



**MCRS 2017  
ANNUAL REPORT**

*Seeking Refuge. Finding Hope*



It is with a heart full of gratitude that I reflect on the past year at MCRS. Although the organization has gone through tremendous transition in 2017 and welcomed more refugee claimants than ever before in its history, it has remained a catalyst of community.

MCRS unites the efforts of staff, interns, more than 40 regular volunteers, and a vast body of supporters to work toward one goal – to create welcome, refuge, and hope for those who have had to flee for their lives. It has been an honour for us on the Board to be part of this important work.

We rejoiced in 2017 to celebrate 30 years of welcome to refugee claimants. How enriched our community has been by the contributions of the thousands of courageous claimants who have joined us over the years! Yet we are saddened that the number of those needing to seek refuge at our borders continues to rise. We look to the coming years with determination to continue making the contribution we can toward a more just society for all.

In 2017 we said some goodbyes. After 25 years with MCRS, we said goodbye to Eunice Valenzuela. We appreciate the many contributions she brought through various roles, including as Executive Director. We also said goodbye to our friends at the Working Centre and the space they had generously provided for years, and hello to a new adventure sharing space with Reception House at 675 Queen St.

# FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

It has been heartening to hear from claimants about how much they appreciate the private meeting space we now enjoy, and from staff about the efficient work space. Thank you to our many supporters for making this possible!

This past year, the MCRS Board met nine times. Working within the priorities of our 2015-19 Strategic Plan, we developed our volunteer base to provide skilled support to claimants, updated organizational policies, increased donor support, advocated for Legal Aid for refugee claimants, engaged in community education and made strides toward the development of long-term, stable funding for the organization.

Supporting all the efforts of MCRS this year is the energy and leadership of Director, Shelley Campagnola. It has been a delight to work together with Shelley and our committed staff.

We are deeply grateful for their tremendous work, and profoundly appreciative of your ongoing support. We look forward to a new year of refuge and hope ahead.

With many thanks,

Nan Cressman  
MCRS Board Chair  
January 2018

# SO MUCH TO CELEBRATE

After 30 years, MCRS remains the “go to” organization for supporting refugee claimants. As Director, it is my honour to be able to celebrate what our team – Board, staff, interns, volunteers, community partners, and donors - did in 2017!

**Refugee Claim Process:** We saw a record number 207 new files (up from 122 in 2016) representing 484 people here plus family members still in another country. A surge in persecution in Turkey, hostilities in the United States, and dangers in 35 other countries continued to drive people to seek refuge here.

Most hearings in 2017 were postponed indefinitely. The wait is so disheartening, especially for family members still in other countries who learn that they cannot come to Canada for years. We did see significant movement with older claims and we celebrate 57 positive decisions and many families reunited, including one that had been in process since 2007!

**Settlement Support:** A significant part of our caseworkers’ role is doing referrals for employment, housing, education, health, and food assistance. We are so thankful for the support of Waterloo Region Emergency Shelters as they had a 150% increase in claimant emergency accommodation in 2017.

We also celebrate relationships with Welcome Home, Open Homes, Ontario Works, the two School Boards, House of Friendship, and many other food assistance and support programs in the region.

**Building Community:** Imagine trying to buy food or a bus pass and no one speaks your language. Imagine feeling -30 C



temperatures for the first time. These kinds of things mixed with being separated from family, make it incredibly difficult for a claimant to feel like he or she belongs. To help, we extend “welcome” through two events designed to build community.

We celebrated our **Christmas Event** with people from 23 different countries! We enjoyed an amazing buffet of food provided by WMB Church, and presentations by Crossing Borders and Colombian dancers. We turned our **Summer Picnic** into a potluck event. What a delight to savour foods from all around the world and to see the joy that such opportunity to share favourite recipes brought. We will do this again in 2018!!

**Advocacy and Education:** In 2017, we partnered with MCC Ontario and Mennonite New Life Centre and other refugee claimant organizations to successfully advocate for **Legal Aid** to continue to be provided to refugees. Without this support, many cannot afford legal representation at their hearings and the success rates of claims drops from 80% to 30%.

We deeply appreciated the support of local media and partners as we spoke to the lack of **affordable transitional housing** that saw too many claimants and their children stuck in emergency shelter with no place to go.

With funding from the KW Community Foundation, we were able to provide staff for **Crossing Borders** who went on to give over 50 presentations. They also placed second for the Ken Spencer Award in recognition of their excellence in “breaking down barriers between Canadian-born and newcomer students, one story at a time”.



