

“

They have taken my home  
but they can't take my future.  
As refugees flee persecution  
and conflict, they lose their  
home and all that this entails  
– family, friends, work,  
community and culture.

([www.unhcr.ca](http://www.unhcr.ca))







# ***THE FIRST DOOR:*** **FINDING HOME IN A NEW PLACE**

# 02

## **WHAT IS HOME?**

What is the first place you would call home? Is home a place? A person? How has your idea of home changed over time? Have you ever had to leave home? Was it your decision? Sharing stories about home is a good starting place to begin a creative project. Most of us have stories about home – a past or present home, a home we were forced to leave, a home we want to create. Home is a common denominator that connects us to each other and taps into what matters to each of us.





# TELL ME A STORY: DIGITAL STORYTELLING WORKSHOPS AT MAISON HAIDAR, A RESIDENCE FOR REFUGEES

*Michele Luchs and Liz Miller*

## OVERVIEW

Over the course of a year, Mapping Memories collaborated with Maison Haidar, a residence for newly arrived refugee claimants. Together with the Canadian Council for Refugees and student volunteers, we conducted weekend workshops in mapping, digital storytelling, and still photography involving over 200 young men. In addition to the workshops, we created *The First Door*, a documentary that profiles Coordinator Sylvain Thibault along with three remarkable individuals who have passed through Maison Haidar upon arrival in Montreal.

*Maison Haidar is part of Project Refuge, a program in Montreal that provides a secure residence and emotional support to men who have fled traumatic situations in their home countries. In operation for twenty years, Project Refuge is one of many programs coordinated by the Montreal City Mission, an organization that offers a wide range of services for asylum seekers. Project Refuge also helps newcomers to identify individuals, networks, and resources to carry them through the challenging process of integration.*



## LEADING WORKSHOPS AT A REFUGEE RESIDENCE

Our digital story and photography workshop, *Tell Me a Story*, was one of a series that Project Refuge Coordinator, Sylvain Thibault, organized for both newcomers and former residents of Maison Haidar. The workshops covered subjects ranging from the history of social movements in Montreal to finding employment, and they are among the many activities Sylvain has coordinated to develop peer networks and to help individuals establish themselves in a new home, Montreal.

When Sylvain first approached Mapping Memories to be a part of his workshop series, we were eager to collaborate. While our projects had been directed toward youth, Project Refuge offered us a chance to work in an intergenerational context without the rigors of recruiting, since Sylvain had a ready-made group. Together we wanted to offer opportunities for these men to share stories and in doing so, to strengthen their relationships with each other.

We also wanted to see if the work produced might eventually reach a larger public, addressing systemic problems in the immigration system or countering stereotypes about refugees. Sylvain had expressed his frustration that the public was insensitive to changes around immigration policy and that, too often, news stories framed individuals as victims instead of focusing on how they were adapting to a new place.

Participatory media projects offer an opportunity to address the gap between mass media representations and lived experiences, since

individuals have a chance to frame their own stories. But would individuals who had just arrived want to be involved in a project like this? Was it too soon, given that most of them had only been in Montreal for a few weeks?

We began the workshops with these concerns, and so to guide our process we came up with a set of questions: How will this workshop benefit the individuals? How can we ensure that newcomers are ready to share their stories? Can the project also benefit a larger public? What is the balance between a meaningful process and a polished media project that can reach a larger audience?

## KEY FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP

Over the years we have discovered a number of key factors that must be in place for a workshop to be successful. One factor is to use the technology that works best within a given context. In this case, we wanted to ensure the greatest participation possible within a limited time frame. Given these constraints, cameras, pens, and paper were the most appropriate tools to lead these workshops.

Another key principle we have discovered is the importance of developing media projects over time. When we first began planning with Sylvain, our hope was to work with a small group over four or five sessions. We intended to move from initial activities like photography to digital mapping, peer video interviews, and more. We quickly realized that this would not be possible due to the transitional nature of the shelter. Because residents couldn't stay at the centre

for more than three weeks, Sylvain simply could not guarantee ongoing participation of individuals from one workshop to the next.

Instead of a series, our workshop became a one-time session with its own unique challenges. On a practical pedagogical level, for example, it was difficult to plan a workshop without knowing the language and literacy needs of a group, or even the number of individuals who might show up each week. An additional concern was how to ensure 'shared ownership' of a product created in the workshop if we might never meet these individuals again. The photo essays would stay at the residence for others to appreciate, but was that enough? With full acknowledgement that participatory media projects are most effective when they evolve over time, we came to view the workshops as a first step in our collaboration with Sylvain.

In addition to providing the space and recruiting past and present residents for the workshops, Sylvain organized social work student volunteers to help out during the sessions, along with our partner Colleen French of the Canadian Council for Refugees. Sylvain and the co-facilitators participated enthusiastically in the activities and helped lead the workshops. Most importantly, Sylvain was a visible support person for every individual in the room, providing what we called the 'trust factor' in the equation.

The presence of a key individual in whom participants trust is pivotal to the success of a participatory media project. In fact, of all the factors needed for a successful workshop, the 'trust factor' is the most essential.

## FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP

- » *Clear objectives*
- » *Engaging and organized facilitation that makes all participants feel comfortable*
- » *Realistic expectations with regard to time*
- » *Stimulating activities adjusted to the needs of participants*
- » *Activities that allow participants to work together*
- » *An inviting space with snacks and drinks available*
- » *Technology that has been tested in advance*
- » *Adequate materials (e.g., handouts, equipment, paper, cameras, etc.)*

## MAPPING A MEMORY EXERCISE

We organized the one-day workshops into two main exercises: mapping and photo-stories. In the first part, participants individually drew personal maps with magic markers on 11"x17" paper about a place they called home or about their journey to Montreal. They used the maps as a backdrop to share the stories with the rest of the group, which often included up to forty participants coming from Rwanda, Congo, Afghanistan, Colombia, and other countries.

Before beginning the activity, we presented models of maps from past sessions to show examples of what others had done during the mapping exercise. We explained that after drawing their map, they should write details to help readers imagine the space: recurrent sounds (birds chirping, or the sound of children playing),

colours that stood out, smells they remembered, and so on. We also asked them to write their names and countries of origin on their maps, unless they preferred to remain anonymous, which was also fine.

one small room. The images were compelling and served as visual cues for the speakers as they shared their stories with the group. The drawings were also catalysts for the audience to ask follow-up questions.

