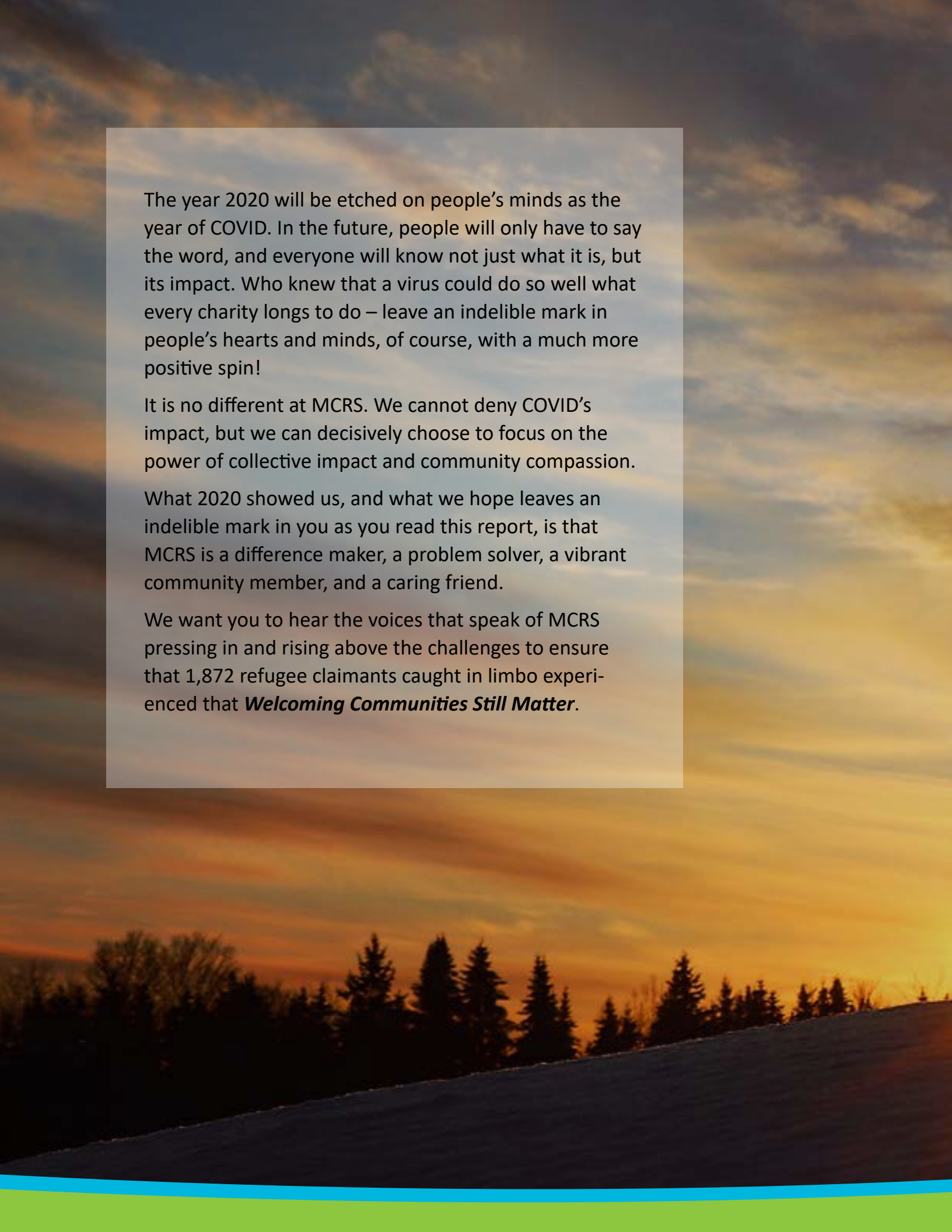




Welcoming Communities Still Matter

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

The background of the page is a photograph of a sunset. The sky is filled with soft, golden light, transitioning from a pale yellow near the horizon to a deeper orange and then a soft blue at the top. In the foreground, a snow-covered hill slopes upwards from the bottom left towards the right. A line of dark evergreen trees is silhouetted against the bright horizon. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

The year 2020 will be etched on people's minds as the year of COVID. In the future, people will only have to say the word, and everyone will know not just what it is, but its impact. Who knew that a virus could do so well what every charity longs to do – leave an indelible mark in people's hearts and minds, of course, with a much more positive spin!

