



FOCAS CANADA HANDBOOK



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Message



Our services address the socio-economic and political hardships faced by community members in their home countries and refugee camps, aiming to help them overcome these experiences as quickly as possible. We recognize and build upon the valuable cultural assets they bring to Canada. The majority of our community members arrived in Canada as refugees, not through business or skilled worker categories. We understand the challenges of being immigrants and newcomers, especially after living in refugee camps with broken morale and difficult physical and economic experiences.

Recovery often seems impossible when professional credentials are not recognized, and starting from scratch becomes inevitable. Newcomers face numerous challenges:

- Adapting to unfamiliar cultures, religions, and norms
- Engaging in unfamiliar types of work
- Supporting children's education in languages they don't speak
- Balancing children's interest in new cultures with traditional beliefs
- Starting a new life in their 40s and 50s
- Learning a new language or how to drive later in life

At FOCAS, we work tirelessly to make these seemingly insurmountable situations more manageable for our clients. Many of our staff, including myself, have personally experienced these challenges. We understand what it takes to start work in a new country and to successfully re-enter one's profession as an internationally trained professional.

Our ultimate goal is to create a universal design for social integration (UDSI), a system that accommodates internationally trained professionals' credentials, enabling them to quickly return to their professions and serve the community their new country. I extend my gratitude to all our funders and partners, without whose support and encouragement our initiatives could not have materialized.

Thank you for taking a few moments to read this organizational profile about FOCAS!

About Us



➤ **Our Vision**

Our vision is to empower, inspire, and instill confidence in newcomer and refugee community members so they can confidently participate in Canadian society. With our motto "Community Empowerment and Excellence," we bridge gaps and advocate for the rights of community members experiencing inequities. As challenges are overcome and strengths built, we envision healthy communities who can imagine and create evolving pathways to educational, economic, cultural, and social success.

➤ **Our Mission**

FOCAS is a settlement community-driven organization welcoming newcomers and the immigrant community with particular attention to the underserved Oromo from Ethiopia. At FOCAS we help refugee, newcomer and immigrants adapt to their new home in Canada and become resilient, active participants in society through settlement services, help with employment, language training, cultural pride and intercultural connections. In service of this goal we cultivate a hub of cultural and immigrant serving organization partnerships so that we can both extend and receive assistance as required. These partnerships provide:

- a) Expanded opportunities for intercultural exchange and friendship.
- b) Complimentary service touch points throughout the settlement and integration journey of the populations we serve.



➤ Our Philosophy

We believe in service to others and the development of capacity. It is said that the rising tide lifts all boats. As struggling members of society learn to communicate effectively with each other and across differences of culture and language, they gain confidence. As skills improve, employment opportunities increase. Through social interaction and social skills support we can learn to overcome barriers of racism, language, religion, and culture. At FOCAS we see our services to refugee and newcomer communities as bridges which when strengthened, empower diverse cultures to cross freely and relationships to deepen.

➤ Our Values

INCLUSIVITY: We work towards authentic inclusivity, valuing and respecting differences while creating environments where all people can participate.

EMPOWERMENT: We empower clients and community members to identify their needs and articulate their strengths. We acknowledge that communities change and grow, requiring innovation to respond to evolving needs. To respond to changing needs and developing strengths, we find new ways to listen, respond to issues, develop programming, and work collaboratively to achieve our goals.

INTEGRITY: We maintain integrity through honest and transparent work. Our intentions and accountability to staff, funders, partners, and community members are clearly communicated in all our interactions, and can be viewed on our website under the reports section.

POSITIVITY: We believe positivity builds health. We seek positive solutions and engage in continuous learning to assist our target populations with developing positive, healthy attitudes.

WHERE DID WE START

Who We Are

Our story begins with Oromia, an epicenter in Ethiopia where diverse nations and nationalities have coexisted peacefully for centuries. The African Union headquarters and World Economic Forum offices are located in this region. This coexistence may be attributed to the Oromo culture of Guddifacha (adoption) and Mogaafacha (naturalization) of non-Oromos, similar to modern Western practices of naturalization and citizenship for immigrants and refugees. In honor of this culture of multiculturalism and mutual coexistence, we named our organization the Foundation for Oromian Culture, Education and Art Services (FOCAS).



> THE PEOPLE WE SERVE



Many of our clients come from war-ravaged regions in Africa and the Middle East. They have experienced violence, destruction, and tragedy, and frequently suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Most arrived in Canada from refugee camps after enduring mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion. Many have resettled in urban centers in Canada after living in rural regions in their homelands, facing jarring transitions.