*These are the images in my head thinking about the genocide of our community.*

*I remember my house that stayed empty after the genocide.*

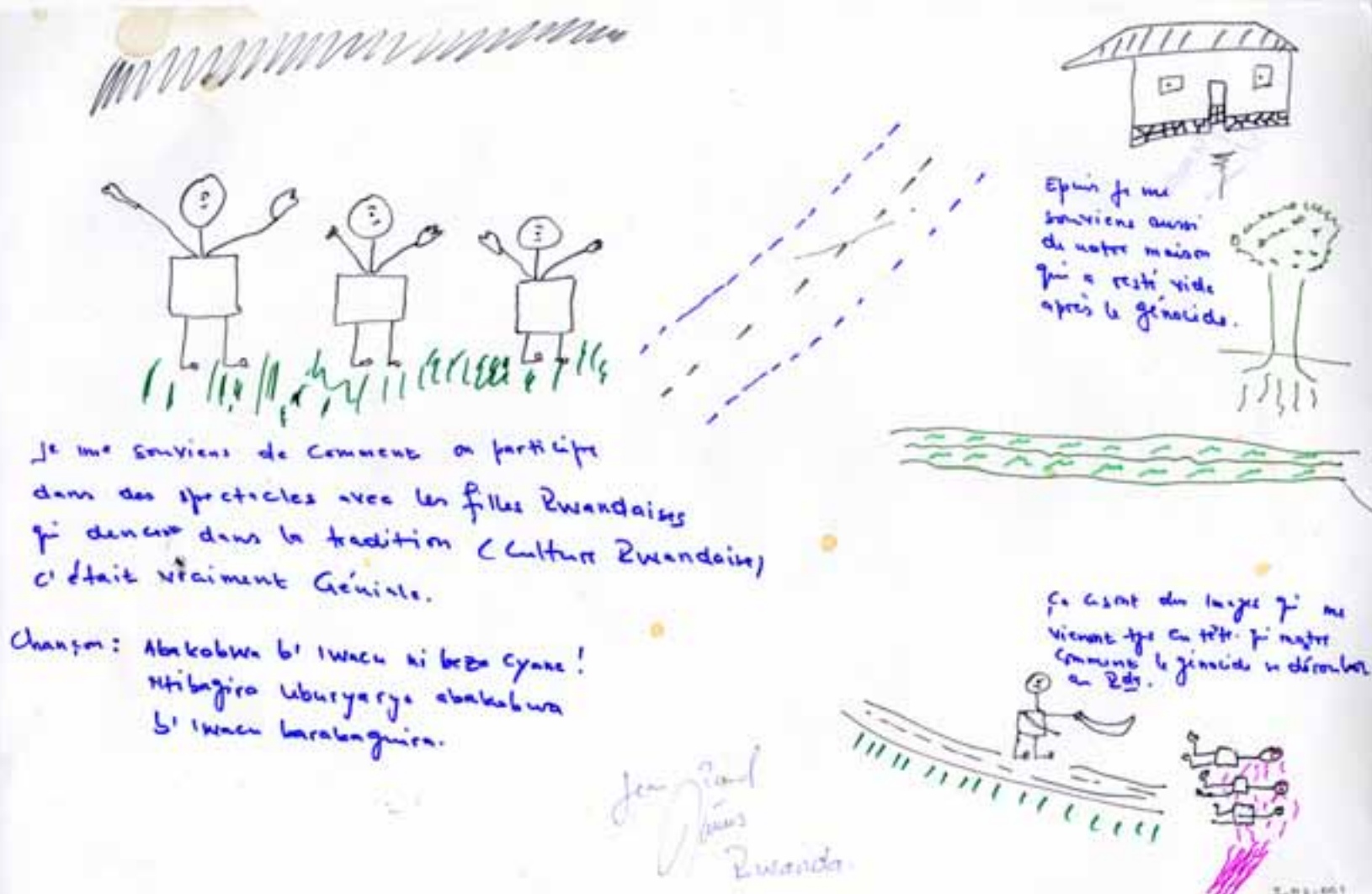
*I also remember the cultural events and young girls dancing.*

*Translation from map, below:*

Although the men seemed uncomfortable initially with a drawing exercise, once they began, the room warmed up with fully engaged participants. The room became especially lively while sharing the stories in groups of eight to ten. As more participants around the table spoke, the stories grew more intricate, spurred on by questions from other participants, nodding heads and attentive eyes. The maps were useful for communicating across cultural and language barriers, which was essential given how many languages we were negotiating in

The stories and maps had common elements. Many participants drew places where they felt a sense of peace. In some of the maps, nature played a strong role, with paths through the woods on the way to school, fishing and swimming in the sea, and pastoral scenes with wild bursts of colour. But not all of the maps depicted pleasant memories (see examples below).

What the participants also had in common was a lived experience of dislocation caused by persecution or the threat of violence. For example,





one young man from Rwanda drew a village scene split into three parts: his family's home, a community event with dancers in traditional costumes, and in the corner, his three dead brothers lying side by side. In maps of their journeys to Montreal, criss-crossed lines revealed hiding places and arduous paths over land and water before arriving in the city. It had taken some participants years to get to Montreal, and in many cases we were meeting them only days after their arrival.

Over time, we gleaned insights on how to best facilitate the group discussions with the limited time we had with the men. There was a fragile balance between respecting someone's privacy and providing a collective space for participants

to share a part of themselves. To strike this balance in our workshops, we found it helpful to focus discussions on the resources participants had discovered in their first few days or weeks in the city to help them adjust. Instead of emphasizing the pain of the recent past, we facilitated discussions around strategies of survival. We also had a list of psychological services, developed by the Life Stories Project, to which we could direct participants if overwhelming emotional issues surfaced within the workshop. And while the list was important to have on hand, what was most important was to have Sylvain in the room, as someone who the participants knew and trusted and who would be around after the workshops.





## A PHOTO STORY IN FOUR FRAMES



### PowerPoint on Composition

During the second part of the workshop, participants worked in groups of three to create photo stories. The groups were organized primarily by language. The idea was to find a collective story about the departure from their country or arrival in Montreal. Before beginning the activity, we shared a PowerPoint about basic photo composition and showed models of photo stories created in past workshops. Using their maps as a starting point, groups would decide on a story to tell together.

A key part of the production process was to provide time for the small groups to brainstorm ideas. This part of the workshop helped participants realize how much they had in common as they shared and discussed story ideas. By creating a new story based on their shared experiences or by emphasizing one of the stories told in the small groups, the collective

aspect took some of the burden away from those who were hesitant to take their story public.

After deciding on one story idea, they would storyboard their ideas by drafting the scale and perspective they hoped to capture with the photographs. Storyboarding is a technique primarily used by filmmakers and more recently by writers and other artists to visualize a project. Storyboarding helped our groups to negotiate a collective vision and see if the proposed images would work together. Storyboarding also allowed us as facilitators to see if the participants had grasped the concepts introduced in the composition presentation.

