

## Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support (MCRS) and COVID-19:

### UPDATE and THANK YOU July 2020

*Thank  
you*

We have so deeply appreciated the support and prayers of so many! We have remained fully staffed and serving very vulnerable people. When the borders closed and the lockdown went into effect, all procedures and processes for refugee claims, permanent residency applications, and family reunification stopped. It left every single one of the over 1,600 people we **assist, accompany, and advocate for** caught in the gaps.

Without status, many were excluded from the various COVID-19 supports that were being offered. But even more devastating, many were left without any sense of certainty that they would ever see family members again. Even once the borders open (probably not before 2021), there are still questions about what will happen in other countries:

- ✓ Will family members that had to be left behind in the flight for safety make it through COVID-19?
- ✓ Will foreign embassies and governments be able to complete security screenings and travel documents, and to verify identities and circumstances?



### **YET, AMID THE UNKNOWN, THERE HAVE BEEN REASONS TO CELEBRATE!**

Recently, we received the news that one of the families we have been journeying with for four years, was granted Canada's protection under a humanitarian and compassionate claim. Here is the email we received (*excerpts only, and edited to protect identity*):

*"Thank you so much for all your supports and encouragements. I still remember what you told me, that you [will] be pleased to type congratulations for me. I have been hanging on that hope, that I [will] also be congratulated.*

*I am so grateful and full of joy that after 4 years I can dream to see [my family together again]. Thanks for believing in us. The journey was long, but without [everyone at MCRS] I don't think we could have done it.*

*Many occasions ... the little voice will say, don't give up, your God is able.*

*May God continue to bless your efforts and devotion."*

**We continue to press on further motivated by these kinds of outcomes!**

We have also been working hard to reconfigure our main office on Queen Street in preparation for limited in-office client services. With **refugee hearings scheduled to begin** again in August, it will be critical for us to be able



to provide a safe space for in-person meetings. Each caseworker now has their own office, thus ensuring limited crossover with others and the ability to meet safely with clients.

We are also setting up a COVID-19 safe and private space for clients who need to do their

hearings remotely but for various reasons cannot do them from home.

At our **Guest House** ...

... we have worked diligently to ensure people’s safety in a shared-living context. Everyone has masks, hand sanitizer and disinfectant for surfaces. It is hard on the residents to be restricted from having visitors and limited to only essential off-site excursions. We also had to suspend the programs that would have reduced their isolation, but in so doing, we protected staff and volunteers. Most of our residents have moved on to permanent housing. We received this note from one of them:

*“I thank you for the love of God and gracious Canadian hospitality you showed me in a difficult season of my life. I will always be grateful of your kind service. May God bless Canada as you bless immigrants. Thankyou.”*

We are now doing some reconfiguration there as well in preparation for new residents in September.

**Thank you for your continued encouragement and prayers** as we navigate this current reality. We continue to say that like a compass, we have been able to compassionately **assist, accompany, and advocate** for people as they journey through the fog and uncertainty that COVID-19 has brought on us all. Because of people like you supporting us, we have stayed on mission with our eyes on:



- ✓ our priority of relationship
- ✓ our values of empathy, respect, empowerment, and inclusion
- ✓ our foundational call to **love God, love our neighbour, and love the foreigner.**

Peace always,

*Shelley*

Shelley Campagnola  
Executive Director

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## OTHER NOTES OF INTEREST

# of families impacted by our assistance, accompaniment, and advocacy since lockdown: 604



Check out [Ride for Refuge 2020 FREESTYLE!](#) Fundraising through the RIDE this year will be more important than ever for us so please, GET INVOLVED!