



Annual Report

A Word from The Chair

I want to begin by extending warm thanks to the board, staff, interns, and volunteers at Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support (MCRS) for all your hard work and commitment in the past year. Working with refugees and issues related to refugee claimants in Waterloo region is both challenging and rewarding but never without highs and lows. Staff and volunteers in the office understand this most acutely.

Certainly 2012 was a year of ups and downs, joys and sorrows, rewards and challenges. The year began with new energy as the board approved a new staff position – a Resource Development Coordinator – to give more attention to fundraising, donor cultivation, and public education, and the decision was made – not without risk – to move to a substantially larger office space at the Working Centre. The new office space has been a blessing, even while kinks are still being worked out, and how fortunate MCRS is to have such a positive, ongoing relationship with the Working Centre. We were able to maintain a level of financial donations such that we ended the fiscal year in a good position, despite an increase in budget.

A highlight of the year was the celebration of MCRS' 25th anniversary with a sold-out dinner in March. The success of this event – thanks to the very hard work of board members, staff, and volunteers – indicates the wonderful level of support for MCRS in the community. In all we do, we maintain the mission of MCRS as our highest priority, which is “to create a more just, welcoming, and supportive environment for refugee claimants in our community.”

Respectfully submitted,
Marlene Epp, Board Chair

...The Executive Director

This past year has been a difficult one not only for refugee claimants but also for us at MCRS. We have been challenged to respond to demands beyond our capacities and at times we have had to do extra work to respond to the needs of refugee claimant families and individuals. With the implementation of Bill C-31, (Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act), as well as painful cuts in refugee health coverage, Ontario Works etc. has exacerbated refugee claimants' general service needs and created barriers in accessing services – including food, shelter, medical care, counselling and other referral services. The changes to the Interim Federal Health Program, which took effect on June 30, 2012, have had a significant impact on refugee claimants' ability to access health care. Furthermore, the Designated Safe Countries list was published in December 2012 and claimants who are citizens of “safe” countries have been left with virtually no health coverage, making access to medical care extremely challenging, further compounding the stress that refugee claimants experience.

This coming year we will need to deal with the implementation of the new policies and prepare for this new and difficult reality. We will need to respond to this demand that has been imposed not only on refugees, but also on service providers; settlement services, legal representatives, churches and the community at large. We need to bring together all sectors of the refugee support community and MCRS needs to play a leading role as the main organization that serves refugee claimants. Our advocacy work needs to continue not only to change the negative discourse set by the government, but to work even more diligently for individuals and families.

Yours truly,
Eunice Valenzuela, Executive Director

Our Mission *To create a more just, welcoming, and supportive environment for refugee claimants in our community through the provision of orientation and advocacy throughout the refugee claim process, settlement support, and through the building of a community of mutual support.*

Board Members

Marlene Epp, *Chair*
Jim Huebner, *Treasurer*
Nan Cressman
Cathy MacLellan
Jennifer Toews

Perry Bartel
Steve Tulloch
Ray Brubacher
Jackie R. Keller

Program Highlights.

In the fiscal year 2011-2012 MCRS ran the following volunteer programs; Legal Support, Social Support, Community Outreach, Community Action Group, and the Youth Speak Up! project in addition to office, reception, and interpretation/translation support. Our most popular and enduring volunteer programs were the Legal Support and Office Support.

- There were a total of 115 new volunteers who logged 4253 hours for MCRS programs and priorities. Volunteers offered valuable support by painting, moving and setting up when we moved into the new office space.



Legal Support

The *Legal Support program* with funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario was a main priority throughout this year. Legal Support has allowed MCRS to provide enhanced legal counsel to claimants navigating the refugee claims process.

This funding was instrumental in achieving the following: updating volunteer management procedures and training processes; enabling volunteers to attend trainings in Montreal, Toronto and Kitchener; and the implementation of an integrated database system tracking volunteers, clients and donors.