The next production step was taking the photographs sketched out in the storyboards. We made ourselves available to help with photo composition techniques and to offer creative consultations. Towards the end of the workshop, each group downloaded and organized their

## STORYBOARDS

- » A storyboard is a mock up of your story. It helps you organize your thoughts and consider how a series of photos or video shots will look together.
- » Fold a blank paper into four squares and open it. Try imagining the first or last shot and draw it (using stick figures). How do you want to introduce the story? What is the last photo? What do you want your audience to walk away with?
- » Keep in mind that it's not important how well you draw but how well you communicate your vision to others.
- » Consider important details, like who is present in each frame, where is it shot, is the frame a close up or long shot and what is in the foreground? Background?
- » Remember you only have four frames, so every shot is important.
- » Make sure to vary your shots so that your work is more interesting for your audience.
- » Only use the camera once you have completed your storyboard.
- » Use the storyboard as a reference point during the shoot, but leave room for improvisation.

photos on a computer. They chose the best four photos for their story, and we projected each story on the wall. As group members shared the story behind the photos, the projects became even more emotionally compelling. We were all surprised at how effective the finished pieces were in communicating a mood, and at how the photos seemed to move the group to a new place of intimacy.

The collective stories addressed common themes: leaving home, arrival, finding shelter, memories

from home, hope, and integrating into a new city. Humour was a part of many stories; participants recounted experiences of losing their way in the metro system or feeling lost inside huge winter jackets, as they faced their first cold winter season. Other stories told of the pain and anger from being in detention, or worries about being accepted by Canadian immigration authorities. Simple gestures were especially effective. For example, in one essay a man with closed eyes lovingly held a winter coat given

**A Difficult Goodbye**  
photo-essay by  
workshop participants







to him to keep him warm by his wife whom he had left behind. The gesture spoke to his desire to hold onto her presence in his new life.

Many of the photo stories also included arrivals at the Maison Haidar residence. Smiling faces, hands shaking, hands on shoulders, and photos of groups eating meals around tables were common endings to these stories. The stories were yet another catalyst for discovering commonalities, as the men shared the pain of having left people behind (spouses, children, parents). They also acknowledged their anxieties about dealing with upcoming challenges, such as finding housing and employment as well as facing the expectations of extended family members in their countries of origin who they feared they might disappoint.

## VALUABLE LESSONS

With each workshop we gained clarity on the elements that led to the best workshops. For example, taking the time to fully explain the production process and to share and discuss photos was key to the creation of strong photo projects. We learned this the hard way during one workshop when we were short on time. We hadn't shown enough examples of past projects or properly shown the participants how to use the cameras. And, instead of having participants work collaboratively, we asked them to work individually and take photos to add to their map drawings. We asked them to take a variety of shots and suggested that their photos could include such things as scars that had interesting stories or special objects they had brought with them from their country of origin.



**Keeping Home Close to Me** photo-essay by workshop participants

As each man returned, we noticed that the photos were a series of vague, out-of-focus shots of scars and other items that were impossible to identify. Because of our rushed explanations, participants had not been clear on what they needed to do. We had introduced the solo portrait/object exercise because we hoped that connecting the map to an individual portrait would strengthen the potential for an outside audience to connect to that drawing. Yet what we realized was that the collaborative process had offered an invaluable opportunity for the participants to work together. Through collaboration, participants became more forthcoming and the participants inspired each other to take creative risks. We had inadvertently cut out this key component.

## **SAFETY AND CONSENT**

Within this workshop, ensuring participants' safety and consent was of utmost concern. For example, we encouraged participants who did not want to appear in photographs to become their group's photographer. If we were working with individuals such as unaccompanied minors, we had them work together with a more experienced facilitator so that their stories could be handled more carefully. Explaining our objectives and securing consent across languages was an ongoing challenge, but we did slowly improve our methods over time. For example, to help participants grasp where the maps and photo essays might be shared, we added very specific categories on the written consent form: "I agree to allow my map/photo story to be: 1) shown on the walls of the shelter to let future newcomers know they are not alone; 2) shared with educators,

policymakers, and academics working to improve the circumstances of individuals impacted by a refugee experience; or/and 3) included on the Mapping Memories website to create greater understanding for individuals who could benefit from either the method or the results of the work."

For each category, we attached a why statement or goal, i.e. "to let future participants know they are not alone." At the beginning of the workshop we shared a PowerPoint presentation to complement the written consent form and to lay out our categories in a visual manner. At the end of the workshop, we revisited the written consent forms again to confirm where participants wanted to share their work. The process went more smoothly once we had mounted several photo essays on the walls of the residence so that participants could immediately understand how the resulting work would be displayed. Most participants were also interested in sharing their work with educators and advocates.

For many of the participants, the most complex decision was whether to have their images included on the website. Even presenting that option compromised some participants' willingness to take part in the workshop. The Internet is a complex venue because of its potential risks around ensuring safety, especially for individuals fleeing repression who have left family and friends behind. Because we did not have the time to fully engage with participants about these risks during our one-day workshop, we had to eliminate the Internet as a possible venue for sharing their work. It was too much of an unknown and too overwhelming for them to make such a decision so quickly.



## IT'S ALL CONNECTED

*Sylvain used to manage three residences with 46 beds. Two have been shut down. Why are cut-backs in staff and services taking place at Montreal residences like the YMCA and Project Refuge? Advocates explain this as the result of new measures at the federal level intended to curb the influx of refugees. One measure, called the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement, states that Canada can turn away many of the individuals seeking asylum who come through the United States. There are also new visa requirements for some individuals seeking entry into Canada. These policy shifts are part of larger global trends referred to as a "Shrinking Protection Space." What is shrinking is funding for humanitarian work and the willingness and ability to address the protection of refugees. Fewer resources make it harder to meet our international obligations to protect refugees.*

### LEARN MORE:

- » *Refugee and Immigrants Glossary:*  
[www.ccrweb.ca/en/glossary](http://www.ccrweb.ca/en/glossary)
- » *Canada's Commitments to Refugees:*  
[www.ccrweb.ca/en/bulletin/09/07/14](http://www.ccrweb.ca/en/bulletin/09/07/14)
- » *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:* [www.unicef.org/crc](http://www.unicef.org/crc)
- » *UN Convention on the Status of Refugees:* [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)
- » *"Who is a Refugee?" presentation:*  
[www.ccrweb.ca/en/public\\_education](http://www.ccrweb.ca/en/public_education)

## SHARING THE WORK WITH THE PUBLIC

Our next challenge was to determine how we might share the results with a larger audience, while respecting the terms of consent we had agreed upon with the participants. Mid-way through our workshops, we created a photo book of the maps, photo essays, and images of the production process. With the book, the project became real. Sylvain was thrilled to have a product he could show to partners and funders. Returning participants were excited to see their work in print.