It is no different at MCRS. We cannot deny COVID's impact, but we can decisively choose to focus on the power of collective impact and community compassion.

What 2020 showed us, and what we hope leaves an indelible mark in you as you read this report, is that MCRS is a difference maker, a problem solver, a vibrant community member, and a caring friend.

We want you to hear the voices that speak of MCRS pressing in and rising above the challenges to ensure that 1,872 refugee claimants caught in limbo experienced that ***Welcoming Communities Still Matter***.

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01 CHAIR'S MESSAGE

David sat across the table from me and with a big smile, lots of animation and glowing words, he expressed gratitude to MCRS for the support he and his family received for a successful refugee claim. He and his wife are working, and his children are safe and able to grow to their full potential. This is the work of MCRS, to welcome the stranger by:

- **assisting** in the hard work of navigating through a complex system from refugee to citizenship,
- **accompanying** in the day-to-day effort to thrive,
- **advocating** when hindrances to justice are daunting, and to promote welcoming communities.

BOARD ACTIVITIES IN 2020

In 2020 we brought greater clarity to our mission and vision statements and approved strategic objectives for our next five-year plan that focus on program relevance, community collaboration, agility, generosity and excellence.

We also expanded our programs to include temporary housing support and transferred management of Welcome Home from Ray of Hope to MCRS. We will continue to grow program supports that include food security, employment readiness, community integration, and help in finding permanent housing.

We did significant policy work to strengthen our governance processes and practice.

We are pleased to be welcoming new members who bring cultural, experiential, and knowledge diversity to our Board.

EXPANDING OUR WELCOME

In 1987, a group of Mennonite churches, with the support of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (MCCO), answered the call to support people fleeing from impossible situations in their country of origin. Thirty-three years later, MCRS continues to mature in its response to refugees, assisting, accompanying, and advocating for people fleeing from over 65 countries.

WE ASSIST ACCOMPANY ADVOCATE

This year, following a two-year journey of extensive community research and reflection led by Graf-Martin Communications, the MCRS Board of Directors approved moving MCRS into 2021 with a new name and more distinct brand – *Compass Refugee Centre*.



We remain committed to the history, ethos, and culture of MCRS rooted in our Mennonite origins. However, we have grown beyond our formative times and expanded our welcome to include many others who also seek peace and justice for refugees. We also recognize the name confusion that has persisted since our birth through, and subsequent independence from, MCCO. We are excited to better reflect the broader base of those who support us and the global diversity of those who come to us seeking support.

As *Compass Refugee Centre* we will continue working enthusiastically with Partners, Regional and Municipal governments, and like-minded organizations and individuals as we strive to build collaborative relationships for comprehensive refugee care in our community. Expect to see more people rightly receive Canada's protection. Notice that we are growing, with more people pursuing peace and justice for refugees. Celebrate as we contribute to a community that believes ***Welcoming Communities Still Matter!***

We are thankful to all who generously support this work and to our staff who faithfully steward the resources you provide and who also serve refugees so well.

Blessings to all,

Peggy Snyder
President and Board Chair





02 EXECUTIVE'S DIRECTOR MESSAGE

At our last AGM in January 2020 we said, *“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 ... We need to be here – all of us together – ensuring excellence in service, compassion in connections, and purposeful action in the face of challenge.”*

The phrase “hindsight is 2020” will have new meaning for all of us as we go into 2021, but for MCRS, those words shared in January could not have been more spot-on for what unfolded! The pandemic wreaked havoc for us all, but also ground to a halt and then a slow crawl, the multitude of systems that refugee claimants must navigate, leaving their lives full of gaps, in limbo, and separated indefinitely from family members they had to leave behind in their flight for safety. For them and us, courage, vision, and investment were the touchstones needed when the challenges produced so much uncertainty.

Over the year, our incredible team of staff, interns, volunteers, partners, the broader community, and our donors responded with purposeful action to meet real needs with excellence, compassion, and generosity. Some did this even as they experienced their own losses of family members and friends due to Covid-19 and other things. WOW!

