

## SURREY REFUGEE INTEGRATION STRATEGY 2017-2020

# SURREY: OUR NEW HOME







Mayor Hepner,  
Surrey Refugee Forum,  
January 2016.

## Message from the Co-Chairs

On behalf of the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership, we are pleased to present Surrey's Refugee Integration Strategy. It marks the culmination of three years of research and consultation, an effort that has received the input of hundreds of Surrey residents, involved the participation of dozens of service providers and community organizations, and tapped the expertise of some of our community's most accomplished individuals and organizations. We are thankful for all their contributions. That so many people came together in common cause is reflective of the good intentions and desire to ensure the successful inclusion of refugees in Surrey.

Surrey truly is a city that celebrates its diversity and welcomes its newcomers, from wherever they may come. Increasingly, in the case of refugees, it is B.C.'s arrival city, welcoming about half of all refugees whose destinations within the province can be tracked. We embrace that role, recognizing that refugees arrive with tremendous optimism and a strong desire to integrate into their new country, community and the workplace. At the same time, refugees face a variety of barriers, and this Strategy is based on the principle that all Surrey citizens, businesses and institutions will benefit from the elimination of those barriers. The path to creating a community where everyone feels a sense of belonging is woven throughout this Strategy.

On behalf of everyone involved in this crucial effort, we wish to express our thanks to the key contributors who provided so much of their time and expertise in the development of this Strategy, including the Refugee Strategic Planning Working Group, the Surrey LIP project team and project consultants PEERs Inc. and to the hundreds of Surrey residents whose participation was so important, whether civic leaders, employees and representatives of concerned organizations, or refugees themselves.



**Judy Villeneuve**  
Councillor  
City of Surrey



**Anita Huberman**  
CEO  
Surrey Board of Trade



I long for the day that I get my Canadian citizenship and officially be one of you, because it is this country in the world that has given me back my sense of humanity and dignity.

—Ebraheem Abo-Korj, the Ethar Organization Founder, fled Syria in 2013 and landed to Canada in 2015





A family portrait activity at the Surrey Welcomes Refugees event, July 20, 2016.

## CONTENTS

- 3 Message from the Co-Chairs
- 6 The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership
  - 6 Who We Are
  - 7 How We Work
- 8 Research and Consultation
- 10 Surrey's Refugee Planning Context
- 12 Our Vision, Mission and Mandate
- 13 Strategic Directions and Implementation
  - 14 **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #1**  
**Investing In the Potential of Refugee Youth**
    - 14 Our Goal
    - 14 How We Got Here
    - 15 Our Objectives and Implementation Plan
  - 16 **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #2**  
**Enhancing Service Capacity and Coordination**
    - 16 Our Goal
    - 16 How We Got Here
    - 17 Our Objectives and Implementation Plan
  - 18 **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #3**  
**Supporting Economic Self-sufficiency and Inclusion**
    - 18 Our Goal
    - 18 How We Got Here
    - 19 Our Objectives and Implementation Plan
  - 20 **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #4**  
**Enhancing Social Inclusion**
    - 20 Our Goal
    - 20 How We Got Here
    - 21 Our Objectives and Implementation Plan
- 22 Acknowledgements
- 23 Contact Us

I have a deep interest in helping and working with refugees and new immigrants. I believe that giving back to the community is the first step to a better society.

— Kue K'nyawmupoe, Surrey Immigrant Advisory Roundtable member, came from Karen State, Myanmar in 2007

My vision of the welcoming Surrey is where newcomers have an opportunity and a say in making more welcoming spaces in the city.

— Aydin Nozhat, Surrey Immigrant Advisory Roundtable member, came from Iran in 2012

On the front and back cover are members of the Ethar Organization at the Surrey Welcomes Refugees event, July 2016.



# The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership

## WHO WE ARE

The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a robust committee made up of 30 community organizations representing community, immigrant and refugee service agencies, education, business, government, libraries, health, parks and recreation, faith, and others. Led by the City of Surrey, the Surrey LIP works collaboratively to identify and support coordinated, comprehensive, and strategic approaches to immigrant and refugee settlement and integration that work for all residents of Surrey, newcomers and longer-term residents alike.

## SURREY LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

**Kelly Aslanowicz**  
*Senior Manager, Business Development  
Human Resources Management Association*

**Minakshi Bagai**  
*Acting Director of Employment Services  
Sources Community Resources Society*

**Ravi Basi**  
*Manager, Multicultural Services  
Surrey Libraries*

**Debra Bryant**  
*Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC*

**Devinder Chattha**  
*Director, Language Studies, Settlement  
& Social Services  
Progressive Intercultural Community Services*

