



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 12, 2016
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers - Update (CES16023(a)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

Not Applicable

Information:

Background

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers was established in April 2016. The 18-member table consists of key settlement agencies, community stakeholders and City support staff. The Mayor's Advisory Committee is also supported by five working groups in the areas of Housing, Health, Education, Employment, Language & Skills Development, and Community Supports & Networks.

The membership list for the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers and the five supporting Working Groups is attached as Appendix A to Report CES16023(a).

Key Accomplishments

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers and the five Working Groups have been meeting regularly and working together to accomplish their mandates. Some of the current accomplishments and work to date include:

1. Creation of mandates, work templates and guides

- The Terms of References for the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers and the Working Groups have been approved by members.

**SUBJECT: Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers – Update
(CES16023(a)) (City Wide) - Page 2 of 5**

- Working Groups developed and approved their project planning template used for inputting objectives, tasks, actions, milestones and success indicators.
- Two settlement guides for Syrian newcomers were developed - housing and recreation guides. The guides were completed and translated into Arabic by the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC) and the City's Recreation division.

2. Identification of key issues, gaps, challenges and opportunities

The Mayor's Advisory Committee and the five Working Groups have identified key issues, challenges and opportunities relating to the current Syrian newcomers' resettlement efforts in Hamilton. The 10 most prominent issues include:

Translation Services:

The demand for information in Arabic and translators currently exceeds supply. Community service providers and volunteers from Hamilton's Arab community continue to provide formal and informal supports to meet these needs.

Language Skills:

Like other municipalities, Hamilton's Syrian newcomers have low levels of English literacy. This makes attendance at LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) language training classes particularly important. Community service agencies continue to support language training, although many have expressed there is a need for more LINC classes to meet current demands.

Child Care and Transportation:

Barriers have been identified which are impeding many newcomers from attending the LINC language classes. Of priority is the lack of adequate childcare spaces and transportation costs to LINC locations. Community partners and agencies continue to explore opportunities to meet these needs.

Family Reunification:

Like other Syrian newcomers across Canada, Hamilton's newcomers are separated from family members who are still living in refugee camps and unsafe locations overseas. Increasing community support for privately-sponsored refugees in Hamilton has been identified as a solution. This will allow more families overseas to join their loved ones who are already in Canada. Various sponsorship groups in Hamilton are already working on this issue.

Employment Readiness:

Syrian newcomers in Hamilton are very motivated and eager to work. Low levels of English literacy combined with lack of local network and employment experience are some of the barriers to employment. Several settlement agencies in Hamilton are involved in efforts to improve the employability of the newcomers by providing English classes and employment support services. These include resume writing, interview skill-building and employer networking opportunities. The Employment, Language and Skills

**SUBJECT: Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers – Update
(CES16023(a)) (City Wide) - Page 3 of 5**

Development Working Group, in collaboration with the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC), is in the process of organizing an Employer Forum to take place on October 27, 2016 at the David Braley Health Sciences Centre. The purpose of the forum is to promote the skills and talents of our newcomers to local employers.

Healthcare:

The health needs of Syrian newcomers are varied and ongoing. The Health Working Group has identified dental care, mental health, health of women, children and youth as priority focus areas. Health partners continue to meet regularly and work together to address these emerging needs.

Cultural Awareness Training:

Many community partners, stakeholders and volunteers do not understand cultural etiquette, beliefs, language, norms and social interaction associated with the Syrian culture. The need for cultural awareness and sensitivity training was identified. Community partners and service agencies are already sharing information and providing services on cultural awareness training opportunities in Hamilton.

Ontario Works & Ontario Disability Support Program:

Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) are supported by the federal government for up to one year upon arrival. The timing allows the newcomers to improve language skills and become employed. Some refugees will be successful in finding employment within one year of arrival. However, those who are not able to find employment will rely on OW (Ontario Works) or ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program). In recognition of this, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration is already engaging with key resettlement agencies and municipalities to discuss transition into OW, ODSP and other related programs.

Long-term Housing Needs:

100% of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton who came through the Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) program have been housed. Each GAR receives a housing allowance from the federal government based on their family size. However, once the housing allowance ends (for most people between December 2016 and April 2017) there is a concern that some Syrian newcomer families may be at risk of losing their current housing. The Housing Working Group is monitoring this risk as an issue to be addressed.

Advocacy and System Supports:

Some settlement support agencies have expressed concerns that the volume of work created by the Syrian refugee resettlement has not been matched equally by federal funding to meet needs. Critical needs such as childcare, language training, skills development and community engagement continue to overwhelm services. However, this is not unique to Hamilton as other settlement support agencies across Canada have similar concerns.

The Mayor's Advisory Committee and the five Working Groups are addressing some of the identified challenges, gaps and opportunities. Staff will provide an update on progress made in addressing the issues identified report in the first quarter of 2017.

Community response and communications

Community stakeholders identified that a clear and centralized system is needed to facilitate donations to Syrian newcomers and to engage volunteers more effectively.

A community support portal has been created to address this opportunity- <https://hamiltonnewcomers.recovers.org>. The portal is an online Hamilton community collaboration hub for stakeholder organizations, community partners and private sponsorship groups to organize, coordinate and communicate newcomer support initiatives. Some of the key partners on this initiative include:

- Wesley Urban Ministries;
- Immigrant Working Centre (IWC);
- TrueCity Hamilton;
- Hamilton Newcomer Alliance;
- Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC);
- McMaster Welcome Group; and,
- Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI).

The City's website on Syrian newcomers – www.hamilton.ca/syrianncomers - is regularly maintained and updated with useful information and events, many of which are provided by the community.

A community success story: Karam Kitchen, Hamilton

Within a few months upon arrival, an all-woman group of recent Syrian newcomers has opened a food catering business in Hamilton called Karam Kitchen. Karam means "Generous" in Arabic. Started through a Kickstarter online funding campaign, the three sisters involved (Rawa'a Aloliwi, Dalal Al Zoubi and Manahel Al Shareef) and their key local supporters (Brittani Farrington and Kim Kralt) raised about US \$5,000 within four days. Karam Kitchen caters Syrian homemade pitas, *mutabal*, *yalanji*, *falafel*, *kibbeh*, *kababs*, *manakeesh*, *kabsa* and other fresh Syrian delicacies. The kitchen operates out of the Kitchen Collective on King Street East, Hamilton.

The Mayor's Community Support and Networks Working Group, Hamilton's Farmers Market and the City's economic development division have played key roles to support Karam Kitchen. This success story has been featured the Hamilton Spectator and US-based Savor magazine. The story particularly focussed on the openness, generosity and incredible support from Hamilton's community partners, stakeholders and residents in creating a welcoming space for Syrian newcomers. More information on Karam Kitchen can be found at www.karamkitchen.com.

Conclusion

The collective mandate of the Mayor's Advisory Committee and the Working Groups continues to be important to successfully resettle and integrate Syrian newcomers in Hamilton. The progress of the Working Groups and the Advisory Committee to date is demonstrating the importance of strategic collaboration, community mobilization, and information sharing to support the short-term and long-term needs of our newcomers.

Key issues, challenges and opportunities are being jointly identified, discussed and addressed. Subsequent staff reports to the Emergency & Community Services Committee will be highlighting some of these key issues and successes.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report CES16023(a): Membership List: Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers and Working Groups