



## Reflections from the Board Chair

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. I offer warm thanks to the board, staff, interns, volunteers, and donors at MCRS for all your hard work, commitment, and support in the past year.

*“My friend had an excellent lawyer to help him with his claim – but thanks to MCRS I think I received far more settlement support, connections, & resources than my friend did.”*

*EDGAR\*, REFUGEE CLAIMANT*

For MCRS, the year 2013 was one of transition; some of the internal changes brought greater stability to the daily operation of the organization while external changes created new challenges and difficulties. MCRS saw significant renewal of staff, with a new bookkeeper/office manager, a new case worker, and a new resource development coordinator. They joined other relatively new staff and executive director Eunice Valenzuela whose long-term service creates the needed stability to weather such change in personnel. In the midst of hiring new staff, MCRS underwent an ‘operational plan’ review to assess program priorities and revise job descriptions to improve the daily functioning of the office. This was done with the assistance of intern Rod Friesen, a graduate student in Peace & Conflict Studies from Conrad Grebel University College, whose expertise in human resource issues was invaluable in the past year.

Canadian Council for Refugees, held in Kitchener. Staff and board members alike have increasingly used the digital stories produced last year to educate churches and the public about our work. We need to continually work at getting the word out about MCRS, even while we are increasingly mindful about the political implications of doing ‘advocacy.’

In the year ahead we will be developing a new strategic plan to take MCRS beyond 2014. This will give us the opportunity to think creatively about the nature of our advocacy mandate, about our vision and values, about our ‘branding,’ and how we can move forward to best support refugee claimants in Waterloo region.

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.”

Thanks for your support!

*Marlene Epp*  
Board Chair

Alongside the internal and external changes that have presented new challenges for MCRS, many positive things have happened. MCRS is increasingly known in the local community and indeed nationally for its unique work with refugee claimants. The staff of MCRS have been key players in important educational events, such as the many activities around World Refugee Day and in organizing the national consultation of the

## Mission

*“Our mission is 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.”*



# Annual Report

2012-2013



### BOARD MEMBERS

- Marlene Epp,  
*Chair*
- Jim Huebner,  
*Treasurer*
- Cathy MacLellan,  
*Secretary*
- Nan Cressman
- Jennifer Toews
- Steve Tulloch
- Ray Brubacher



*We would like to thank all of our financial partners, the many individual donors and churches and the all the dedicated volunteers who give so much to support refugee claimants in Waterloo Region.*

115 volunteers  
contributed 4574 hours

87 new refugee claims  
from 28 Countries

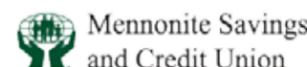
544 open cases—  
individuals and families  
still being supported by  
MCRS

564 pages translated  
from Arabic, Farsi,  
Croatian, French &  
Spanish

21 digital video stories  
completed

Mennonite Coalition  
for Refugee Support  
58 Queen St. S., Kitchener,  
ON N2G 1V6  
Tel: 519.571.1912  
Fax: 519.473.9452  
refugee@mcrs.ca

www.mcrs.ca



This year, we have not only experienced major changes to the refugee determination process (Bill C-31) but we have also witnessed cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program, which left many refugee claimants without access to one of the most basic and important needs: health care.

As a result of these changes, families are facing increased burdens and anxiety as they try to meet the rushed deadlines and cope with health issues. We spent time educating and preparing ourselves for the implementation of the new system. We are also working with a new Legal Aid application process which has become much more complicated and unclear. There have been significant cutbacks to the amount of legal aid funding available and a two-step application process which clients must navigate, with no guarantee of success. We have also seen high numbers of "legacy" refugee claim applications being declined.

In the midst of these difficulties, we have witnessed a tremendous community response to the challenges claimants face. Many individuals and organizations have come together to respond. New partnerships have developed, previous partnerships have been strengthened, a new Refugee Health Clinic was established, and most importantly, MCRS staff and volunteers continued to work diligently in order to provide incessant support.

With our limited resources, we continue to support new refugee families arriving to this community. This year, 87 new cases have been added to a large case load from previous years. Recently, we have celebrated 9 positive hearing decisions, 6 positive H&C decisions, many final permanent residence approvals, and 1 positive PRRA (Pre-Removal Risk Assessment) decision, which is almost a miracle in itself.

While it has been a pleasure to meet and welcome so many new refugee claimants, it is heart breaking to know the conflicts in our world have not been resolved. New conflicts occur and more people are forced to flee their homes due to violence and to seek shelter in places in our Region. At MCRS, the number of arrivals from the Middle East alone has increased from 20 % last year to 43 % this year.

We realize that it is the kindness of strangers which is often the key to survival in this world, and we are thankful for the supportive community we live in.

Eunice Valenzuela  
Executive Director

### Legal Support Highlights

In 2012-2013 MCRS continued to run our core volunteer programs: **Legal Support, Social Support, Interpretation & Translation, Speak English Café, Sewing group** and **Community Outreach volunteers** group. The most popular volunteer programs continue to be the **Office Support program** and **Speak English Café**. 115 volunteers worked the equivalent of 2.2 years of a full time staff person in this period!

We received a grant from the Law Foundation of Ontario, in December 2012, which enabled MCRS to completely revise our office intake forms, legal support manual and make changes to the database system. We also held four major workshops, many multiple smaller workshops and a community forum about the changes to the refugee determination process.



