

Clause 14 in Report No. 6 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on April 21, 2016.

14

Integrated Community Planning for Refugees

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated March 11, 2016 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. Council authorize the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to spend up to \$200,000 on a one-time basis, taken from 2016 operating dollars, in support of the Syrian refugee resettlement efforts.
2. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services be authorized to enter into service delivery agreements with Community Investment Fund Agencies subject to review by Legal Services.
3. The Regional Chair write to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to request enhanced base funding for the Welcome Centres in York Region in recognition of the Syrian refugee initiative and also to better support York Region's increasing newcomer population.
4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Members of Parliament for York Region and the five Welcome Centres in York Region.

Report dated March 11, 2016 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services now follows:

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Council authorize the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to spend up to \$200,000 on a one-time basis, taken from 2016 operating dollars, in support of the Syrian refugee resettlement efforts.
2. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services be authorized to enter into service delivery agreements with Community Investment Fund Agencies subject to review by Legal Services.

3. The Regional Chair write to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to request enhanced base funding for the Welcome Centres in York Region in recognition of the Syrian refugee initiative and also to better support York Region's increasing newcomer population.
4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Members of Parliament for York Region and the five Welcome Centres in York Region.

2. Purpose

This report seeks approval on an approach to support Syrian refugees arriving in York Region.

3. Background

The Federal Government is committed to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees

The federal government committed to the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by February 29, 2016, of which an estimated 300 will settle in York Region.

Refugees arrive in Canada through three primary streams:

- **Government Assisted Refugees:** Canada works with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to identify refugees for resettlement. Refugees settling in Ontario through this stream may access reception centres managed by settlement agencies in Hamilton, Kitchener, Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor, and London, Peterborough and Leamington. The Government Assisted Refugees are eligible for the Resettlement Assistance Program from the federal government which is a one-year financial assistance program to provide for the basic needs of life, immediate essential services and accommodation.
- **Privately Sponsored Refugees:** Private sponsors across the country also help resettle refugees to Canada. These are persons, groups or organizations in the community that have come together to sponsor a refugee(s) or refugee family. Private sponsors can identify refugees to sponsor and organize a support network and must raise adequate funds to support the refugees for up to one year upon arrival in Canada, or until the refugees become self-sufficient, whichever comes first.

- **Blended Visa Office Referral Refugees:** This blended program matches refugees identified for resettlement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with private sponsors in Canada. The goal is to engage in a three-way partnership among the Government of Canada, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and private sponsors. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will identify the refugees, the Government of Canada will provide up to six months of income support through the Resettlement Assistance Program, while private sponsors will provide another six months of financial support and up to a year of social and emotional support.

The federal government's 'Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative' has received support from other provinces and municipalities across the country and from the private and public sectors. The United Way Toronto and York Region has allocated \$340,000 for its agencies who are supporting Syrian refugee efforts. The City of Toronto has allocated \$600,000 to specifically help with financial supports to Lifeline Syria and additional staff supports.

The federal government has identified that most refugees arriving in York Region will be Privately Sponsored Refugees, however recently and within a short period of time, more than fifty Blended Visa Office Refugees have landed in York Region. Staff expect an increased arrival of Government Assisted Refugees over the next year as COSTI Immigrant Services, a federally funded agency responsible for the settlement of Government Assisted Refugees, is looking for accommodations throughout the Greater Toronto Area.

Table 1 indicates the number of Syrian Refugees admissions and applications received and their intended destination.

Table 1
 Refugee Admissions and Applications to Canada as of March 1, 2016

Destination	All Refugees Admitted	Government Assisted Refugees	Privately Sponsored Refugees	Blended Visa Office Referral Refugees	Privately Sponsored Refugees Applications in Progress
Canada	26,166	14,992	8,950	2,224	12,284
Ontario	10,820	6,167	3,436	1,217	1,999
Greater Toronto Area	5,106	1,769	1,837	399	1,101
York Region	217	0	161	56	86

Note: Numbers do not include destination communities with values less than five.
 Source: Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada. Data retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/map.asp> on March 1, 2016.

The Region has taken steps towards supporting the arrival of Syrian Refugees

When the need for refugee planning was identified, the Region was able to quickly respond in a number of ways:

- A Refugee Sponsorship Information Fair for York Region was held on February 2, 2016. The Region with its Welcome Centre partners hosted this event; approximately 250 residents and service providers attended. The purpose of the Fair was to inform agencies and existing and possible sponsors about services available to refugees in York Region. It also provided an opportunity for open discussion and networking on how best to support refugees in their resettlement process.
- www.YorkWelcome.ca/refugee online resource was established to provide information on supports and services for refugees and their sponsors. The website also includes an interactive map of services which was developed in partnership with the Region’s Geographic Information Services branch.
- A York Region Refugee Planning table was created as a direct result of the expected long term impact of the refugee resettlement process. To help coordinate services and exchange information on refugee issues, the table includes representation from: the lead agencies of the Welcome Centres; the United Way Toronto and York Region (the United Way); York Regional Police; both school boards; and staff from Community and

Health Services, Transportation Services and Access York. Other organizations serving York Region refugees are also included.

- The Region participates on two immigration planning tables; a provincial table led by the Cabinet Office and a table organized by the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association. Each provides landing and demographic information on the Syrian Refugee resettlement process and both allow an opportunity for municipalities to discuss issues related to housing, settlement services and long-term federal and provincial financial support.

4. Analysis and Options

Supporting refugees longer term in York Region may require enhancements to services offered by community agencies

Based on planning table discussions, refugee resettlement may require more resources for successful integration than was originally thought. The arrival of refugees within a short period of time may create added pressure for front-line service immigration service providers in both the short and long term. Not only will there be pressure as a result of the volume of newcomers but the type of need for refugees may be different, for example, there may be more identified cases of trauma and depression. Welcome Centres staff in particular may require additional training to identify and support refugee mental health issues.