We also had the opportunity to share the book with several hundred teachers at a series of English Language Arts workshops around Quebec. Teachers found the book useful as a model of a project they could use with their students. At the same time, they had a series of questions about the people in the photos, and they wanted to know more about the backstories. Where were they from? Why had they come to Montreal? As we recounted stories that had emerged in the workshops, the teachers were so moved that many asked for copies of the book and wanted more information about refugees in Canada.

This experience helped us to identify the primary shortcoming of that initial publication, which was a lack of context. We knew that the personal maps and photo essays were powerful, but this feedback confirmed that the maps and photos could not stand on their own; future audiences would also want more context. On another occasion, we used the book as an opening exercise at an international conference, "Remembering



*images from "Remembering War, Genocide, and Other Human Rights Violations" conference*



War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations: Oral History, New Media and the Arts” at Concordia University, where we invited small groups to discuss the themes being communicated through different photo essays. There, we used the ‘lack of context’ to our advantage, as a technique to get the groups thinking about the intentions behind each story. Following the exercise, we invited our collaborators, Colleen French from the Canadian Council for Refugees and Sylvain Thibault, Project Refuge Coordinator, to fill in the gaps by discussing the larger context of immigration and refugee policies in Canada.

Because we hoped to use the results of the workshops to promote dialogue, we started to ask ourselves, what additional information would help the work stand on its own and make it useful in the areas of education, policy, and service? We realized that the story of the shelter itself was an important part of the context.

When we began the workshops, Sylvain was managing three residences with 46 occupied beds and our workshops were packed. One year later, as a result of the government’s change in immigration policy, Sylvain was forced to close two of the three shelters, and three of the four employees were laid off. In the last year, he has been fighting to keep this last remaining residence open. Sylvain expressed his concern that without residences to serve this vulnerable group, refugees would end up in homeless shelters as they did twenty years ago, without adequate support and without a chance to establish peer networks.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM: *THE FIRST DOOR*

Because of its precarious status, and because Project Refuge was approaching its twenty-year anniversary, Sylvain worked with us to create a short documentary, involving past residents and some of the more engaged workshop participants in the production. One of the goals in making the documentary was to address common stereotypes about refugees, as well as to offer intimate portraits of past residents to show that they had not only adapted to their new home, but were making a contribution to Quebec society.

The finished film, *The First Door*, profiles three individuals who benefited from Maison Haidar. It also illustrates the specific strategies Sylvain uses to “help newcomers help themselves.” We have shared the documentary with a network of shelter coordinators from around Canada and with general audiences in Montreal who found the film useful for different reasons.

Network coordinators used the film to brainstorm how to improve services for this population. At other screenings audience members discussed how the film opened their eyes to how difficult it is to go through the refugee process, and the tenacity it takes to integrate into the fabric of Montreal.



*Find The First Door film on the Mapping Memories DVD.*





## **THE FIRST DOOR** (dir. Liz Miller and Quentin Rameau, 23 minutes, 2010)

*This documentary explores the crucial role played by the Maison Haidar residence in helping refugees adapt to Montreal. Through the perspective of Sylvain Thibault, the passionate Project Refuge Coordinator, and three former residents, this film provides an insider's perspective on the challenges refugees face when resettling. By following Sylvain as he supports residents dealing with trauma, language differences, racism, and homophobia, the viewer witnesses how Project Refuge offers much more than a safe place to sleep.*



## ALFREDO LOMBISI, CABINDA



### Excerpt from *The First Door*

My father is a "Zonzi" which means "talker." I am like him. I am someone who tries to build peace around me but there are places where peace is not always welcome... *Radio Refuge* is where I found my place when I arrived in Quebec. I have been here for four years. *Radio Refuge* is like my home. It allows me to express myself, to share my opinions, and this is really important for me.



Alfredo is a former resident of Project Refuge and is featured in *The First Door* documentary. He took part in several of the *Tell Me a Story* workshops. He is one of the co-founders of *Ici Radio Refuge*, a weekly one-hour collaborative community radio program. The program is hosted by a different refugee advocacy group each month.

## ALBERTO IGLESIAS, MEXICO



I remember my first day in Montreal. It was cold. I didn't know what was going on. They said you will go to a place where you will feel at home. I arrived at Project Refuge. I was nervous and I asked myself "where am I, what am I doing here?" When you arrive you have so many fears.

Alfredo opened the door to welcome me. After only three days things got easier. I remember sitting in the kitchen and I was cutting pizza to prepare lunch. Sylvain asked me to prepare a slice for the newcomer. It was terrific. I could now help someone else feel at home. This place extended a hand when I needed it most.



Alberto, a former resident of Project Refuge, took part in the *Tell Me a Story* workshops, and is featured in *The First Door* documentary. Alberto is very active in his community. When he is not working as a pastry chef, he volunteers with senior citizens and has stayed involved with Project Refuge.



## REFLECTIONS

What became increasingly clear working at Maison Haidar was that telling a personal story could be an empowering experience, but it could also be an experience that reinforced isolation, depending on the context in which that story was told. One individual explained, “people often ask you where you are from, but they are less interested in the story behind the answer. And because we are asked this so often, you come to understand the questions as ‘what are you doing here? Do you belong?’”

To ensure respect for an individual sharing a difficult story, Sylvain’s advice to all volunteers working at the residence was, “before asking a question, ask yourself ‘is this about personal curiosity or for the person’s well being?’” It was important to follow Sylvain’s advice in our workshops. Over

things (abstract or physical) they brought with them, participants were instead able to acknowledge each other’s areas of strength and tenacity in the face of difficult times.

The privilege of redoing the workshop several times allowed us to reflect, refine activities, and bring a greater sensitivity to workshop facilitation. However, the results of the one-day workshop were evocative snapshots rather than in-depth, reflective stories.

