



CITY OF HAMILTON
COMMUNITY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Ontario Works Division

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	January 23, 2017
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Syrian Newcomers and Ontario Works (CES17006) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

That the Mayor correspond with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada requesting one-time funding in the amount of \$90,205 (representing 2.8% of the cost to administer Ontario Works exclusive of staffing costs) to the City of Hamilton to offset the increase to the 2017 Ontario Works caseload as a result of the services provided to the Syrian newcomers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Refugees entering Canada as Government Assisted Refugees (GAR), Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) or Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) are provided financial support up to a maximum of 12 months upon arrival, or until they become financially independent, whichever comes first. The Federal government provides financial support directly to GARs through its Resettlement Assistant Program (RAP), which is administered by Wesley Urban Ministries. Sponsor groups and individuals also provide financial supports to sponsored families under PSR and BVOR according to their 12 month sponsorship commitments.

After 12 months, refugees who are unable to secure employment may qualify to apply and transition to the Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). This is often referred to as "Month 13". The first arrivals of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton began on December 21, 2015. This means "Month 13" began for Hamilton's Syrian refugees in December 2016, therefore this will result in a peak application period between January and February 2017. Based on Syrian newcomers'

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demographic data, it is anticipated that approximately 190 new Syrian families will transition onto OW or ODSP in Hamilton.

It is estimated that with this increased caseload, there will be a financial impact of approximately \$3,221,640 gross/\$90,205 net. Staffing costs have not been included in this calculation as additional Case Managers have not been hired. This does not include potential additional Ontario Works benefits (e.g. transportation, dental, job start-up, etc.), housing costs paid by Housing Services or child care if receiving subsidized child care.

Table 1 reflects a summary of the financial impact to the City of Hamilton for the 2017 fiscal year as a result of Syrian resettlement.

Table 1: Syrian Resettlement Financial Impact to the City of Hamilton

Total Number of Participants	Total Number of Months	Average Monthly Assistance	Total Benefit Cost	Cost to City of Hamilton to Administer(2.8%)
190	12	\$1,413.00 ¹	\$3,221,640.00 ³	\$90,205.00 ²

¹Based on an average of 5 person family.

²Based on an average of 5 person family with a monthly cheque of \$1,413 per month.

³Exclusive of staffing costs.

The financial support which qualifying families receive from OW is comparable to financial support under the GARs Resettlement Assistant Program. Factors such as family size, number and age of children, rental costs and eligibility for additional mandatory/discretionary benefits is required to accurately determine the amount of monthly financial support Syrian newcomer families will qualify for assistance.

Preparing Hamilton's Syrian newcomers for "Month 13" required information sharing, engagement and collaboration across the human services sectors. To this end, Ontario Works staff worked closely with the following: Wesley Urban Ministries; settlement agencies; relevant City divisions; and other key community stakeholders to plan for a successful transition process.

In anticipation of reduced staffing over the holiday closure and peak volume in January and February 2017, Ontario Works scheduled and processed applications for 69 Syrian families between December 9, 2016 and January 10, 2017. Planning is underway to receive and process applications for 69 applicants in the month of January and an additional 76 applications within the timeframe for this cohort. In consultation with Wesley Urban Ministries, OW is also tracking secondary migration and anticipates an increase in estimated numbers as a result.

Alternatives for Consideration - Not Applicable

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FINANCIAL - STAFFING - LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial:

It is estimated that the Ontario Works caseload will increase by approximately 190 cases from January 2017 to December 2017. Based on an average 5 person family with a monthly OW cheque payment of \$1,413 per month, the client benefit cost will increase by approximately \$3,221,640 gross of which 2.8% or \$90,205 is a direct cost to the City of Hamilton.

Staffing:

With no increases to staffing ratios, it is anticipated that there will be added workload pressures to the existing complement as they will be required to service the additional 190 cases.

Legal:

There are no legal implications associated with Report CES17006.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Government of Canada reported the resettlement of 35,745 Syrian newcomers in more than 36 communities across Canada between November 4, 2015 and November 27, 2016. Ontario received 15,552 (43%) of the national total, out of which 1,330 (4%) have since called Hamilton home, and of these, more than half (57%) are under the age of 14.

Hamilton Syrian newcomers' immigration status is as follows:

- 84% are Government Assisted Refugees
- 11% are Privately Sponsored Refugees
- 5% are Blended Visa Office Referred

Wesley Urban Ministries is the lead agency for GARs in Hamilton, while various private groups, church affiliates, community organizations and other private individuals provide support to sponsored PSR and BVOR refugees who came to Hamilton.