- Despite the challenges we have faced, we were able to support 84 new cases: 32 families, 52 individuals for a total of 163 people.
- More than 700 pages of *translations* were completed for refugee claimants in 2012. Translation material included evidence for claimant hearings, letters of support for H&C applications, and other documents needed to facilitate the settlement of new refugee claimant families.

Social & Settlement Support Program

During 2012 families continued to be supported in the areas of housing, social assistance, work permit applications, food, clothing and furniture, referrals to counselling, childcare resources, connecting with school (ESL and elementary/high school), employment support and health care. A settlement support training manual was also revised and made available to staff and volunteers.

- Based on their common interest, the *Sewing Group* brings together 11 members who are building lifelong friendships. It provides an opportunity for refugee claimants to come together to sew, meet new friends, share their stories and develop their English skills in a non-judgmental and welcoming environment. It also incorporates inter-faith components, where members are encouraged to learn from and support each other. These practical skills help them to stretch their limited household budgets by creating and repairing clothes and other household items.
- The vibrant community that makes up the *Speak English Caf * has continued to connect newcomers with Canadians. Meeting within the inclusive walls of the Queen Street Commons, 35-40 people meet weekly, sharing their desire to learn about other cultures, as well as speak, teach and learn English.



The Youth Group collaborated in events such as the rally for refugees, the summer picnic, the volunteer appreciation dinner and the multicultural festival. The youth groups also met for activities such as gym, movie, and game nights; all with the spirit of forging a new place of belonging for refugee youth.

- The *Youth Speak Up!* project funded the opportunity for MCRS youth to share their stories through digital media, including photography and video. Ten sessions were held throughout the year which yielded 15 photographs with their corresponding stories which are now on display on the walls of the MCRS office.

- *Money Matters Collaborative Financial Literacy Project:* During 2012 we received grants from MSCU and MFC, providing us the unique opportunity to support families with money management and budgeting. Through a series of workshops facilitated by money management experts, claimants were presented with a wide range of financial tools and resources. Additionally, we have established an inventory of community organizations with financial literacy programs and are providing ongoing referrals for free tax clinics.



Belly Dancing at the Holiday Party December 2012

Event Highlights

MCRS has been an active partner with the Community Coalition on Refugee & Immigrant Concerns (CCORIC) this year informing the public of the government's increasingly restrictive and aggressive policies towards refugees and refugee claimants (Bill C-4, C-31). We hosted a World Refugee Day on June 16th with the theme of refugee sponsorship.

- The *Rally for Refugees* took place on October 11, 2011 to protest Bill C-4, the precursor to Bill C-31, Protecting Canada's Immigration System to raise local consciousness of the impending reforms.

- On June 18, 2012 we participated in the nationwide *Day of Action* to raise community awareness and to demonstrate our opposition to the proposed cuts to the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program which claimants rely on almost exclusively to meet their healthcare needs.

- *Ride for Refuge:* This year's ride in September was a tremendous success in raising community awareness and funds for MCRS. We are so thankful to all the riders and donors who participated.

This year, MCRS produced 14 short videos that were used for educational purposes in churches, schools and community events.

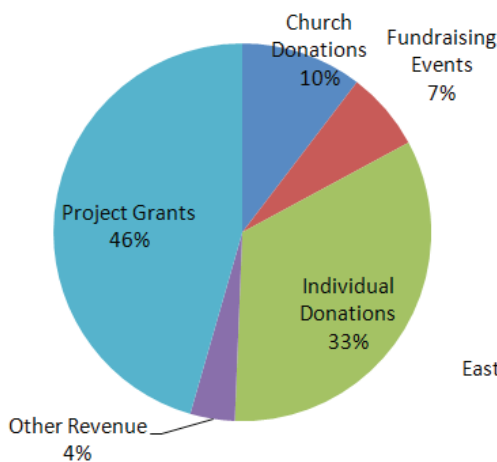
- Presentations included the Digital Storytelling project in conjunction with Latitudes storytelling festival at the Queen Street Commons, and the documentary *Compassion for Strangers: The Work of MCRS* which premiered in October 2012 at the Princess Twin Cinema. It documented the stories of several refugee claimants who have come through our doors and their journey through the legal & settlement processes once in Canada.



