



CITY OF HAMILTON
COMMUNITY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Neighbourhood and Community Initiatives

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	January 23, 2017
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers - Update (CES16023(b)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SUBMITTED BY:	Suzanne Brown Director, Neighbourhood & Community Initiatives Division Community & Emergency Services Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the Mayor correspond with the Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, requesting an increase in funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs for newcomers;
- (b) That the Mayor correspond with the Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Provincial Minister of Education, requesting an increase in childcare spaces for parents attending ESL and LINC language classes; and,
- (c) That the Mayor correspond with Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and Federal Minister of Health, requesting the broadening of the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) dental coverage for newcomers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since March 2016, the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers has successfully brought together over 100 community partners, service agencies and key stakeholders to support the resettlement of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton. Five Working Groups were created to specifically collaborate and advise on critical resettlement issues in the areas of housing, education, health, employment, language, skills development and community supports. These critical areas are integral to the overall wellbeing of the newcomers, both in the short-term and long-term periods.

Significant progress has been made over the course of 10 months since establishing the Mayor's Advisory Committee, making the committee a successful cross-sectoral collaboration and inclusive voice of the community. The Committee and its five working

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groups have documented the following as some of the key current issues, gaps and achievements relating to the resettlement of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton:

Language and Childcare Spaces

Like many other municipalities across Canada, Hamilton's Syrian refugee newcomers have low levels of English literacy. Given that English language competency is a critical success factor for employment readiness and integration, newcomers' access to LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) and ESL (English as a Second Language) training classes are often very critical for gaining financial independence.

However, an environmental scan conducted by the Employment, Language and Skills Development Working Group in the fall of 2016 has discovered waitlists for LINC and ESL classes in Hamilton. As of the end of October 2016, there were 240 individuals on the waitlist for LINC or ESL classes across Hamilton. In addition, more on-site childcare spaces are also needed at the LINC/ESL language class facilities for many newcomers with young children (lack of childcare spaces has become a barrier for many families).

These service gaps are very consistent with what have also been identified in other communities across Ontario, requiring advocacy at the political level of government.

Employment

Syrian newcomers in Hamilton continue to be motivated and eager to find employment. However, low levels of English literacy (as noted above) combined with lack of local network and employment experience continue to act as barriers to employment in the first year of resettlement. This is consistent with challenges newcomers are also facing in municipalities across the province.

In support of all newcomers including Syrian newcomers, the Employment Language and Skills Development Working Groups collaborated with the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC), Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) and Workforce Planning Hamilton on the "*Employers Embracing Diversity*" event held at David Braley Health Sciences Centre on October 27, 2016. Over 100 employment service providers and employers attended the event to raise awareness of newcomer talents and motivating employers to hire newcomers. A short video "*Newcomers in Hamilton: Journeys to Success*" showcased the journey of a variety of newcomers finding employment in our workforce (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVovQAz9ulg>).

The Employment, Language and Skills Development Working also continues to engage with service providers, settlement agencies and employment centres to further advocate for long-term language and employment needs of Syrian newcomers.

Housing

All GAR Syrian newcomers have been housed based on affordability. As of October 2016, 66 families were receiving subsidies (\$200 per month) funded through the Syrian Refugee Welcome Fund from the Community Foundations of Canada (through the Hamilton Community Foundation) until the end of December 2017. Housing Services has also provided an allowance that covers 24 families (\$200 per month) for some families until March of 2018.

Across Ontario, several communities have also expressed concerns about housing retention and affordability in year two starting in 'Month 13' when some families will transition from federal RAP support to Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The decrease in social assistance support during the transition to 'Month 13' combined with possible increases in rent for 2017 may create a housing affordability challenge for some families. The Housing working group is monitoring the trend and will further chart a course of action if required.

Interpretation and Translation Services

Community service providers and volunteers continue to provide formal and informal interpretation and translation supports. A gap identified by the Health Working Group is the lack of Arabic speaking interpreters with medical interpretation training to ensure safer and better quality care for Syrian newcomers. Lack of high quality medical interpretation services may lead to confusion when navigating the healthcare system and a reliance on high-cost emergency services. In addition, risk of a medical error may be increased when language interpreters do not have some health language training or when family members/volunteers are relied upon to translate. The Health Working Group is currently assessing how these identified gaps can be addressed.