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OUTCOME?

185 men, women, and children received approval for Canada’s protection! The threats that drove them to Canada were answered with certainty of refuge!

As you read through the pages of this annual report, you will also learn of the courage, vision, and investment that saw housing and food security protected for hundreds of people, and new relationships and belonging formed. You will learn of people just like you who believe that **Welcoming Communities Still Matter**. They reached out to claimants who, more than ever, desperately need that to be true!

Finally, you will read about how we will be expanding our welcome in 2021, bridging the stories of those looking for answers to the injustices of this world with those who come to us seeking justice, thriving, and welcome.

Join us in 2021! We are needed - all of us together - and greater things are still come!

Shelley Campagnola
Executive Director



**185 MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN
RECEIVED APPROVAL FOR
CANADA’S PROTECTION!**

WELCOMING COMMUNITIES STILL MATTER





03 REFUGEE CLAIM ASSISTANCE GOES VIRTUAL

Incredibly, this year rounds out the top 5 years for new claimant files since our beginning in 1987. Only four other years were busier: 2018, 2019, 2017 and 1993. The claim process changed dramatically because of the pandemic and we learned and changed with it. We worked hard to remain a source of stability and information for people who were already here and caught in a precarious and uncertain situation. We grieved over those turned back at the border, understanding the health concerns but knowing that many of them were put into detention and deported.

When the lockdown in March happened, we pivoted quickly and within 48 hours we were fully transitioned to delivering our services virtually, allowing us to continue our work with people who were counting on us to be here.

This change did not come without its difficulties. Many of the people we work with have limited access to internet and computers. Talking about some of their most difficult experiences, and completing various forms using their phones, left us all looking forward to when we could meet face to face again.



**THIS YEAR ROUNDS OUT THE TOP
5 YEARS FOR NEW CLAIMANT
FILES SINCE OUR
BEGINNING IN 1987.**



At the same time, there were also benefits as it reduced the challenge and expense of traveling to our office for families who have children, limited resources, and great concern for using public transit. This transition also made us accessible to claimants in other geographic areas that do not have similar services and who desperately needed support. Now, 22% of our clients are located outside of the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

When refugee hearings began again in August, we ensured our translation and hearing preparation services remained available, and we are deeply thankful for our volunteers who made that possible. Finally, and most important of all, we celebrate that 185 people we have been helping received the good news of Canada's protection this year!





04 ACCOMPANYING WITH CARE

RELATIONSHIPS

Our foundation of building relationships and providing regular check-ins proved crucial for our clients this year, assuring them they were not alone!

"I am so grateful and full of joy that after [so many years] I can dream to see [my son] meeting his dad and get my home together again. Thanks for believing in us ... without you ... I don't think we could have done itww ... May God continue to bless your efforts and devotion."

Referrals: Refugee claimants do not have access to Child Benefits or OHIP, and limited access to employment counseling and housing services. Social Assistance provides income support while waiting for a work permit, but it also forces them into deep poverty.

One of our strengths has been to help mitigate this through a reliable referral system. We deeply appreciate the relationships we have with organizations like Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre, House of Friendship, the YMCA, The Working Centre, The Food Bank of Waterloo Region, and many churches who work tirelessly to ensure needs are met.



CRITICAL SUPPORTS

The need for access to some critical supports has increased beyond what referrals can manage. To that end, we completed a transition of Ray of Hope's Welcome Home to us, renamed it the MCRS Guest House, and blended it with the private host program and a community integration program. We supported 26 individuals at our Guest House, many of whom stayed there during the spring lockdown. One family remains, thankful for a safe place to stay. We suspended all private home hosting to protect hosts and claimants. Our home hosts remained engaged by providing valuable input for what things could look like when hosting is possible again.

We are thankful for our many individual donors and Lyle S. Hallman Foundation, United Way Waterloo Region, Waterloo Pentecostal Assembly, the Meeting House, Kitchener-Waterloo Redeemer Church and Kindred Charitable Foundation, all of whom made it possible to meet housing needs, and upgrade and refurbish the Guest House in preparation for when people will be staying there again. We also supported claimants living in dire situations and who were having difficulty buying groceries and other basic items for their families.