One of our principles in participatory projects was to ensure that participants are included at every step of the process, including distribution. The transitory nature of the residence and the brevity of the workshops simply did not make this possible. While we were thrilled to have had the chance to share the book with hundreds of



*One of the characteristics of media representation is that it captures and freezes a particular moment in people’s lives, while their stories continue to change and develop.*

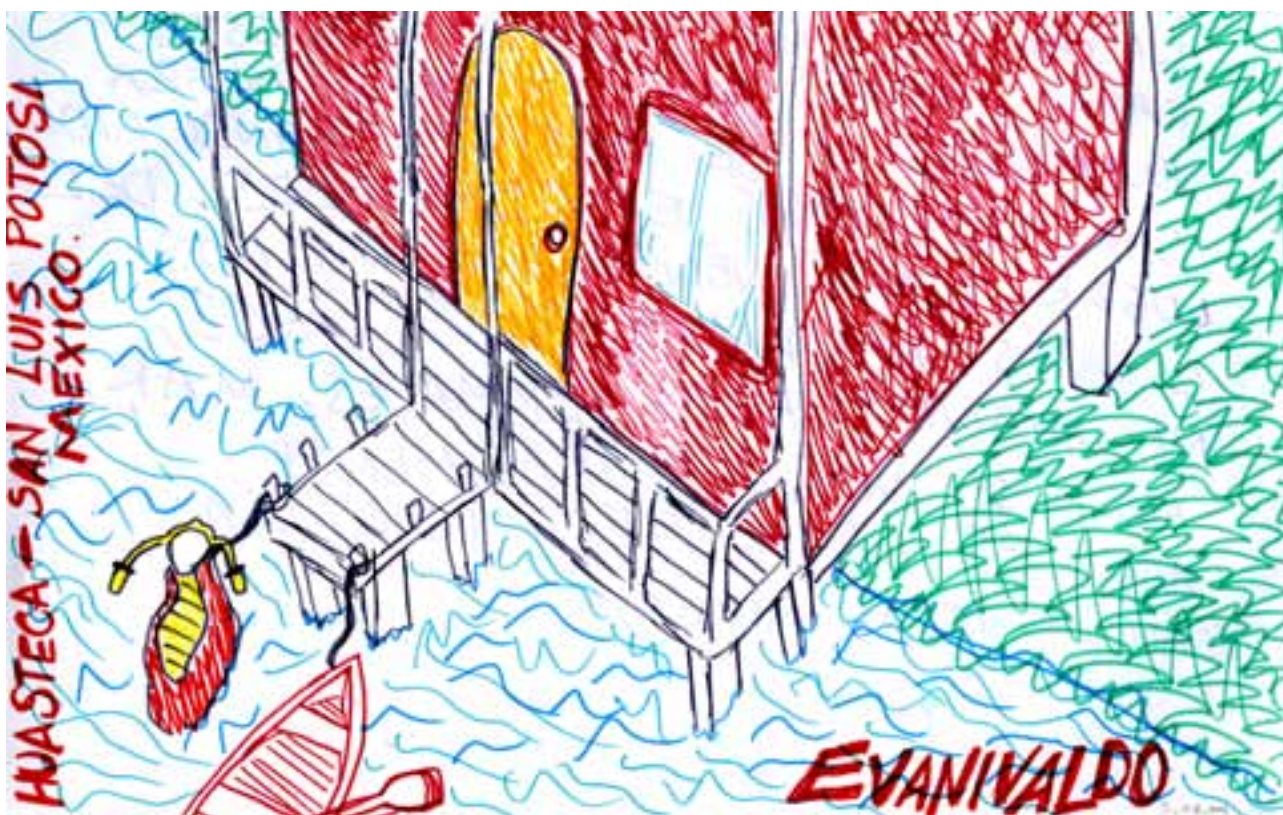
Liz Miller and Michele Luchs

time, we learned how to structure activities and frame the discussion questions in ways that reinforced a sense of belonging amongst the group, instead of allowing our inherent curiosity or inadvertent insensitivity to re-open fresh wounds.

For example, a seemingly innocent activity – asking participants to share three things they left behind – raised emotions that were difficult to address in the context of a short workshop. By shifting the request to share three

teachers, the project would have been much more meaningful for the audience had we been able to include the storytellers in the presentations. In addition, the participants would have had the chance to see how their stories impacted an audience.

We discovered that participants’ needs to make their stories public changed over time. When they first arrived, the newcomers in our workshops were eager to unpack what they had experienced in their home countries or



in the process of arriving in Canada. But as one former resident explained, this need changed over time: "Sometimes people want to know why you had to leave, what happened to you, and you don't want to share. At first I didn't mind, but now I want to share less. My story has become very intimate to me..."

One of the characteristics of media representation is that it captures and freezes a particular moment in people's lives, while their stories continue to change and develop. The maps and photo essays created in the workshop were only 'snapshots' of individuals in transition. Though we had worked to restore the balance of who was telling the story, we were not able to facilitate more reflective and time-based personal expressions. Greater reflection would have been beneficial for the participants to communicate how they continued to adapt to their new surroundings, and would have

helped audiences understand this transition as a gradual process.

Nonetheless, we were able to put many things in place for this workshop: a safe space for participant expression; strong facilitation that improved over time; technology that didn't get in the way; activities that were adapted to the participants' needs; and, importantly, a conviction that the workshops were fulfilling a need expressed by our partner, Sylvain.

The documentary permitted a means to compensate for some of the shortcomings of the one-day workshops, and to balance our goals of combining a meaningful process with a product that could help a general audience better understand the challenges that refugees experience in their integration to Canada. But if we were to do it again, we would certainly want to find a way to bring more continuity into the equation.



## AYANDA DUBE, Zimbabwe



*Ayanda Dube left his home in Zimbabwe and arrived in Montreal as an unaccompanied minor at 18 years old. He spent his first three weeks in Montreal at a residence for refugees run by the YMCA. Ayanda describes himself as a young/old Zimbabwean man. He enjoys learning about the world and contemplating how he can make a difference. He has been active with Canadian Council for Refugees*

*(CCR) for several years. Ayanda also sings in a gospel choir and is studying political science and economics at Concordia. In YUL-MTL, written for the Going Places project (see Chapter 2), Ayanda contemplates the meaning of home.*

## YUL-MTL

The beauty of living in the city of Montreal is the idea that almost no one living in Montreal is from Montreal. And because of this, we are submerged in a culture in which we are ever asking the fundamental questions – Where are you from? How long have you been here? Why are you here? These questions are the foundation of every Montreal story. YUL-MTL is my story about my journey as a refugee coming to Canada by way of Montreal.

### Chapter 1 – YUL

YUL is the International Air Traffic Association symbol for The Pierre Trudeau Airport – commonly known as the Montreal Airport.

I see YUL as a vault. Not of money, jewellery, and other valuable items, but of precious and priceless moments – beautiful, happy, and sometimes, sad. When family, friends, and lovers see each other after some time apart, it is obvious that the hugs, the kisses, the embracing, the laughing, the joy, the excitement are one hundred percent pure, raw, and unscripted.

For me, YUL is a reminder of a moment that is more somber than joyous. It is the beginning of a long and treacherous journey full of all the obstacles life throws at you. Many such stories have been told before. However, I will focus on my journey beginning with my arrival at the YUL with nothing but one piece of luggage, a ton of hope, a smile, and the belief that one day, from the seed of a few worldly possessions, I will reap success, love, and a sense of belonging.

