



# Report on the Syrian Refugee Support Fund May 2017

## Background on the fund

In September 2015, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) set up the Syrian Refugee Support Fund (Fund) to manage and distribute funds donated by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and its affiliates to assist with the Syrian resettlement initiative in Canada. Further contributions to the Fund were made by many other unions, organizations, companies and individuals.

The Fund supports the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Canada in three ways:

- A. supplementing funds raised by private sponsorship groups to allow them to sponsor more Syrian refugees,
- B. facilitating family reunification through legal channels (e.g. airfare for family members of refugees where funds not available),
- C. providing income support to impoverished recently arrived Syrians in Canada.

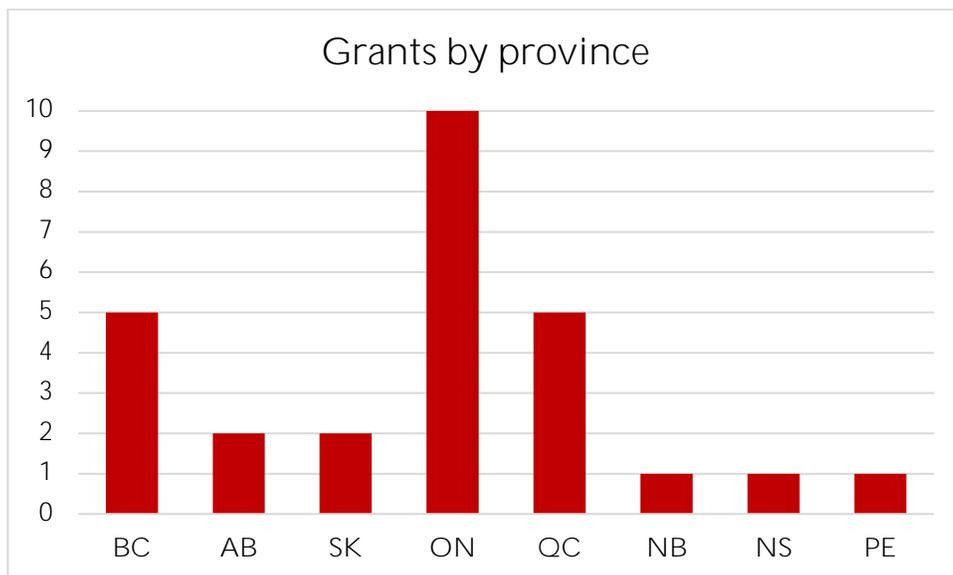
The Fund is distributed through organizations with charitable status in Canada. A CCR selection committee carefully reviews applications according to the following criteria:

- a) the money must support Syrians who are refugees or who have been personally affected by the conflict in Syria;
- b) the money must support people who have the greatest need and who do not have access to other funds (i.e.: through local or provincial funding sources)
- c) when the money is used to support private refugee sponsorship, the Fund should not be used for more than 50% of the budgeted costs for the sponsorship.
- d) where money is used to support recently-arrived impoverished Syrians in Canada, the focus should be on the most vulnerable and based on need.

In October 2016, on the recommendation of the selection committee, the CCR Executive Committee revised the purposes for which the Fund could be used in the future. As a result of the enthusiastic response of Canadians to the sponsorship of Syrian refugees, there were already numerous Syrian refugee sponsorships in process, some of which had been supported through the Fund. Meanwhile, other refugee populations were waiting much longer, leading to a call from the CCR for a resettlement plan reflecting equity for all regions. To continue to provide financial incentives for Syrian refugee sponsorships through the Fund would not be consistent with CCR's call for equity. Accordingly, from that time applications for the purpose, "to supplement funds raised by private sponsorship groups to allow them to sponsor more Syrian refugees" were no longer eligible for funding from the Fund.

## Funds granted

Since September 29, 2015, the Syrian Refugee Support Fund has received donations totalling \$345,000. As of May 1, 2017, \$270,000 has been distributed to twenty-six charitable organizations in eight provinces.



### 1. Sponsoring more refugees

The cost of private sponsorship can be very high, depending on the size of the family. To assist sponsoring groups committing to multiple Syrian refugee sponsorships, the following organizations applied to and received funding from the Fund. These funding decisions were made prior to the selection committee's decision to discontinue using the Fund for the purpose of increasing Syrian refugee sponsorships.