Community members benefit from the variety of services we offer to promote both healing and integration:



- Trauma care for migration and displacement issues
- Culturally sensitive adult literacy programs
- Heritage language learning
- Education to improve intercultural competence
- Workplace cultural responsiveness
- Life skills education for financial management and family life

➤ Volunteers

Volunteers are fundamental to FOCAS services. They come from diverse cultural, national and racial backgrounds and help keep our doors open while we deliver vital programs and services.

Volunteers contribute by:

- Serving on the board of directors
- Assisting with fundraising campaigns
- Coordinating grant projects and special events
- Tutoring and mentoring youth
- Serving seniors
- Helping with English and Oromo language learning
- Food bank collection and distribution

Many of our volunteers work directly with our FOCAS members. We average around 100 people contributing over 3000 volunteer hours annually.



➤ Principal Responsibilities of FOCAS Board and Its Members

The Policy Governing Board is the highest administrative authority within FOCAS, responsible for creating policies that guide the organization's governance and determine its long-term direction.

To implement these policies and oversee the day-to-day operations of the organization, the Board appoints an Executive Director, who is directly accountable to the Board. The Executive Director, in turn, oversees the front-line staff and service volunteers, who are responsible for delivering programs and services to the community.

This structure ensures clear accountability and effective implementation of FOCAS's mission and objectives.

Responsibilities of the Board are:

- Oversee the operations of the organization as fiduciaries. The Board is legally, financially, and morally responsible for the organization's performance on its stated mandate and goals.
- Define and refine FOCAS' purpose, vision, mission and core values.

- Consider existing and new programs as they align with the organizational purpose and recommend adjustments as required.
- Prepare for the Annual General Meeting and Annual Election of Board members
- Choose, hire and evaluate the work of the Executive Director

It is essential for board members to understand the distinction between the roles of the Executive Director and the Board Chairperson. Board members are accountable to the Board Chair and their fellow board members, with their primary responsibility being to oversee the governance and policies of FOCAS. Together, the Board and the Chair ensure that the organization fulfills its mandate and fiduciary responsibilities.

The Board Chair and the Board work collaboratively with the Executive Director to establish and prioritize the implementation of policies and procedures, as well as to define the Executive Director's responsibilities.

The Executive Director, in turn, is responsible for managing the organization's programs, hiring staff, and overseeing day-to-day operations.

Board members are individually responsible for staying informed about FOCAS's programs and activities and understanding how they serve the organization's target populations. They are also expected to actively participate in board meetings and fulfill their assigned duties as members of the Board.

Our Board members maintain an unwavering commitment to diverse causes, including:

- Community health and well-being
- Education of children and youth
- Women's empowerment and advocacy
- Arts and entertainment
- Poverty relief
- Sponsorship and refugee resettlement

Their extensive experiences and long-standing commitments to community building have been crucial to FOCAS's current position.

➤ Vital Projects

1. Tutoring and Mentoring of school children.
2. Out of School Summer Activities/summer camp
3. Senior support services
4. Adult English Language Classes
5. Food Hampers in partnership with the Edmonton Food Bank
6. Sponsorship and resettlement program.
7. Youth training and employment / Canada Summer Job

Our Impact



► Student Achievement

On September 4, 2017, we launched a tutoring program for 20 students ranging from Grade 4 to Grade 9. At the outset, only one student had achieved a grade of “B” in English Language Arts (ELA), while the remaining students had a grade of “C.” This reflected a common challenge faced by many immigrant children across Canada. Determined to make a difference, we worked diligently over the years. Today, after five and a half years, we are proud to report that 90% of our students now achieve a grade of “B” or higher in ELA. Additionally, many of our students have been recognized on the honor roll for the past two years.

In addition to academic support, we are committed to creating job opportunities for youth through programs like Canada Summer Jobs and Youth Employment. Over the past three years, FOCAS has hired more than 20 students for roles such as Early Childhood Educator, Administrative Assistant, Youth Engagement Worker, and Youth Sports Worker. These positions not only provide valuable work experience but also support our Out-of-School Summer Activity Program.

➤ Child and Parent Relationships



We inspire children to develop self-confidence, motivation, energy, and determination to overcome challenges and grow into confident individuals capable of shaping their futures. By collaborating closely with parents, we provide proper guidance and monitoring to help children achieve greater academic and social success.



Our efforts encourage children to excel in the classroom while fostering leadership skills that prepare them for broader opportunities. Parents notice significant positive changes in their children, recognizing the impact of our work. They appreciate how academic success contributes not only to their children's education but also to their overall social well-being.

➤ Sponsorship

As Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) we are able to extend support and advocacy to refugees most in need. We are able to provide pathways through private sponsorship and resettlement programs. In the last four years we have sponsored more than 675 refugees and more than 200 have arrived in Canada. The service will continue with increments every year. We offer this service in collaboration with refugee families, relatives, and friends as well as the constituent groups who share the responsibilities of meaningfully resettling these newcomers.

