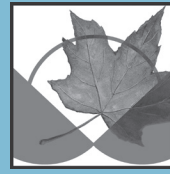


Election 2016 UNSPUN



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CANADIAN CENTRE
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MANITOBA OFFICE

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Supporting Refugee Resettlement Beyond the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian refugee crisis has attracted unprecedented political attention and, arguably, corresponding political will in Canada. In November 2015, the Province of Manitoba publicly stated it could welcome 1,500 to 2,000 of the 25,000 Syrian refugees that the federal Liberal government promised to resettle in Canada over a short period of time. According to Welcome Place, the housing arm of the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (MIIC), between November 4, 2015, and March 17, 2016, 928 Syrian refugees arrived in Manitoba. To put matters into perspective, the total number of refugee arrivals to the province in 2014 was 1,495. On March 21, 2016, Welcome Place claimed on its Twitter account that since November 2015 it has provided settlement support to over 630 Syrian refugees.

The recent concentrated arrival of individuals and families fleeing unimaginable tragedy and trauma has required an unprecedented response, including planning efforts and financial resources that are outside ordinary structures of refugee resettlement responses. Since September 2015, the Manitoba government has committed almost \$3.5 million to assist these resettlement efforts. Combined with funds provided by the federal government, such support has enabled new and robust initiatives at the community level as organizations mobilize to meet the needs of many refugees in a short time. Of course, Manitoba has welcomed refugees from diverse countries for many years. The objective now is to render the

goodwill offered towards Syrian refugee resettlement into permanent capacities for the refugee serving community as a whole.

On the surface, refugee resettlement seems to be a federal matter. Via Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), government-assisted refugees (GARs), which comprise the majority of resettled Syrian refugees, receive income support for up to a year at a social assistance level corresponding to provincial rates. RAP clients are eligible for a 'shelter allowance', which is a monthly amount for rent and utilities corresponding to provincial shelter allowances and policies, and a 'basic allowance,' which is determined by family size and age corresponding to provincial Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) rates.

Syrian GARs have been able to access Rent Supplements via Manitoba Housing and Community Development, by which the province pays the difference between market rental rates and rent-g geared to income paid by the tenant for approved units. The Province of Manitoba also ensured that 400 rent subsidies were available through the Rent Assist program to support permanent housing solutions for Syrian refugees. Rent Supplements and Rent Assist are available to low-income renters, including refugees, who do not receive other provincial housing subsidies.

As the initial point of contact for many GARs

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in Manitoba, Welcome Place offers refugees temporary residence while assisting them to find longer-term housing. The organization opened two overflow locations in order to immediately house Syrian refugees. One of the locations is a repurposed provincial government building, which was opened with support from the provincial and federal governments.

As a result of Rent Assist, the Rent Supplement and infrastructural capacity, Manitoba's incoming Syrians were able to avoid relying on hotels as temporary 'homes,' a scenario that occurred in Toronto. This is a more dignified and promising step towards successful resettlement than staying in hotels. In short, Manitoba's Syrian refugees have fared better in their initial housing outcomes because of the province's commitment to improve the housing outcomes for all low income Manitobans.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) serve as the lynchpin between government funding – such as that provided for rent subsidies – and a successful resettlement experience for refugees. Resettlement takes place in a context of limited local housing stock, high rental costs, language barriers, legacies of trauma, and financial constraints. CBOs are needed to assist refugees in securing housing as it is a matter that goes beyond bricks and mortar. For example, Welcome Place successfully placed a number of arriving refugees, Syrian and otherwise, into supplemented units only after time-consuming searches for suitable units and engagements with landlords. In order to successfully resettle refugees, supporting the indispensable work of CBOs is as necessary as infrastructural support and rent subsidies.

Despite the commendable efforts, resources, and public concern to assist the resettlement of Syrian refugees, let us not, forget about the thousands of refugees who have arrived in Manitoba in previous years and about those who will continue to arrive from countries other than Syria. Of course we can derive many lessons from the Syrian refugee resettlement efforts, but there are also lessons to be learned from the cumulative experiences of welcoming and resettling refugees in the province over many years. Unfortunately, until recently, matters of refugee resettlement have existed in

the periphery of public consciousness and attention. Let us use the recent concern to continue to ensure that people fleeing their country have a welcoming home. Let us ensure that organizations who assist in all aspects of the resettlement process receive the funding they require to do their jobs now and into the future. Let us continue to draw on and be inspired by the compassion shown by many community groups who have sponsored refugees and never forget that there are, and will continue to be, individuals and families in need of humanitarian efforts.

Settlement and integration are long-term processes that involve efforts from both newcomers and the welcoming society. It is not enough to merely welcome refugees - plans must be in place to ensure they successfully settle over a long period of time. Housing is one of their most immediate needs, but a range of employment services, language learning opportunities and other social supports will be required in the very near future. Individuals and their families still have a long road ahead of them; their resettlement process has just begun. Moreover, the positive moves made to support the resettlement of Syrian refugees, such as the federal government beginning to forgive transportation loans, must be scaled up and made available to all incoming refugees.

The war in Syria has meant that millions of people are in immediate need of refuge and the seriousness of this mass migration cannot be underestimated. However, this will not be the last humanitarian crisis. There will continue to be people who fear for their lives and are given no other choice than to flee their home. Collaborative, proactive, and well-funded efforts will always be needed to ensure people may be able to find a safe and welcoming place to resettle. The groundswell of support that the Manitoba government and public have offered Syrian refugees must be conveyed into long-term, durable support for refugees and the sector that serves them.

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[UNSPUN is the 2016 provincial election commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba](#)

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