Welcome Centres are an integral part of coordinating services for newcomers in York Region

Previous studies have demonstrated that supporting newcomers, including refugees, from the outset of their arrival increases the chances of successful and earlier integration. Investment in the Welcome Centre model has not kept pace with York Region's growing newcomer population. Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada needs to enhance funding for Welcome Centre operations to maintain service levels for newcomer/refugee integration in York Region.

While many refugees being resettled in the Greater Toronto Area have been privately sponsored, this does not lessen the demand on community services. Discussions at the immigration tables with stakeholders and with sponsors have confirmed that all refugees, whether Privately Sponsored, Blended Visa Office Referrals or Government Assisted Refugees, will require on-going community supports to successfully integrate, particularly as government and private sponsorship supports end after one year.

York Region can increase support to Syrian refugee resettlement

It is recommended that Council approve an additional, one time investment towards the Community Investment Strategy funding of up to \$200,000 to support the work on the front lines and coordinate community efforts to address the service needs of refugees settling in York Region. Any funding considerations will occur in consultation with United Way Toronto and York Region to ensure that funding recommendations do not duplicate other funding activities for Syrian refugee supports in the Region.

In York Region, the federal government funds settlement specific services through the Welcome Centres including: language training, accreditation and employment supports across the five centres in Markham, Newmarket, Vaughan and Richmond Hill. Welcome Centres indicate that a new client who requires settlement services and language instruction visits the Welcome Centre an average of 80 times in the first year.

Help to develop social connections and financial skills, providing housing stability and mental health supports are not funded by the federal government, resulting in gaps in adequate service provision for refugees.

The recommended funding support is aligned with the Community Investment Strategy and the Transit Ticket Program

Some of the services not funded by the federal government are provided by agencies funded through the York Region Community Investment Strategy. Under this strategy, financial supports are provided to community agencies that offer services for low and moderate income York Region residents. There are currently thirteen Community Investment Strategy funded programs for newcomers ranging from cultural mentoring to linguistically appropriate mental health supports.

The Community Investment Strategy provides the thirteen newcomer programs with approximately \$400 per person each year. If this additional amount was funded for each expected refugee in York Region this year, various types of identified service gaps could be addressed.

The Refugee Planning Table members have identified that lack of transportation is a significant barrier to access services and supports such as seeking employment, language classes or travelling to school. At the Refugee Sponsorship Information Fair, private sponsors identified the same issue.

The York Region Transit Ticket Program currently assists York Region residents by providing eligible community agencies, including the Welcome Centres, funds to purchase YRT/Viva fares (tickets and/or passes) for residents that use their

services. Fares are provided at no cost to clients to help them access basic needs such as health care, employment and education.

Although the specific demographic characteristics of the refugees arriving in York Region is unknown at this time, the allocation for the Transit Ticket Program is based on the anticipated needs of sixty refugee families with approximately five persons per family. This ‘average’ family includes two adults, one high school student and two other younger children, i.e., 300 persons comprised of 120 adults, 80 students and 100 children. Offering additional financial support to currently funded Transit Ticket Program community agencies to provide the equivalent of three months adult or student transit passes will assist refugees to access required services.

Not every refugee would need this exact allocation, but funded agencies could provide these funds based on need.

Link to key Council-approved plans

The recommendations to support Syrian refugees arriving in York Region are consistent with York Region’s strategic direction and priorities included in *Vision 2051* and the *2015 to 2019 Strategic Plan*. The approach aligns with the Strategic Plan goals to ‘Strengthen the Region’s Economy and Support Community Health and Well-being’ including specifically ‘making our communities more welcome and inclusive’.

5. Financial Implications

The recommended one time gross expenditure of up to \$200,000 to support refugee resettlement in York Region will be managed within the approved 2016 tax levy budget for Community and Health Services.

Pending Council approval, the Commissioner of Community and Health Services would have the ability to use this one time in-year funding to assist Community Investment Fund agencies provide resources to the increased refugee population. Based on Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada current information, York Region could anticipate the arrival of up to 300 Syrian refugees in 2016.

Current and historical Community Investment Fund expenditures for both newcomer programs and the Transit Ticket program result in a per person served cost of approximately \$666 as explained in Table 2.

Table 2
Breakdown of \$200,000 to Assist 300 Expected Refugees

Amount per person	Total
Community Investment Strategy program per person cost @ \$400 per year	\$120,000
3 month Zone 1 pass @ \$136 each month for 120 adults	\$48,960
3 month Zone 1 pass @ \$102 each month for 80 students	\$24,480
3 books children’s tickets @ \$21 each book for 100 children	\$6,300
TOTAL	\$199,740
Approximate per person cost	\$666

Expenditures for increased resources for refugees will be reported back to Council in the spring of 2017 as part of the Community Investment Strategy 2016 Activity Update.

6. Local Municipal Impact

Based on the Region’s continuing partnerships on diversity and inclusion, local municipalities will continue to play a key role in shaping a welcoming community for all newcomers.

7. Conclusion

The Region was able to make use of the strong collaborations with its community partners, such as those that exist with the Welcome Centres, to respond quickly to the Syrian refugee situation as it unfolded. Recommendations included in this report can help build on these relationships and strengthen community agencies’ ability to support refugee integration in York Region.

Integrated Community Planning for Refugees

For more information on this report, please contact Lisa Gonsalves, Director, Strategies and Partnerships, at ext. 72090.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

March 11, 2016

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Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request