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TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING ON MAY 25, 2016
FROM:	SANDRA DATARS BERE MANAGING DIRECTOR, HOUSING, SOCIAL SERVICES AND DEARNESS HOME
SUBJECT:	SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO SYRIAN NEWCOMERS - UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home, the following report on Supporting the Community Response to Syrian Newcomers - Update, **BE RECEIVED** for information.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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February 17, 2016, CPSC, Supporting the Community Response to Syrian Newcomers

BACKGROUND

On February 17, 2016, City Council received an information report from the Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home with respect to supporting the community response to the Syrian newcomers.

Civic Administration, through the Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home, continues to chair a task force which supports the efforts of the community in assisting the Syrian newcomers.

Federal Update

The federal government met its target of receiving 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of February 2016. The Immigration Levels Plan announced at the beginning of March confirmed that Canada would accept approximately 57,000 individuals under the "Refugee, Protected Persons and Humanitarian" category in 2016. This number includes the Syrian Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), Privately Sponsored Refugees, and Blended Visa Office Referrals (BVORs) brought in under the Welcome Refugees initiative from January 1 - February 29, 2016. Refugees will continue to flow to Canada and to London from countries other than Syria as well.

Since November 2015, the federal government has been fast-tracking the processing of Privately Sponsored Refugees from Syria in order to bring them to Canada more quickly. The initial deadline for the fast-tracking of applications from potential sponsors was the end of February 2016. This deadline was subsequently extended to the end of March 2016, meaning that applications that were received by this time will be processed in 2016, or early 2017.

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) continues to work with Resettlement and Settlement Service Providing Organizations to identify challenges and opportunities to support the Syrian Refugee Initiative. IRCC is considering the provision of a plan to provide additional funding through the agencies that it currently funds.

Interim federal health benefits, reduced by the previous federal government, have now been restored to all refugees. Benefits will provide basic health care and access to dental and vision care for those who are not yet eligible for provincial health benefits.



Provincial Update

Of the approximate 27,000 Syrian refugees who have entered Canada since November 2015, 11,500 or 43 percent have settled in Ontario. In addition to the \$10.5 million committed to immediate and future support to refugees and support for groups that are privately sponsoring them, the province is providing additional funding of \$3.7 million to the Resettlement Assistance Programs (RAP) agencies to assist in integration efforts in six communities including the Cross Cultural Learner Centre in London to assist Government Assisted Refugees, and \$1.8 million to help recruit, and train private sponsors.

Local Update

London is the third largest recipient of Syrian refugees in Ontario after Toronto and Ottawa (combining all visa categories) and the seventh largest in Canada. As of the writing of this report, London has received 916 Syrian GARs, 141 PSRs (with applications for another 381 people in progress) and 53 BVORs since November 4, 2015. IRCC has planned for the arrival of an additional 440 Syrian GARs (March 1st, 2016 – December 31st, 2016), and 221 non-Syrian GARs (for 2016 Calendar year) in London. These numbers may fluctuate.

The London Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC) provides resettlement services to the Government Assisted Refugees and other settlement services are providing a role in helping to settle all of the Syrians.

As of May 4th, all of the 184 Syrian GAR families in London, representing 915 individuals, have been moved from the CCLC reception house and local hotels to permanent accommodation. The community has responded very positively and is providing funding and other donations to programs to assist the Syrians. It is also extending the Syrians with opportunities to participate in the cultural and recreational life of the London community. CCLC is working closely with the school boards to integrate children into the school system and has completed the language assessment of all of the adult Syrian Government Assisted Refugees.

The role of Civic Administration remains to help coordinate community efforts, to communicate information on the availability of services offered free of charge by the settlement agencies, and other health, education, and employment organizations. Civic Administration is participating in various provincial, federal and local committees as well as the FCM Task Force on Syrian Refugee Resettlement.

The Task Force of local service agencies, convened by Civic Administration under the direction of Sandra Datars Bere, is continuing to meet to exchange information and to facilitate the coordination of efforts. This group has met four times and will continue to meet as needed. Participating in the Task Force are the settlement agencies: London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, LUSO Community Services, South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre, ACFO London-Sarnia, and Collège Boréal; as well as other services: London and Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership, London and District Catholic School Board, Middlesex-London Health Unit, Thames Valley District School Board, WIL Employment Connections, United Way of London Middlesex, Across Languages, London Muslim Mosque, London Community Foundation, YMCA, and officials of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade.

On March 30, 2016, the CCLC prepared a report which provides a profile of the Syrian GARs in London who arrived between December 20, 2015 and March 6, 2016. 60%, or 552 are children, with the vast majority being under 10 years of age. Most families have 5 to 6 members, and several have up to 10 members. The CCLC report does not have a clear picture of the education levels of the Syrian GARs in London, however anecdotal evidence from the CCLC, the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) and other agencies, shows that many of the Syrian newcomers will require significant English language instruction. The younger school aged children have had limited participation in the last five years since the onset of the war in Syria. Of the London Syrian GARs who are of working age, most have a background in the services or trades. Full details are available in the attached report (Appendix 1).

After welcoming 467 students into its board across 38 elementary schools and three secondary



schools, the large majority in London, the TVDSB recently closed its Guided Entry to New Teaching and Learning Experiences (GENTLE) program. The GENTLE program was opened in January to welcome newcomer children and their families and to assess their educational levels and needs. TVDSB has reverted back to its standard practice of welcoming newcomer elementary students in their local schools and receiving newcomer secondary students at their Reception, Orientation and Assessment Centre located at Montcalm Secondary School.

London's service agencies are developing new partnerships to assist the community, in the provision of language classes, child-minding, preparing the Syrians for employment, and recreation, and are thinking about future needs. For example, WIL Employment Connections is partnering with the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre to provide employment counselling for immigrants and newcomers. Collège Boréal is offering federally funded LINC classes (language training courses in English) at the London Muslim Mosque on evenings when the Mosque runs fun recreational activities for children and youth. This is a holistic approach for the whole family so the parents can improve their language skills while their children enjoy themselves.

Local needs and concerns for future

The Task Force of local service agencies has discussed a range of needs for the short and long-term future. Complementary supports and services exist within the community in the areas of health care, education, English language training, job preparation, and other areas. Looking ahead to the summer, there is a need to plan for recreational programming for the children. Some follow-up work is already in place: TVDSB is expanding its summer program of English language instruction to children in grades one through eight. Service providers are connecting with the City of London's recreational services. IRCC is considering options for additional financial support to its funded agencies. Funding is required to employ additional Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) who assist newcomer children and their families in integrating into the community. Some elementary and secondary schools have received large numbers of students, and these schools may need assistance as they continue to support and integrate the children.

Volunteers in the community are being acknowledged by many groups including the London Muslim Mosque and the Office of Mayor Brown, and this will continue. Service agencies would find it helpful to have data on the location and needs of the Privately Sponsored Refugees in order to best serve this population. There is a need for Arabic language interpreters and funding to train future interpreters. The group discussed opportunities to provide creative positive stories in the media.

Among the larger, long term challenges is a need to consider year 2, once the financial supports for the Syrian newcomers end. There will be ongoing challenges in supporting the successful integration of the Syrian newcomers into the community, making them job ready, and assisting with mental health and trauma supports.

CONCLUSION

Civic Administration will continue to support the community response to Syrian newcomers through the London and Middlesex Local immigration Partnership, settlement services, and other broader support services by providing coordination and communication assistance where required.

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This report was prepared with contributions from many individuals, including members of the City of London Task Force on Welcoming Syrian Newcomers.

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Appendix 1: Report: Syrian GARs to London, December 20, 2015 – March 6, 2016