**Patrick Donohoe**  
*Dean, Faculty of Academic &  
Career Advancement  
Kwantlen Polytechnic University*

**Steve Dooley**  
*Executive Director  
Simon Fraser University Surrey*

**Neil Fernyhough**  
*Manager, Community Programs  
Alexandra Neighbourhood House*

**Meri Ghazaryan**  
*Manager, Global Connections  
Immigrant Employment Council of BC*

**Daljit Gill-Badesha**  
*Healthy Communities Manager  
City of Surrey, Surrey Parks, Recreation  
and Culture*

**Jonquil Hallgate**  
*Surrey Interfaith Council*

**Anita Huberman**  
*CEO, Co-Chair of the Surrey LIP Committee  
The Surrey Board of Trade*

**Tahzeem Kassam**  
*Chief Operating Officer  
DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society*

**Jamie Kopp**  
*Program Manager  
Umoja Operation Compassion Society*

**Jennifer Kuenzig**  
*Community & Contract Services Manager  
Douglas College, Training Group*

**Caroline Lai**  
*Manager, ELL Welcome Centre  
Surrey School District #36*

**Jenny Lam**  
*Regional Manager  
SUCCESS Surrey Delta Service Centre*

**Catherine Ludgate**  
*Manager, Community Investment  
Vancity*

**Jagbir Mand**  
*Program Coordinator  
Oak Avenue Neighbourhood Hub Society*

**Harbinder Mann**  
*Employment Specialist, Human Resources  
City of Surrey, Human Resources*

**Aileen Murphy**  
*Senior Social Planner, Surrey LIP  
Contract Manager  
City of Surrey, Social Planning*

## SURREY IMMIGRANT ADVISORY ROUNDTABLE

The Surrey LIP Committee identified the need to have representation and input of Surrey immigrants and refugees included in its research and planning processes and expanded its governance structure to include the direct participation of newcomers. The 18 Immigrant Advisory Roundtable (IAR) members represent 16 different source countries. The Advisory Roundtable occupies a central role in the Partnership's strategy, fulfilling three key roles:

- 1 To represent authentic voices of newcomer residents in the Surrey LIP strategic planning processes;
- 2 To help increase awareness of and engagement in intercultural issues; and
- 3 To reach out to ethno-specific communities to disseminate Surrey LIP information and encourage participation in its work.

## IMMIGRANT ADVISORY ROUNDTABLE MEMBERS (IAR)

Mayyadah Al-ani  
Wafa Al-jabiri  
Mohammad Ali, Co-Chair  
Khaleda Banu  
Nina Bazie  
Margery Cantil  
Faisal Durrani  
Preeti Hiro  
Kue K'nyawmupoe  
Robert (Jin-Chein) Lin  
Rehab Marghany  
Drastant Mehta, Co-Chair  
Piyush Mehta  
Magdalena Mot, Co-Chair  
Yasin Muktar Mussa  
Aydin Nozhat  
Pranjali Wadkar  
Dongmei (Lily) Yang

**James Musgrave**  
Manager Surrey Youth Services – South  
Pacific Community Resources Society

**Diane Purvey**  
Dean of Arts  
Kwantlen Polytechnic University

**Mulalo Sadike**  
Manager, Global Initiatives and  
Immigrant Services  
YMCA

**Geoff Sale**  
Manager, Internationally Trained  
Professionals Program  
Applied Science Technologists & Technicians of BC

**Kathy Sherrell**  
Associate Director, Settlement  
Immigrant Services Society of BC

**Hemi Shrestha**  
Manager, Population and Public Health  
Fraser Health Authority

**Rosy Takhar**  
Manager, Crime Prevention and  
Community Services  
Surrey RCMP

**Khim Tan**  
Senior Manager, Immigrant Services  
Options Community Services Society

**Doug Tennant**  
Executive Director  
Semiahmoo House Society

**Councillor Judy Villeneuve**  
Surrey LIP Co-Chair  
City of Surrey



## HOW WE WORK

The City of Surrey manages the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership and is responsible for all the Surrey LIP deliverables.

It supplies the project staff: a Coordinator and a Senior Social Planner. The LIP Committee meets four to five times per year and is co-chaired by Councillor Judy Villeneuve, representing the City, and Anita Huberman, CEO of the Surrey Board of Trade.

Additional services and input are provided by ex-officio members, working groups and contracted researchers and consultants.

## Research and Consultation

The Surrey LIP Refugee Settlement Strategy has been developed through a process involving in-depth research guided by extensive community consultation.

Considerable data and insight relevant to the refugee situation were accrued during research and consultation leading to the development of the Surrey LIP Immigrant Integration Strategy, released in early 2016. These included a Service Mapping Project that identified applicable services, as well as gaps and overlaps; an Immigrant Integration Research Project that canvassed both newcomers and longer-term residents, and identified 10 areas of specific concern; and a Labour Market Research Project that identified key obstacles to newcomer employment.

Additional information was obtained during Surrey LIP activities that included demographic research and other investigations leading to the production of refugee-specific newsletters, fact sheets and bulletins.

