



Reflections from the Board Chair

The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees reports that 51 million people in the world today are displaced because of “unthinkable crises.” These include refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless individuals, and asylum-seekers. Of late, we have heard most about the millions of Syrians who have fled their homes to seek safety in neighbouring countries or in less dangerous regions of Syria. Only a few Syrians (about 200) have come to Canada as government-sponsored refugees in the past year. Even fewer have found their way to Canada as asylum-seekers – refugee claimants – the group that MCRS supports.

Even while the sheer number of refugees in the world today is overwhelming, the staff and volunteers at MCRS work with each person or family as individuals with a unique story. The refugee claimants that arrive at the welcoming doors of MCRS are not numbers, but human beings, each with accounts of tragic loss and hopes for a better future. They are “Seeking Refuge. Finding Hope” as our new tagline says. Their experience, regardless of the outcome of their claim, is mainly positive due to the commitment and compassion of the people who support them as they attempt to find new homes in Canada. On behalf of the board of directors of MCRS, I acknowledge and thank the dedicated individuals who work in many capacities with refugees at MCRS.

As I write this report, MCRS has just completed a day-long planning discussion which will provide direction for the organization for the next five years. Earlier in the year, the board began the renewal process by articulating a vision statement, tweaking our mission statement, and identifying a series of values and principles that guide our work. Our vision is that refugees in Waterloo Region experience welcome, compassion, inclusion, and justice. The values that underlie our work include: Empathy, Compassion, Respect, Equality, Inclusion, Empowerment, Community, Dignity, Fairness, Security, Love, and Peace.

The years ahead offer many challenges and opportunities. We look forward to exploring questions about our Mennonite identity, about long-term stability in revenue, and about our work on advocacy and public education, for instance. Above all, we will do our best to welcome and support refugee claimants and ensure that their unique stories are heard in our community.

Marlene Epp
Board Chair

Seeking safety. Finding hope.



“I was so scared, I didn’t know who to ask, I was in hiding for 6 years. When I came to MCRS they smiled and gave me tea, offered me pie. I felt so welcomed and like I belonged.”

HEATHER, SUCCESSFUL REFUGEE CLAIMANT*



Father and sons, some of our volunteer Arabic translators



MCRS Staff; Eunice, Yasmina, Jacqui, Amanda, Kaylee, Melissa



Annual Report

2013-2014



BOARD MEMBERS

- Marlene Epp,
Chair
- Jim Huebner,
Treasurer
- Nan Cressman,
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- Cathy MacLellan
- Steve Tulloch
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- Lino Disonoma
- Mike Strathdee



We would like to thank all of our financial partners, the many individual donors and churches and all the incredibly dedicated volunteers who give so generously to support refugee claimants in Waterloo Region. Our success stories are your success stories. Thank you.

77 volunteers contributed over **4,301** hours

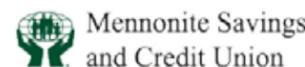
68 new refugee claims from **38** Countries

Approximately **500** open cases—individuals and families still being supported by MCRS

509 pages translated from Spanish, Arabic, French, Farsi, Dari and Pashto - that’s **109,984** words!

21 families referred to the MSCU Health Care Assistance Fund

Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support
58 Queen St. S., Kitchener, ON N2G 1V6
Tel: 519.571.1912



From the Executive Director

This year has seen further changes at the federal level impacting refugee claimants both positively and negatively. In June the Federal Court ruled that the 2012 cuts to refugee health care were “*cruel and unusual treatment*” and ordered the federal government to reinstate the Interim Federal Health Program. While the federal government has appealed the decision, this represents a significant victory for refugee claimants’ rights in Canada. On November 5th, the federal government re-instated temporary measures for refugee health coverage while waiting for a decision on the appeal.

The federal government is currently proposing legislation that would no longer restrict provinces from having a minimum residency period for people before they can receive social assistance. This could negatively affect refugee claimants, as provinces may disallow them from receiving social assistance when they first arrive in Canada. Social Assistance is vital to the survival of many of the families who come to MCRS, providing them much needed income support in their first few months and while they wait for their work permits to be processed. We have seen a positive response from many community partners regarding this unfair legislation, bringing together both organizations supporting refugees and those dedicated to income equality. We have concerns about the increasingly difficult environment being created for refugee claimants through legislative changes like this one.

