

RESILIENCE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

GREETINGS FROM THE BOARD!

The 2018-2019 fiscal year brought many exciting changes to MCRS and the MCRS Board of Directors.

In November 2018, Nan Cressman (past Chair), Shelley and I were able to attend the three-day Manulife Board Governance Boot Camp presented by Capacity Canada, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Kindred Credit Union. The time spent was intense and highly effective and provided us with new tools and perspectives to bring to our work.

After the January 2019 AGM, the new Board of Directors restructured our approach to Board Governance with a focus on Committee work. This enabled the Board to make significant progress on many governance items over the last year including Strategic Planning, Human Resources and updated Governance policies and procedures. With the shift of detail work to Committees, the Board meetings became more focused on discussion and decisions rather than information gathering and dissemination. I am very proud of what our teams have accomplished!

Transitional and emergency housing for our guests newly arriving is always a concern as affordable housing in the KW community is scarce and shelter options are limited. When Ray of Hope notified us they were closing their Welcome Home program for refugee claimants, this matter became urgent. Our Executive Director presented this opportunity to incorporate the housing program into MCRS programs. The Board already recognized that to effectively support our guests, we needed to expand our services to include a focus on housing, employment supports and food security.



However, we hadn't thought it would happen so soon and in such a large way! After many hours of discussion and debate, multiple rounds of information from MCRS staff and Ray of Hope and specific requirements and milestones being met, the Board of Directors joyfully approved the adoption of Welcome Home into the MCRS portfolio! The process also drove MCRS to develop a holistic housing transition model that has gained the support of government officials at several levels.

Thank you to everyone who has worked with MCRS over this past year. With the efforts and support of donors, volunteers, advocates and staff, people coming to our community seeking a new life and home experience a warm welcome and greater opportunity for justice. A special thank you to the members of the Board and Executive Team: Scott Lewis, Manuela Jimenez, Fabienne Prior, Jim Pankratz, Peggy Snyder, Rafael Vallejo, Thom Dixon and Shelley Campagnola (ED). Your support and hard work have made this year as Chair enjoyable and productive. Looking forward to next year!

Best regards,
Victoria Turner Shoemaker
Chair, MCRS Board of Directors



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Our mission to welcome and support refugee claimants in our community sounds simple but behind the words is a complex world of ever-changing rules, laws, forms, public and political perceptions, and immediate needs. Having a highly talented and deeply caring team that can “stay the course” with agility and responsiveness provides confidence and comfort to hundreds of people who need help navigating various legal and social systems.

Our culture is continuously being redefined with every person that joins our team, but, at our core, we are people who: have deep empathy and compassion; thrive on empowering others; promote a sense of community and belonging; and work hard to build what we do for the long term. We have an amazing blend of professionalism and personal connect likened to being a family.

One of our highlights of the past year was studying together Margaret Wheatley’s book, *Walk Out, Walk On*, an inspiring call to rethink what it means to empower others. We were challenged to a more vital collaboration with others, and deeper engagement of those we help, believing in their resilience and capability to direct their own journey.

We also invested more intentionally with our Refugee Claimant Organization Coalition partners (22 like-minded organizations in Ontario), hosting one of the bimonthly meetings, and working together to ensure access to justice through advocacy for Legal Aid.

We also called on the respectful relationships we have been nurturing with our political and media leaders to successfully advocate for the continuance of the Transition Child Benefit.

Finally, we dug deep into a Brand review with the help of Graf-Martin Communications, listening to various stakeholders and exploring how we best live into our mission, vision and values. We are being increasingly recognized as a difference-maker that our community needs. From this we have stepped out courageously and are crafting a Strategic Plan for 2020 and beyond that focuses on **influence, action, and impact**.

Shelley Campagnola
Executive Director



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CLAIMS PROGRAM

This past year has been a busy and exciting one for the Casework Team at MCRS. There have been changes and plenty of challenges but the flow of incredible people who come through our door looking for help has remained consistent. We've continued to see high numbers with 255 new files opened over the fiscal year representing 626 individuals from around the world. At the end of our fiscal year in 2019 our Casework Team was working with a total of 764 cases representing over 1,847 men, women and children.

