



Refugee Settlement Support Program 2017

Manitoba Islamic Association
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Ph: 204-256-1347
www.miaonline.org

With generous support from Islamic Relief Canada, the Manitoba Islamic Association (MIA) hired a settlement support worker to complement the volunteer efforts of the MIA refugee support committee and to provide the committee with professional support. Ms. Lubna Usmani, started as the settlement worker started in February 2016. Here is a summary of some of the programs and services we have been able to provide and contribute to over the past 12 months. Our efforts have reached close to 100 refugee families who were assisted in variety of ways.

Educational Programs

- 1. Drivers Education Class:** MIA offered a four week drivers education in the classroom, instruction in Arabic. A total of seventeen participants attended the class. All attendees had access to the Manitoba Drivers Manual, provided by the MIA. Many of the clients we support have obtained drivers licenses and purchased vehicles.
- 2. English Program for Women:** A women's EAL class was started in July 2016, to provide language training during the summer months. The class has been popular and has been extended until this time. It is led by an experienced EAL teacher. Nineteen women have attended the classes, which are held twice a week. The class attracts Syrian women and women from other backgrounds and cultures, largely coming from Winnipeg's core neighbourhoods. Since the creation of this class, a 39 page course workbook has been created and used by all students!



Special Events

Several special events were held to provide support to new refugees in the community, The MIA, in collaboration with the Syrian Assembly of Manitoba, held two welcome receptions for over 400 refugees in the Winter of 2016. In addition to refugees, these receptions were attended by leaders of the settlement sector, the Winnipeg police and members of city council.



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Children's program at the Refugee Welcome Reception in Winter 2016



Community friend Cecile Berard presents refugee children with hand-made blankets at MIA's Refugee Welcome Reception in 2016.



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During Eid Al Fitr, our community held a major Eid festival. Special arrangements were made to ensure new families had access to transportation to the event and many were given free admission. The MIA arranged for 8 buses, originating from various communities around Winnipeg, equipped with volunteers to assist with interpretation during the ride to and from the carnival hosted at the Grand Mosque. Over 320 people were bussed in to enjoy the 2016 Eid carnival festivities!



Fireworks at MIA's 2016 Eid Carnival. Buses lined up ready to take new comers home.

In November 2016, we worked with the Winnipeg Police to hold a special event at the police headquarters. Over 50 Syrian refugees attended, met with senior police officers, enjoyed a presentation about police services and had their questions and concerns addressed.



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Syrian newcomers listen to a presentation by the Winnipeg Police.

In-kind Support

The MIA has assessed the initial settlement needs of refugee families and determined that there was a need for essential household items. Through community donations, essential household items were provided to a number of families. These include bedding, kitchenware, baby supplies and other essential items. Over forty families have received this specific aid.

Cultural Competency Presentations

MIA refugee committee members and outreach program volunteers presented at many schools, churches and other institutions, to share their knowledge of the cultures and religious practices that inform the refugee backgrounds. We also worked with settlement agencies in conducting focus group discussions with Syrian refugees to better understand their needs and challenges.



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MIA volunteers presenting at Altona United Church. Five Syrian families have been privately sponsored in the small town of Altona.



MIA volunteers visit a Syrian family in Altona, Manitoba.



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Housing

The city of Winnipeg has a rental crisis and rental costs are continuing to rise. Government rental assistance does not meet the needs of new comer families. For example, a family of 6 will receive under \$600 for rent, whereas a 3-bedroom residence will cost around \$1200+ plus utilities. Thus, there were and still are many challenges around housing. The MIA Settlement Support Worker along with the MIA Refugee Committee has worked hard to deal with several issues that arise with the newly settled refugee population. MIA continues to assist families with needs such as:

- Housing: identifying potential housing, especially for large families. Assisting settlement agencies with housing challenges (showing homes to clients, mediating disagreements).
- Moving families from one home to another, when the first was deemed unsuitable. Providing legal aid to families who wish to break from rental leases.
- Coordination of in kind donation requests and drop offs.
- Filling of Rental Tenancies Branch Complaint Forms for several families in unsuitable housing conditions.
- Advocated with government for better housing solutions, especially for large families.
- Advocate for families facing accessibility issues within their rental accommodations.
- Requested a city health inspector to inspect rental units that were deemed unsuitable. Attended meetings between residents, organizations and landlord to reach agreeable solutions.
- Attended and supported a family during Child and Family Services home visit and helped close the case.
- Presentations in Arabic and English to refugees in temporary housing about the community, city and available services.