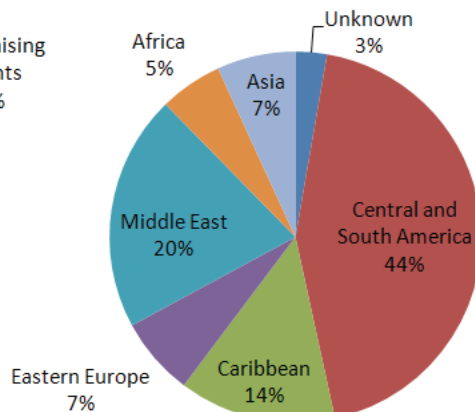
Summer Picnic Fun



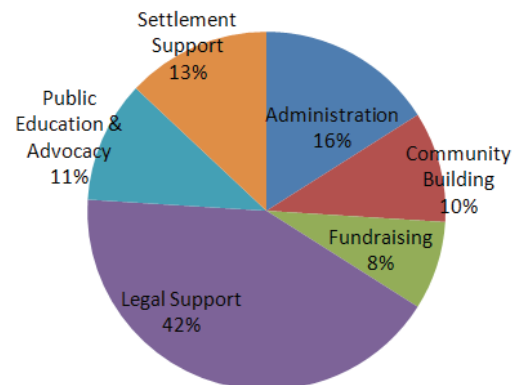
2011-2012 Overview



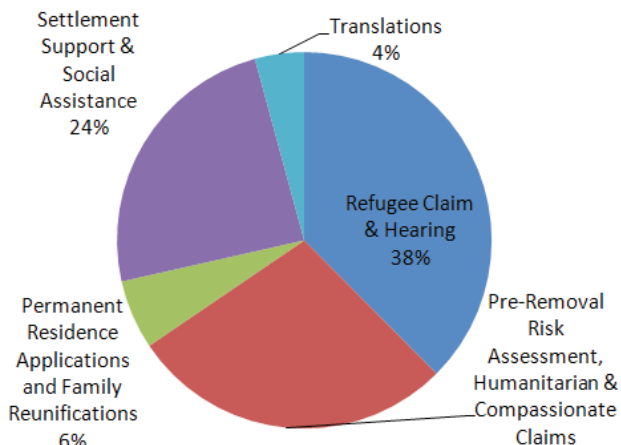
Total Revenue: \$286,648



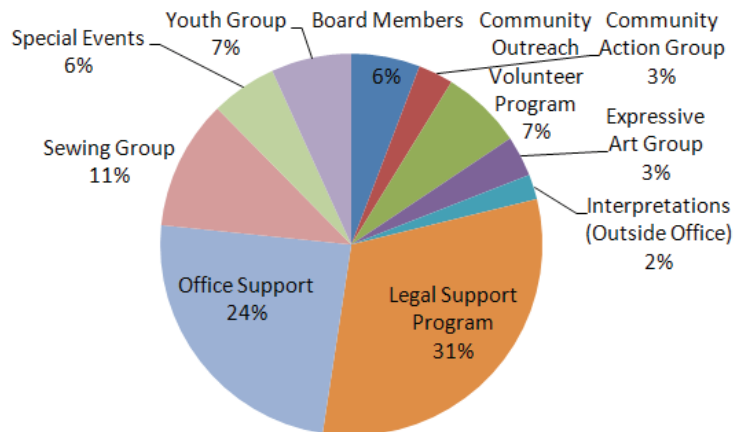
Refugee Claims By Region
(130 new cases)



Total Expenses: \$272,701



Client Services



Volunteer Hours By Program
(115 active volunteers contributed 4253 hours)

Many thanks to our financial partners:



Thanks also to the individual donors and churches that make our work possible.

Staff Members

Executive Director
Eunice Valenzuela
Volunteer Coordinator
Steven Reesor Rempel
Support Worker
Melissa Paciulan

Accountant
Yasmina Montalti
Student Interns
David Celis
Carolyn Longman
Marcee Groen

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