



mcrs



2018 ANNUAL REPORT



SEEKING REFUGE. FINDING HOME

IN SOLIDARITY

All around the world today, there are people who work with others to build a better life, who invest their energies for the common good. That's what you and I are trying to do through MCRS, and it's what causes a number of those we serve to be targeted in their home countries. Some are persecuted because of race, religion, culture, orientation, or political opinion; others, because they stick their necks out for their community. If I were targeted because I was involved in community organizing or in a women's, farmers', faith, or small business group, I would pray that somewhere there were folks in solidarity with me, people who could help me to safety, and create space for me to join them in their efforts for a better world. That's exactly what we've been trying to do through MCRS this year.

In 2018, through MCRS, we walked in solidarity with 632 new guests from 45 countries. It has been challenging, satisfying, frustrating and joyful work - and an honour and privilege for us on the Board of Directors to walk with them, you our supporters, and the MCRS staff and volunteer team.

2018 broke 2017's record numbers by over a third, yet MCRS was able to meet the challenge because of your support. We were able to settle more into our new home at 675 Queen St. and strengthen the MCRS team with two new staff positions because of your generosity. Now three Caseworkers provide critically needed support to our guests and our new Development and Communications Coordinator supports the connection between you and those we serve.



In 2018, through MCRS, we walked in solidarity with **632** new guests from **45** countries.



In our nine meetings this year, we on the Board have revisited the priorities of our 2015-19 Strategic Plan in light of our changing political climate, which makes the situation of refugee claimants - the poorest of the poor of refugees - even more challenging. We are engaged in new discernment on housing for claimants, in community education, in updated organizational policies to meet changing guidelines, in a review of MCRS branding, and in the development of long-term, stable funding.

For us, one highlight of 2018 was our staff/board retreat to build community, fine-tune our mission and values, and set goals for the coming year. Throughout the year, it has been a great pleasure to work with our extraordinary staff, interns, and volunteers under the guidance of our insightful and multi-skilled Executive Director, Shelley Campagnola. We are deeply grateful for their excellent work, and profoundly appreciative of your ongoing support.

In solidarity with all those seeking refuge and home we offer you our thanks.

*Nan Cressman
MCRS Board Chair
January 2019*



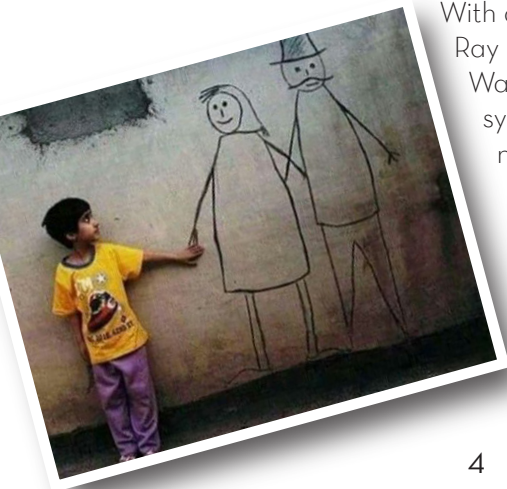
BETTER TOGETHER

This past year marked the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There was irony in this, as various countries closed their borders to those seeking refuge, and we learned about prison-camp style accommodations for asylum seekers in other countries. Here in Canada, asylum seekers fared better but were still boldly called out by some as imposters and threats to the economy, national security, and familiar ways of life.

At MCRC, we repeated the record year of 2017, growing by another 33% in new families served. This brought our total number to 1600 people that we are helping through various stages of the refugee claim process. For most of the year, we did this with two full-time caseworkers, a few interns and many volunteers.

275 NEW FILES IN 2018
45 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES
1,600 PEOPLE NOW
IN PROCESS
83 POSITIVE DECISIONS

In quiet contrast to the public rhetoric, we continued to offer welcome, steadfastly upholding our values of empathy, respect, empowerment and inclusion. We adjusted our tagline to read *seeking refuge, finding home*. This reflects our long-term commitment to help until people are reunited with their families, which can take anywhere from three to ten years.



With deep gratitude to Open Homes, Ray of Hope/Welcome Home, and the Waterloo Region Emergency Shelter system, no one who came to us needed to sleep on the streets even when resources were maxed out.

