



Report on the Syrian Refugee Support Fund April 2019

Background

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.

Overview

A total of \$345,000 has been distributed from the Fund, divided into 35 grants of between \$5,000 and \$15,000, through 27 different organizations. Some organizations, after completing their first grant, applied for a second. Grants totalling \$200,000 have already been completed. The remaining \$145,000 are in active grants which will most likely be completed in 2019.

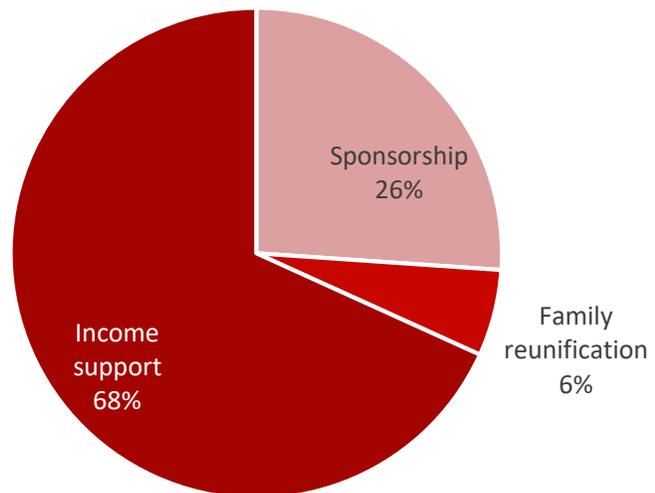
\$345,000
distributed in grants

27
organizations supported

Breakdown of the funds by category

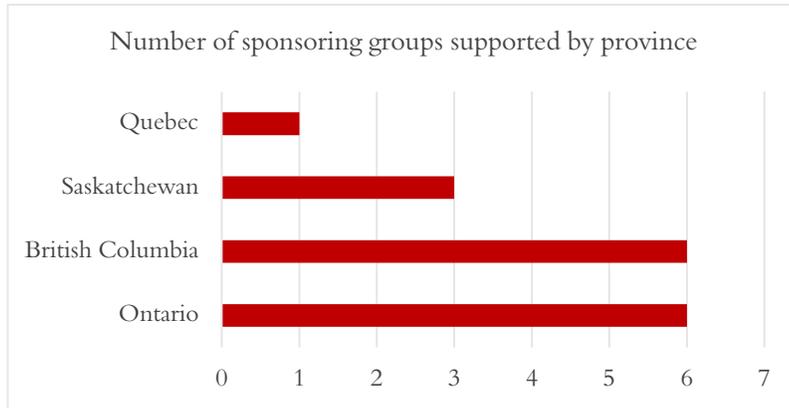
The Fund supports Syrian refugees in Canada through three categories: private sponsorship, family reunification, and income support. The graph below shows the breakdown of distribution of funds by category. Most organizations applied for grants under the income support category. This category was the most flexible and allowed the organization to tailor the use of funds to the needs of their specific region.

- A. **Sponsorship:** supplementing funds raised by private sponsors to allow them to sponsor more Syrian refugees,
- B. **Family reunification:** facilitating family reunification through legal channels,
- C. **Income support:** providing income support to impoverished recently arrived Syrians in Canada.



A. Sponsorship

Nine organizations received grants to support private sponsorship groups to bring more Syrian refugees to Canada. Organizations each received a grant of \$10,000 which they could distribute to one or more sponsorship groups, depending on the needs of the group. Often the grants provided private sponsorship groups with additional funds to meet the financial threshold necessary to submit an application. For example, a group might have raised enough money to sponsor a couple with children, but required additional funds in order to bring extended family members such as grandparents. In total, 16 sponsoring groups, located across 4 provinces, received support.