Finally, through wonderful partnerships with the Button Factory, Learning for Humanity, and other local groups, we provided access to recreational and educational activities that encouraged well-being, continued learning, and new connections.

EMPLOYMENT READINESS

Most of our clients are working within 5-8 months of coming here having the ethic of "you don't work, you don't eat". Sadly, many find employers reluctant to hire them and end up underutilizing the skills that had made them difference-makers in their countries of origin. Our community is stronger when people give their best, so we launched a basic Employment Readiness program that focused on resume and interview preparation, as well as skills matching, to help claimants get employers interested and then give their best when they are hired. The initial success of this program was encouraging. We look forward to a relaunch in 2021 to help those who lost jobs because of the pandemic.

"I wanted to thank you personally at your office but the COVID made it difficult. Thank you for all the great support [in finding a good job] in this difficult time of corona."



**"OUR WORK IMPACTED
1,872 MEN, WOMEN AND
CHILDREN - MORE THAN
ANY OTHER TIME IN OUR
HISTORY."**





05 SHARING IN ADVOCACY TO MEET NEEDS

Every time a caseworker makes a call to learn the status of a delayed work permit, or a letter is written in support of a Humanitarian and Compassionate claim, or a plan is created to improve access to community services, our team is involved in advocacy. Yet, this is just one aspect of advocacy, and not the most important.

At MCRC, we believe strongly in the self-agency of refugee claimants who, though they have been through horrible experiences, can speak for themselves. It is our role to ensure they have every opportunity to understand and decide on matters that affect them. It is also our role to encourage others to listen to them before making conclusions, whether in the trenches of social life or in the hearing rooms of the Immigration and Refugee Board, or in the policy rooms of various governments.

Our advocacy involves speaking out about injustices, wrong perceptions, and false assumptions. It includes challenging with facts, figures, and stories and with distinct calls for change. We look to create opportunities to speak about the unique needs of refugee claimants and the barriers to justice that can loom large in every aspect of their lives. This includes networking with people and organizations to learn best practices and enhance coordination and quality of services.

All of this requires having a mindset that compels us to seek **access to justice** in our systems, **thriving** of those who have come to us for protection, and **welcome** by communities that know they are stronger and better when new people from around the world come to live in the midst.

We are deeply appreciative of our many ongoing partners in advocacy: Immigration Partnership, CCORIC, the Coalition of Refugee Claimants in Ontario, and the Canadian Council for Refugees. Over the past year we worked on various initiatives including:

- Continued collaboration with Legal Aid Ontario for best practices in service delivery,
- Access to essential services regardless of a person's immigration status,
- Opportunity for virtual refugee hearings,
- Awareness of the abuses happening at the border under the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), and
- The need to consider people without status when developing affordable housing strategies.

Our advocacy work ripples through many spheres – personal, local, provincial, and national. We also want to say thank you for the support of our local MP's, MPP's, and community leaders and members as we reached out to them for help in resolving many difficult situations that arose when refugee and social service systems ground to a halt or became painfully slow because of the pandemic. The enthusiastic and nonpartisan compassion in action ensured things like:

- housing for an abandoned mom and her children,
- food and other essentials when the cupboards were bare for another family,
- proper and timely repairs to an apartment with secondary damage from an adjacent fire,
- access to COVID-19 medical care for those who do not have OHIP.

Through it all, we saw that there are many who believe with us that ***Welcoming Communities Still Matter!*** Thank you!





06 TRIBUTE TO VOLUNTEERS

One of the benefits of working in the Social Profit world is that we get to work with the best of people: Volunteers. Volunteers are vital to MCRS and they are the “engine behind the scenes” of our organization. They give their time, passion and talents not for personal gain or praise, but to make a difference in the lives of refugee claimants in our community.

As volunteers stopped coming into the office in March to stay safe at home, we had to reinvent ourselves to keep serving our clients. Our volunteers never stopped caring and we knew we could count on them. They stepped-in in new ways by attending virtual trainings, new protocol orientations, helping us pilot the office re-entry. Many of them continued serving our clients by translating important documents remotely, interpreting virtually, and even fundraising!

