



Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support

Annual Report

2014-2015

Vision: that refugees in Waterloo Region experience welcome, compassion, inclusion, and justice.

BOARD MEMBERS

- Albert C. Lobe
Chair
- Andrea Charette
Treasurer
- Nan Cressman
Secretary
- Marlene Epp
- Ray Brubacher
- Steve Tulloch
- Mike Strathdee
- Eunice Valenzuela



Thanks to all of our financial & community partners, our passionate donors and the churches who give so generously, and to all the volunteers who continue to give their time to support refugee claimants in Waterloo Region. On behalf of refugee claimants — Thank you.

Thank you to our key partners this year! You made this possible!

- Laidlaw Foundation
- Mennonite Central Committee
- Ontario Library Association
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Mennonite Savings Credit Union

- Shantz Mennonite Church
- The Meeting House
- The Working Center
- The Law Foundation of Ontario

47 volunteers contributed over **2345** hours in the office

112 new refugee claims from **17** countries

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

269 pages translated from Spanish, Arabic, Farsi and Dari - that's **36,038** words!

18 families referred to the MSCU Health Care Assistance Fund

Reflections from the Board Chair

Even unto them will I give mine house and within my walls a place and a name. (Isaiah 56:5)

Our world is in turmoil. This past year 15 violent conflicts broke out or were reignited; sixty million people are without refuge, searching for hope. As the Syrian conflict entered its fifth year, the worst ever, we witnessed a mass migration which exceeded that of post World War II. Sadly, by March 2015 only 434 of the 1,300 Syrian refugees who came to Canada were Government Assisted. Recent Canadian policy relative to refugees has been less than compassionate.

The MCRS vision is that refugees in Waterloo Region experience welcome, compassion, inclusion and justice. Our particular focus is on refugee claimants, those who arrive in Canada and make a claim for protection either at the border or from within the country.

This year MCRS staff listened to the stories of 112 new claimants from 17 countries, all desperate for asylum. Of these new cases, 1.4 % were resolved successfully; the remainder are still pending.

This was our first full year working within our new five year Strategic Plan (available at www.mcrs.ca). We began strengthening the legal support offered to claimants. We worked deliberately to improve fundraising and communication and to strengthen financial support from the community. Although we were unable to expand income from grants, our balance sheet looks good and the auditor's report is positive. With a budget of \$275,000, and a staff of only 4 FTE, fulfilling our vision is no small task.

Two new staff joined us this year, further strengthening our capacity. Special thanks to Marlene Epp for her strong leadership as Chair of the Board over the past 4 years and to Eunice Valenzuela for her dedicated service. Concerted effort was expended on Board recruitment; two new members joined the Board and by the end of the next year we will have a full contingent of dedicated Board members, each of whom bring strong skills and financial support.

Our Strategic Plan calls for a review of MCRS branding, including the possibility of developing an expanded and broader base of support and closer collaboration with partner agencies. This, along with the challenge to increase financial support from churches and donors, to review and strengthen our administrative structure, and to promote the work of the Committees of the Board remain the priorities for the coming year.

Shakespeare's King Lear struggled with how best to bear well the weight of his own great sadness, a challenge staff face daily. Yet providing the service we do yields immense satisfaction to both staff and Board; Thank you for the privilege of your support in this work.

Albert C. Lobe

Board Chair, November 2015



"I don't know if I would have been reunited with my kids without MCRS working with me to complete forms and advocate for my situation. Knowing I had someone to talk to made such a difference for me; I was never turned away and always felt heard and respected."

**HELENA, A SINGLE MOTHER WHO WAS REUNITED WITH HER THREE CHILDREN THIS YEAR*



Crossing Borders Youth Program at World Refugee Day Celebrations



Staff: Jacqui Terry, Eunice Valenzuela, Leikun Araya, Tony Van Giessen, (insert) Kaylee Perez & Amanda Botelho

Mission: to welcome and support refugee claimants in our community by:

- providing assistance with the refugee claim process
- accessing a network of settlement support
- building communities of mutual support
- advocating for a fair and just environment for refugees in Canada

Seeking Refuge. Finding Hope.

Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support
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www.mcrs.ca

From the Executive Director

We began 2014 confronted with the most exclusionary immigration system Canada has seen since our doors opened nearly 28 years ago. We have witnessed an increasingly complicated refugee determination process and a system that continued a shift towards exclusion, rather than welcome of refugees. At the time of writing, policy changes during 2014-2015 continue to negatively affect the people we serve. For example, in December 2014 the moratorium for deportation to Zimbabwe was lifted. This means that people who have fled that country in fear of persecution can now be deported back there. Many of our clients wait over four months for a work visa, and without the right to work legally, face prolonged financial hardships. Finally, beginning August 2014, Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC) reduced the age at which a child is considered a dependent, from 22 to 19 years of age. We have strong concerns about this change, as it dramatically curtails the opportunity for families to be reunited. On a more positive note, the Federal Court ruled that to deny refugee claimants from Designated Countries of Origin (DCO) access to the Refugee Appeal Division is a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Court ruled that these claimants must have access to an appeal, effective immediately. In addition the High Court has ruled that denying refugees health care through the removal of coverage provided by the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program is 'cruel and unusual'; we hope to see this coverage fully re-instated for all refugees under the new government.

Looking back we can highlight a few of our key successes:

- Although the shortage of affordable rental housing for refugees continues to be a critical issue, we were able to lessen this gap in partnership with the Open Homes Refugee Ministry, a community of families connected to Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church (WMB) who opened their homes and hearts to a number of refugee claimants this year.
- Crossing Borders is an inspiring group of newcomer, refugee and Canadian youth who have had the opportunity to build friendships, and powerfully deliver their stories to the community. Crossing Borders Youth continue to develop new skills as they integrate and connect us all with their own unique energy and passion for telling refugee stories.

In the midst of the overwhelming suffering and tragedy faced by refugees worldwide, fulfilling MCRS' vision that *refugees in Waterloo experience welcome, compassion, inclusion, and justice*, has never been more important.

We are grateful for all your generous support that makes this work possible. We hope to see more positive changes in the coming year!

In appreciation,

Eunice Valenzuela
Executive Director

MCRS Program Reports, based on 2015-2019 Strategic Plan Goals

Legal & Settlement Support Program: 63 new files (which include families); a total of 112 new people served. Volunteers helped with translation, interpretation and advocacy.	Health Care Program: 18 clients referred through Mennonite Savings and Credit Union Health Care Fund. People with health issues ranging from cancer to diabetes were able to get the treatment they needed.	Family Reunification (FR) Program: 1 family was reunited this year; 14 FR cases are pending. This is an ongoing issue for many successful claimants - their families left behind.	Community Building: MCRS Summer Picnic, Christmas Party, and Koinjiji, a church-hosted Facebook page dedicated to connecting free items to people who need it.	Sewing Group: 4 regular members met 32 times this year, a small and intimate group which allows close friendships to grow. They made a quilt and Christmas ornaments for us!	Speak English Cafe: Celebrated its 13th anniversary, with 20-30 regular attendees, many of them claimants not eligible for sponsored ESL classes.	Long term Funding Development: 6 of the 11 grants submitted were approved 83 new donors joined our work \$108,162 was raised through private donations!	Volunteer Program: 47 volunteers gave over 2345.5 hours of legal and settlement support to high-needs refugee claimants on a one to one basis.	Advocacy & Public Education: more than 3500 people saw 24 presentations by 20 Crossing Borders youth, a mixed group of newcomer, refugee and Canadian youth telling their stories.
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Your support has impacted so many this year. Here are a few comments!

"Through MCRS I have learned that anyone can help you, it doesn't matter what religion or colour they are. I will try my best to be like them. I am studying hard so I can become a nurse, because I want to help people, especially women. I am so lucky in my life, and I don't look at the past, I look at my future!" **Amara came to Canada as a young bride, was abandoned by her husband and was illegal and alone. MCRS supported her through her refugee claim process.*

"You guys completely changed my life. When I came from B.C., I was completely lost when my case was rejected. I was so hopeless. I feel like I have a new life now because of MCRS and all the hard work they did to help me with my humanitarian application." **Hadsa, a single man whose application for refugee status was denied at his hearing, moved to Kitchener to seek help. MCRS assisted him with a Humanitarian & Compassionate application that was later accepted.*

"I went to my hearing recently and it was really hard – that whole day was hard for me and my children but we did it. The first thing I thought afterwards was to call MCRS to say thank you for everything they had done for me — helping me find housing, helping get my children enrolled in school, helping me find support within the community and helping me prepare for my hearing. I don't know what the outcome of my case will be but I do know that because of MCRS I have established myself here in Canada and I felt prepared to present my case. Thank you." **Elisa is a single mother who arrived in Canada with 3 young children and no support. She was living in a shelter for 2 months and visited the MCRS office at least twice a week.*

"Your welcoming and smiling faces kept me strong and confident through this very stressful process. Thank you!" *Successful refugee claimant, a law student from South America.*

**names changed*

MCRS' role is to build a community of support around refugees. The following groups and people help us do this better!