# ON THE FRONT LINES

In 2017 we worked with many who had called America home for years, if not decades, and were now threatened with being deported to places unknown by their children. ***We walked alongside*** regular people from around the world, including new trouble zones like Venezuela and Turkey. Strong, courageous people in extraordinary circumstances, they risked everything for a chance at a life free from persecution and danger for themselves and their families. ***We watched*** with sober hearts as most of their hearings were postponed indefinitely leaving people waiting... and waiting. ***We celebrated*** as a long-time advocacy piece was finally acted upon and the age of dependants was raised back up to under 22 years of age.

The humanity of our work was there every day. ***We struggled*** with a young man from Eritrea dealing with uncertainty about his future, separation from his wife and children, and his first Canadian winter. ***We offered comfort and support*** to a family from Nicaragua as they faced deportation to an unknown future.

***We celebrated*** many positive decisions this year with families from Colombia, Syria and Turkey as well as young single men and women from Venezuela, Palestine and Somalia. ***We celebrated*** as wives were reunited with husbands after years of being apart and as fathers who hadn't been able to watch their children grow up were able to greet them and begin to live as family again.

Every year ***amazing people*** come to us and entrust us with their stories and their struggles. It is a great privilege and joy to share life with refugee claimants and we are very grateful to have the chance to continue to do so into 2018. – **Tony Van Giessen and Amrita C. Shrestha, Caseworkers**



“Suppose, you are in a country as a refugee claimant where you don’t know which door to knock on to get support! Who will introduce you to your rights as a refugee; and, also your responsibilities? Who will let you know where to start your journey from and where to end? Imagine, you have no idea about when and which document you need to fill out and where to submit it, which leads your status towards processing.

The only thing that you have heard is that there is a country in North America called Canada which provides refuge to people facing life threatening risks in their home country. And, you have a handful of stereotype information about that country that you have heard from family and friends.

So, would you expect a place like MCRC which provides very warm and friendly services regarding your settlement in terms of residence status and housing? ***Would you expect to have them change the phrase from “my problem” to “our problem”?*** Yet that is [exactly] how they follow up every stage with you!





# MCRS = FAMILY

People see MCRS as an organization. However, it is more pronounced **a family** for me. A family which not only supports refugees regardless of their country of origin, language and faith for their paperwork in the Canadian Government, and with housing help, but also ties families with communities and provides them emotional supports towards their journey until they turn to be a permanent resident.” - **Client**

***“MCRS gives hope to those  
who had hope taken away”***

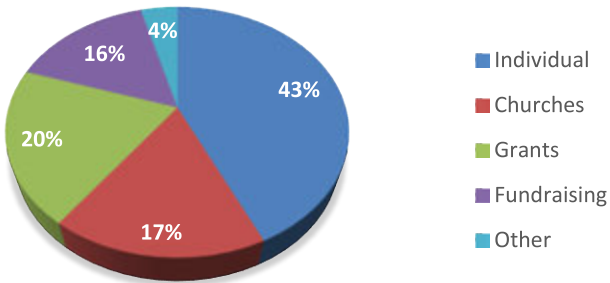
“For our family, MCRS has been that **counselor** and that **helping hand** that you need to have to achieve a new beginning in an unknown place.

It is a great **blessing** to have support since our arrival in Canada as MCRS has given us the right **guidance and support** for all the procedures associated with the presentation of our case from the legal point of view, as well as the fast integration to the lifestyle that a newly arrived immigrant can perform.

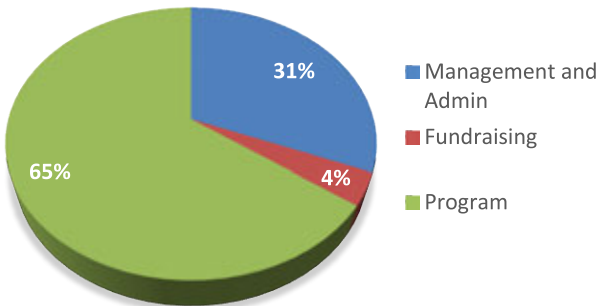
They have also given us very **warm and friendly** service through our caseworker who has made us feel part of this community from the first day. We will always be grateful to MCRS and wish you success and blessings in your efforts for this [next] year 2018.” - **Client**