We had volunteers who were willing to safely follow the protocols and assist with the painting and renovations that were done at the Guesthouse. Others offered their support and expertise remotely. Although these times have been difficult, their efforts made our plans and deadlines possible to fulfill.

Yes, we missed their smiles, handshakes, and presence, but we are hopeful that we will get to see them again soon. That day will be a celebration as we will be able to express our gratitude face to face.



From a volunteer

“THE HEART OF A VOLUNTEER IS NOT MEASURED IN SIZE, BUT BY THE DEPTH OF THE COMMITMENT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.”

DeAnn Hollis





07 REVISIONING EVENTS

As a donor-funded charity, events are essential for us to raise funds, and to engage supporters, volunteers, and partners beyond the “ask”. They also help us to encourage a more accurate and positive perception of why people become refugee claimants, and what it means for them to have to leave everything behind.

“100 Men Who Give a Damn” hosted an event that allowed us to touch their hearts with a real story no man ever wants to face, but every dad in our client database has had to. Deeply moved, they gave us \$13,600 and encouragement to keep up our life-changing work. The Knitting Pilgrim and Floradale Mennonite Church also hosted an event, and showcased our work, raising almost \$1,800.

In December we partnered with WMB Church once again for our annual Christmas dinner provided for our clients. The room was filled with people from many different countries, enjoying good food, and great entertainment. Families were blessed with handknit hats and mittens gifted to them by Comforting the Cold, and toys for the children provided by the Salvation Army. For a few hours, everyone forgot that people’s futures were in limbo, made some new connections, and enjoyed peace and goodwill toward all.

Also in December, we were hosted by SVP Teens who provided a donation of winter wear for our clients. And we were celebrated as a finalist for the International Peace Award hosted by GIDSS - Gandhian Initiative for Development of Support Services - recognized for our efforts to promote peace, justice, and love for refugees.

In January, the Auditorium Neighbourhood raised funds for our Guest House by hosting a ticketed home renovation tour on our behalf and gave us opportunity to share the work of MCRS with those who participated.

Our Executive Director also spoke in eleven of our local churches between October and February, inspiring members with a biblical perspective on our work, and sharing stories of lives changed because of their support.



THEN, COVID-19 struck, and the first lockdown was imposed. That put an end to any further events and associated fundraising plans for 2020. We had been getting ready pack out Princess Cinemas on Refugee Right's Day in April with a showing of "Midnight Traveler". Our Annual Walk with Refugees in June and Picnic in July were cancelled as well, along with all speaking engagements.

There was one bright light – Ride for Refuge – which was reimagined this year to be Ride for Refuge Freestyle. This family-friendly fundraising event is our premier Fall event. It provides an unmatched opportunity to come together for a common cause. This year, we were blown away by the creativity and commitment of all who participated and a total of \$31,216 was raised toward our work. It was a fitting climax to our year.

Events and fundraising remain critical to the continuance of the work of MCRS and to us optimizing the social profit we provide to the community. Running virtual events is not our strength but we look forward to learning as we work for the thriving of Waterloo Region and of the refugee claimants who seek refuge here.

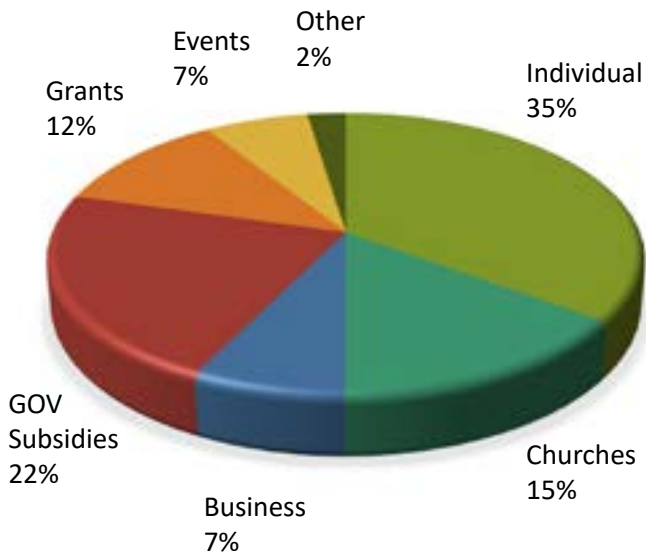


**EVENTS AND FUNDRAISING
REMAIN CRITICAL TO THE
CONTINUANCE OF THE WORK OF
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THE SOCIAL PROFIT WE PROVIDE
TO THE COMMUNITY.**