But, before reaching this light at the end of the tunnel, I would first have to endure humiliating treatment at the hands of the airport immigration officers who practiced police-like authority – taking mug shots and detaining me in an empty room fit for a criminal. A water fountain and a bathroom were the only two things I was entitled to. After thirteen hours of waiting, I would eventually be released at 2:00 am and left to find my way into the new world. Welcome to Canada.



## Chapter 2 – The YMCA

The YMCA's mission statement describes it as a charitable organization dedicated to the development of people in spirit, mind, and body, and to the empowerment of individuals, families, and communities.

More than just the theme of a popular song by the Village People, the YMCA represents what is arguably the first home for a number of people coming into Canada as refugees. The YMCA residence welcomes approximately 2,000 refugee claimants every year. It provides a safe environment for families in the process of their new beginning in a strange land and a gateway for them to integrate into Canadian life. Through the YMCA residence, I discovered Montreal multiculturalism at its best, with people of many different nationalities bound by the same hopes and dreams. The YMCA also gave me my first experience of the warm, welcoming nature of Canadians. It



taught me that living in harmony with others is not at all a difficult task. We all were able to share our struggles, laugh at the same jokes, and help each other out. It is a community consisting of individual asylum seekers, families, workers, and volunteers.

### **Chapter 3 – Home**

After a number of years of being in Canada, I reflect – what is home? Is Canada my home or is this a temporary refuge? Have I made friends and connections that will last a lifetime? Do I have people I can call family? Did I endure those many cold winters in vain? How did I feel watching Canada take those many gold medals in the Olympics? Did I feel Canadian? What is it to be Canadian? If I have professional skills and I am forced to drive a taxi, am I Canadian or just a person living in Canada? Do I have two homes? Reasonable accommodation – am I part of the debate? Will I ever be Quebecois or am I just a Quebecker? Do I love Canada? Do I love its people? What do I love? What do I hate?

Poutine, maple syrup, bacon, canoeing, camping, skiing, the cottage, lakes, coast to coast, snow, ice, English, French, the maple leaf, O Canada, Canada, eh, bear, moose, beaver, Montreal, Quebec. What is home?

*To read the behind-the-scenes of Ayanda's story, go to Chapter 3.*



**YUL-MTL** photos by Ayanda Dube.





## 2 YEARS 2 MANY

### CREATING A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

A public service announcement (PSA) is a short radio or video spot (15, 30, or 60 seconds) that delivers a simple social message and a call to act. Making a PSA is an excellent exercise to develop media skills, to learn how persuasive texts work, and to develop texts for a real audience. PSAs can be easily used in an elementary, high school, or a university setting. In this project, Mapping Memories worked with a human rights lawyer and a class of 24 Concordia Communication students over a period of four weeks to develop two PSAs on the delays refugee claimants face while waiting for the Canadian Government to process their claims.

Our steps:

#### **Research** – understand the issue

Our first step was to invite refugee lawyer, Mitchell J. Goldberg, to visit our class and explain the issue. Following this brief, we compiled a list of follow up questions and designated a group to conduct additional research.

Questions to consider while conducting research: What stands out? Does the information confirm or conflict with your pre-existing knowledge?

#### **Determine your approach** – study the form

We began by watching sample PSAs to explore how they were made. After watching each PSA we discussed the message, the target audience, the opening and closing shots, and the visual and audio techniques utilized. *Additional examples of PSA projects can be found at [Listenup.org](http://Listenup.org).*

#### **Determine your audience** – identify your target audience

With this project, we were building a viral campaign, which uses social networks to spread the message, because the group wanted to reach young adults on the Internet who were unaware of the issue and would be moved to contact their legislators. With this in mind, we cast actors, parents, and friends whom we felt the audience would identify with. We also cast two popular young actors from the TV series *Degrassi* to help draw attention to the PSA.

#### **Clarify the message** – determine a title

Finding a title helps to clarify the message of the PSA. Our title was, 2 Years 2 Many. Another way to clarify the message is to frame the video around a central question/s. Our thematic question was, What if you had to wait up to two years for your refugee status to be determined? From there we developed a series of questions that would be relevant to the audience, such as "What if you had to wait two years to get your medical results?" A script needs to be concise and to the point. Find PSA scripts on our website.

**Plan the production** – make a production schedule

We had one month to complete the project and our class met once a week for three hours. With these constraints in mind, we designated a week each for research, script, production, and editing. Because we had three hours to shoot, we kept the production simple. We had a studio team and a field team. The first PSA was shot in our studio and each of our six actors stood against a black background and delivered a simple message. We rehearsed and set everything up the day before. For the second PSA, our field production team went to a local market, Jean Talon.

**Work with partners** – get the word out

Once we had finished the video, we shared it with refugee lawyer Mitchell Goldberg to ensure the PSA was accurate. We set up a web page, using a blog template on Wordpress, uploaded the video to YouTube, and the students wrote a press release to provide additional context. Mitchell Goldberg used his networks to get the word out and we also sent the link through our own networks, as well as through the press release.

You can watch *2 Years 2 Many* or access the script at [www.mappingmemories.ca](http://www.mappingmemories.ca).

For additional resources on making a PSA visit: [www.learnquebec.ca](http://www.learnquebec.ca).





# WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

## WHAT TO COVER

**What** – describe what you are announcing: a PSA, a bus tour, etc.

**Who** – include your organization and contact information

**Where** – include the address

**When** – make sure the day and date correspond and include time of day

## KEEP IN MIND

- » Have a strong headline or intro that is up to four lines long
- » Include a two to three line description of the group
- » Keep it short and check facts to ensure accuracy
- » Have a few people review the press release to avoid typos, correct name spellings, and verify dates and times
- » Avoid jargon, mission statements, or long sentences
- » If your event features strong visuals, let reporters know about photo ops
- » End with "###" to let readers know the release is over

## DON'T FORGET

- » Logos at the top of the page
- » "For Immediate Release" in the header
- » The date the release is being distributed
- » Contact information

## WHEN TO SEND IT

- » Mail it ten days in advance
- » Fax it five days in advance
- » Make a follow-up phone call three days in advance
- » Email it the day before
- » Emailing and calling are paramount

## RESOURCES

Spin project: [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org)

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE FOR WEB-BASED (VIRAL) PSA CAMPAIGN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Concordia Students and Actors Fight for Refugee Rights**

What if you had to wait up to two years for your refugee status to be determined? For refugees coming to Canada, this is an unfortunate reality.