\$ 90,000

distributed in grants

16

private sponsorship groups supported

26%

of the Fund was used in this category

Aliza and Hassan (Nest Saskatoon)

Aliza fled Syria with her 5 children after her husband was killed during the war. Her brother, Hassan, had been resettled to Canada in 2016 and was desperate to bring his sister to Canada. He approached Nest Saskatoon about sponsoring Aliza. Fortunately, in the spring of 2016, Nest received a grant from the Fund – the timing was perfect! Aliza’s application was submitted and sent overseas for processing. However, after Aliza’s interview in Lebanon she found out that she and her family had been refused. Despite the fact that Aliza had a large support system in Saskatoon, the visa officer considered Aliza’s settlement needs too high. Nest intervened and was able to get the decision reversed. In 2018, Aliza arrived in Saskatoon with her children. Aliza’s and Hassan’s families are delighted to be reunited. Both families are adjusting well. They live together in a townhouse supplied by the Westgate Heights Attainable Housing initiative which is quite a difference from the tiny apartment the two families shared in Lebanon.

This category represents 26% of the money distributed from the Fund, all granted during the first year of the Fund. In October 2016, the CCR Executive Committee decided not to fund any more applications in this category. As there were already numerous Syrian refugee sponsorships in process, the CCR felt that this category was no longer consistent with the organization’s call for equity across all regions. Other refugee populations had been waiting much longer to come to Canada.

Although most of the people sponsored with the support of the Fund have arrived, there are three Syrian families who are still waiting. Long processing delays continue to be a challenge for both the Syrians waiting to come to Canada, and for the sponsoring groups that need to be ready at any moment to receive them.

* To protect privacy, all names of individuals in this report have been changed. *

B. Family Reunification

Five organizations used their grants, either partially or entirely, to support family reunification of Syrian refugees. The organizations all provided funds to defray one of two major costs faced by refugees: reimbursing the travel loans, or covering costs related to a permanent residence application.

Only one organization used their funds exclusively for family reunification purposes; the others split their grants between support for family reunification and provision of income support.

\$19,650

distributed in grants

5

organizations supported

6%

of the Fund was used in this category

“I cannot find the words to thank you; the support provided to help pay the [travel] loan has been a huge relief and lessened our burden.”

Rasha (Jesuit Refugee Services)

The government of Canada offers travel loans to cover the costs of airfare to Canada, among other travel-related expenses. The amount of the loan can be up to \$10,000 and the burden of repaying it often causes newcomers major stress. In some cases, people abandon language or educational programs in order to work to pay off the loan, hindering their ability to integrate successfully in their new home. Through the Fund, organizations could apply for grants to assist Syrian refugees who were experiencing hardship and unable to pay the monthly installments of their travel loans.

Jesuit Refugee Services in Montreal used a portion of their grant to help five Syrian families pay part of their travel loan. One woman who benefitted from this support noted that she is being looked after by her daughter – she is grateful to the Fund because the less of the transportation loan left to be paid, the less of a burden she feels she is to her daughter.

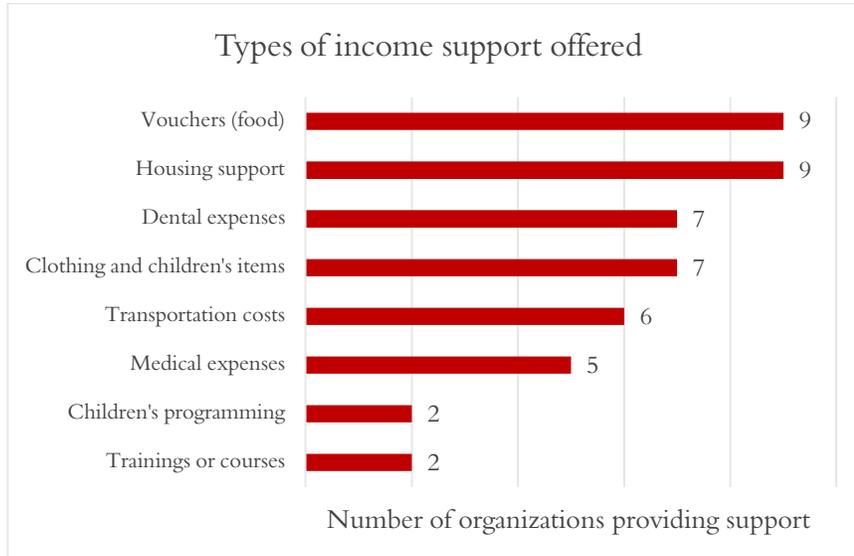
Naief (New Canadians Centre Peterborough)

When she left Syria, Naief was separated from her 2 teenage sons who eventually became refugees in Germany. When she applied to bring her sons to Canada, the Canadian government required DNA proof of relationship from one of the children. Naief could not afford the testing, which was \$500. NCCP covered the cost of the testing through the Fund. Naief is still waiting to know if her children will be able to join her in Canada after a two-year separation.