The “Our Community, Our Voice” Refugee Research Project, led by Simon Fraser University Surrey, involved intensive research into the realities of Surrey’s refugee populations. This project was guided by 22 community stakeholders, staffed by 12 research assistants (including seven refugees), and incorporated a diverse array of research techniques, including a literature review, community consultations, and focus groups that involved a broad cross-section of refugees, service providers and community leaders.

During all elements of the research process, youth were a consistent focus. Specific projects included a day-long consultation involving about 50 newcomer youth, aged 15 to 22, about half of whom arrived as refugees.

In the final stages of development, nearly 40 key Surrey civic and community leaders came together in a fruitful day-long planning consultation. Participants included the Surrey LIP co-chairs, councillor Vileeneuve and Anita Huberman, and senior representatives from several of the city’s largest organizations and institutions.

Input to the plan was also obtained from the work of the Fraser Valley Refugee Response Team (RRT-FV). Since the influx of Syrians refugees into the communities of the Fraser Valley in 2016, the RRT-FV has worked to identify, prioritize and address the needs and challenges of refugees in the region. The RRT-FV included representation from 25 organizations involved in the resettlement and integration of refugees.



Visual summary from refugee research consultation, May 2015.





Children at the Surrey Welcomes Refugee event, July 2016.



## Surrey's Refugee Planning Context

The Surrey LIP is unique amongst the nation's LIPs as its work will be guided by two strategic plans – one focused on immigrant settlement and integration and one focused on refugee settlement and integration.

This approach has been followed because, over the last decade and especially over the last year, Surrey accepts a significant proportion of the refugees to B.C., and stands out as one of the largest refugee receiving communities in Canada. Surrey contains a little over 1% of Canada's population, and about 10% of B.C.'s, yet during the period November 4, 2015, to October 31, 2016, the municipality became home to 5% of all Government-Assisted Syrian Refugees settled in Canada, and more than 40% of those in B.C.

Equally important, refugees and immigrants face very different situations. Most immigrants to Canada arrive within the economic class and have been selected based on qualifications such as occupation, age, education, and language proficiency that make them strong candidates to succeed. Others arrive within the family

class and their settlement and integration is facilitated by the support provided by their families. They still face obstacles, but are in a better position to be able to overcome them.

Many refugees arrive in large families or single parent families with limited transferable skills and English language skills. Moreover, they would not be refugees if their lives had not been turned upside down, often leaving them with significant health care needs and suffering from mental health and post-traumatic stress disorders. The obstacles that they face in adjusting to Canadian society are of a different magnitude, and often of a different nature, than those of immigrants. As well, in the case of Syrian refugees, Canada has committed to a humanitarian approach that has resulted in the arrival of many refugees with serious medical issues and special needs.

At the same time, Canada's experience as a settler of refugees has been overwhelmingly positive, and both the process of developing this strategy, and the strategy itself, are infused with optimism. The plan stresses asset-based thinking rather than thinking that is deficit-based. The latter can lead to a culture where change is hindered due to a feeling that little can be done. An asset-based approach focuses on what is working, on opportunities, on building strength through positive efforts that move a situation forward.



International Refugee Day booth to sign petition to cancel Refugee Transportation Loan, City Hall, June 2015.



## REFUGEES IN CANADA



In recent years Canada has accepted about 25,000 refugees annually; for 2016 the number was about 36,000 or more due to the response to the Syrian refugee crisis. There are two types of refugees, admitted under three classifications.

### TWO TYPES

#### 1 Convention Refugees

Persons who, before their arrival to Canada, have been sponsored by the Government of Canada as Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) or by a private group, in keeping with Canada's role as a signatory of the United Nations Refugee Convention. In recent years, Convention refugees have accounted for less than half of refugees to Canada, but in 2016 the proportion is expected to exceed 70% with the majority from Syria.

Convention Refugees fall under three classifications



**Government-assisted refugees (GARs)** are people who are resettled from abroad and receive financial support from the federal government.



**Privately sponsored refugees (PSRs)** are people who are also resettled from abroad, but are financially supported by private sponsors.



**Blended visa office-referred refugees (BVORs)** comprise a hybrid of these categories. The BVOR program provides up to six months of federal government support and an additional six months of financial support by private sponsors.

#### 2 Refugee Claimants

Persons who make their own way out of the country or situation they are fleeing. After reaching Canada by land, sea or air, they apply for asylum. If they are carrying valid identity documents, they can live in the community while they await a hearing to determine their case. If their documents are missing or are suspicious, they may be held in detention until their identity can be confirmed.

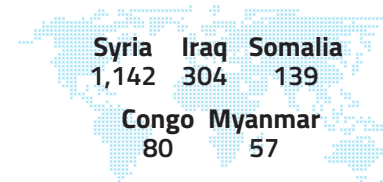
## REFUGEES IN SURREY

Between January 2010 and September 30, 2016, approximately 2,200 GARs have settled in Surrey.

YEAR	BC*	SURREY	
2010	763	213	28%
2011	158	63	27%
2012	701	217	33%
2013	641	194	32%
2014	941	207	22%
2015	1,139	261	23%
2016	1,911	1,031	54%

Source: ISSofBC Bulletins  
\*Including transfers from other provinces.