Application fees continue to be a major challenge for many of the families we see. Struggling to establish themselves in a new country, work permit and permanent residence fees are out of reach to many who desperately need them. Currently there are no forms of financial assistance to help with such fees.

We have grown increasingly concerned with the extended time frames for families awaiting reunification with their families. Some of our clients have been waiting for years to see their children again, even after receiving permanent residency themselves. We hope to see changes in the processing time so that these families can be together again after long and difficult journeys. Within our office and closer to home, we see the daily struggles of the families that we serve. We also see the strength, perseverance and resiliency of these families every day, while they continue to make Canada their home, and build new lives here.

The dedication and hard work of our staff, volunteers, board members and the broader community allows MCRS to accomplish goals far beyond the reach of most small charities. Daily, we see the impact that our support makes in the lives of the people who come here seeking refuge. We are thankful for your continued support, both financial and spiritual.

Eunice Valenzuela
Executive Director

MCRS Program Reports

Legal Support Highlights

This year as part of the Refugee Health Program we planned and delivered 9 health and wellness workshops for refugee claimants, receiving between 5-12 participants per session. Each month we refer between 2-7 families and individuals to Dr. Michael Stephenson of Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre for primary care. Over the course of the year we referred 23 individuals to Sanctuary. We continue to refer between 2 and 4 families, each month, to Mennonite Savings and Credit Union to assist with the cost of medical expenses.

Settlement Support Highlights

The Women’s Sewing Group continues with about 6 regular members. They took a short breather from their projects over the summer, but are back at it again, working on fabric Christmas ornaments .

Speak English Café is still going strong with between 30 and 35 people in attendance each week. This year we created weekly conversation sheets for Speak English Café with support from volunteers, and have received a positive response from refugee claimant families when invited to attend the Café.

Events and Education: CCR Consultation

This year the Canadian Council for Refugee’s fall Consultation was held in Kitchener for the first time. MCRS spearheaded the Local Organizing Committee (LOC). Over 300 people from across Canada and beyond attended. Partnerships among the LOC will continue in the future and have demonstrated the influence our community can have when we all work together towards a common goal.

- We participated in Hope + Help (Trauma Initiative Community Action Group) working group to enhance access to inclusive, accessible and appropriate trauma services in The Region of Waterloo.
- Held a Zumbathon for Refugee Claimants on June 28, which attracted a crowd that would not normally have heard about refugees. We raised over \$1700 and appeared on CTV news, creating awareness within our community!
- We continued to participate in Access to Primary Care working group (Health Supports Action Group) of the local

Immigration Partnership to discuss changes to the Interim Federal Health benefit program and implication of such changes on newcomers and immigrants.

- We continued to participate in the Money Matters Community Collaborative at The Working Centre in November 2013, a group of local, community partners dedicated to helping people think creatively about finances.
- We attended the *Refugee Rights Day* Event October 10th, 2013 and celebrated World Refugee Day, June 21st 2014, by *Walking with Refugees for a Stronger Canada*—a community solidarity walk we facilitated, in partnership with the KW Multicultural Centre, Mennonite Central Committee, Reception House Waterloo Region and Welcome Home Refugee Housing Community.

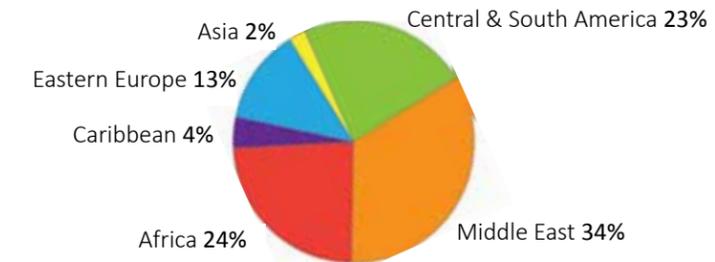
Youth Activities

Thanks to a CCR Youth Speak Up Grant, students performed a creative media presentation entitled, “Celebrating Student Voice: Raising the profile of the refugees experience in schools and communities” at various schools, community events, and at the Waterloo Regional District School Board. Four students involved in this project attended the Youth Action Gathering in Toronto, put on by the CCR in August. Inspired to take further action these same four students have formed the core group for our *Border Crossings* Project, generously funded by the Laidlaw Foundation, and continuing in 2015.