Other major expenses the Fund helped to cover were costs related to permanent residence applications, including supporting documents such as DNA tests to establish a family link. Fees for permanent residence applications are expensive, and until the fees are paid, applications cannot be processed, resulting in further delays for family reunification.

C. Income support

A total of 25 organizations received Funds that were used in the category of income support. Twenty-one organizations used their grants exclusively for this category, while another four split their grants between income support and family reunification. This category was the most flexible as organizations were encouraged to provide support that was specific to the community where they were located, or specific to a newcomer’s situation. The graph below offers an overview of the different ways that organizations assisted newly arrived Syrians. Among the most common were housing support, vouchers for grocery stores, and dental expenses.



\$235,350

distributed in grants

25

organizations supported

68%

of the Fund was used in this category

Food vouchers

Cumulatively, nine organizations provided hundreds of gift vouchers for grocery stores so that refugees could purchase fresh grocery items, such as fruits, vegetables or meat, to meet their daily dietary needs which otherwise would be impossible due to tight budgets. Providing a gift voucher allows the refugee the freedom and agency to purchase food that is culturally appropriate and nutritious, often supplementing items not available through local food banks.

“One of the worst things a parent could face is to struggle to feed their kids; we have been through that once during the war in Syria and in the asylum country and I do not want to be there again! Thank you for the support.”

Noor (DIVERSEcity)

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Noor came to Canada in 2017 with her husband and three children. As Noor and her family embarked on their lives in Canada, new challenges arose. Her family’s income assistance payments were delayed by 3 months and it reached the point where she did not have money to buy food for her children or for herself as a pregnant woman. Through this fund, Noor was able to buy the food she needed that wasn’t available at foodbanks, until her assistance payments resumed.

Housing

Housing support was the most common type of support provided by funded organizations. Many refugees struggled to find adequate housing in areas of Canada where vacancy rates are very low and prices are high, such as Vancouver and Toronto. Organizations provided funds for first month's rent, security deposits, utility bills, and furniture.

Dental expenses

Many refugees are eligible for additional health coverage known as the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) which provides coverage for emergency dental care; however, it does not cover on-going regular care such as teeth cleaning. Many Syrian refugees have gone years without seeing a dentist and are in dire need of dental care, but the cost is prohibitively expensive. Several organizations partnered with dentists to cover costs of cleanings, filling cavities, etc. In some cases, when IFHP would only cover a tooth extraction, an organization would use some of a grant from the Fund to support a more costly treatment (such as a root canal) to allow the refugee to keep the tooth. The Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia has provided interpretation services during dental appointments for 300 Syrian refugees.

Clothing and children's items

Many newly arrived Syrians struggled to find appropriate winter clothing, especially those with large families or several young children. In other cases, newcomers could not afford to purchase expensive but necessary items for babies and children such as strollers and car seats, diapers and formula. As can be seen through Samar's story (to the right), something as simple as a stroller can radically change a person's ability to settle after arrival.

Transportation

Several organizations used funds to help cover transportation costs such as public transit passes, or contributions towards the cost of gas for a car. Access to transit is essential for going to medical appointments (sometimes several per week), receiving settlement services or attending language courses. Humanity First, Armenian Family Support Services, Centre d'appui aux communautés immigrantes, and Jesuit Refugee Services all provided public transit tickets for adults and children attending language courses. In some cases, if a refugee had an appointment a great distance away, or if a family member was hospitalized at a location which was difficult to access, an organization would offer to cover a portion of the travel cost by subsidizing the gas used to drive there.

Samar (DIVERSEcity)

Samar, separated from her husband during her migration, arrived in Canada with two very young children. Her budget was so tight that she was unable to purchase a stroller for her children. This, coupled with a physical injury, prevented her from accessing simple but crucial services such as the food bank and settlement agencies. Through the Fund, Samar received a twin stroller enabling her to take advantage of support to learn how to use public transit and get to services. Samar was able to receive medical treatment for her conditions, take her children to Early Years Child Programming, go to the food bank and focus on her settlement trajectory.