### TOP SOURCE COUNTRIES OF GARs IN SURREY 2010-2016



### SYRIANS IN SURREY

Nov 4, 2015 – Dec 15, 2016

2,365 Syrian GARs have arrived in B.C.

- 905 individuals or over 50% of all Metro Vancouver Syrians have settled in Surrey

### REFUGEE CLAIMANTS

Approximately 1,200 refugee claimants arrive annually in B.C., representing a 60% increase since 2012.

- China is the top source country
- About two-thirds of claimants are accepted

*Not possible to accurately track, but believed as many as half of the total number settle in Surrey.*

## Our Vision, Mission and Mandate

### VISION

Everyone in  
Surrey belongs!

### MISSION STATEMENT

The Surrey Local Immigration Partnership supports a coordinated and strategic approach to immigrant and refugee settlement and integration.

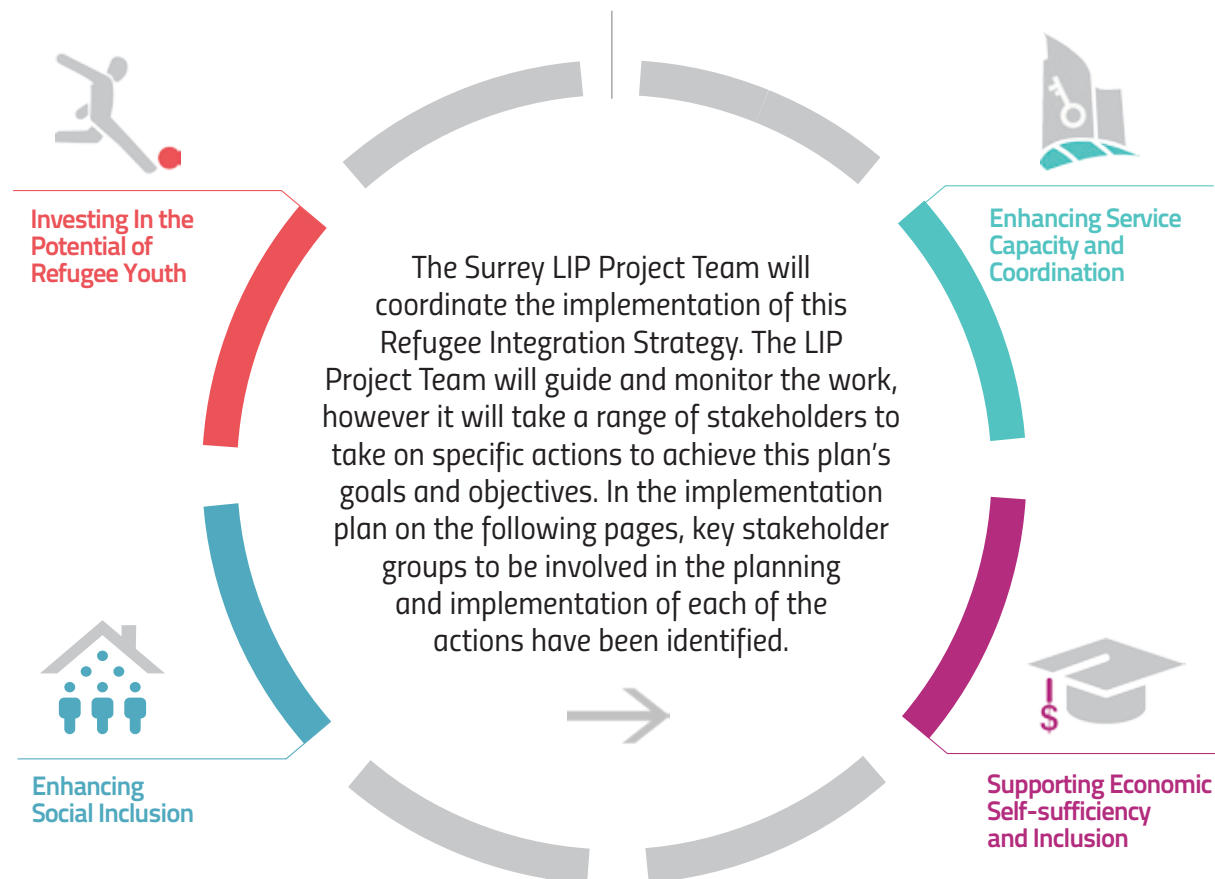
### SURREY LIP MANDATE

The overarching mandate of the Surrey LIP is to:

- Strengthen community capacity to work collaboratively and cooperatively, which will result in improved access to immigrant settlement and integration services and reduce duplication among service providers;
- Increase engagement of multiple sectors of the community by including organizations that primarily serve immigrants as well as those that serve the whole community;
- Inform community strategic planning process and increase awareness in the community of immigrant/refugee-related issues as a result of comprehensive community-level research produced by the LIP project; and
- Improve immigrant settlement and integration outcomes, including social inclusion, labour market and civic participation outcomes.