➤ Tackling Food Insecurity

One of the key initiatives launched by FOCAS in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was providing food hampers to support communities in need. Through the Canada Emergency Fund for COVID-19, we distributed food hampers to over 3,000 individuals over a period of 16 months, making a significant impact during the early stages of the pandemic.

Thanks to an ongoing partnership with the Edmonton Food Bank, we have continued to offer bi-weekly access to food hampers. This initiative has provided vital support to vulnerable community members from diverse ethnic backgrounds, enabling them to collect essential food items for their families.

➤ Computer Literacy

In today's world, computer skills are essential for success. At FOCAS, we provide digital literacy training to equip newcomers with the skills they need to navigate daily life and seize employment opportunities. By fostering these critical skills, we empower individuals to adapt, grow, and thrive in a digitally driven world.

Through our programs, we witness firsthand how newcomers and refugees quickly adapt to using computers while navigating the socio-economic and political landscape of their new country. As their computer proficiency grows, so does their confidence, leading to positive changes in their attitudes, behaviors, emotions, and motivations.

We are dedicated to making a meaningful impact on our communities through education, culture, entertainment, and fostering a mindset of positive thinking.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we provided more than 125 children in our community with Chromebooks to support their online learning. Additionally, we maintain a supply of over 50 computers and Chromebooks, which are available for students to use during tutoring sessions and for our clients to access for schoolwork and other needs.



➤ Community Media Studio

One of the key challenges facing our community is a lack of accessible information about how to integrate into the new communities where they have settled. Due to low literacy levels and language barriers, many newcomers from East Africa tend to rely on familiar networks and remain within their comfort zones. While bonding with others from their cultural, traditional, and religious backgrounds provides a sense of connection and belonging, it can also lead to a scarcity mindset. This mindset often prioritizes quick solutions to settlement challenges rather than embracing the learning and adaptation needed for successful integration.

To address this issue, FOCAS is launching a media program designed to dispel misconceptions and provide newcomers with the information they need to move from merely surviving to truly thriving. The program will feature policymakers, scholars from diverse backgrounds, community leaders, successful role models from East African communities, and other trusted sources.

Through this initiative, newcomers will gain a clearer understanding of Canadian expectations regarding education, healthcare, employment, and entrepreneurship. By hearing from individuals who have successfully navigated the challenges of immigration, participants will be inspired and equipped with practical knowledge to help them integrate and achieve their goals in Canada.



➤ Youth Training And Employment

We believe that quality education and training are foundational to the success of our youth. Academic achievement not only paves the way for a brighter future but also helps prevent youth from becoming involved in harmful activities such as drug use, violence, and crime. Immigrant youth, in particular, face unique challenges and are at greater risk for such behaviors. By equipping them with the necessary tools for success and fostering relationships with positive mentors, we are helping them grow into healthy, well-educated, and responsible citizens of the future.

Collaboration with parents is essential for the success of children and youth. Our mandate includes raising awareness among parents to help them better understand how they can support their children in achieving academic success.

Advancing education involves creating opportunities to enhance school performance, reduce risky behaviors, decrease dropout rates, and promote a structured and safe learning environment. We work to bridge the gap between students, parents, and school administrators, ensuring a cohesive support system that empowers students to thrive.



➤ Women's Empowerment

Newcomer women are often among the most disadvantaged members of society. Many face challenges rooted in the cultural norms they bring with them to Canada, having spent much of their lives confined to domestic roles. This can leave them with little motivation or support to challenge the oppression that may exist within their cultural frameworks. While a few are leading the way toward change, many still struggle to engage in public life, pursue employment, or achieve self-reliance.

Our organization is dedicated to addressing these challenges, helping immigrant women embrace public roles, learn self-reliance, and take control of their destinies.

This program has sparked significant interest within both newcomer and mainstream Canadian communities, fostering meaningful exchanges of experiences and mutual learning. Volunteer women run the program entirely, showcasing the power of collective action.



Empowering women and youth is crucial for societal progress. An empowered woman not only reduces gender disparities but also promotes equality between men and women in society. At FOCAS, we believe that motivation and support can empower individuals to take charge of their lives.

To this end, FOCAS encourages women to pursue formal education and vocational training, helping them realize their potential and achieve their dreams.

➤ Employment Connection

Newcomers may have to take on three entry-level jobs just to make ends meet. Despite their hard work, many remain in poverty and cannot get beyond survival jobs. Without the time, head space and resources to develop upward mobility skills, or to know how to articulate the abilities they do have, newcomers remain at a distinct socio economic disadvantage.

FOCAS is committed to addressing these challenges. We connect qualified individuals from diverse backgrounds with employers, helping them navigate the job market and access meaningful employment opportunities.