Assessments completed on the Syrian newcomer adult education/language levels indicate the following:

- 51% have elementary or less
- 31% arrived with Level 1 English
- 30% are illiterate in Arabic

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newcomers' demographic data, it is anticipated that approximately 190 new Syrian families will transition onto OW or ODSP in Hamilton.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

The Ontario Works Act, 1997 ("the Act")

"Convention refugees are not eligible for Ontario Works during the period in which they are eligible for RAP or the PSR and JAS programs. When the sponsorship/eligibility period for these assistance programs expires, a convention refugee may be eligible for Ontario Works".

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Ontario Works consulted and worked closely with community stakeholders including the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council and Wesley Urban Ministries to prepare for and implement a transition plan for Syrian families in need of financial support following the end of Federal financial assistance.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

In alignment with broader Government initiatives to support Syrian resettlement, OW targeted interventions have focussed on three key areas:

Building System Readiness

- Hamilton has been an active participant in monthly teleconferences hosted by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Ministry of Community and Social Services. These teleconferences act as a forum for best practices in building system readiness and have resulted in the development and implementation of translated Ministry documents and resource materials. These materials help newcomers and their support agencies and groups to understand the OW and ODSP program and their rights and responsibilities.
- In partnership with Wesley Urban Ministries, OW staff delivered a high level overview of OW and ODSP to both GARs and PSRs in 11 workshop sessions throughout the fall of 2016. Sessions were delivered in three languages and attendance was over 92%. Information sessions were also offered and delivered to several community partners across the settlement and human services sector.
- Understanding the need for cultural safety and awareness, OW partnered with the Access and Equity office to deliver a full day of cultural competency training for newcomer OW Case Managers. Together, training, information and on-going supervision help staff understand immigration and settlement better and develop and use evidence based practice to support individuals in successfully navigating the settlement process and move to employment. Opportunities for staff learning and development are a foundation for success and require on-going commitment and support from the leadership team.

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- To ease the transition for families and for OW staff, a streamlined OW intake process was developed and implemented. Application appointments are scheduled in advance of the RAP income end date to ensure potential issues facing Syrian families are identified and addressed in a timely and efficient manner, such as housing affordability.
- Streamlining of the ODSP application process for those individuals who experience disabilities was initiated to ensure medical adjudication takes place in advance of the end of RAP income.

Program Supports

- To provide person-centered services and to better support our OW program and staff, OW has designated eight of the existing OW Case Manager staff complement to form a newcomer team. All applicants identified as part of the Syrian cohort will be assigned to work with one of these designated Case Managers. On average, each OW Case Manager will be assigned to work with 25 Syrian families averaging 137 beneficiaries.
- OW currently has a contract with ITS Hamilton (ITS) to provide interpretation and translation services. ITS has confirmed the availability of Syrian translators for the increased demand.
- Connecting people to jobs is critical and will require exploring new and potential pathways to support individuals who may have low-skilled experience and/or low language capacity. To provide focused and rapid supports for employment, an OW Employment Development Counsellor has been designated to work directly with the newcomer OW Case Manager team.
- Connecting people to supports is critical and will require responsive and person-centered service delivery. Uptake of primary health care, culturally relevant supports for teenage sexuality and assistance to access resources such as child care, language class and tax benefits are noted challenges across municipalities.

Communications and Outreach

- Communicating clearly and providing outreach to the community has been a hallmark of our OW transition plan in Hamilton. Working closely with community partners has ensured that information is widely disseminated and channels of communication remain open.
- OW staff participate in and draw input from a wide array of committees and boards passionate about improving newcomer resettlement, including the Mayor's Advisory tables, Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council, Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Board and the Skills Development Flagship.
- Connecting refugees to existing provincially funded settlement supports will remain a focus of OW Case Manager plans.
- Community outreach, collaboration and the feasibility of integrated services through a hub model will be explored for its potential to support a "No Wrong Door" approach to service delivery and improve outcomes.

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ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

Not applicable

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.

Healthy and Safe Communities

Hamilton is a safe and supportive city where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.

Culture and Diversity

Hamilton is a thriving, vibrant place for arts, culture, and heritage where diversity and inclusivity are embraced and celebrated.

Our People and Performance

Hamiltonians have a high level of trust and confidence in their City government.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None.