# Surrey's Strategic Directions and Implementation Plan





## Investing In the Potential of Refugee Youth

### GOAL

All refugee youth have the supports and access to the opportunities that will enable them to thrive and grow; this includes full access to educational, labour market, recreational and family resources and opportunities.



Surrey Welcomes Refugee event, July 2016.

### HOW WE GOT HERE

Demographically, Surrey is one of the youngest communities in the province, and among the youngest in Canada—and the refugee population is younger still. As an example, 59% of the recent Syrian refugee arrivals in Surrey are 18 or younger. For the purposes of this plan “youth” encompasses those aged 13 – 25 years. This definition of youth includes school aged teens, and also young adults who are transitioning into adulthood and seeking access to education and or employment, as well as playing a pivotal role in the support and integration of their parents and siblings.

In the settlement and integration process refugee youth represent a crucial link, helping their families understand and connect with Canadian society. Generally able to learn English quickly, they also benefit from immersion in the education system, and can function as translators for adults who are slower to adapt to both the language and the Canadian systems. This is a blessing, but also a curse, in that they are under extreme pressure to help their families.

Refugee youth face barriers that go well beyond those of most immigrant youth. In many cases, refugees are escaping violent wars or severe social and economic collapse, and many youth have spent a significant proportion of their lives near battlefronts or in refugee camps, traumas that are often manifested in emotional and psychological conditions. Some have not learned common social

behaviours due to the environments they have lived in.

There is a high likelihood that they have not benefitted from an education appropriate for their age, and they may live within families with low literacy levels. Here in Canada, cultural norms may limit their participation in everyday activities, both within the education system and outside of it. There is a strong need for more culturally appropriate activities, especially for girls.

Supports for these youth are crucial. They need opportunities to connect with youth from their culture as well as youth from other cultures, in school and in other activities. Supports should be developed and offered to meet the needs of refugee youth in recognition of their different stages of their integration.

The objectives identified are in keeping with the City of Surrey’s Child and Youth Friendly City Strategy, which identifies actions to promote the healthy development of young people, from early childhood, through middle childhood and adolescence. The Strategy emphasizes community connectedness, youth engagement and participation in all aspects of civic life, and access to enriching programs and services that promote their healthy development regardless of their family’s income or background.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1 OBJECTIVES

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ACTIONS

<p><b>1</b> Gain a better understanding of both the capabilities and the integration barriers of refugee youth.</p>	<p><b>1.1</b> Support, compile and disseminate localized research on the integration barriers, challenges and solutions to integration for Surrey's refugee youth that recognizes the diversity of refugee youth (age at time of resettlement, cultures, LGBTQ, etc.).</p>	<p><b>1.2</b> Consult with the Refugee Youth Advisory Group to identify potential research topics and youth specific issues.</p>
<p><b>2</b> Support opportunities for refugee youth to convene, connect across cultures, share their experiences and perspectives and build leadership skills.</p>	<p><b>2.1</b> Establish a Surrey LIP Youth Advisory Group. <b>2.2</b> Support refugee youth to undertake a project or organize an activity (e.g. an annual refugee youth forum).</p>	<p><b>2.3</b> Engage community agencies to identify convening spaces / facilities for both younger and older youth (e.g. library).</p>
<p><b>3</b> Enhance services and supports for refugee youth to participate in the full range of day to day social and recreational activities available to all young people in Surrey.</p>	<p><b>3.1</b> Work with the LIP membership and the LIP Youth Advisory Group to identify what Surrey refugee youth are interested in and what they are able to participate in; e.g. what cultural, intergenerational and other limitations exist and, the available opportunities that respond to those interests, and gaps.</p>	<p><b>3.2</b> Conduct a scan to solicit information from LIP stakeholders to identify suitable, affordable and accessible recreational opportunities and distribute findings.</p>
<p><b>4</b> Collaborate with Surrey's education system to identify the specific community needs of recently arrived refugee youth and develop responsive and more accessible programming and supports.</p>	<p><b>4.1</b> Identify and share information with refugee service providers about homework clubs, after school programs, post-secondary information, etc. <b>4.2</b> Work with the school district to ensure administrators and teachers have access to current Surrey refugee demographic information and refugee needs and challenges.</p>	<p><b>4.3</b> Promote refugee youth access to post-secondary by supporting the coordination of an information event bringing together Surrey's post-secondary institutes and refugee youth.</p>
<p><b>5</b> Increase opportunities for refugee youth to access suitable (age and culturally appropriate) employment services and supports, volunteer opportunities and gain work experience.</p>	<p><b>5.1</b> Identify employment service models in Surrey that allow youth to attend school or language services while gaining access to employment supports. <b>5.2</b> Engage the employer community in a campaign to raise the awareness of refugee youth's need and requirements for employment and volunteer experiences.</p>	<p><b>5.3</b> Coordinate the identification of volunteer opportunities for refugee youth and volunteers that will work with refugee youth. <b>5.4</b> Review volunteer application processes and identify means to simplify processes and increase eligibility for refugee youth.</p>



## Enhancing Service Capacity and Coordination

### GOAL

Surrey stakeholders understand the needs of refugees and have the tools and resources required to provide comprehensive and coordinated settlement and integration services.