Health

The Health Working Group has also identified several gaps in oral health services available to newcomers in Hamilton. These gaps are an issue because many Syrian newcomers have significantly unmet dental health needs and are experiencing inequitable barriers to accessing dental services since their Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) coverage may disqualify them from more comprehensive publicly funded dental programs like OHIP (Ontario Health Insurance Plan).

The major inadequacies of IFHP dental coverage compared to OHIP dental coverage include areas such as:

- Coverage for preventive dental services;
- More competitive reimbursement rates in the IFHP fee schedule to discourage dental service providers from denying care to resettled refugees with only IFHP coverage; and,
- Expanded special approval for oral surgical procedures and root canal coverage.

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These IFHP dental coverage inadequacies are issues affecting all newcomers in municipalities across the Province. The Health Working Group has concluded that political advocacy is needed to broaden IFHP dental service coverage for resettled refugees. The Health Working Group has also created a '*Newcomer Dental Health Services in Hamilton Navigation Tool*' to help healthcare providers determine the most suitable dental health service for eligible Hamilton newcomer patients. Furthermore, a sub-committee has been formed to address emerging mental health issues.

Family reunification

Many Syrian refugee newcomer families in Hamilton are separated from family members who are still overseas and are looking for help with sponsoring them to come to Canada. For Syrian newcomers who are separated from family members there is often a psychological toll and worry that can slow down the process of fully resettling and integrating. Supporting family reunification has been identified as a priority by the Community Support and Networks Working Group. As a course of action, a sub-committee has been established by the Working Group to focus on facilitating family reunification and private sponsorships for refugee newcomers in Hamilton.

Cultural Awareness Training

As detailed in a previous staff report (CES16023(a)), many community partners, stakeholders and volunteers do not understand cultural etiquette, beliefs, language, norms and social interaction associated with the Syrian culture. As a result, the need for cultural awareness and sensitivity training was identified. To meet this need, Wesley Urban Ministries, Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI) and the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC) hosted a Cultural Competency workshop for community partners, stakeholders and volunteers that are involved in welcoming and resettling Syrian newcomers in Hamilton. The workshop was held at Wesley Urban Ministries on December 5, 2016 and focused on developing cross-cultural communication skills and recognizing unconscious bias.

One Year Anniversary of Syrians in Hamilton – a community success story

On November 29, 2016, over 200 people including community partners, volunteers and Syrian refugee newcomer families gathered at City Hall to celebrate the anniversary of Hamilton's community efforts to prepare for and welcome Syrian newcomers. The event was organized by the Mayor's Office, Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC) and the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers.

Volunteer Arabic interpreters circulated through the crowd to facilitate conversations between community members. A family engagement area with Hamilton themed colouring books for the many children in attendance (donated by local graphics design team the Jelly Brothers) and a festival of lights program activity centre (sponsored by the Children's International Learning Centre) were particularly popular with the young ones. A young Syrian pianist performed as part of the celebrations (on a keyboard

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generously provided by An Instrument for Every Child). “Thank You” remarks were offered by the MP for Hamilton West, the Mayor, the President of the Muslim Association of Hamilton, the Co-Chair of the Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers, the Bishop for the Catholic Diocese of Hamilton and the Bishop for the Anglican Diocese of Niagara. The MC for the event was the Chair of HIPC.

One of the Syrian newcomer families in attendance presented the City of Hamilton with a Christmas tree as a gift of thanks for welcoming them to Canada. A short video showcasing Hamilton’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis as a welcoming city was screened: <http://hamiltonimmigration.ca/thankyou>.

Next Steps: Evaluation Report on the Resettlement of Syrian Newcomers

The Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers has identified the need for a “lessons learned” report detailing what worked, what didn’t and how to use the collective experience of the current Syrian resettlement efforts to improve community collaboration, advance city building and support any future refugee wave in Hamilton.