Our vision is to contribute to an inclusive workforce that reflects the diversity, skills, and experiences of Canada's newcomer population.

➤ English Language Proficiency Program

Many members of the communities we serve come from countries where English is not widely spoken. Even in places where English is part of the education system, graduates often lack practical proficiency in the language, even after completing university. Additionally, many newcomer adults have had little or no formal education and are unable to read or write.

Many of these individuals arrive in Canada after enduring prolonged mental and emotional challenges in refugee camps. Once here, they often need counseling and advice from professionals who primarily communicate in English, which adds another layer of difficulty to their resettlement.



As one of Canada's official languages and the primary medium for accessing services, employment, and integration, English is critically important for newcomers. Proficiency in English is a key tool for effective resettlement and participation in Canadian society.

Recognizing this, offering English language instruction is one of our top priorities. We currently provide basic language skills to help newcomers navigate the challenges of early resettlement. In the future, we aim to expand these services to include intermediate and advanced courses, enabling even greater opportunities for integration and success.

➤ Application & Translation

FOCAS provides assistance with a variety of applications and services to meet the daily needs of newcomers who may face language barriers or lack familiarity with Canadian systems. Some of the key application services we offer include support with passport renewals, Permanent Residence (PR) card applications, business incorporation, job applications, and completing online forms.



To further assist newcomers, FOCAS has a team of multilingual and certified volunteer translators and staff. We offer translation and interpretation services, including document translation and in-person or remote interpretation for government offices and other civil service organizations. Our goal is to bridge the communication gap and help newcomers navigate essential services with confidence.



➤ Mental Health

Within African communities, mental health issues are often viewed as taboo, and there is a strong stigma attached to them. A common saying is, "A person affected by mental health can only temporarily improve, but is never truly cured." This belief makes it difficult for our members to openly acknowledge their mental health struggles or seek professional help.

At FOCAS, we recognize that mental health is a critical issue that requires more attention within our community. We are committed to addressing this challenge and providing victims with access to immediate professional support. By raising cultural awareness around trauma and mental health, we aim to create an environment where community members feel comfortable seeking the help they need to heal and thrive.



➤ Seniors Services

Many of our seniors face loneliness and isolation, having endured significant pain, loss, and suffering on their journey to Canada. As a result, they often struggle with stress, depression, and various physical and mental health challenges. Communication barriers also present a major obstacle for them.

In response, we are working to establish a center where seniors can maintain daily routines that mirror those from their home countries. Currently, we offer a Saturday get-together program, which includes activities such as playing cultural games, enjoying coffee time together, sharing cultural traditions with youth, and participating in traditional and religious rituals. These activities provide valuable opportunities for seniors to socialize, stay connected with others, and engage with different age groups across cultural communities.

➤ Oro-Canadian Art & Cultural Remaking

FOCAS believes art can play an important role in empowering communities to be proud of their culture, celebrate where they came from, as well as bridge gaps between their heritage culture and new culture.

Music and art can make newcomers feel at home in their new country and help the new country understand the newcomers more. We also work to remix the traditional music and dance of Oromo culture with other cultures to share ways of making music, art and dance. Visual arts projects help our members depict the difficult journeys they and their parents have experience

At FOCAS we strive to create a cultural and socially sensitive environment where newcomers can access all the services they need in one convenient place, within the comfort of their known culture and heritage. We align language and computer instruction with traditional and conventional healing and help newcomers create friendships across cultures. Our staff and volunteers know first hand the difficulties of newcomers, but are in a position to provide not only one on one help, but a system within which we can all grow and learn together.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Our Partners and Funders



Partnership and collaboration are essential to community services, and FOCAS relies heavily on volunteers and partners who contribute in many meaningful ways. Our local and national funders are crucial to the ongoing existence of FOCAS and the quality of the services we provide. Key local funders and partners include the Edmonton Community Foundation, the City of Edmonton, the Alberta Government (CIP), the Stollery Foundation, the Butler Family Foundation, Reach Edmonton, Basically Babies, and the Edmonton Food Bank.

On the national level, we would like to acknowledge Employment and Social Development Canada for initiating the Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative (SBCCI). FOCAS has been consistently funded by SBCCI intermediary organizations such as Tropicana Community Services, Black Business Initiative (BBI), and the African Centre.

We also extend our appreciation to our other funders and partners, including Second Harvest, Horizon Seniors, Action for Health Communities, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, CRRF, TELUS Foundation, Africa Centre, Community Initiatives Action for Healthy Communities, Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, Alberta Council for Global Cooperation, TD Ready Commitment, Foundation for Black Communities, and the Canadian Red Cross.

To all our funders and partners, we offer our heartfelt thanks for your support!



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