Immigrant Advisory Roundtable booth at the Surrey Welcomes Refugees event, July 20, 2016.

### HOW WE GOT HERE

The numbers and needs of Surrey's refugees require increased capacity and more coordinated approaches to service delivery. Surrey has become British Columbia's refugee arrival city, settling 25% to 40% of arrivals annually, and almost 50% of Syrian refugees. These figures do not take into account significant secondary migration of refugees from other provinces and cities.

The influx of Syrian refugees over such a short time period has been challenging for service providers and systems of many types. With so many families to support, it has not always been possible to provide services in a timely manner, leaving clients frustrated and affecting outcomes.

Service providers are increasingly called upon to deal with more complex cases. Many refugees have limited education, no English language facility and families with five or more children.

Disabilities and complex health and dental issues are widespread, and many experience some degree of trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder. Compounding this, there is a shortage of doctors and dentists accepting new patients, and not all medical professionals are willing to take on or register for the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program. As well, mental health services and supports are limited.

Lack of English language ability adds a further layer of complication, and English

language training lags. There are long waitlists for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes, especially at lower levels. Not all refugees are getting assessed, leading to under-reported needs and inadequate funding. As well, traditional LINC language classes do not work for many refugees who have limited experience in formal learning environments, creating the need for alternative modes.

With so much good work being accomplished, shortcomings such as these frustrate both refugees and those who support them. Public and private bodies, as well as the population at large, have shown a strong desire to help, but are not always aware of the true situation. A lack of coordinated management of volunteers and donations has also been a serious hindrance.

Higher capacity, better organization and wider communication are essential for refugee settlement to be truly effective.

**Canada is a country of opportunity that has given me a chance to change my life for the better.**

— Somali-born Ahmed Mohamed, came to Canada from a refugee camp in Kenya

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2 OBJECTIVES

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ACTIONS

<p><b>6</b> Educate the community about the range of refugee settlement and integration services and supports including both those offered by immigrant and refugee serving agencies and mainstream community agencies and institutions.</p>	<p><b>6.1</b> Annually update the Surrey service map to ensure that Surrey's refugee services are accurately represented.</p> <p><b>6.2</b> Develop and implement a promotional schedule to raise awareness and use of the Surrey service map and other Surrey LIP web resources.</p>	<p><b>6.3</b> Raise awareness of LGBTQ services within the refugee population(s) by updating and promoting the Surrey service map to include LGBTQ resources.</p>
<p><b>7</b> Enhance Surrey's capacity to coordinate refugee services supports and respond to the demands of the significant refugee population.</p>	<p><b>7.1</b> Establish and host an annual forum to discuss and explore emerging refugee integration issues in Surrey.</p>	<p><b>7.2</b> Conduct a service scan to identify strengths and weaknesses in Surrey's refugee service continuum and identify service gaps to be addressed.</p>
<p><b>8</b> Educate stakeholders on the services and supports available to address refugee health needs.</p>	<p><b>8.1</b> Raise awareness of the need for Fraser Health and Ministry of Children and Family Development to catalogue refugee health services.</p>	<p><b>8.2</b> Promote services and supports available to address refugee health needs.</p>
<p><b>9</b> Improve coordination of volunteers and donations that support refugees in Surrey.</p>	<p><b>9.1</b> Identify resources to support coordination of volunteers.</p>	<p><b>9.2</b> Educate the community about the agencies and organizations that accept and/or coordinate donations for refugees.</p>
<p><b>10</b> Identify and better address the English language acquisition challenges faced by refugees.</p>	<p><b>10.1</b> Raise awareness of language acquisition and literacy challenges faced by refugees.</p>	<p><b>10.2</b> Promote all non-LINC language training opportunities available to refugees.</p>





## Supporting Economic Self-sufficiency and Inclusion

### GOAL

Refugees in Surrey have access to the information and supports required to become economically self-sufficient and included.



City Councillor LeFranc dancing with Somali women, 2015.

### HOW WE GOT HERE

Economic self-sufficiency is a struggle for all refugees, particularly in the early years after arrival. They face all of the problems experienced by other low-income Canadians including the very high cost of housing and transportation prevalent in Metro Vancouver.

In addition, many refugees are required to pay back transportation loans with interest to the federal government. According to the federal government, the average loan per person is \$3000 and repayment must begin within 30 days of arrival.

It is a huge challenge for refugees, especially those with large families, to find safe and affordable housing. Many pay rents that consume most of their monthly income, leaving very little money for food and other basic necessities. The cost of transit is burdensome, especially with large families, and when travel is required outside of Surrey and multi-zone fares come into play. Lack of money for food leaves them no choice but to rely on food banks, which themselves are overburdened.

