that is as broad and as inclusive as possible in order to fully respect the reality of many family clusters.

We have particular concerns for children separated from their parents and affirm that speedy family reunification should be of the highest priority for any society that cares for the best interests of the child.

We deplore any immigration or refugee system that is indifferent to the hardships caused by separation of families, and we call for the removal of any and all barriers to family reunification. We underline the costs of family separation, most importantly for those kept separate, but also for society at large which is also the loser when families are kept apart by the immigration system.



We particularly grieve the ongoing stress and anxiety that is imposed on refugee families separated by persecution and violence, and we make a renewed call for these families to be reunited as quickly as possible. We denounce any government that acts in our name to arbitrarily and cruelly turn a blind eye to the risks to which these families are unnecessarily exposed once a family member has been accepted for protection in Canada.

We therefore call on our government to promote an immigration and refugee system that respects basic rights by favouring the speedy reunification of families in the interests of the healthy, humane, respectful and productive integration of newcomers. We also call for the processing of family members of refugees, especially separated children, to be done in Canada.

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**For more information, visit [www.ccrweb.ca](http://www.ccrweb.ca) or call the Mennonite New Life Centre at 416-699-4527. The Canadian Council for Refugees has developed fact sheets on family reunification, including key messages and recommendations for MP visits.**

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# HOPING FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION

*By Jessika Liao*

As settlement workers, we see the human impact of changing family reunification policies on our clients. In years past, immigration allowed newcomers to sponsor their brothers and sisters from abroad. Laws have changed, and this is no longer possible. I would like to share the story of someone very special whose life has been seriously affected by this policy change.

In October 2005, Ms. Zhou came to see me for help with a second application for permanent resident status. As she told me her story, I was saddened to hear of the many barriers she had faced in seeking to build a new life with her sister in Canada.

In 1999, Ms. Zhou faced a severe emotional crisis when her husband had an affair. Devastated and vulnerable, Ms. Zhou wanted to leave China as soon as possible. Her parents were no longer living, but she had a sister in Canada. Ms. Zhou decided to move to Canada to start a new life.

Ms. Zhou was a successful journalist working for Xinhua News Agency. She sought help from her employer to apply for a student visa, but the agency refused. Xinhua News Agency worked for the government of China. They did not want a journalist with inside knowledge of the Chinese government to travel abroad.

An influential friend was worried about Ms. Zhou's emotional state and feared that she might commit suicide if forced to remain in China. He helped her to apply for the student visa, using documents that identified her as a manager for his company. Ms. Zhou got the student visa, but later regretted her decision to assume a false identity, as it has become a

formidable barrier to gaining permanent residence status in Canada.

Ms. Zhou arrived in Canada in 1999 and started to study English. In 2001, she applied for permanent resident status. On the application and in her immigration interview, she confessed to having lied on her visa application and expressed remorse for her mistake. The immigration officer denied her case. In 2004, Ms. Zhou applied again for permanent residence on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, but was rejected. In 2005, with the help of the New Life Centre, she applied as a skilled worker, but has not received a decision.

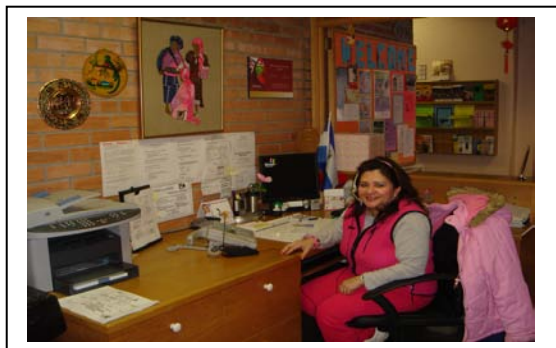
Ms. Zhou has acknowledged past mistakes and taken responsibility for her actions. As a skilled journalist, she has much to contribute to her new country. In Canada, she has even worked as an editor for a Chinese Christian newspaper. Will she have the opportunity to continue to give her skills to Canada? Recently, Ms. Zhou received a letter requesting further information on her case in order to make a final decision on her status. She continues to wait, between hope and fear.