Caseworkers at MCRS play a variety of roles in the lives of the people we work with. Our role is always shaped primarily by our clients and their specific needs. Sometimes that means discussing the confusing and lengthy process that lies ahead of them or working together to explore options. In other cases we are very involved in the preparation of forms, making sure things are as accurate and complete as possible when mistakes can really matter. To some, we are the first people with whom they share their story as we work together to put painful experiences into words. We are often used as a local guide who can connect them with resources, activities and services and advocate for them where necessary.

We rely heavily on our partners in the social assistance, education, employment, legal and non-profit sectors to work with us to make this possible. Through all this we are relied on as a friend, someone they can turn to for help and who will accept, respect, and empower them.

Our clients usually work with their caseworkers for years and in that time we are privileged to be able to build strong relationships as we walk together through the process.



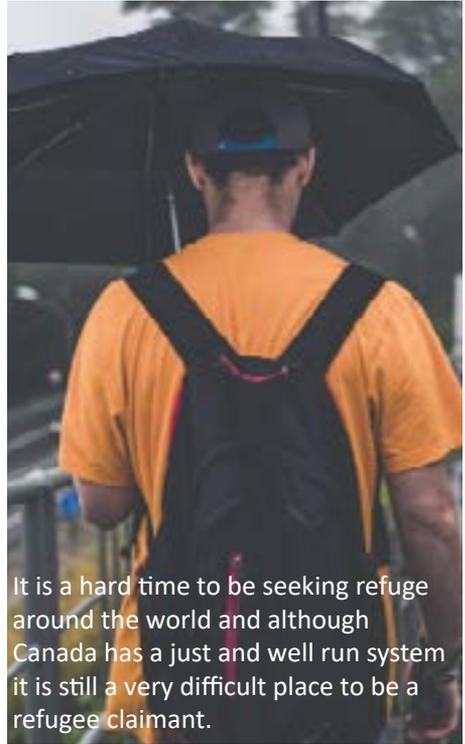
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CHANGES AND TRENDS

The refugee claimant world is very dynamic and tumultuous. Every year comes with its own changes and challenges and as an organization we have to be flexible and adaptive.

This past year at MCRC our numbers remained quite consistent as did the origin countries of our clients. The majority of the trends and challenges we have seen have been systematic. We struggled to help our clients know what to do when faced with sudden cuts to legal aid, which resulted in hundreds of claimants facing the prospect of hearings without legal representation, only to have the shortfall covered months later. Soon after we faced the threat of significant cuts to social assistance payments that would have seen many of our clients forced into the already overflowing shelter system; thankfully these cuts were cancelled at the last minute. These challenges highlighted how uncertain things can be for refugee claimants, vulnerable people who are often the first to suffer when governments try to cut costs.

On a more national scale we witnessed a surge of negative language regarding the population we work with. There was a rise in rhetoric that slandered and spread false information about claimants. In the run up to the election the government made some policy changes that have resulted in an even more complicated situation at the border.



It is a hard time to be seeking refuge around the world and although Canada has a just and well run system it is still a very difficult place to be a refugee claimant.

At MCRC we have walked with claimants through this ever-changing system for over thirty years. In that time there has been a wide range of governmental and cultural attitudes, constantly changing global stability and significant changes in the numbers of people seeking safety in our region. Change is nothing new, the only constant is the need to remain flexible and adapt to what is happening around us. We will continue to do what we can to be a source of guidance and comfort for refugee claimants despite the changes and challenges into the future.

Tony Van Giessen
Operations and Program
Manager, Case Worker

POSITIVE DECISIONS

When a refugee claim is accepted, that paves the way to become a Permanent Resident and eventually a Canadian citizen. Clients often share that they were not living life to the fullest before the positive decision due to uncertainty. One of the clients called following their hearing in Toronto sharing that they had received a positive decision and said: “I have great news. It is the happiest day of my life. My life was stuck. Now, I can plan my future.”