# FINANCIAL REPORT

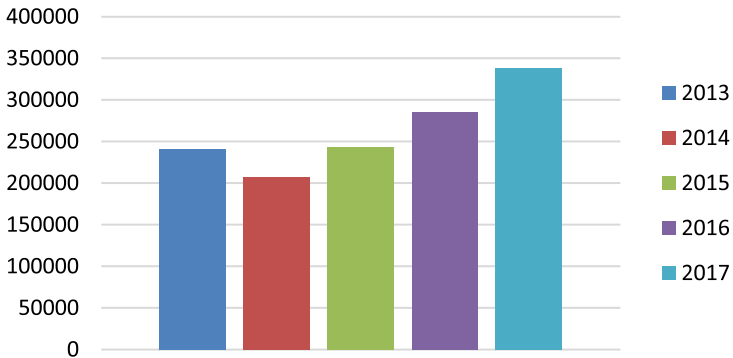
## 2017 Revenue \$338,144



## 2017 Expenditures \$378,746



## Annual Revenue



We have been ***blessed*** to have a strong and consistent core of faithful donors who have given generously year after year!

We made strategic moves in 2017 to provide dedicated working space for our staff, and private space for our clients that ***protected their dignity*** as they shared their stories.

With a ***65% increase*** in the number of clients over 2016 we also positioned ourselves to be able to grow and meet what we expect will be a continued increase in need for our services.

As the “go to” organization that ***treats people like family***, one of our primary goals moving forward will be to grow our support base with a focus on ***monthly donors***. Regular monthly support enables us to be ***agile in our response to immediate and long-term shifts*** in refugee and refugee claimant issues and trends.



In 1987, when MCRS began, our primary focus was on helping people seeking refuge from devastating civil wars and persecution in Central America. Since then, MCRS has welcomed people from over **50 different countries**, and in May 2017 we celebrated 30 years of giving hope to those seeking refuge, with thousands of lives changed because of our support.

The world has changed since our first days. **Anti-refugee sentiment** around the world has reached crisis proportions, with 70 countries now having **closed borders**, making finding refuge not only difficult, but dangerous and desperate.

In 2017, words of welcome by leaders in Canada were mixed with words of warning by those same leaders about the **challenges of gaining refugee status** in Canada as thousands came, some at the risk of their lives, hoping to be safe at last.

This has placed extraordinary stress on our refugee claimant systems, creating **a backlog that some say will take at least a decade to clear**. It has created stress on **housing supports and on Legal Aid resources**. While we were able to prevent suspension of Legal Aid to refugees in 2017, we are anticipating a bigger challenge in 2018 as their budget deficit soars.

As the backlog grows, families remain separated for longer periods of time. Being a second family, advocating for resources and expedited processes, and helping to facilitate family reunifications will remain top priorities for MCRS in 2018 and beyond.



Our mission is 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

Our vision is that refugees in Waterloo Region experience welcome, compassion, inclusion, and justice.



# WAYS YOU CAN HELP!

MCRS is us! All of us! The people we help. The staff and interns and volunteers. The churches and businesses and foundations and individual donors. The community partners! We are all MCRS!

*“For me, MCRS is ... people that really care ... about other people!!!!” - Client*

Here are some of the ways you can join all of us!

- **DONATE:** Become a monthly partner and make a difference right away! Visit [mcrs.ca/donate](http://mcrs.ca/donate) for more details.
- **VOLUNTEER:** We primarily need interpreters, translators, reception hosts, social media gurus, and event volunteers. For a full listing of volunteer opportunities visit [mcrs.ca/getinvolved/volunteering-at-mcrs/](http://mcrs.ca/getinvolved/volunteering-at-mcrs/).
- **FUNDRAISE:** Do you have some friends, family or coworkers that would love to grow the welcome by raising funds for MCRS? Visit [mcrs.ca/donate/friends-of-mcrs/](http://mcrs.ca/donate/friends-of-mcrs/) to look for ideas or come up with one of your own.
- **PRAY:** In whatever way you do it, know that it really does make a difference.



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Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support

## *Seeking Refuge. Finding Hope*

MCRS is a community of people driven by love for their neighbour working together and with others to help refugee claimants establish their new home.

We believe that love and wisdom can create a safe environment where a community of creative and resourceful people can help refugee claimants build a new home where they can offer the best of themselves to their families, our community and our country.

We are motivated by love to help those escaping from violence and vulnerability, in other countries, to find a peaceful and productive future in the Waterloo region.

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