The incredible generosity of donors, churches and foundations including Mersynergy Family Foundation, Kindred Charitable Foundation, MCCO, Shantz MC and WMB Church (to name a few), meant that we were able to finish with a surplus. We are thankful and humbled by the confident support of many long-term, as well as newer, donors. We maintained lean operations even as we initiated efforts to increase monthly giving, grow our donor base, and pursue timely responsiveness to people in need. There is still much to be done but we are deeply encouraged, and we look forward to good outcomes in 2019.

Finally, with elections dominating the public domain, and much of the negative tone targeting asylum seekers, we strengthened our local, provincial and national partnerships in a spirit of **“better together”** resulting in many positive outcomes including better Legal Aid services for our friends. We also worked hard to tell the stories in as many ways and places as we could of 83 people *finding home* in 2018.

It is a privilege to work with a team of people who believe that asylum seekers have the right to be heard and to be treated with warmth and dignity. Our staff, interns, and volunteers carry a heavy load with kindness, humility and steadfastness to the cause. Thank you for investing in them and in those we help to find home. We are truly better together!

Shelley Campagnola
Executive Director
January 2019



WALKING ALONGSIDE

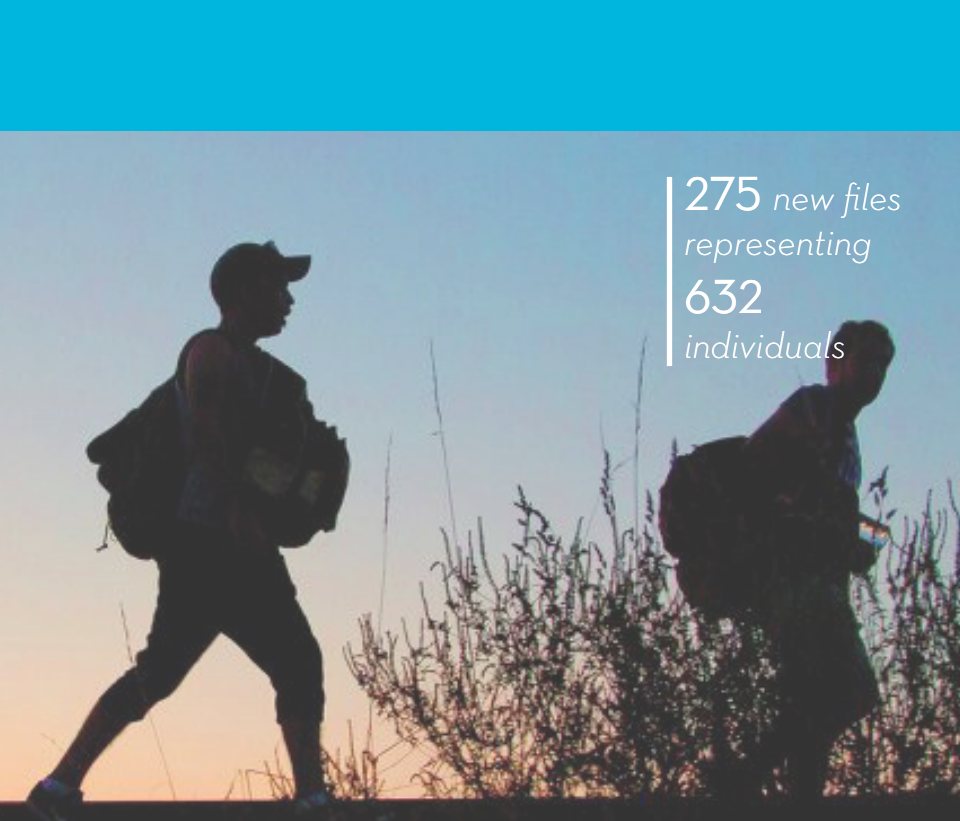
2018 was another year of new faces and at times, great challenge. Last year we talked about the incredibly busy year we experienced.



Last year we talked about the incredibly busy year we experienced. This year was busier yet. Thus, we recognize that this might be the new norm.

We had 275 new files this year, representing 632 individuals, which is 148 more people than the previous year. However, we are not facing the challenge in isolation. These numbers impacted the refugee sector across the country and in the housing and settlement sectors that we partner so closely with.

While managing new claimants and the active caseload from previous years, we have been involved with clients at all stages of the claim process. We spent time in consultation with clients from Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Nigeria helping them consider the implications of this life changing decision. We navigated the early days of the claim process with single mothers from Eritrea, and young couples from Central America. We worked to find lawyers, get legal aid and begin putting their story into words together.