We are privileged to be part of the lives of 267 men, women and children who received a positive decision this year. For a high school graduate, it gives opportunity to pursue post-secondary studies as a domestic student. For a father whose children and wife are still back home, it gives hope to being together again.



We witnessed several family reunifications this year. One of the highlights was a mother who was reunited with her children and husband after 3 years. She shared that though it took three years, she forgot the pain of separation when she met and hugged her family at the airport. Now, she can watch her children grow up and enjoy every moment of life. We are privileged to be part of these types of celebration. This gives us energy to continue the work we do and help clients in the journey until they are all home as a complete family.

Amrita Shrestha
Case Worker

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WORKING IN THE FRONTLINES

Referring clients to community organizations, services and initiatives is a vital part of how we function at MCRS, and it is important because our services alone can't meet every client's need. In a community that offers a variety of services, we utilize what is already being offered so that other client needs can be met. Peter was told he did not have medical coverage but needed emergency medical attention. Through community relationships we contacted the local MP and Doctor who worked with us to ensure that Peter would receive the medical attention he needed.

When a refugee claim is made, we assist clients to address the most urgent needs: completing immigration documents, housing, food and financial resources. Every need listed is also a referral a caseworker makes for clients to receive support from: lawyers, food bank, shelter/ community housing alternatives, and social assistance. Some other important services include: school enrollment, language assessment, counselling supports, outreach/settlement workers, and medical services.

Every client wants the best possible outcome. They see Canada as an opportunity to start again, and rebuild their lives. Clients are always grateful for the support they receive at different agencies because these services are also important contributors to their success in the Refugee Claim process and their lives.