Grants

The Islamic Relief Canada grant has been used exclusively for the salary of the settlement support worker. In addition, community members have donated more than \$20,000 to support the refugee settlement efforts of the MIA. The Islamic Relief Canada grant was essential in raising the profile of MIA's work and presenting a professional image to the settlement sector and government agencies, which lead to additional support in the form of program-specific grants.

The MIA and the Syrian Assembly of Manitoba jointly applied for a grant from the Multicultural Secretariat of the Manitoba government for summer and social programs. \$10,000 was awarded



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and part of those funds was used to support the participation of Syrian children in the MIA day camp.

The MIA also received the federal government summer student employment grant which enabled us to hire a Syrian refugee youth to help run the summer youth group program.

The MIA also received \$15000 from the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg to support the summer youth program. These monies were used for program supplies, transportation, and additional staffing resources to meet the need of the program. We look forward to continuing similar programming next summer, as these summer programs proved positive for all who attended.

Youth Programming

During the summer of 2016, MIA held a seven-week day camp. With other grants that we were able to get, seven Syrian children participated in this camp.



Manitoba Islamic Association's Day Camp kids making Ice Cream in a bag!

We also held a special summer program for high school refugee youth. This program was the first of its kind for the MIA, as programming was focused and tailored to the needs of the newcomer youth population of Syrian descent. The refugee youth program spanned three months. Thirty participants met twice a week. Programming ranged from educational movies on the Indigenous peoples of Canada, outdoor outings, visits to some of Winnipeg's landmarks and sports activities.



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The boys in MIA's youth program added an additional day of programming where they met to play soccer, often meeting at various fields around the city. A refugee who was a professional soccer player volunteered his time coaching the boys during their soccer meets.

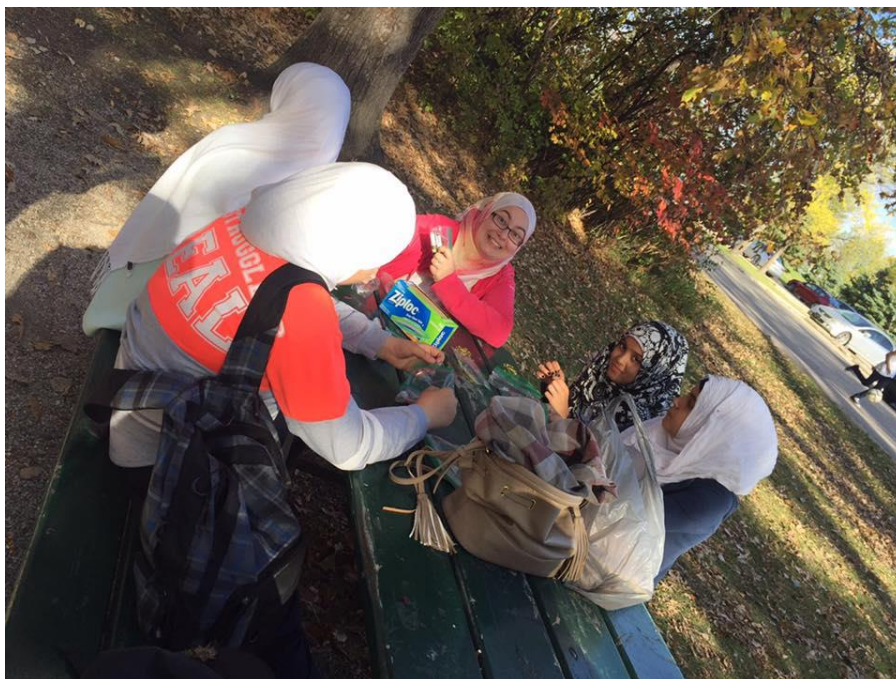
Many of the youth who have participated in the MIA youth program continue to volunteer with MIA and are making Winnipeg their home. It is clear that not only has this youth program been of benefit to help integrate the youth during what may be viewed as big change in their lives, this program has helped to aid in long lasting ties with the Muslim community here in Canada. We look forward to maintaining and building on the relationships we've forged throughout the past eight months.