Open Homes: a network of people connected to WMB who host newly arrived refugees in their homes for the first few weeks/months they are in Canada. Throughout the year this group has hosted families on one or two days notice, shared meals with and offered friendship to refugees.

Historic St. Paul's Community Cupboard program: this church has often kept food aside for new refugees.

The Meeting House: a member started putting together welcome kits for new refugees. These kits have been a blessing to many people who arrive in Canada with very little. Each kit also includes a beautiful handmade card welcoming the person receiving it to Canada!

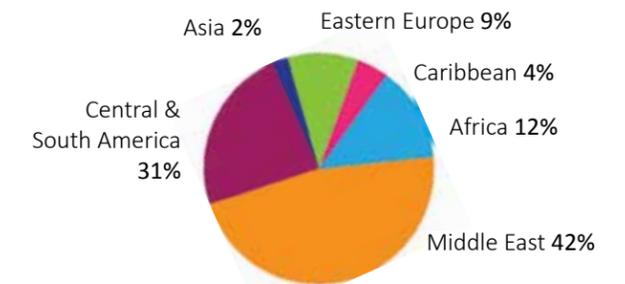
The Green Door & Worth a Second Look: both owned by The Working Centre, these stores allow donations made to MCRS to be held in-store and then redirected to a refugee in need at a later time.

A special thank you to **Lynn Schulze, the Waterloo Collegiate Institute** teacher who has lovingly led the Crossing Borders Youth program over the last year. One of the refugee youth involved said, "I would like to bring the truth to people who are not aware of who refugees truly are. We are strong, we are smart, and we contribute positively to Canada." She is 17. See their videos online at www.mcrs.ca!

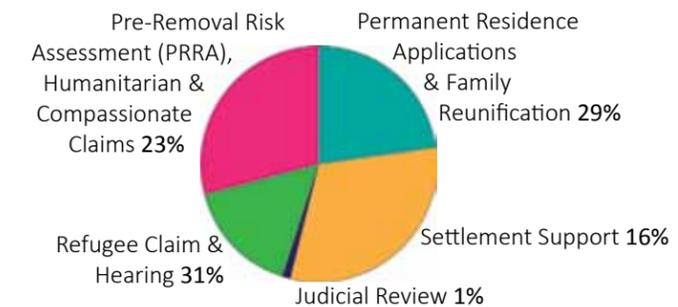


MCRS Summer picnic fun, 2015

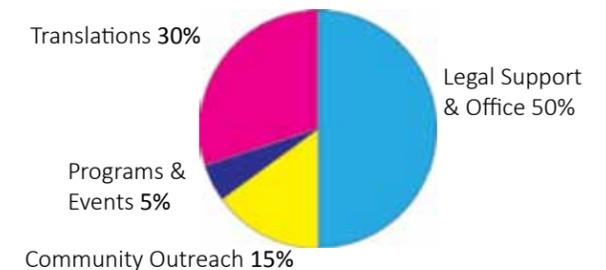
2014-2015 Overview



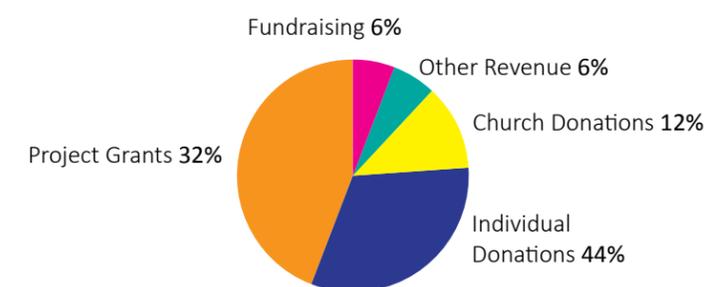
Refugee Claims by Region (112 new cases)



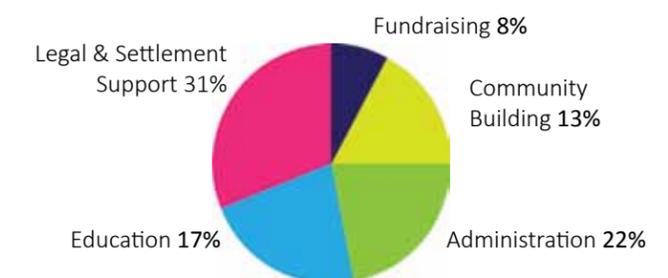
Client Services



Volunteer Hours by Program



Total Revenue \$242,701



Total Expenses \$227,663