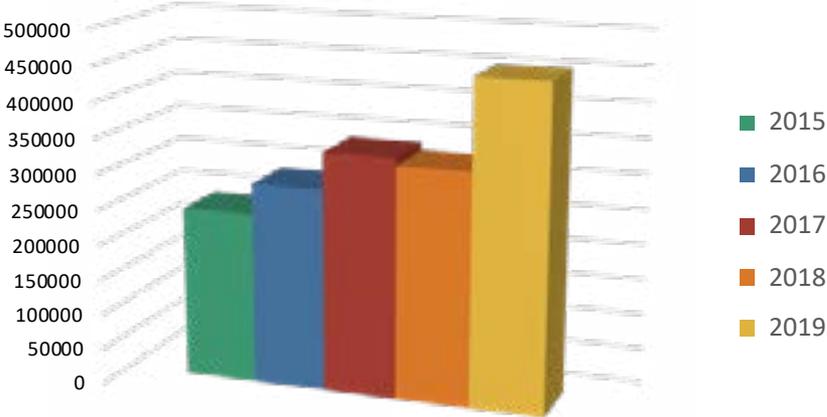
Donalee Mc Intyre
Case Worker



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FINANCIALS

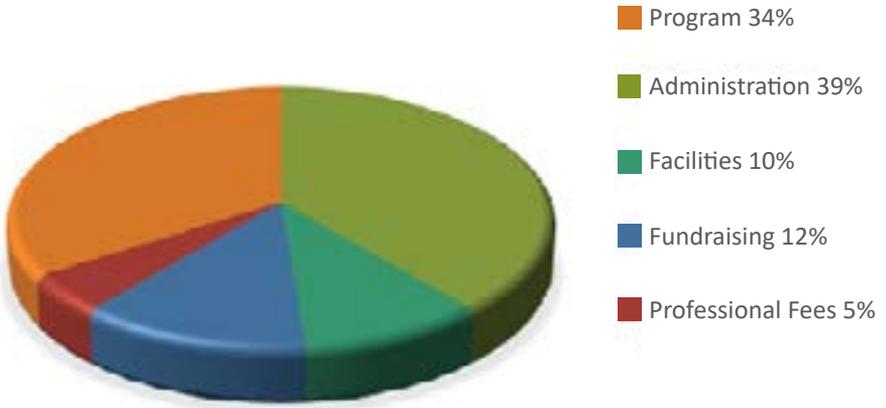
ANNUAL REVENUE



2018-2019 REVENUE \$453,141



2018- 2019 EXPENDITURES \$391,355



One of the things that inspires greater work is the support of donors who agree that great work is already being done and who invest so more of that can happen. Our donors' generosity made it possible to respond to men, women and children who needed help with their refugee claims and their settlement in our community. Because of this, hundreds of people received Canada's protection and many families were reunited after years of separation. THANK YOU!

We want to highlight the support of 15 of our local churches, a mix of denominations but with a unity in mission. We also want to say thank you to the following: Conrad Grebel Mad Market; Kindred Credit Union Charitable Foundation; Menno Singers; Mennonite Central Committee Ontario; Mersynergy Charitable Foundation; Paul and Gillian Thompson; Ross-Shire Foundation; The Caring Connection; The Jim & Lorna Blair Foundation; and The Mark and Jenny Guibert Foundation.

There are more we would love to name, but many of our donors invest quietly and faithfully. To them we also say THANK YOU! God continues to surprise us with what he wants to do through each of us doing our part! We look forward to what this next year will bring.

CELEBRATING EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

At MCRS, we believe that fostering social connections is crucial to our clients' wellbeing amidst their circumstances. They are extraordinary people caught in hard situations. Social events provide opportunity for fun, food and friends and to experience a sense a community, safety and belonging. This past year we made wonderful memories together!

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS 2018

Thank you to WMB church who hosted almost 180 clients, staff, board members and volunteers celebrating Christmas together. It was a wonderful opportunity to be together in a different setting; to enjoy presentations, share a meal, and sing together. Seeing the smiles on the children's faces as they received their presents was the highlight of the evening. Thank you to the Friends of Bay Street for donating the gifts.

SUMMER PICNIC 2019

Our clients and their families, along with MCRS staff, volunteers, and Board members came together at Victoria Park to enjoy a sun-filled fabulous day. Potluck food meant an international buffet of savoury meals. Bubble blowing, face painting, a few rounds of tug-of-war, and the ever popular soccer game were just some of the other highlights. Thank you to Rob Gast and his talented team from Creekside Church for investing in an event that focused on relationship building and celebrating our clients. We all had a blast!



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The past year brought many opportunities to connect and collaborate with different partners. Thank you to all of you who donated, volunteered, attended events and supported us. We could not have done it without you!

DECEMBER 1, 2018.

The Grebel Peace Society held their **MAKE-A-DIFFERENCE-MARKET** with all proceeds going to MCRS. It was inspiring to see youth involved and working hard towards building a better world. We were grateful to receive enough money to help nine families throughout the year!

APRIL 4, 2019.

We celebrated **RIGHTS FOR REFUGEES DAY**. In collaboration with six students from the Master of International Public Policy (MIPP) program at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, we held a one-night showing of the HBO movie *Icebox*, a harrowing film about a young boy's quest for asylum. The sold-out event was an evening of knowledge sharing with the unveiling of the results of a Waterloo Region-wide public opinion survey about refugee claimants conducted by the students. Thank you to Princess Cinemas for hosting the venue and movie screening!

APRIL 6, 2019.

Was a delightful opportunity to attend the **MENNO SINGERS CONCERT** as the chosen charity to receive all proceeds. It was an absolutely beautiful experience! Thank you to all who attended the concert and donated to MCRS.

JUNE 22, 2019.

2019 WALK WITH REFUGEES.

As members of CCORIC (the Community Coalition on Refugee and Immigrants Concerns), the organizers of the Walk, we were thrilled to have the highest attendance ever!

We were inspired by presentations that challenged us to stay active in our engagement and advocacy for refugees.