275 *new files*
representing
632
individuals

There were many individuals and stories that were memorable over the past year: families fleeing oppressive regimes, women seeking protection from violent partners, individuals seeking religious freedom and middle age professionals driven to flee their homes in response to real and imminent threats of murder and extortion. The language, religion, citizenship and source of persecution all may change and yet the core struggle and the end goal remains the same. Every day we work with strong, courageous and determined individuals who have found themselves in extraordinary circumstances. They have taken incredible risks to try and find a new home where they and their loved ones are safe and can experience peace.

At MCRS we are privileged to walk alongside such incredible people and we are all excited to continue doing so in the future.



“

Empathy is a strange and powerful thing. There is no right way to do it. It's simply listening, holding space, withholding judgement, emotionally connecting and communicating that incredibly healing message of "You're not alone".

—
BRENE BROWN

”

Moving past sympathy and embracing empathy with the claimants we work with is a value we all try to work towards as caseworkers. This can occur in both the pain and the celebrations that are part of the claimant process.

Some of the more memorable experiences I have had sharing empathy with claimants have been around the experience of family separation. Sitting with young men as they struggle with the uncertainty, loneliness and powerlessness that comes with being away from your partner and children for years on end. One young man who I spent time working with through this process described MCRS' approach as turning my problem into our problem. I believe that is what we are aiming for, approaching and grappling with problems collaboratively. It also means that in the end when the goal finally becomes reality and families are brought back together that we share in their joy and celebrate it together.

Tony
Case Worker



LIVING OUR VALUES: **EMPOWERMENT**

At MCRS, caseworkers focus on empowerment and assist clients to see their own skills, strengths and capacity. We actively listen to clients, validate their stories and help them make their own decisions. Many clients feel helpless and think they have little control over their lives in Canada. Our role is to empower and encourage them, to help them get back a sense of pride and take ownership of their own lives.

I had the privilege of working with a young professional couple who felt powerless and thought they had little control of their lives in Canada. When we met, I told them that we would walk this journey together.

I reminded them it is their journey and that they have ownership of where to take it. When time came to choose a lawyer, they insisted that I made the decision, but I reminded them that they owned it. They took some time and made the decision. While working with them they appreciated how we provided a safe space where they can share their stories, struggles and successes with us. They expressed MCRS saw them as human beings rather than just a number. They really valued the relational aspect of MCRS' work.

Amrita
Case Worker



We actively listen to clients, validate their stories and help them make their own decisions.



LIVING OUR VALUES: **RESPECT**



Respect is given, received and requested. The third is often forgotten but I'd like to centre this story on the art of requesting respect.

I received a referral for an older couple to complete a work permit. After opening and assessing the file, I found that they had bigger issues than expected. They were working with a paralegal who had promised to take care of everything related to their claim. Maybe the service provider assumed that the client's age and vulnerability as a newcomer meant they would do as they were told, without question. However, these clients did want to be involved and informed, and had many questions when things didn't quite add up. I assisted them, to get their work permit, and a new lawyer. Yet, the process was driven by the clients' request to be treated with respect: to be informed, to be involved, and to know everything related to their claim.

Respect is central to how I operate in my role as a caseworker, but I am always sensitive to the ways that I can encourage client driven respect rather than respect that's driven by me.

Donalee
Case Worker



“

Have a big enough heart to love unconditionally, and a broad enough mind to embrace the differences that make each of us unique.

—
D.B. HARROP

”

LIVING OUR VALUES: **INCLUSION**

When refugee claimants arrive, they can experience barriers to integration such as insecure legal status, poor housing conditions, a lack of access to education and employment opportunities and prejudice.

We are the friend and second family that many people need when they first arrive. We practice welcome in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, and have equal access to opportunities and resources. We provide a positive space and a bridge to new connections that expand the network of support and relationships people need. We are an active member of a broader community that cares for and supports refugee claimants.