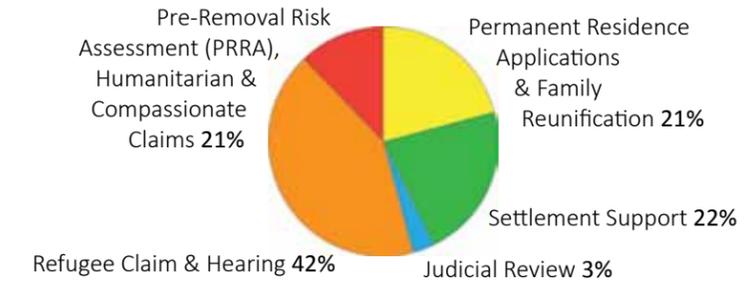
“We’re beginning a new life here in Canada and you helped us to make this happen! We don’t have words to tell you how grateful we are. God bless you always.”

MARIA AND JOSE LOUIS,
UPON RECEIVING A POSITIVE DECISION
ON THEIR REFUGEE CLAIM

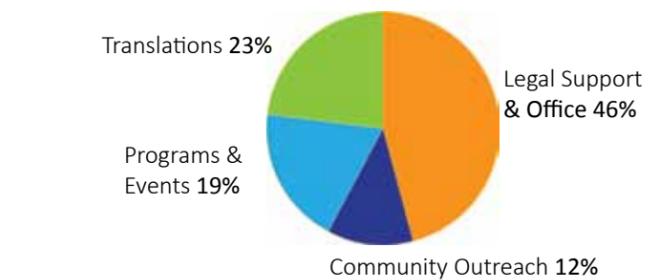
2013-2014 Overview



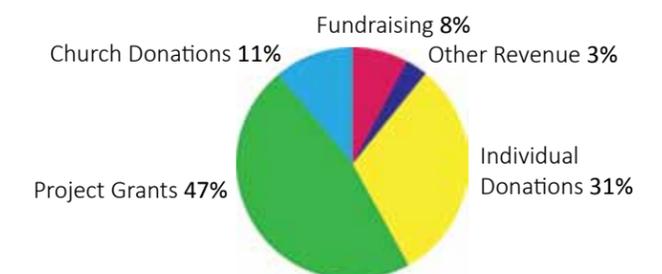
Refugee Claims by Region (100 new cases)



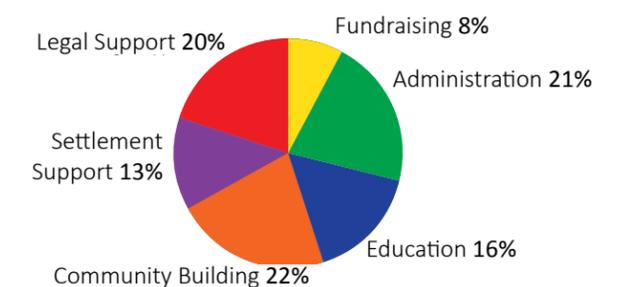
Client Services



Volunteer hours by program



Total Revenue \$ 207,493



Total Expenses \$ 237,392

Zumbathon fundraiser in Waterloo Town Square



MCRS Summer picnic fun, 2014



Health Care for Refugees

In July 2014 the Federal Court ruled that the 2012 cuts to refugee health care (IFHP) were "cruel and unusual treatment" and ordered the federal government to reinstate the IFH program. The federal government has appealed the decision.

Social Assistance for Refugees

A conservative Member of Parliament introduced Private Members Bill C-585 earlier this year, which could limit refugee claimants' access to social assistance. The federal government later included the same provisions in omnibus budget bill C-43. Bill C-43 was still under consideration at the time of printing.

Ontario Temporary Health Program

The Ontario Temporary Health Program (OTHP) was implemented on January 1, 2014. OTHP provides access to essential and urgent health care and medications to refugee claimants in Ontario, filling in the gaps in the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) coverage for failed claimants or claimants from Designated Countries of Origin. Although this program is theoretically a good idea, the response we have heard from medical practitioners is that the process of billing through OTHP is complicated and thus reduces the chances that a practitioner will see a patient needing OTHP.