Carmen Clubine
Development and
Communications

CELEBRATING PROTECTION GRANTED

BAHAMAS

Afghanistan

Angola

Argentina

Albania

Azerbaijan

“Thank you very much for all the help your organization provided us with. If it was not for the efforts of Amrita, it might have been another story. We really appreciate your warm, welcoming and hospitable assistance that led us all the way up to here, and beyond on our journey to becoming Canadians. We are ready to help in any way that you require of us to make dreams of others to be realized.” – T.F.

El Salvador

Egypt

Ethiopia

Haiti

Hungary

INDIA

Iran

Honduras

Jamaica

Netherlands

Nigeria

NICARAGUA

Pakistan

Palestine

Romania

“I just want to say thank you for your help; especially to Donalee! May God bless you all and give you the strength to help more and more people every day. I will keep you in touch!” – N.R.

Russia

Rwanda

Saudi Arabia

Somalia

South Sudan

Sri Lanka

South Africa

Trinidad and Tobago

Turkey

(The countries above represent the citizenships of clients we served this past year.)

Bangladesh
Burundi
Colombia
Ecuador
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Cameroon
Congo
Czech Republic
Cuba
Dominican Republic
EGYPT

"We are beyond grateful for all the help and support that MCRS has provided to us when we most needed it. I would love to help or join MCRS to help others. Let me know how I can be helpful." – J.D.

Gambia
Jordan
Libya
Ghana
Guatemala
Kosovo
Lebanon
Mauritius
Mexico

"We would like to thank you for the support and help that has been provided by your organization with a special thanks from [our] heart to the great Tony. He was always there to offer his support, even the extra mile. There is no word can describe our gratitude. We believe that we are blessed by getting this YES which will allow our kids to be raised in such [an] amazing country and become a part of such outstanding community of Waterloo. We finally can feel safe about future." – S.A.

Lanka
Sudan
Uganda
Venezuela
Syria
Yemen
STATELESS
Zimbabwe

(Because many people still have family in hiding or at risk in their country of origin, we continue to protect their identities by using pseudonym initials.)

CELEBRATING INTERNS

Each year we welcome Interns who come to put into practice the things they are learning in their studies, or who are preparing for their next steps in schooling. We want to thank Renison College (BSW program), Wilfrid Laurier University (MSW program), Conestoga College (SSW program), Balsillie School of International Affairs (MIPP program), and Conrad Grebel College (MPAC program) for great partnerships and outstanding students over this past year. We also had opportunity, through the Canada Summer Jobs Grant, to hire two summer interns.

Without our interns we could not have done so much of what we did: support record numbers of men, women and children in our frontline casework; research and policy development; a youth mentorship pilot program; Refugee Rights Day signature event; Walk with Refugees event; Translation and Interpretation program development; and record outcomes for our Ride for Refuge fundraising event!

Thank you to all who interned with us. We are stronger and better because of each of you!

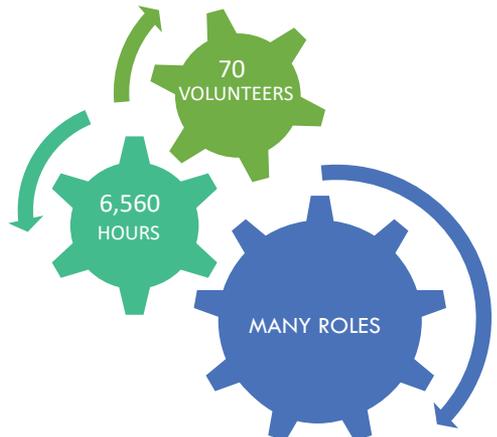
CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERS

Thousands of lives have been impacted over the years of MCRC because we have had volunteers willing to do everything from giving a warm hello in our office to event or project support, cleaning, fundraising, photocopying, translating, interpreting, research, and so much more!

Every voice and effort of our volunteers matters. This past year we met with volunteers to find out what was working and what we needed to improve, believing that they have the insight and passion for excellence that we need to achieve the best outcomes! We began a monthly newsletter to keep our volunteer team informed, equipped, healthy, and aware of amazing opportunities in the community for them.

