



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

City of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Program – Progress Report

Date:	February 22, 2016
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	AFS#22175

SUMMARY

In October 2015, Toronto City Council approved the City of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Program. The Toronto Newcomer Office (TNO) is coordinating City divisions and partners to implement the Program.

The Program aims to mobilize existing supports within and outside of City structures, and facilitate enhancements where needed. The City is playing three key roles:

1. **Coordination Role:** Coordinating municipal services with community-based settlement services, with the other orders of government, and other partners.
2. **Enhancement Role:** Using Council-directed resources to enhance community-based support in key areas.
3. **Integration Role:** Once they arrive, the new Torontonians will have the ability to access most of the same City services that all other residents have access to. The sponsors will fulfill the refugees’ most urgent needs such as housing, clothing and food.

This report provides an update on the implementation of the City of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance & Administration (SDFA) recommends that:

1. City Council receive this progress report for information.

Equity Impact

Newcomers to Toronto, including refugees, face a number of barriers that challenge their ability to successfully integrate into the social, economic and civic life of the city. Toronto City Council approved the Toronto Newcomer Strategy in 2013 in recognition of the important roles the City of Toronto plays in advancing the successful settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees in Toronto. The Syrian refugees coming to Toronto require targeted and coordinated support from the City, community and institutional partners and Toronto residents. Targeted efforts will ensure that programs, services, and opportunities are available to meet the needs of Syrian refugees to assist them to effectively transition and settle into life in Toronto.

Financial Impact

There are no new financial impacts associated with this report. Funding of \$0.600 million \$0 net for this work has been included in the 2015/2016 Council Approved Operating Budgets for Social Development Finance and Administration, with funding from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve (XQ0703). To date, a total of \$0.556 million has been committed to this initiative.

In February 2016, City Council approved an additional \$0.220 million, on a one-time basis from the Property Tax Stabilization Reserve, to be directed to the Toronto Newcomer Office for the purposes of the Syrian Resettlement Program. This includes \$0.130 million for work to support the successful integration of Syrian refugee youth re-integration work inclusive of the funding of a temporary employee up to December 31, 2016 and \$0.090 million for the City's public education and anti-rumours campaign.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In February 2013, City Council approved the mission, vision and guiding principles contained in the Toronto Newcomer Strategy:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD18.7>

In October 2015, City Council approved the City of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Program, and a one-time allocation of \$0.600 million from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve (XQ0703) to fund the settlement program:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX8.39>

In December 2015, City Council approved allocation of project resources and named Councillor Joe Cressy and Councillor Joe Mihevc as its Newcomer Advocates:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD8.9>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In late 2015, the Federal Government announced plans to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees across Canada by the end of February 2016, with further arrivals continuing throughout the year. As Canada's largest city, Toronto will receive a larger number of refugees than any other municipality in the country.

Since November 4, 2015, more than 16,000 Syrian refugees arrived to Canada on government-organized flights. Approximately 43% of the arrivals have been destined to Ontario and 47% of arrivals to Ontario have been destined to Toronto. The total arrivals to Toronto have been greater than the total arrivals to the entire province of Quebec. This translates into more than 3,000 refugees or approximately 20% of the national total.

It was anticipated that the majority of refugees settling in Toronto would be Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), however, the Federal Government has shifted its approach, significantly increasing the number of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs).

The impact of this shift is considerable. There are key differences between GARs and PSRs, not only in the way they are initially processed and supported, but also in terms of their longer-term needs. According to the demographic profile released by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), GARs have larger family sizes with more children, have lower educational levels, and often lack English or French language skills. While both GARs and PSRs have high settlement needs, GARs require even more supports in order for their settlement and integration to be successful.

It is expected that the arrivals will continue in significant numbers for the next three to four months. This means that the total number of refugees arriving to Toronto by the end of December 2016 could surpass 7,000. A coordinated approach to settlement and integration is essential to ensure the ongoing success of this national resettlement effort.

COMMENTS

In December 2015, City Council reaffirmed its support to the Refugee Resettlement program and approved allocation of project resources to:

- ensure adequate and appropriate supports are in place for privately sponsored refugees and their sponsors;
- provide assistance for all refugees to secure housing; and
- implement a public awareness campaign to send a clear message that racism, violence and intolerance are unacceptable

City Council also named Councillor Joe Cressy and Councillor Joe Mihevc as its Newcomer Advocates to help promote the integration and inclusion of refugees in the civic, economic and cultural life of the city.

Activities to Date

In October 2015, City Council approved a one-time allocation of \$0.600 million from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve (XQ0703) to fund the Refugee Resettlement Program. Staff have taken a number of actions to implement the Program with a particular focus on addressing the immediate priorities identified above. \$556,273 of program funds have been committed. Appendix A provides a summary of program funding commitment to date.