- Byron United Church in London, Ontario, sponsored six families and used the monies from the Fund to make an initial deposit on an apartment for one of the refugee families.
- Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria used the funds to supplement funds raised by more than thirty-five sponsoring groups to sponsor Syrian refugees.
- Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan assisted Bridge City Neighbours Sponsorship Group to sponsor a large extended Syrian family of eleven members.
- The Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) assisted a Group of Five to sponsor a Syrian refugee family of eight people.

## 2. Reuniting families

Often families are separated while fleeing persecution. Some organizations are assisting with reuniting families.

- The Anglican Diocese of Niagara used its grant from the Fund to reunite five Syrian refugees with relatives in Hamilton.
- Nest Saskatoon helped reunite two families from Syria with family in Canada.

## 3. Supporting recently arrived Syrians

It can be very difficult for newcomers to meet all of their basic needs (including, food, accommodation, transportation, health and dental needs) at social assistance rates. The following organizations received funds to assist newly arrived Syrian newcomers to meet basic needs and their needs and those of their families.

- New Canadians Centre Peterborough established a dental fund for refugees in partnership with a local health unit. Money from the Fund has been used for full dental examinations, root canals, and restorative work. Additionally, antibiotics and other medications are provided as needed at a subsidized rate.
- The Calgary Catholic Immigration Society helped an elderly Syrian woman with her household expenditures and enabled her to enrol in the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association Food Service Industry Programme in her effort to achieve financial independence.
- The Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society has provided support for newly-arrived families moving to permanent and affordable housing, and with start-up costs. Additionally, they provide trauma counselling for adults and children.
- Humanity First (Toronto) provides grocery gift cards and transit tickets to Syrian newcomers struggling financially.
- Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) partnered with Public Health and various dental schools to provide dental services for approximately three hundred patients.
- KidSport Canada in Alberta (Calgary and Edmonton) provides 'fee assistance cards' to assist Syrian newcomer children to participate in various sport leagues.
- PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada provides financial assistance to families experiencing delays in receiving their start-up cheques from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. It also provides school supplies, furniture, and therapy sessions.
- Action Réfugiés Montréal provides income support to recently arrived Syrians in Montreal. The money has been used to purchase President's Choice gift cards and winter clothing for Syrian families in need.
- The Agincourt Community Services Association has helped 131 Syrian refugees facing significant barriers in finding jobs to develop practical, marketable skills to support their labour market entry.

- D.O.O.R.S. To New Life Refugee Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario, has used the funds to support 17 Syrian families, including providing them with gift cards for food during the Christmas season.
- CultureLink in Toronto provides a stipend to families whose children are members of the Nai Syrian Children's Choir. While the children participate in the weekly rehearsal, the parents attend an English conversation circle. The money helps them pay for the public transit fares. The Nai Syrian Children's Choir performed at the House of Commons in December 2016, and was featured on the CBC.
- In Montreal, the Centre d'appui aux communautés immigrantes (CACI) has provided grocery and pharmacy gift cards to Syrian families in need. Three families with special needs received cheques. Many of the recipients are not able to work in Canada as a result of health issues or because they are elderly.

## Stories

The organizations who successfully applied to the Fund were asked to share a story of how the funds they received helped Syrian newcomers. The following are two stories.

Faced with the choice of leaving Syria or dying at the hands of ISIS, a family fled their home in 2014. Sadly, the younger brother of the husband in this family stayed and was later killed by ISIS. After two years of living in Lebanon, dependent on subsistence farming and money sent from Canadian relatives, and the family's refugee application to Canada was approved. On October 20th, 2016, the family arrived in Canada. They were met by brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles – and much happiness. They are staying with a family in Hamilton while looking for housing of their own. Thanks to the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, the children have settled well into school and, along with the rest of the family, are learning English. They feel like human beings again and, most importantly, feel safe in Canada. They are incredibly grateful to everyone who made it possible for them to re-build their lives in Canada.

Mohamad is a 7-year-old Syrian newcomer who arrived in Canada just 6 months ago. He is an active young boy, with a passion for soccer. While his parents were busy settling the family and learning English, he found his summer days long and lonely. He desperately wanted to participate in a soccer camp, but the family did not have the funds. Thanks to the bursary from KidSport Canada, he was able to spend a week at the Calgary Soccer Centre camp. When he was picked up at the end of each day, he would be grinning from ear to ear and would talk non-stop about the games they played and the time spent in the pool. Mohamad is usually an extremely quiet boy due to his limited English, but on the rides home from soccer camp he couldn't get the words out fast enough.

The CCR continues to manage the Fund. While we are no longer receiving contributions, we continue to encourage organizations to apply to help strengthen their efforts to support the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