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Syrian new comer youth enjoy an outing in the park with MIA refugee support staff



Friends and newcomers Zain and Khaled from MIA's Youth Program share their stories with MIA Day Camp children.



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Future Activities-Update

MIA has focused on four major areas: Housing, Capacity Building, Employment and Social Issues.

1. **Capacity building:** Building capacity within the refugee community has been an important focus of ours. Our goal is to support and enable the refugee community to step up to help its members. Through our summer youth program, we have identified several promising young leaders who have been mentored and encouraged to take on volunteer roles in their communities. This has proven to be effective, and so far, we have been pleased with the youth that have stepped up and continuously are asking to do more!

We continue to work with the Syrian Assembly of Manitoba who is organizing support committees from within the refugee community. The MIA and SAM Refugee Committee hold quarterly meetings in which members of the newcomer Syrian population are included. Inclusion in these meetings ensures that newcomer refugees can express their needs, concerns and suggestions to better support for their community.

2. **Employment:** Our goal is to assist refugees who have been here for close to a year and new comers who possess bench mark level 4 or higher in English, to identify employment opportunities, in a complementary role to that played by settlement sector organizations. MIA has successfully matched a few individuals with dependable work and continues to share career opportunities with those individuals who both express interest and individuals who are ready and able to work. We are also planning to hold food handling training and certification workshops, as several of our Syrian clients expressed interest in this line of work.
3. **Social issues:** Focusing on and addressing emerging social issues, we feel is important for new comers. Breaking social isolation, supporting youth and encouraging positive integration in the community are aspects we strive to assist with.

MIA, in collaboration with a local psychiatrist has arranged a men's mental health workshop to allow new comer men to come together and speak about their feelings about their arrival to Winnipeg and address any issues they would like. This workshop is scheduled to take place in Spring 2017.

MIA has requested and is organizing a Gangs and Drugs workshop with the Winnipeg Police Service. The Gangs and Drugs workshop will be presented to newcomer youth and facilitated in both English and Arabic. This workshop is scheduled to take place in Spring 2017.

4. **Home visits:** MIA refugee support staff is conducting home visits to all the families that have been supported by MIA in one form or another. These visits accomplish several



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goals. They ensure the families of our long-term commitment to their wellbeing. They also enable us to conduct assessments of long-term settlement needs and to cater our programs and support accordingly. MIA refugee support staff often check in with families that are deemed higher need, and continue with ongoing support as required.

5. **Grants:** We have applied to the Winnipeg Foundation to support our summer day camp. If our application is successful, we will be able to offer free registration to 10 children per week, and our focus will be on new comer, refugee and marginalized sectors of our community.
6. **Refugee Claimants:** This is an emerging crisis at the Manitoba border. At the time of writing, about 200 refugee claimants have crossed the border through the snow fields from the US and filed asylum claims in Canada. This is more than we would get in 1 year under normal circumstances. The MIA has joined forces with other religious and civic organizations to form a broad coalition to assist in this crisis. The areas of focus will be on providing temporary housing, essential needs and paralegal support.

Conclusions

With Islamic Relief Canada's support, we have been able and continue to play an active and effective role in supporting the arrival of over 1000 Syrian refugees. Our efforts have received recognition by professional settlement sector organizations and government agencies. We have been able to demonstrate our professionalism and effectiveness by directing organization resources towards this issue.