Support for Sponsors

Ensuring supports are in place for private sponsors and PSRs will help prevent sponsorship breakdown. The City entered into service agreements with the Arab Community Centre (\$65,580), Catholic Crosscultural Services (\$66,854) and Lifeline Syria (\$65,000), to enhance their capacity to provide supports to private sponsors in Toronto. A number of activities have taken place so far, including workshops on managing expectations, conflict resolution and the ethical considerations of sponsorship, as well as one-on-one post-arrival assistance and referrals to community supports.

Housing Assistance

Stable, affordable housing is critical for successful settlement and integration. To help facilitate access to housing for Syrian refugees, the City has entered into service agreements with COSTI Immigrant Services (\$92,866) and WoodGreen Community Services (\$145,773). Both agencies have received funds to provide housing help services to privately sponsored refugees and their sponsors. To date, more than 35 landlords, 70 privately-sponsored refugees and 65 private sponsors have been engaged through outreach activities.

WoodGreen was also contracted to develop a housing registry that connects Syrian refugees and private sponsor groups with offers of housing, goods and services. On January 16, 2016, WoodGreen, along with the donated services of Deloitte and the Konrad Group, launched Housing Opportunities and Marketplace Exchange (H.O.M.E.). Refugees, sponsors, landlords and donors can register for H.O.M.E online and are granted access after a two-step verification process. Units listed must be self-

contained (no rooming houses or single rooms) and landlords are encouraged to offer units at below market rent. As of February 17th, H.O.M.E. had over 500 registered users, 57 rental units, 23 offers of services and 116 donated goods. The City continues to outreach to large private sector landlords to elicit their involvement.

Public Awareness Campaign

Welcoming communities help to facilitate positive settlement outcomes. The City entered into a six month service agreement, January to June 2016, with the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) (\$60,200) to develop a public awareness campaign against racism, violence and intolerance. Toronto Newcomer Office continues to work closely with OCASI to develop campaign messaging and materials. The campaign is expected to launch mid-March.

Programming at Hotel Sites

COSTI Immigrant Services is the refugee reception centre for Toronto. They provide temporary accommodation and initial settlement services to all government-assisted refugees that arrive in the city. Due to the scale of the Syrian refugee resettlement effort, COSTI has temporarily housed approximately 1,500 Government Assisted Refugees at five hotels across the city until more permanent housing is secured. 60% of the refugees are children 16 years of age and younger.

The Toronto Newcomer Office has been coordinating with COSTI and City divisions to implement programming for refugee children and youth staying at these hotels. \$20,000 in funding has been allocated to support the City's programming for refugee children at the Toronto Plaza Hotel, the largest site, where there are approximately 250 children (70 below the age of three).

- **Parks, Forestry and Recreation** has run a drop-in program at Chalkfarm Community Centre near the Plaza Hotel for children and youth ages 8-16 since January 12th. The program has been well received with over 200 children and youth partaking in activities.
- **Children's Services** provided a supervised childcare space at the Plaza Hotel for children ages 0-8, five days a week from February 2nd to February 11th. COSTI has since established the capacity to takeover. The program ran at its 80 child capacity on a daily basis.
- **Toronto Public Health** has been onsite at the Radisson and Toronto Plaza Hotel periodically from Monday to Friday since February 8th to liaise with medical staff, provide guidance on infection and prevention control improvements and strengthen disease surveillance. TPH is offering full service immunization clinics at the Plaza Hotel and flu clinics at the other sites every two weeks. As of February 9th, over 1,200 refugees have received the flu shot and/or immunizations. TPH is also working to respond to the urgent dental care needs of

both children and adults. \$40,000 from the Refugee Resettlement Program has been dedicated to support the provision of urgent dental care for children and adults who are not covered under any other program. As of February 12th, 186 Syrian refugees have received urgent dental care through TPH.

Strategic Planning Committees

The Inter-Divisional Team and the Inter-Agency Task Force have been meeting on a biweekly bases since late September 2015 to plan for the immediate and long-term impacts to services and to leverage existing resources to mitigate service system gaps.

- **The Inter-Divisional Team** is made up of senior-level representatives from eight City divisions to identify and mobilize internal resources and response measures to meet the needs of refugees and aid in successful settlement. The swift implementation of interim programming for children and youth at the five hotel sites was facilitated by this committee.
- **The Inter-Agency Task Force** is composed of senior-level representatives from key humanitarian, non-profit organizations and government agencies. The Inter-Agency Task Force is focused on coordinating and streamlining external response activities, including communication and information sharing, to help facilitate partnerships that will benefit resettlement efforts. The recent partnership between the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board and COSTI Immigrant Services is a direct outcome of this committee; the three organizations have partnered to offer 'school-readiness' programs for refugee children staying at the temporary hotel sites.