08 FINANCIALS

2019-2020 REVENUE \$618,618



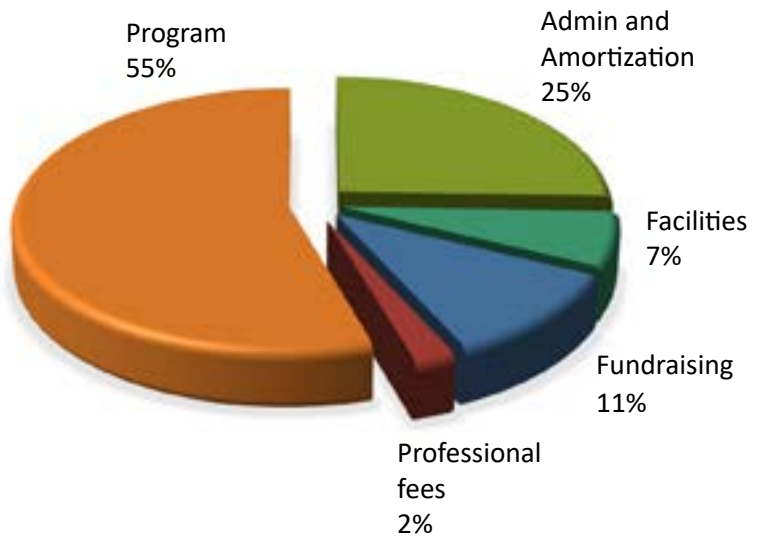
DIVERSITY IN GENEROSITY ENSURED

1,872 people supported
 185 people received Canada's protection
 26 people protected throughout lockdown at our Guest House

+

Claim support, translation services, hearing preparation, welcome and care kits, food security, housing support, advocacy for change, employment readiness support, and so much more! **IMPACT:** Families lives changed forever!

2019-2020 EXPENDITURES \$557,097



CAREFUL STEWARDSHIP IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

This was a year of disruption and uncertainty. Never quite sure if, or when, funds would come in, we prayed, worked hard, and focused on essentials.

Our primary expenses have always been tied to having a quality team who can deliver programs geared to real needs that cannot be met elsewhere, and this year was no different.

Our biggest change in expenditures came with adding the Guest House and the necessary staff to run it. This proved to be a strategic move that grew our capacity to meet critical needs and expanded opportunities for people to get involved in tangible and relational ways.



1,872 people SERVED

\$0.82 = cost per person/day

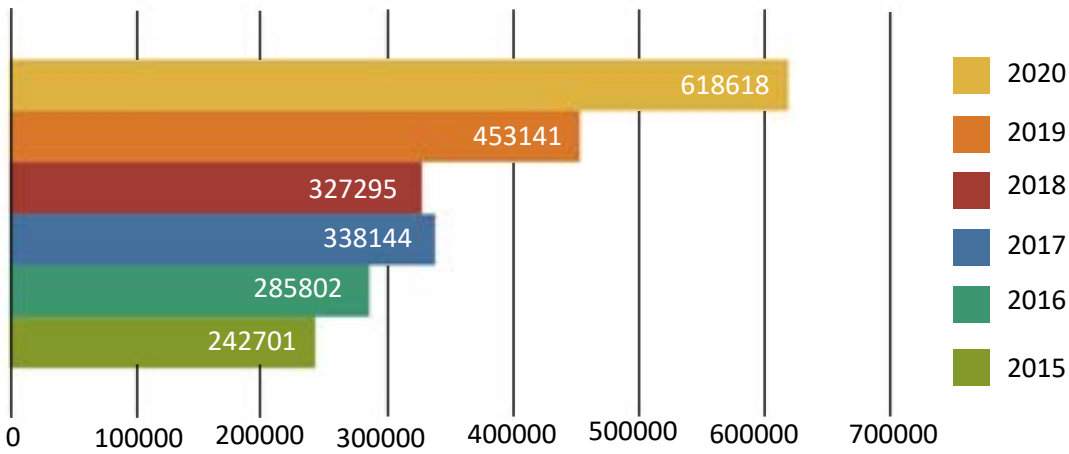
ENCOURAGING MONTHLY GIVING!