*Carmen
Development &
Communications*

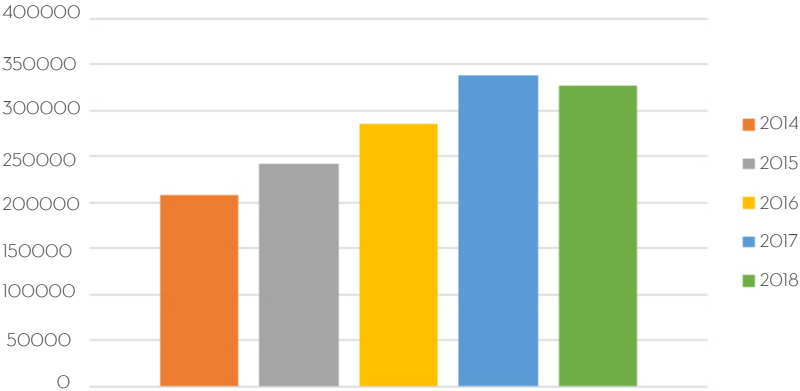


STEWARDING GENEROSITY

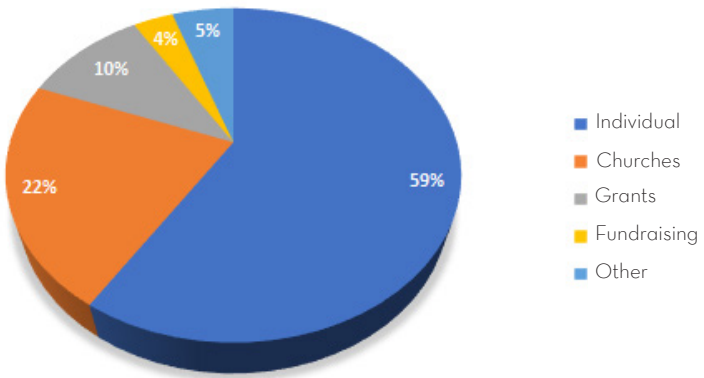
As a small charity with a BIG IMPACT (1600 people being served), we remain the "go to" organization serving refugee claimants. One of the challenges we face is having enough resources to grow our programs - the reason we exist. With minimal staff, high demand for services, the same compliance requirements as larger charities, and nonnegotiable expenses, the opportunity to enhance current programs and develop new ones is especially dependent on growing our funding resources.

We are **deeply thankful** to the many donors who stepped up over 2018 and agreed it was time for us to grow. Near the end of our fiscal year we were able to hire personnel and get positioned for strong efforts in 2019 to add the number of people who financially support MCRS. This will enable us to multiply our program resources and assist ever-increasing numbers of people coming to us for help in *seeking refuge*. Thank you!

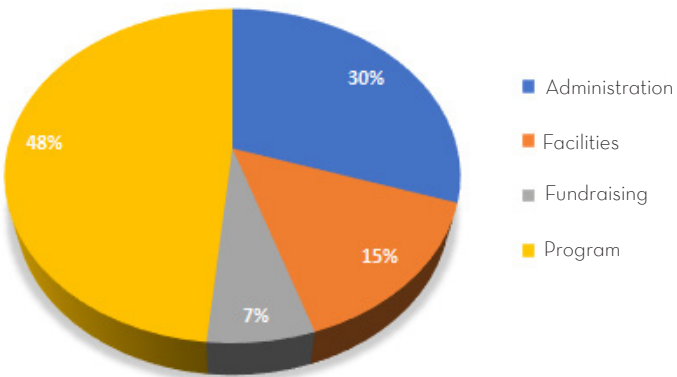
Annual Revenue




2018 Revenue \$327,295



Expenditures \$263,026



ACTIVE IN MISSION



Our mission is to welcome and support refugee claimants in our community through four strategic objectives. The following are highlights for the year 2018 and what we anticipate for 2019.

Providing assistance with the refugee claim process. In January, the IRB implemented a new “First-in, First-out (FIFO)” policy for most refugee claims. This has meant a significant delay for people, many of whom will not have their first hearing for at least two years. In response, we prioritized our follow-up program to ensure regular check-ins with people to encourage them and let them know we care, especially at times when being separated from family for so long can feel especially painful.

Accessing a network of settlement support. Roughly 25% of the people who came to us for help in 2018 needed immediate shelter. Some were welcomed into Open Homes, some stayed at Ray of Hope’s Welcome Home, and some went to Emergency shelter. Stays in these temporary accommodations were extended well beyond the norm, due to the challenge of trying to find independent affordable housing. Throughout the year we wrestled with our role in finding solutions to a system stressed by the longer-term needs, and limited resources, of claimants.

Building communities of mutual support. Two of the biggest challenges of seeking refuge are the separation from all that has been familiar, and isolation. This is where we have the greatest opportunity to encourage and empower the people we help. We love being able to provide opportunities to volunteer for some of our refuge-seeking friends. Their skills and eager support of us are a shared joy.