The evaluation report will contain key recommendations and serve as the final key deliverable that comes out the Mayor’s Advisory Committee table. The report process will conduct interviews and focus group discussions with key organizations, agencies and individuals that have played key roles in the resettlement efforts. They include:

- Members of the Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers
- Wesley Urban Ministries (Hamilton’s lead agency for GARs)
- Settlement Provider Organizations (e.g. Immigrants Working Centre)
- Muslim Association of Hamilton
- Settlement Agreement Holders (e.g. the Anglican and Catholic dioceses)
- Private sponsor groups and individuals
- Relevant City of Hamilton departments
- Syrian newcomer families and individuals

The evaluation report will be completed between January and April 2017. The Mayor’s Advisory Committee is expected to present its findings to Council in Q2 of 2017. The report is funded by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: There are no financial implications associated with Report CES16023(b).

Staffing: There are no staffing implications associated with Report CES16023(b).

Legal: There are no staffing implications associated with Report CES16023(b).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Syrian civil war, which broke out in 2011, has reportedly displaced about 11 million Syrians who have fled their homes, with 13.5 million more estimated as needing humanitarian assistance within the country.

Between November 4, 2015 and November 27, 2016, the Government of Canada has resettled 35,745 Syrian newcomers in more than 36 communities across the country. Ontario received 15,552 (43%) of the national total, out of which 1,330 (4%) called Hamilton their home. 84% of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton are sponsored by the federal government (1,123), 11% are sponsored privately (144), while the rest 5% are a blend of government/private sponsorship (63). The statistical breakdown is below:

Refugee Category	Canada	CAN (%)	Ontario	ON (%)	Hamilton	HAM (%)
Government Assisted Refugee (GAR)	18,863	53%	7,942	51%	1,123	84%
Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)	3,622	10%	1,902	12%	63	5%
Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR)	13,260	37%	5,678	37%	144	11%
Totals by region	35,745	100%	15,522	43%	1,330	4%

Wesley Urban Ministries is the lead agency for GARs in Hamilton, while various private groups, church affiliates, community organizations and other private individuals providing sponsorship to PSR and BVOR refugees who came to Hamilton. The first arrivals of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton began on December 21, 2015.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

There are no policy implications or legislated requirements related to the recommendations.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Various internal and external stakeholders are regularly consulted as part of the mandate of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers, and in informing the recommendations of this report. Some of these stakeholders include:

Internal Stakeholders:

- Mayor's Office, City of Hamilton
- Neighbourhood & Community Initiatives Division
- Housing Services Division
- Public Health Services
- Children & Home Management Division
- Communications & Intergovernmental Affairs Division

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- Employment & Income Support Division
- Recreation Division
- Other City divisions

External Stakeholders:

- Wesley Urban Ministries
- Immigrant Working Centre
- The Anglican Diocese
- TruCity
- Hamilton Family Health Team
- The Muslim Association of Hamilton
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton
- Anglican Diocese of Niagara
- Hamilton boards of education (public and catholic)
- YMCA
- YWCA
- Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council
- Other housing, education, health and settlement partners

In addition, the Mayor's Advisory Committee directly engages with Syrian newcomers, many of who are serving or attending various committee meetings and initiatives.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The success of any newcomer to any country largely depends on the systems, programs and policies that are in place and specifically designed to support short-term and long-term integration. Central to these success factors is the swiftness by which language and employment barriers can be removed. Like many other municipalities across Canada, Hamilton's Syrian refugee newcomers have low levels of English literacy. Being able to quickly complete ESL and LINC classes is critical to how soon many of these newcomers can gain financial independence.

240 Syrian newcomers are on the waitlists of ESL and LINC classes in Hamilton. Many Syrian parents who are also very eager to enrol in ESL and LINC classes further have their aspirations dashed due to the lack of adequate childcare spaces within the ESL and LINC locations.

Oral health is critical to overall health and confidence of any individual. The Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) provides limited health coverage to resettled refugees, refugee claimants and other certain groups before they are eligible for provincial or territorial health benefits (typically one year for resettled refugees). Although IFHP covers various medical, health, dental, prescription drugs and other supplemental benefits, the Mayor's Advisory Committee Health Working Group has determined the

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dental coverage doesn't go far enough in comparison to provincial or territorial dental benefits.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

None

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Community Engagement & Participation

Hamilton has an open, transparent and accessible approach to City government that engages with and empowers all citizens to be involved in their community.

Economic Prosperity and Growth

Hamilton has a prosperous and diverse local economy where people have opportunities to grow and develop.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None