Montreal, March 10th, 2009 –

Refugees coming to Canada experience lengthy delays in waiting for the Canadian Government to process their claims. The new publication, Immigration and Refugee Board's Report on Plans and Priorities, 2009-2010, warns that wait times will continue to increase dramatically over the coming years. This is why actors from *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, human rights advocates, and Communication students from Concordia University have come together to create a viral video campaign to pressure Canada's Immigration Ministry to ensure that the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada has all the resources it needs to make timely decisions.

Joining the Canadian Council for Refugees' call for sufficient appointments, *2 Years 2 Many* is a video produced to raise awareness to the general public about the challenges that Canadian refugees face. Featuring *Degrassi's* Sarah Barrable-Tishauer and Jake Goldsbie, the campaign has all the ingredients to make waves nation-wide. "It is wonderful to witness a group of 24 communication studies students taking a stand and making a contribution – it's the Concordia way," says Liz Miller, communications professor and executive producer of the project. Not only have the students heard passionate testimonies but they have also realized the impact they could have on the government's decisions.

Since 2006, the Harper government has allowed refugee judge positions to remain vacant. While the recent wave of appointments is promising, the newly published Auditor General's report makes clear the problems run deeper. A backlog of claims, combined with a politicized reappointment process affects tax payers and most importantly, affects the lives of refugees. Refugees wait lengthy periods for a hearing, resulting in uncertainty. With their lives in limbo, refugees need to know if they will be protected in Canada and if they can be reunited with family.

Visit the website [www.coms.concordia.ca/video2](http://www.coms.concordia.ca/video2) and help us make a difference.

For more information, contact [yourname@domainname.com](mailto:yourname@domainname.com)

###



# ONE-DAY STORYTELLING WORKSHOP

*We were always together there, my mother, my sister and I... if my kitchen could speak it would have many stories to tell.*



## MAPPING

**Tool box:** Pens,  
11"x17" paper, digi-  
tal still cameras  
(1 to 4 ratio), laptop,  
projector, screen,  
USB keys, card  
reader.

**Level of difficulty:**  
Beginner

**Time:**  
One-day workshop  
(4 hours)

- » Ask participants to draw a map of a place they would call home. Provide colored markers and white paper.
- » On the back of the map have the participants write their name, their country, and include: sounds, smells, and details that could make the place come alive for someone who had never been there. If individuals are uncomfortable drawing they can write a story or even share a story with a facilitator.
- » Break into small groups to discuss the drawings and the significance of what they have drawn. Ensure that there is a facilitator for each small group to identify commonalities in the stories. Ask participants to describe what they have drawn.
- » A variation of this exercise is to have participants map their journey to Canada.

## PHOTO STORY IN FOUR FRAMES

- » Present a slideshow on photo composition using the Mapping Memories PowerPoint on Composition. Discuss basic terms such as close up, medium shot, long shot, and the basics of frame composition using the reference sheet, Taking and Selecting Photos.
- » Share photo story models. Ask the group what each photo story is about. What does each of the photos contribute to the story?
- » In small groups have participants storyboard their stories by drawing a rough sketch of each of the four photos. Ask them to use a variety of different kinds of shots to tell their story.
- » Introduce basic camera techniques. To keep it simple, set the camera on automatic.
- » Have participants take photos in their small groups, using their storyboards as guides. Encourage them to experiment so that they have options to work with. Make sure to give them a time limit (20 minutes or so) to take their photos.
- » Download the photos onto a computer and have the groups select the best four images that tell their story.
- » Present all of the stories to the group, using the computer and a projector to view the images. Have participants explain their photo stories to the group.



*PowerPoint on  
Composition*

## CONSENT

If you are planning to share the work with an audience outside of the workshop, discuss and seek participants' informed consent. Hand out consent forms at the beginning of the workshop and review them as a group. Revisit consent forms at the workshop's conclusion to ensure participants understand where the work could be shown. Be sure to leave enough time and offer participants the opportunity to discuss consent individually. We have provided our own consent form online as a resource.



*Sample  
Consent Form*

## TAKE IT FURTHER

- » Record a story on a digital sound player to accompany a memory map.
- » Write a short text or caption to accompany the photo essays.
- » Have participants identify five places in their new neighborhood that make them feel "at home." Work with individuals to map these on Google Earth.



# TAKING AND SELECTING PHOTOS

## POINTS TO CONSIDER:

**Content and Message:** What do you hope the photograph or photo essay communicates? What is the subject?

**Mood:** What emotional impact does the image have on you? How is the mood created?

**Composition:** How are the objects/subjects placed in the frame? How do they relate to one another?

**Focal Point:** Is it clear what the viewer should be looking at in the photo? What is the first thing that draws your eye? What is the focus?

**Shot Variation:** When telling a story with photos, you need a variety of shots. Are all of the shots taken at the same distance? From the same angle?

**Point of View:** Who do you think is taking the picture? Why are they taking the picture? From which perspective is the image shot? Is the image taken at eye level? From above (bird's eye view), or from below (bug's eye view)?

**Framing:** How is the image cropped? What is cut out of the photo and what is left in? When taking a photo, especially a medium or close-up shot, you don't want to crowd your subject. Make sure there is room around his or her head ('headroom'). Avoid distracting backgrounds, such as a plant that appears to come out of the subject's head.

**Negative Space:** What is the purpose of the 'empty space' in the image? How does it interact with the **Positive Space**, a place that is full of activity?

**Background and Foreground:** What is in the background? What is in the foreground? What is the relationship between these two planes?

**Focus:** Is there a long depth of field where everything in the frame is sharp and in focus, or a short depth of field, where only fore-grounded objects are in focus?

*For further information, consult our Mapping Memories PowerPoint on Composition for use in workshops, [www.mappingmemories.ca](http://www.mappingmemories.ca)*

## INTRODUCTORY PHOTO EXERCISES

- » **Professional photography:** select a photo in a magazine and have participants try to replicate the photograph.
- » **Photo scavenger hunt:** develop a list of five to ten items, and have small groups of students capture these items in photographs.
- » **Mood and location:** create two baskets – one with pieces of paper that name different kinds of moods, and another with pieces of paper that each name a nearby place. Each group will select one piece of paper from each basket, giving them a mood (somber, melancholy, ecstatic) and a location (playground, school, park). Have them take photographs of the place to fit the mood.
- » **Portraits:** take an action shot, take a posed shot, take a self-portrait, break into pairs and take portraits of each other.



*Photo  
Scavenger Hunt  
Exercise*

## ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PHOTOS

If you do not have cameras available, you can adapt an exercise to work with found photos. These images can be gathered from newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and flyers, or printed from the web. You can also have participants take photos using cell phone cameras. For a great collage project using found photos, see [www.sabrinawardharrison.com](http://www.sabrinawardharrison.com).