Medical expenses

Although most Syrian refugees have provincial health coverage, some treatments or services are either only partially covered, or not covered at all. Often interpretation is not provided during a medical appointment, which limits a patient's understanding and causes stress. Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society provided interpretation services for three pregnant Syrian women who were scheduled for C-sections but had very limited English. Other organizations have provided financial support for treatments such as physiotherapy or purchasing medication.

Children's programming

Three organizations provided funding for children's programming. The Fund supported CultureLink's Syrian children's choir, whose success is demonstrated by the fact that there was 100% attendance during Ramadan. While children practised, a conversation group for parents was offered. In addition, a paid apprenticeship for Syrian refugee musicians was created to offer performance experience for those who wished to establish themselves as professional musicians in Canada. KidSport Alberta helped cover more than 40 sports registrations for activities such as soccer, gymnastics and basketball. Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society also covered summer camp registration fees for Syrian children.

Trainings and courses

Two organizations provided support in the form of trainings or courses. Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA) received two grants, with which they have helped almost 300 Syrians receive training for practical, marketable, employment-ready skills. Examples of training include Food Handling, Security Guard Training, Haircutting, Accounting Essentials, and Home-based Childcare. Their second grant is dedicated to helping women entrepreneurs. Cowichan Intercultural Society has used the Fund in part to support refugees to obtain driving licences. Living in a rural area, public transit can be intermittent or non-existent, limiting access to English classes and employment.

“I can't thank you enough for all your support since our arrival. I'm very happy to know that the community kitchen has been offered to me. Now

I can have an income and do something I love and be a better contributor to our new community.

Thank you for the training opportunities and the guidance.”

Abeer (ACSA)

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Abeer wanted to open a small catering business to support her family but did not have financing to obtain a certification in food safety and hygiene, or capital support to cover her expenses. ACSA was able to connect her to the Dorset Park Community Hub that has a community kitchen available to meet her cooking requirements and cover the cost of her Food Handler's Certification. In addition, the Fund provided seed capital to cover her business-related expenses. Abeer is now a successful caterer. She supplies Syrian delicacies at Toronto's Sick Kids Hospital.

Next steps

The feedback from organizations who have received grants from the Fund has been very positive. As detailed in the report, many Syrian refugees who were experiencing hardships were able to be supported by their local communities.

Currently, 16 organizations have active grants (in total \$145,000), roughly half of which remains to be spent. It is expected that by the end of 2019 most active grants will be finished. This timeline may vary slightly depending on a few factors, some of which are out of the control of the organization. For example, groups privately sponsoring refugees must wait until the government confirms a travel date before they can begin dispersing funds.

As of April 2019, there remains just over \$1,000 to be distributed from the grant. There is a possibility there will be more to distribute if some organizations decide to return unspent money because the needs of Syrian refugees in their community have diminished. The CCR has a file of pending applications that can be processed if there are more funds to be distributed.

List of organizations who received grants

Action Réfugiés Montréal (QC)	Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia (NS)
Agincourt Community Services Association (ON)	Jesuit Refugee Services (QC)
Anglican Diocese of Niagara (ON)	KidSport Canada – Alberta (AB)
Anglican Synod of the Diocese of BC (BC)	Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan (SK)
Armenian Family Support Services (ON)	Nest Saskatoon (SK)
Byron United Church (ON)	New Canadians Centre Peterborough (ON)
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (AB)	Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (ON)
Centre d'appui aux communautés immigrantes (QC)	PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEI)
Cowichan Intercultural Society (BC)	Relais communautaire de Laval (QC)
CultureLink (Nai's Children's Choir) (ON)	Saint John YMCA - Newcomer Connections Centre (NB)
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (BC)	Southminster-Steinhauer United Church (AB)
D.O.O.R.S to New Life Refugee Centre Inc (ON)	St George Orthodox Antiochian Church (QC)
DiverseCity Community Resources Society (BC)	
Humanity First (ON)	
Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (BC)	