In an ideal world, refugees would soon enter the workforce, alleviating poverty effects, but there are many barriers to this, especially for some of our most recent arrivals. In many cases, refugees need to focus on their settlement and adjustment before considering work. A large majority do not have even the minimal English language skills required in virtually all workplaces, and the skills,

training and work experience that they possess is often difficult to transfer. As a result, those who do obtain employment often remain in low-wage or unstable jobs, in part because having these jobs is a barrier to upgrading language and other skills.

These realities were summarized in the refugee research project conducted by SFU Surrey: "The language training and credential or skills upgrading that would enhance employment opportunities is seen as the way forward, but very difficult to achieve due to multiple barriers: the inequities of the job market, trauma-related psychological impairment, poverty, and complex family care demands" (*Our Community, Our Voice: The Settlement and Integration Needs of Refugees in Surrey, BC, 2016 page 12*)

And yet, despite the many economic challenges and barriers faced by refugees, promising examples of employers stepping up to the challenges and providing opportunities to refugees are starting to emerge across Canada and in Surrey. In recent months there have been examples where employers have offered workplace language training, skills upgrading and even onsite translation and interpretation to alleviate the immediate workforce entry barriers. These practices not only offer a promising attitude and response to individual circumstances, but an opportunity to highlight, share and leverage these experiences more broadly.

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3 OBJECTIVES

### IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ACTIONS

<p><b>11</b> Work with other Surrey, B.C. and national stakeholders to promote the elimination of Canada's refugee transportation loan repayment requirements.</p>	<p><b>11.1</b> Develop and provide information on the requirements of Canada's refugee transportation loan and the impacts of those loans on refugees.</p> <p><b>11.2</b> Research and identify comparative practices from other countries to share with stakeholders as evidence of the need to revise refugee transportation loan repayment requirements.</p>	<p><b>11.3</b> Work with stakeholders to advocate across all levels of government for the elimination of the loan repayment.</p>
<p><b>12</b> Work with all stakeholders to reduce immediate financial burdens faced by refugees in Surrey.</p>	<p><b>12.1</b> Raise awareness of the need for transit passes for refugees who are accessing settlement services and/or income-based fares for all low-income households.</p> <p><b>12.3</b> Ensure that refugee specific poverty issues are identified and included within national, provincial and regional poverty reduction and related plans.</p> <p><b>12.4</b> Work with stakeholders to build rationale for longer Refugee Assistance Program support.</p>	<p><b>12.5</b> Collaborate with poverty reduction groups to investigate possibilities of changes to social assistance that could allow more part time work.</p> <p><b>12.6</b> Promote / acknowledge the range of supports provided by community organizations like Food Banks.</p>
<p><b>13</b> Increase availability of and access to programs that support refugee workforce entry, self-employment, and social enterprise.</p>	<p><b>13.1</b> Develop and broadly distribute inventory of projects that support refugee workforce attachment in Surrey. (E.g. Somali women's cooking program).</p> <p><b>13.2</b> Conduct research and identify innovative models related to refugee workforce entry, self-employment and social enterprise.</p>	<p><b>13.3</b> Identify funding to support innovative employment, self-employment and social enterprise models.</p>
<p><b>14</b> Increase Surrey refugees' knowledge of financial, economic and labour market systems, supports, benefits, requirements and entitlements.</p>	<p><b>14.1</b> Work with Surrey's business and financial sector to build awareness of refugees amongst employer and business communities, so that they can adapt and provide suitable and accessible information to a refugee audience.</p> <p><b>14.2</b> Research, develop and distribute easily digestible information on the various types of employment, e.g. full-time, part-time, self-employment, contract employment, so that refugees understand the differences, variations and requirements of each.</p>	<p><b>14.3</b> Work with Surrey stakeholders and government to ensure that information is accessible to refugees on the various supports available through income, employment, and insurance benefit programs through the Canadian and provincial social safety net.</p>



## Enhancing Social Inclusion

### GOAL

Surrey's rich cultural diversity is valued by all Surrey residents and the cultural backgrounds and experiences of refugees are a vital part of Surrey's growth and identity as a global city.



Surrey's annual Fusion Festival celebrates the cultural diversity of Surrey.

### HOW WE GOT HERE

Surrey's role as British Columbia's largest refugee arrival city, and the work that is being done and that needs to be done to support this, have been recognized only recently. Better understanding will lead to better supports and outcomes.

Public attitudes are crucial. Canada's humanitarian effort with regard to Syria, along with the generally positive public response, have been heartening, but there are signs that tensions are growing. Antagonism based on racial and cultural differences has always been present and given world events, it appears to be increasing. In a research study carried out with Karen refugees in Langley and Surrey, many of the students reported discrimination, isolation and lack of support from both school personnel and their classmates. An analysis of dropout rates found that they were higher for immigrants than for their Canadian-born classmates, and given the structural barriers and discrimination in the school system, the rates for refugees are even higher. (*OCOV Report, 2016 page 29*)

Negative attitudes and practices will undermine the refugee settlement effort regardless of improvements in services and supports. It is important to ensure that the public is aware that refugees have been and continue to be a positive force in Canadian life.