Regular support gives us stability and allows us to budget effectively so that those seeking refuge have access to consistent and quality programs and services when they need them.

Regular support also means:

- ✓ fewer asks to donors
- ✓ reduced costs tied to fundraising
- ✓ more opportunity to focus on sharing the stories of impact!

REVENUE FY 2015-2020



- 2020
- 2019
- 2018
- 2017
- 2016
- 2015

We have grown and we are so thankful!

NOTE:

*financial overview is for twelve months ending September 30, 2020

*please see audited financial statements for details





09 LAUNCHING A WHOLE NEW ERA

For 33 years MCRS has been welcoming refugee claimants, assisting them with their refugee claim, accompanying them as they settle in our community, and advocating for them when there were hindrances to justice because of unfair legislation, poor practice, or barriers to families' reunification, and so much more. For so many we became their second family and forever friend.



First MCRS logo

Over that time, 3,789 families representing over 10,000 people have been supported by an extraordinary team of donors, staff, interns, and volunteers. Each has been passionate about justice and committed to ensuring people who have had to flee for their lives are treated with respect, compassion, empowerment, and inclusion. Each has believed in claimants being given every opportunity possible to receive the protection they desperately need, and to thrive in a new life here.

MCRS began as a small group of Anabaptist Mennonite Churches, and with the support of MCC Ontario responded with love in the name of Jesus to people escaping the oppressive and deadly impact of the Nicaraguan Revolution.

Today, our Anabaptist identity and ethos of pursuing justice, peace, and welcome remains at the heart of our organization. The Parable of the Good Samaritan aptly describes our foundation, our motivation, and our desire to meet the needs of refugee claimants tangibly, freely, and without regard for where they have come from, what they have done or not done, what they believe or do not believe, or where they are going.



Present MCRS logo

In 2018, we began a two-year journey of extensive community research and reflection led by Graf-Martin Communications, a local organization that knows and loves our community.

The profile of our supporters has dramatically changed over the years, expanding to include:

- 60** churches
- 63** businesses
- 17** nonprofits
- 24** foundations
- 13** schools
- 1100** households

And the profile of those we have helped has also changed, expanding to represent

- 1000's**
from over
- 65** countries

THOSE WE HELP WANT US TO BE KNOWN FOR BEING:



OUR SUPPORTERS WANT US TO BE KNOWN FOR BEING:



WE LISTENED. WE ARE CHANGING.

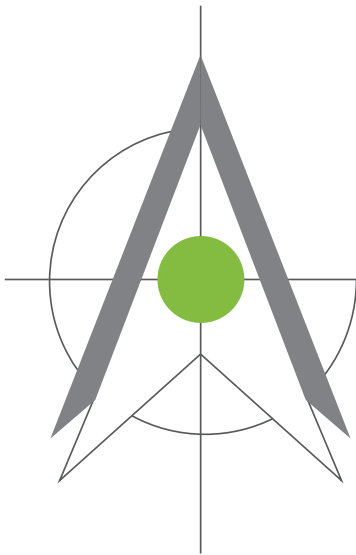
This year, the Board of Directors approved moving MCRS into 2021 with a new look and a new name that better reflects the whole community that supports us AND the people who come to us from around the world seeking refuge.

As of February 2021, we will be COMPASS Refugee Centre!
We will continue to:

- uphold our Anabaptist identity and ethos
- provide warm welcome to refugee claimants
- assist, accompany, and advocate for refugee claimants in collaboration with our community and supporters
- strive to serve with excellence and innovation

You will see changes to our website, social media profiles, and our new visual brand signature. As we do this, we want to say THANK YOU to all of our supporters and to all those who have come to us for help throughout the years. You have made us the amazing organization we are today!

And we want to say, STAY WITH US, giving generously as we launch a whole new era of providing ***access to justice and opportunities to thrive in welcoming communities!***



COMPASS

REFUGEE CENTRE

Assist • Accompany • Advocate





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TO DONATE: www.mcrs.ca/donate