Jack and Jane with Graciela and her children at Pearson Airport

MCRS donors are people like you, committed to serving refugee claimants in our community. Read the story below, written by Jane and Jack about their journey supporting a family this Christmas!

Spiritual Math

10 women, each give \$10 and give that \$100 to God.

When our Ten For Him group met for the first time, I know what I did NOT want...I did NOT want to be picked for the job. My name got picked to find a recipient and I can honestly say that deep inside I was feeling a bit of panic. I tend to be a hermit over the winter, hibernating in my home and taking caring of our grandkids. Then I remembered that God is God, all I need to do is choose to trust him, and boy did He ever do something!

My husband and I were asked to deliver a set of bunk beds to a single mom which had been arranged by the Mennonite Coalition for Support (MCRS). We delivered the bunk beds and that's where we met Graciela and her little son, Alexander. Communication was tricky because of a language barrier, so while Jack set the beds up, I smiled and talked with Alexander a little, and admired the pet birds they had. I remember thinking that maybe this single mom is someone I could bless, but I didn't know anything about her or her needs.

I spoke to MCRS, explained that I needed to bless someone with \$100. I asked if they thought Graciela would make a good recipient. The caseworker at MCRS responded: "This is awesome! As you know (I didn't), she is in the process of being reunited with her children."

MCRS visiting 'Peace Camp' at Conrad Grebel University College



'This was me!' a booth visitor at the K-W Multicultural Festival



It seems that Graciela had been a victim of extortion, the recipient of multiple death threats by corrupt and criminal persons in Guatemala, as well as a victim of marital abuse for over seven years. She was forced to flee her home, leaving three of her four children behind in the care of her mother. It was a journey of fear and tremendous courage that led her to Canada and finally to MCRS. She made her refugee claim in Canada and was accepted on December 19, 2012.

She called home to share the news with her family and was informed that her mother and the primary caregiver to her children had passed away. The children had been split up amongst the family because nobody could afford to care for all of them together. Grieving the loss of her mother and fearing for her children, Graciela once again was overcome with a sense of hopelessness. She came back to MCRS who assisted with the family reunification application paperwork, and who encouraged her to press on.

During all her time in Canada, the only thing Graciela wanted was to be reunited with her children. And after almost four years of separation, the children were accepted to come and received their visa's to travel! The only thing holding them back from being reunited before Christmas was the cost of two tickets from Guatemala to Canada.

"She does not have enough money," said MCRS, "so this money could go to that fund." I love enthusiasm, but seriously? Did God really just want me to put \$100 into a pot that would eventually, hopefully, grow to enough to send two kids from Guatemala to Canada? I didn't think so but that didn't mean I couldn't talk to my husband and his partners about sponsoring these kids to come home, maybe even in time for Christmas. So I did!

Long story short, 18 year- old Jonathan and 17 year-old Estafani arrived in Canada and were reunited with their Mom, in time for Christmas. They were finally together for the first time in four years!

My \$100? It went to a missionary family leaving for South America who contributed more than enough clothing for these youth, facing their first winter in Canada. I am overwhelmed, humbled, and in awe at what God was able to do with \$100. Talk about multiplication!

Sometimes \$100 does not seem to be a lot of money and won't go very far. I have just been taught that in my hands, that's probably true. But what happens when you give that same \$100 to God and allow Him to do something with it? That is what I call Spiritual Math...now you know why I stood on the verse Ephesians 3:20:

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever AMEN."

Enclosed is my one time gift of:

\$25 \$50 \$100 Other \$_____

Please use my  

Name (as it appears on Card): _____

Card #: _____

Expiry Date: _____ Security Number: _____

Billing Address: _____

City: _____ PC: _____

Signature: _____

You may also send a check **OR** donate online at www.mcrs.ca/donate

Your Name: _____

Address (if different): _____

City: _____ PC: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

I would prefer to receive my tax receipts and future newsletters via: Canada post Email

Thank you for your support of refugee claimants through MCRS! Please contact us at 519-591-7481 ext. 4 or email resourcedevelopment@mcrs.ca if you would like to change how we communicate with you.

*All checks payable to MCRS. Tax receipts issued for donations.
Charitable number: 83827 0015 RR0001*

Please take a moment and tell us why you are committed to the support of refugee claimants? It's an encouragement to many of the families in the refugee claim process! (your message will remain anonymous)