Our goal in 2020 is to become the “go to” organization for volunteers!

For now, we wish we could name each volunteer but there are many. Know that you are appreciated and essential to the amazing outcomes so many of our clients experience! THANK YOU for making us a great organization!



2020 AND BEYOND

We can see so much of what God has done; how far we have come! We are incredibly thankful for the hundreds of people and organizations who gave donations, an encouraging word, a listening ear or an open door, and trusted that we would do what we said we would do with their generosity. Together, we all changed lives forever! THANK YOU!

Now it is time to press on with courage, vision and INVESTMENT. As long as there is a lack of peace in the world, we need to be here. As long as there are those making their way to Canada, hoping to be safe at last, we need to be here. We need to be here – all of us together – ensuring excellence in service, compassion in connections, and purposeful action in the face of challenge.

To that end, we have a plan for 2020 and beyond that embraces collaboration, promotes agility and engagement, demands excellence, meets real needs, and enables generosity.

We are here to welcome those who have lost everything with grace, kindness and love. We are here to assist, to accompany and to advocate, seeking their well-being. We are here to enjoy their contribution to the well-being of our amazing community as they find safety at last.

We will stay here only if we have people who will do more than give; they will invest on a regularly basis. Our budget for 2020 is \$604,000. The increase over last year's budget reflects our adoption of the Welcome Home Program that provides much-needed temporary accommodation and food security for refugee claimants, and will provide access to ESL, employment readiness support, housing search support, and numerous other volunteer-run programs designed to promote relationships and accelerate people settling well into the community.

We are presently working with 1,582 men, women and children who are at various stages in the refugee claim journey. Over this next year, we will be seeking 600 people who will INVEST \$50 or more each month to ensure core, stable funding that will solidify our presence in the community and will change these people's lives forever!

Stay with us! Join us! Invest generously, and then a little bit more! The best is yet to come!



WAYS TO ENGAGE

We are a group of people that care about each other and want to share our love and resources to provide a safe space for those seeking refuge in the Waterloo Region.

These are some ways that you can join us:

- **DONATE** Become a monthly partner and make a difference right away!
Visit: mcrs.ca/donate today!
When you become a monthly donor, you invest in the lives of extraordinary people and you provide us the opportunity to funnel some of the effort we put into fundraising into furthering our mission.
- **VOLUNTEER** We need interpreters and translators, social media gurus, and event volunteers.
For available positions visit: mcrs.ca/volunteer
- **PRAY** In any way you do it, please know that it really makes a difference!





THIRD PARTY EVENTS

Third Party Events are organized by community groups (e.g., schools, churches, social groups, corporations, etc.) to help raise funds necessary for MCRS to operate our programs. A Third Party Event is any activity by a non-affiliated group or individual where MCRS has no fiduciary responsibility and little or no staff involvement. However, we are happy to provide you with support and ideas to help it be a success.

Looking for ideas? Consider this list of events, but feel free to exercise your creativity; only you know your strengths, interests and resources! Or contact us at events@mcrs.ca.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Auction | Fishing Derby |
| Arts and Craft Sale/Show | Flower Sale |
| Balloon Pop | Garden Tour |
| Battle of the Bands | Garage Sale |
| Benefit Dinner | Golf Tournament |
| BBQ | Grand Opening |
| Book Sale | House Tour |
| Bowling Tournament | Pet Wash |
| Car Wash | Pledged Events |
| Carnival/Festival | Proceeds from Sales |
| Concert/Play | Run/Walk/Ride |
| Craft Sale | Scavenger Hunt |
| Dinner Party | Sporting Events |
| Donations in Lieu of Gifts | Traditional Gala |
| Face Painting | Work Department Challenge |
| Fashion Party | |

THE STORY DOES NOT END HERE.
LOOK INSIDE FOR WAYS TO GET
INVOLVED AND BECOME PART OF
OUR EXTRAORDINARY FAMILY!

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