For Ms. Zhou, like many others, the long wait for permanent residence status has meant a lot of anxiety and difficulties settling into a new life in Canada. Ms. Zhou is with her sister, but for how long? It saddens me to think that all this anxiety and uncertainty could have been avoided. If Canada allowed sibling sponsorships, or reinstated the Assisted Relative Sponsorship, Ms. Zhou could already have permanent residence status and be a full member of the Canadian family.

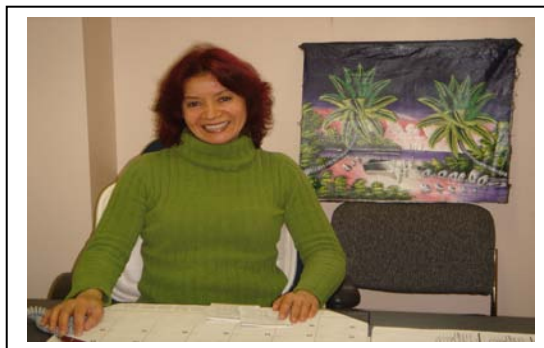
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# WELCOME NEW STAFF of The Mennonite New Life Centre



Carolina Morales is the new Receptionist.  
She started work in November 2006.



Loida Lopez is the new Administrative Assistant.  
She started work in January 2007.

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## Good music for a good cause!!!

Featuring: Latin-Jazz musician Hilario Duran.



We are pleased to announce a great opportunity to enjoy excellent music *and* support the work of the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto.

Please join us on Friday May 18 for a special piano solo concert by ***Hilario Duran, Latin-Jazz pianist and two-time Juno Award winner.*** Hilario Durán has his origins in Havana, Cuba, but has lived and performed in Canada since the 1990s. Hilario Duran is well known for his Big Band Orchestra, a highlight of numerous Canadian jazz festivals.

**Date and Time:** Friday, May 18, 7:00 pm

**Place:** 1774 Queen St East (Limited free parking available)

**Tickets:** \$10.00 (Advance purchase recommended)

Please call 416-699-4527 or visit us at 1774 Queen St E to reserve your ticket. All proceeds will be used to support our settlement services and programs for newcomers.

Many thanks to Hilario Duran for his generosity and to you for your support. See you on May 18!

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# THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS

*By Marina Maksimovic (Volunteer Coordinator)*

**T**he Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto has always relied on volunteers. Due to very limited funding our volunteers have helped make this centre what it is today, a multicultural organization serving individuals and communities no matter where they come from.

To be involved in helping the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto as a volunteer means meeting the clients' greatest needs such as providing clothing for families, furniture and furnishings through donations, knitting warm mittens for cold little hands and sewing beautiful quilts which become part of childhood memories of warmth and sweet dreams. **THANKS** to all of you who dedicated your time and so much love in making, donating and distributing these goods.

After having met our clients' essential needs our volunteers go further in assisting them with conversational English, teaching them computer literacy, French language, interpreting for newcomers wherever it is necessary. Other volunteers help us with short term child care to enable their parents participate in activities useful for them, some do translations of documents, some perform clerical and administrative duties and assist with reception relief. Some volunteers perform paraprofessional counselling which has helped so many families and individuals.

Many of our precious volunteers bring joy to all of us by organizing special events like Christmas parties where they donate toys and food, and bring big smiles to faces of children from all over the world, while others participate in Artistic Performances where they offer their talents of music, dance, arts, crafts, cooking and so much more.

Our Board also consists of volunteers who dedicate their time and expertise to our Centre.

*We wish to express our immense gratitude to all of you, wonderful people who demonstrate interest and put so much effort in helping us serve our community. We want you to know how high an impact your work and dedication has had on the quality and quantity of the MNLCT work. We couldn't have done it without you.*

## **Thank you for supporting us!**

*Donation received from individuals, churches, and other organizations are key to the day to day operations of the Mennonite New Life Centre. All donations are gratefully acknowledged with a receipt for income tax purposes.*

*Please send donations to:*

*The New Life Centre/Centro Nueva Vida  
1774 Queen Street East, Toronto, ON, M4L 1G7  
Tel: (416) 699-4527 Fax: (416) 699-2207*

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