

SANCTUARY

Sanctuary Students, for us, are people for whom immigration status and/or settlement stressors act, or have acted, as a barrier to accessing their secondary and post-secondary goals. Sanctuary Students may be newcomers or we may have lived here for many years; we may have gained secure immigration status or we may hold some form of precarious status (including no status). Federal immigration policy leaves some of us with very few options to remedy our situation. Beyond exclusionary and discriminatory policy, many barriers keep people from securing permanent residence, including a lack of accurate and accessible information about immigration processes, the labour intensiveness and time required to fill applications, high application costs, fear, discretionary decision making by immigration officials, as well as precarious labour law, which intersects with immigration policy in various ways. There are multiple ways that the intersections of gender, racialization, class, ability, age and nationality impact the opportunities to make immigration applications and the likelihood of being successful. Some of the immigration applications that people with precarious status MAY be eligible to make include: Humanitarian & Compassionate Grounds (H&C), Family Class Sponsorships, Refugee Claims, Express Entry, Temporary policy for out-of-status construction workers & International Student visas. These processes have a range of requirements and processing times, for example, an H&C may take 2 to 3 years. For Sanctuary Students, this precarity has caused anxiety, depression and PTSD, however, many of us face more barriers when trying to access mental health support. For example, we may lack information about services available, we may not have OHIP or insurance and lack the money for private counselling, we may face stigma due to our cultural background and/or deal with language barriers, we may also fear having to disclose our status.

KEEP IN TOUCH!

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STUDENTS

Students should have the right to go to school regardless of their immigration status. However, there are manifold barriers in Ontario educational settings. Section 49.1 of the Ontario Education Act states “A person who is otherwise entitled to be admitted to a school and who is less than eighteen years of age shall not be refused admission because the person or the person’s parent or guardian is unlawfully in Canada,” which allows access to elementary and high school. However, there are few options at the post-secondary level, as students are divided by immigration status. The immigration statuses listed under OUAC are: Canadian Citizen; Permanent Resident of Canada (landed immigrant); Currently on, or will require, study permit to study in Canada; Diplomatic; Convention Refugee (Protected Person); Visitor; No-Status – only three of which would allow someone to apply and study on a domestic fee scale (roughly \$8,000 compared to \$21,000). Only roughly 60 students with precarious immigration status are studying in colleges and universities in Ontario.

We also face ongoing status-related issues once in post-secondary, including: food security, shelter, study permit requirements, lack of IDs, lack of work authorization, and gathering necessary documents, such as transcripts. For many Sanctuary Students, underlying all of this is a constant threat of detention and deportation. In order to disclose as little as possible about our unique situations, many of us feel the need to explain our educational delays away – “I’m taking a year to figure out what I want to do...” “I’m going to work for a bit and save up so I don’t have to rely on OSAP...” “I didn’t get into the program I really wanted, so I’m going to try again next year...” In reality this dynamic causes us to become more isolated. Being able to talk about our situations openly in a space like S4 reminds us that we’re not alone and that these systemic issues must be addressed.



SOLIDARITY

Solidarity building is very important for Sanctuary Students. In order to further these connections, the S4 Collective was incorporated in September 2018, and started holding weekly drop-in sessions shortly after. We often rely on the people we trust for the information we need. We find out about accessing school from friends or family, we may also turn to trusted teachers, guidance counselors or community organizations. At times, we have to seek information from the administrators within schools directly. Only one post-secondary institution has specifically undertaken to reduce barriers for students with precarious immigration status (York University). The YU program includes a bridging course that runs for 13 weeks and prepares students to pursue undergrad degrees. Once Sanctuary Students start degrees, the tuition paid includes ancillary fees, like all students. The new Student Choice Initiative allows us to opt out of these fees, undermining important on-campus groups and services; many of us have chosen not to opt out even though it would mean of savings of roughly \$70.



SUPPORT

Support and/or guidance that is future-focused as well as personalized is essential for Sanctuary Students. We need access to information and resources that will equip us to plan and manage our educational career and to make decisions at key transitions points. While academic supports are crucial, financial support for our studies are also a factor in our success, however, we are not eligible for it. As a result, in addition to support in post-secondary education pursuits, a Sanctuary Student may need peripheral supports like access to food banks, housing and legal, physical and mental health support. Some organizations such as Planned Parenthood, Unison, Access Alliance, Blake Boulton, Stella’s House, Immigrant Women’s Health Centre, Women’s Health in Women’s Hands, Barbara Schlifer and CAMH provide mental health support regardless of immigration status. While there are resources that may be available, they do not necessarily provide service or care that is relevant or accessible to a Sanctuary Student’s particular circumstances