Our annual summer picnic and Christmas party were once again a meaningful gathering of people from many different countries.

In 2019, we hope to grow our donor support enabling us to find new ways to engage, empower and encourage our international friends in ways that help them to nurture, develop and launch their dreams while they wait to hear the outcomes of their refugee claim.

Advocating for a fair and just environment for refugees in Canada

This was a wonderful year of positive media engagement, opportunities to visit churches, invitations to present in a variety of contexts, lead an all-candidates meeting for the provincial election, and participate in the Walk with Refugees. We stepped-up our engagement with various advocacy groups (local, provincial and national), working together to press for change in the face of an increasingly polarized context.

The highlight for this year was being invited to join a standing panel of representative claimant organizations that meets twice a year with Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), collaborating to ensure best practices and excellent services for claimants.

In 2019 we will be promoting **#bettertogether** as our key message that claimants need us, and we need them. We will be hosting, participating in, and championing various public opportunities to speak up for a fair and just environment for refugees.



LOVE IN MOTION



MCRS volunteers feel called to help for many different reasons including their desire to welcome newcomers, to gain valuable job skills, or to give back to the organization that helped them through their own claim process. Many volunteers at MCRS know first-hand the difficulties faced by refugee claimants and wish to ease their pathway towards gaining refugee status and transitioning into Canada.

One volunteer in particular found herself longing for purpose after becoming a refugee in Canada. In her home country, she worked as a professional translator and dreamed of a career as an interpreter to important officials. When she arrived in Canada, she found that her skills and experience were not accepted as they were in her home country and she felt her dream slipping away. After using MCRS services, she decided to volunteer as a translator. Each time she came into the office, sat down at the computer, and began to translate she was reminded that her talents are valued, that she is important, and that she has a role to play in this new country. This volunteer's work with MCRS has touched the lives of many claimants whose stories echo her own, allowing her to regain confidence and continue on her journey of healing and belonging.



5,937 HOURS
40 VOLUNTEERS, 5 INTERNS
3.8 FULL-TIME STAFF EQUIVALENT

I came to MCRS as a grant research volunteer in September 2018 with the hopes of using my practical skills to make an impact in the lives of those around me. When I arrived, I found a community of people who have devoted their time, their hearts, and their passions towards the betterment of the lives of refugee claimants and felt that I had found an organization where I could make a difference. I was incredibly fortunate to transition into a staff position as the Administrative Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator at MCRS. Each day I am inspired to work harder as I witness the dedication, compassion, and love demonstrated by our incredible volunteers towards our clients, each other, and MCRS staff. Whether they are welcoming our friends from behind the reception desk, translating vital documents, interpreting conversations for caseworkers, planning community-building events, or doing odd-jobs around the office, each volunteer is a crucial member of our team. As an organization, we gain so much from our volunteers and strive to give back to them a portion of the benefits they have given to us. Through our volunteer

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Great things are brought about and burdens are lightened through the efforts of many hands anxiously engaged in a good cause.

ELDER M. RUSSEL BALLARD

”

program, we can provide volunteers with hands-on job skills, references for future endeavours, and the satisfaction of knowing that they have made an enormous difference in their community.

Emily
Administrative Assistant
& Volunteer Coordinator



JOIN US!

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*, hoping of *Finding Home* amongst us.

You can be part of our family!

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!
- **VOLUNTEER** - We need interpreters and translators, social media gurus, and event volunteers. For available positions visit [mcrs.ca/get involved/volunteering-at-mcrs](https://mcrs.ca/get-involved/volunteering-at-mcrs).
- **FUNDRAISE** - Gather your friends, family, co-workers or neighbours and have fun raising funds for MCRS. For ideas go to: mcrs.ca/donate/friends-of-mcrs.
- **PRAY** - In any way you do it, please know that it really makes a difference!



WORDS THAT KEEP US GOING

“MCRS is a team blessed and committed to providing warm support to newcomers.”



“We are deeply grateful to all the staff of MCRS. You are wonderful and from the first day until today you have accompanied us and supported us in all the steps we have taken. You are our first family in Canada. God bless you always for the valuable work you do!”



“My daughter is safe to go to school and she can have fun and good quality education compared to back home.”

“We feel as part of a family with you and we are thankful with God for people like you. Thank you so much for your support and love for all [the] people who need you. You’re doing a great job!”



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 out 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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MENNONITE COALITION FOR REFUGEE SUPPORT