Sewing Group and the completed quilt

### Settlement Support Highlights

The women's **Sewing Group** continues to thrive. In December 2012, we hosted a Christmas Party/quilt-making afternoon facilitated by the Creative Sisters Quilt Studio. The women completed a quilting project for the MCRS office each square representing each woman's community of origin.

The **Speak English Café** is still going strong with 30- 35 people participating each week. This year we organized two extra events: a Celebration of the beginning of Spring and the 10th anniversary of the program.

The **Financial Literacy Project** concluded this year. These manuals, translated into Spanish and French, printed and added to our library, continue to be a resource for new arrivals. An Arabic version is in process. We continue to participate in the *Money Matters Community Collaborative* through The Working Centre.

**Refugee Health Project:** We made 15 referrals to Mennonite Savings and Credit Union (MSCU) for assistance with medical and prescription costs and referred 27 families to the Sanctuary Refugee Health Clinic. We ran two focus groups discussing health issues, a refugee

claimant women a support group and hosted a series of Health & Wellness workshops.

Proper housing for refugee claimants continues to be a major concern. This year we launched an emergency housing network with a number of families from local faith communities who host people for shorter periods.

### Education & Event Highlights:

- We attended a National day of action marking cuts to the Interim Federal Health program on June 17, 2013 at Kitchener City Hall.
- Dialogue on Diversity:** we presented to 57 employees of the Region of Waterloo at the Waterloo Region Museum.
- MCRS board member Dr. Marlene Epp was the keynote speaker at the **World Refugee Day** opening in June.
- Over 250 people attended the launch at the Princess Twin Cinemas in Waterloo. We hosted the *'Compassion for Strangers'* Film Premiere was held on October 18, 2012.



Marking Bill C-31 health cuts

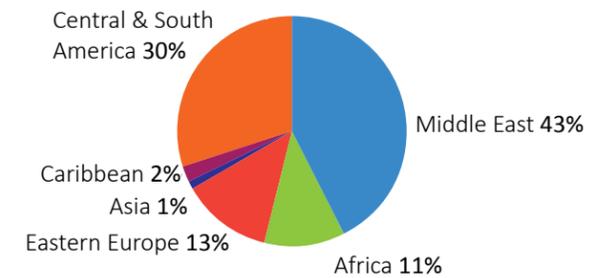


### Youth Activities

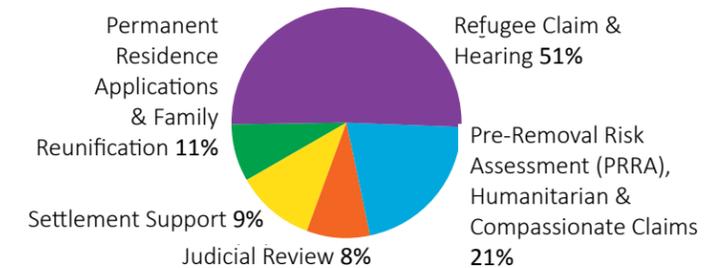
We developed our most successful community partnership to date with Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI). The ESL students, many of them refugee claimants, actively took part in recording their stories on video, supported by the student body and a key teacher who promoted the videos in the community. One of their members was deported back to South America during this time. Students mobilized and sent letters to MPs, wrote petitions, and supported each other. MCRS addressed a general assembly of the entire student body on refugee issues. Students also organized an ongoing fund raising event for MCRS and are still actively involved in the "Proud to Protect Refugees campaign".



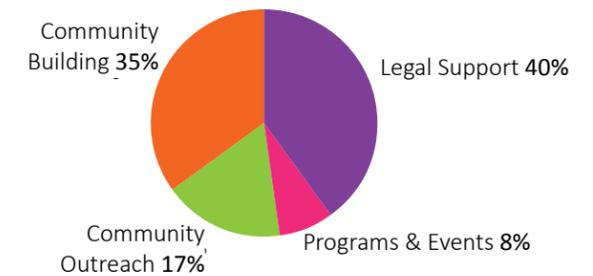
Volunteer Appreciation Dinner



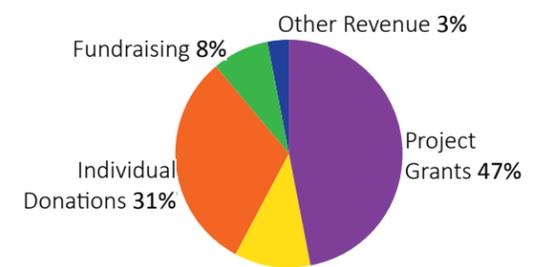
### Refugee Claims by Region (87 new cases)



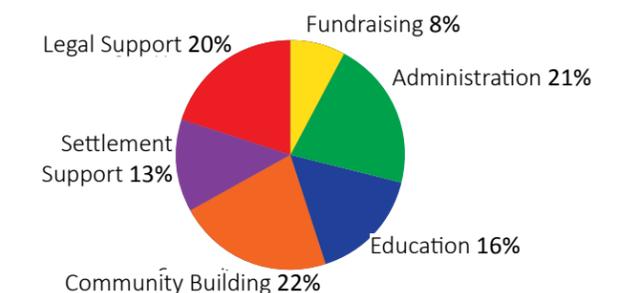
### Client Services



### Volunteer hours by program



### Total Revenue \$ 240, 588



### Total Expenses \$ 228, 649