Staff have also maintained ongoing communication with the federal and provincial governments, and with municipalities across Ontario, participating on a number of ad-hoc committees and working groups to better support the refugee service infrastructure.

Online Sector Supports

In December 2015, the Toronto Newcomer Office launched toronto.ca/refugees, a webpage for sponsors and potential sponsors that highlights settlement supports available throughout the City. The website strengthens service coordination and enhances the ability of stakeholder groups to access the most up-to-date information on available sector supports and services related to the resettlement of Syrian refugees. Since its launch, the website has received close to 16,000 visits. Mayor John Tory's welcome letter, which is featured on the website, has been downloaded over 400 times and the newcomer brochure on City services has been downloaded more than 550 times. Staff continue to make updates to the website as additional information becomes available.

Information Fairs

The Toronto Newcomer Office has partnered with OCASI and Toronto's Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) to organize information fairs for sponsors of Syrian refugees across Toronto. Four fairs have taken place to date in downtown Toronto, Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke. Over 1,000 sponsors have attended these fairs to learn about City services and community resources available to support successful settlement. Two additional fairs are being planned for March 2016.

Information Sharing and Media Relations

A number of activities have taken place to ensure the effective flow of communication between the City and relevant stakeholders, including staff, community agencies, media and the general public. These activities are ongoing and continue to reach a broad number of partners involved in refugee resettlement efforts.

- **Weekly Situation Reports** have been circulated since December 14, 2015. These reports provide a summary of the resettlement situation, recent developments, local impact, and current program work.
- **311 Toronto** received close to 600 inquiries related to the Refugee Resettlement Program in the last 90 days. Toronto Newcomer Office staff continue to supply information to 311's knowledge base to ensure accurate responses.
- The Toronto Newcomer Office has been facilitating regular conference calls between the four quadrant **Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs)** in Toronto. LIPs are multisectoral partnerships funded by the federal government to improve integration outcomes for newcomers. These calls assist with coordinating information sharing across Toronto's robust settlement sector. The Toronto Newcomer Office, based out of City Hall, is the city-wide LIP in Toronto.
- **Inquiries from media, businesses and the general public** are regularly received. With the heightened focus on Syrian refugee resettlement, there has been a significant increase in the number of such requests, and they averaged around five to ten a day. They included media interview requests, offers to provide employment and housing, as well as requests for information about how to volunteer and make in-kind donations. Between November and December 2015 upwards of 40 media inquiries were supported.

Partnership with Community Foundations of Canada (CFC)

The most immediate challenge to the successful resettlement of Syrian Refugees is housing affordability. Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) in partnership with Manulife and CN have created the Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees to assist Syrian government assisted refugees to secure housing across the country. Working through the

Toronto Foundation, CFC has initiated a discussion with City staff on the possibility of a City of Toronto Syrian refugee rent supplement program for government assisted refugees. The Canadian Foundations of Canada has suggested that up to \$750,000.00 may be available to assist Syrian government assisted refugees destined for the Toronto area to secure longer term housing. In discussion with the Toronto Foundation and COSTI, staff have determined that a rent supplement program provides the greatest opportunity to support the largest number of Syrian refugees in the shortest period of time.

In February 2015, City Council delegated authority to the General Manager, Shelter Support and Housing and the Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration to negotiate and enter into agreement with the Community Foundations of Canada to deliver this rent supplement program for Syrian GARs at net zero cost to the City. Staff continue to work with Toronto Foundation and COSTI to finalize the program design.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Refugee Resettlement Program has allowed the City of Toronto to respond to the national Syrian refugee resettlement effort with an efficient and coordinated approach. Program funds have proven critical in quickly and efficiently addressing emerging issues and gaps in service provision. Settlement, however, is a long-term process and the continued coordination of response efforts will be essential to ensure the ongoing success of resettlement efforts.

CONTACT

Vera Dodic
Project Manager,
Toronto Newcomer Office
Social Development, Finance &
Administration
416-392-5679
vdodic@toronto.ca

Denise Andrea Campbell
Director,
Social Policy, Analysis & Research
Social Development, Finance &
Administration
416-392-8614
dcampbe6@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Chris Brillinger
Executive Director
Social Development, Finance and Administration

Appendix A: Summary of Resettlement Program Funding Commitments

Priority Programs	Delivery Partner	Amount
Support for Sponsors	Arab Community Centre	\$65,580
	Catholic Crosscultural Services	\$66,854
	Lifeline Syria	\$65,000
Housing Assistance	COSTI Immigrant Services	\$92,866
	WoodGreen Community Services	\$145,773
Public Awareness Campaign	Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)	\$60,200
Children's Programming at Hotel Sites	Parks, Forestry & Recreation	\$20,000
	Children's Services	
Emergency Dental	Toronto Public Health	\$40,000
Total		\$556,273