|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **MMP – University of Toronto****Summmary of Caregivers’ Journeys Launch****June 26, 2016** |

This document provides a summary of the Caregivers’ Journeys project launch that took place on June 26, 2016 at the University of Toronto. The format of the launch was a community forum with two panels discussions followed by facilitated table conversations. The panel discussions included a legal panel focused on immigration and a panel of caregivers, service providers, and advocates sharing their experiences. Following the panel discussions, facilitated table conversations reflected on the information shared in the panels and discussed existing services and gaps in services. The forum was attended by 48 members of the caregiver community including: current and past caregivers as well as advocates and service providers. There were also six volunteers, two speakers for the legal panel, and two project staff.

The forum panelists included:

* Macdonald Scott, Regulated Immigration Consultant – Carranza LLP
* Elizabeth Long, Barrister & Solicitor – Long Mangalji LLP
* Esel Panlaqui, Settlement Counsellor – Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office
* Pearlita Juan, Volunteer - Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office
* Vilma Pagaduan, Volunteer - Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office
* Lilibeth Santos – Caregiver
* Pinky, Settlement Counsellor – Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office

The facilitated table discussions explored the following questions:

1. What are some of the places or people you have found helpful to support your health care, job assistance, legal advice or family advice?
2. What services are missing or difficult to access (because they are far away, they are not open when you are available, or due to your immigration status)?
3. What types of things can we do to take care of yourselves and each other? (e.g. pray, exercise, social gatherings, sing/art, talk on the phone to family back home, etc.)

**Panel Discussions**

**Legal Panel:**

* Caregivers as a low skilled profession is a form of gender based discrimination that should be challenged. Eg. construction workers, police, and firefighters are considered high skilled but caregivers and personal support workers are considered low skilled.
* Work eligibility when you have an “implied status” (i.e. if your work permit expires but you have submitted a application to renew the work permit);
* If you have been working in Canada for four years you cannot renew your work permit unless you can say that you were not working during that time.
* If your work permit expires you can stay with the same employer without an LMIA.
* Visa offices overseas take very long which results in a general delay. If visa offices not making any progress you can send email to offices in Manila and have to follow up with CIC first and then send email to Manila for follow up
* If your work permit is employer specific you can stay in the country but you can not work for another employer. If you find a new employer that employer will need to file an LMIA.

**Caregivers Panel:**

* Thornecliff Neighbourhood Organization is a settlement agency providing support to caregivers. They provide services in different locations in the community and try to reach isolated individuals.
* One speaker was refused permanent residence because her son has downe syndrome.
* One speaker shared that when their work permit expired their OHIP expired as well and they are not able to access health services.
* Being a caregiver is stressful and difficult, therefore having support and being able to give support is important.
* Caregivers are experiencing significant health problems related to the stress that they encounter as a result of work, the immigration process, and distance from family.

**Facilitated Table Conversations**

**Comments and Responses to Panel Discussion**

* Employers do not understand rules of new program (e.g. work eligibility under implied status);
	+ Proposal to draft a legal opinion to help workers share with their employers
* Delaying health care or declining health while waiting for PR (though stress contributes to decline in health)
* Confusion about rules/process/conditions/rights in regards to work permits and PR applications. Participants posed many questions, and expressed frustration at lack of clear, reliable information
* Sense of arbitrariness in getting work permits/PR (easy and quick for some, long wait times that are horrific for others) –low sense of agency, and low trust in the system
* Experiences of abuse and exploitation from employers; even if you know your rights, employers have a great deal of power over caregivers
* Hardship of long term separation from children/families
	+ Some marital relationships break-down
	+ Children not attached to mother
* Worker must wait until PR application for all family members is processed to adjust their status (which can take years if the dependents are overseas, or in Manila or Abu Dhabi, which have up to 4 year processing times).
* Medical inadmissibility for family members with a disability

**Sources of supports identified by participants:**

* Community (other caregivers, family/friends, social media)
* Churches
* Community organizations, including: TNO, Intercede, Access Alliance, community health centres
* Professionals: Legal aid, immigration consultants, immigration lawyers
* Members of Parliament Offices
* Faith
* History of mobilization and organizing in the Filipino caregiver community since 1980s; sense of strength in coming together and engaging in advocacy

**Gaps in supports/services identified by participants:**

* Gaps in health care coverage—first three months after arrival, if work permit expires and you are waiting for the renewal; not knowing where to go for health services when without OHIP;
* Poor and inaccessible information/services at CIC: hours-long wait times for call centre agents, disconnected calls, staff are unhelpful, etc.
* Legal and settlement services: often far away, or operating hours are inconvenient for caregivers’ schedules
* Need more community legal education for caregivers
* Lack of services for children of caregivers after they are sponsored; reunification raises new problems after long separation
* For trans and LGBTQ identified individuals – they face additional barriers; lack of appropriate services and supports

**Feedback about Forum (more from evaluation forms?):**

* Informative and interesting
* Sense of belonging/community; feeling relaxed/relieved to be among peers
* More time and more speakers from community services
* More promotion so that more caregivers would benefit
* Topics that caregivers would like to learn more about included: family reunification, self-care, accessing services and advocacy
* A caregivers day event