## SELECTING PHOTOS

**Message exercise:** On the back of each photo or on an index card, write the message or mood you want the photo to communicate (e.g. a young girl is lonely, a boy is happy to be making friends, a mother is worried about her son's future). In groups of two, ask your partner what mood he or she thinks that the photo communicates. Compare your partner's answer to what you wrote on the back of the photo. Discuss the difference between your intention and your partner's interpretation.

**Shot exercise:** Organize your photos into three groups: close-ups, medium shots, and long shots. What kind of photos do you tend to take? Long shots? Close-ups?

**Frame exercise:** In groups of two, present your partner with a photograph. Ask what his or her eye is drawn to in the image. What is the first thing your partner notices? You each want to ensure that the main subject or focal point is clear. Often, participants take images at a distance, making it difficult to grasp the focus or subject of the shot.

**Editing exercise:** Which of your photos best communicates the message you want to convey? Which of the photos do you like best? Which are most significant? Once you have reviewed your photographs, select the top five and place them in an order that makes both narrative and visual sense. Try shifting the first and the last photo. Does this change the message, mood, or story you want to communicate?

## RELATED ACTIVITIES

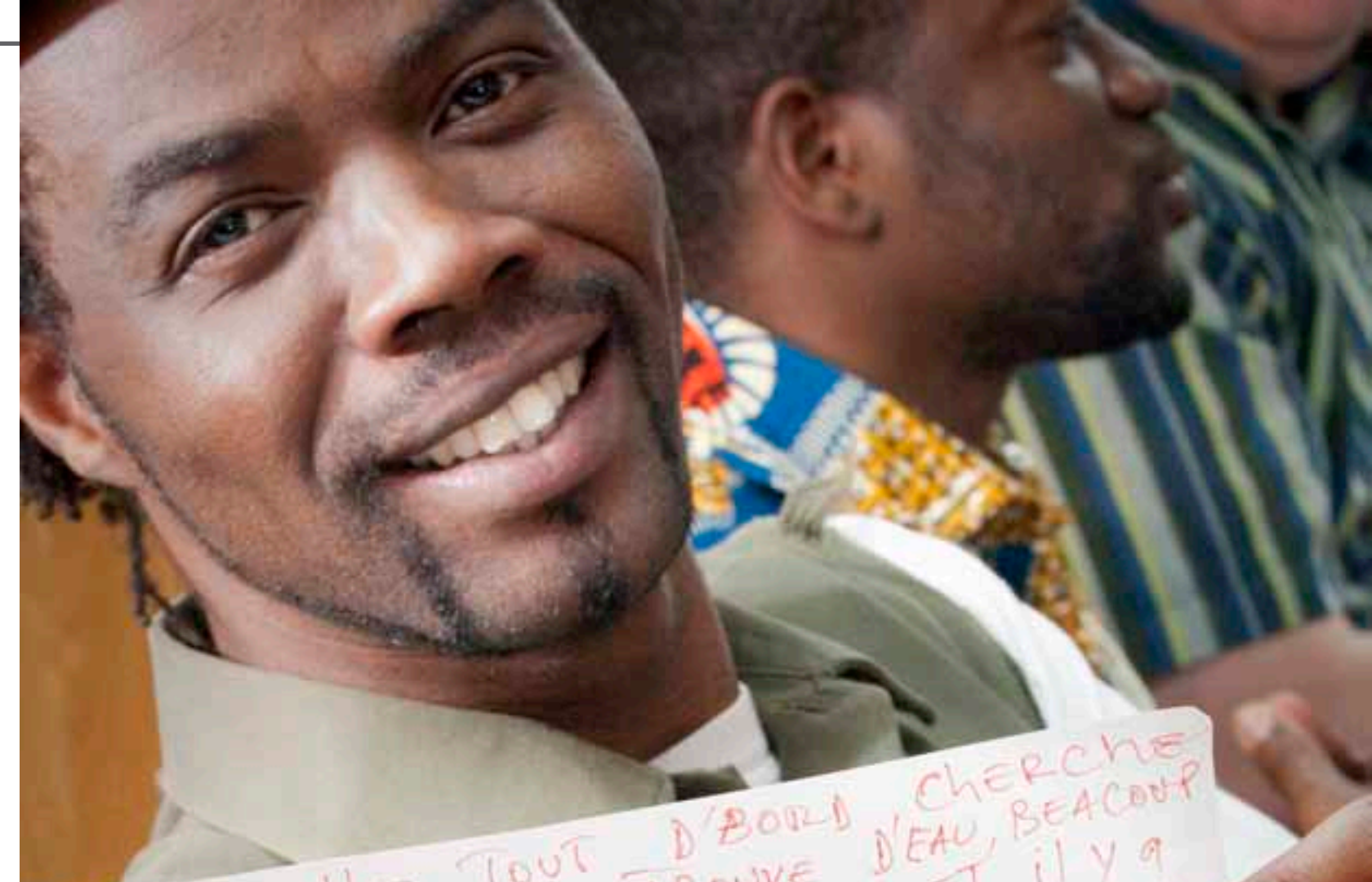
- » Is there a community radio program or station in your neighborhood where contributors feel “at home” in the same way that Alfredo is comfortable at Radio Centre Ville, where *Ici Radio Refuge* airs? Find out more: When does it air? Who are the spokespersons? What kinds of subjects do they cover? Can people call in? Do a listening exercise of *Ici Radio Refuge* (Radio Centre Ville, 102.3 FM) or another show or station and report back to the group.
- » Have you ever made a journey alone like Ayanda did when he came to Montreal? Write about a time you traveled on your own. Describe the trip and something you learned about yourself. Alternatively, write about a time you had to leave your home and it was not your decision.
- » “When do you feel at home?” Ayanda waited many years to become a permanent resident in Canada. Canadians generally accept that once someone has lived for a long time in Canada, they should be given the right to stay. How long do you think is ‘long enough’? One year? Two years? Five or ten years? What factors help to define if a person is ‘settled’ in Canada, apart from the number of years they have been here? For example, is it having a job? Owning a house? Having children born in Canada? Obtaining a Canadian degree? Being involved with community organizations? What might be some other factors?

For more on this issue, check out the *Lives on Hold* video and study guide, [www.ccrweb.ca](http://www.ccrweb.ca).

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- » Does the group you are working with have previous experience with the tools you are introducing? Will they be able to access them after the workshop?
- » How can you ensure that technology does not get in the way?
- » Is there a target audience for the work produced in the workshop? Each other? Students and teachers? A government official?





il faut aller tout d'abord chercher  
l'eau, beaucoup  
important de trouver l'eau, et il y a  
à cause de la difficulté de transporter l'eau, et il y a  
la recherche de l'eau dans la rivière pour après  
ET tout le monde a une tannée