It is equally important to ensure that morale remains as high as possible within the refugee population, by supporting the development of cultural and

cross-cultural connections within and between communities. Recent academic research suggests that lack of community support and isolation play an important role in mental health. "Refugees talk about home life in Canada as marked by the absence of extended family; increased family conflict; lack of means of resolving conflict; unbalanced gender roles; disabling underemployment; and lack of opportunity." (*OCOV Report, 2016 page 30*)

Refugees need to feel that their new life promises a bright future, regardless of what their current circumstances might be.

**Being part of the OCOV research project has been an honor and blessing for me. I've always known that refugees have the strength to overcome anything, but during this research project I really got to see the depth of it. The struggles that led them to flee their countries and come to Canada for a fresh start. I'm thankful that my participants felt safe enough to talk about their experiences.**

— Yansie Ardon, Community Peer Research Assistant, OCOV research project on refugee needs in Surrey



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4 OBJECTIVES

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ACTIONS

<p><b>15</b> Educate and increase understanding amongst community leaders, service providers and the public on the needs, circumstances and experiential realities of Surrey's refugee populations.</p>	<p><b>15.1</b> Annually review and update the Surrey LIP distribution lists to ensure all mainstream community organizations are included.</p> <p><b>15.2</b> Annually review and expand the Surrey LIP membership to ensure Surrey refugee serving agencies are represented.</p> <p><b>15.3</b> Conduct annual research to ensure the Surrey refugee demographic profile is current; this should attempt to include PSR and claimant data.</p> <p><b>15.4</b> Create and maintain a list of Surrey specific refugee needs, emerging issues and local service needs to be used to inform and engage government as well as a range of funders, foundations, corporate investors, and private donors.</p> <p><b>15.5</b> Provide regular updates to Mayor and Council on key refugee issues in Surrey.</p> <p><b>15.6</b> Support the establishment of an annual event related to Surrey refugee settlement and integration e.g. World Refugee Day.</p> <p><b>15.7</b> Annually update and share the Surrey LIP inventory of funding sources.</p>
<p><b>16</b> Increase awareness of the social, cultural and economic benefits that refugees bring to Surrey.</p>	<p><b>16.1</b> Dedicate issues of the Surrey LIP fact sheets and bulletins to refugee related topics.</p> <p><b>16.2</b> Identify and promote mentorship, host and buddy programs.</p> <p><b>16.3</b> Provide space, and support opportunities for long term Surrey residents and refugees to convene, connect across cultures, and share their experiences and perspectives.</p>
<p><b>17</b> Increase awareness and disseminate information and resources to reduce incidents of racism, cultural and religious discrimination.</p>	<p><b>17.1</b> Identify and promote existing programs, services and activities that serve to educate and eliminate racism and cultural and religious discrimination.</p>

## REFUGEE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

### **Mainu Ahmed**

*Director  
Muslim Food Bank*

### **Jenn Basu**

*Project Manager  
Fraser Valley Refugee  
Response Team*

### **Nav Chima**

*Project Director, Strategic  
Engagements,  
Campus Administration  
SFU Surrey*

### **Tahzeem Kassam**

*Chief Operating Officer  
DIVERSEcity*

### **Caroline Lai**

*Manager, ELL Welcome Centre  
Surrey School District #36*

### **Jenny Lam**

*Regional Manager  
SUCCESS Surrey Delta  
Service Centre*

### **Sangeeta Subramanian**

*Senior Manager, Workplace  
Development  
Immigrant Employment  
Council of BC*

### **Kim Tan**

*Senior Manager,  
Immigrant Services  
Options Community  
Services Society*

## Acknowledgements

Surrey's Refugee Integration Strategy is a direct reflection of the contributions, expertise and commitment brought forward by the membership of the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership. Over the past three years, 30-plus organizations, representing government, public and private institutions, business, non-profit and community agencies have joined forces to strengthen Surrey's integration of newcomers and build a more inclusive and welcoming city.

The direction provided by the representatives of the member organizations has been central to the formation this Strategy. Over and above the LIP membership, we would especially like to thank the representatives who stepped forward to form the Surrey LIP's Refugee Strategic Planning Working Group. Their guidance, expertise and input led to the identification of the priorities, objectives and actions of the Surrey Refugee Integration Strategy. The Surrey LIP is privileged to have the commitment of these members and looks forward to working with all of them towards the vision they have outlined.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the research teams and consultants that have played a critical role in identifying Surrey's refugee resettlement and integration needs and in shaping this Strategy's responses to those needs. Immigrant research projects that also played a role in the development of the Refugee Strategy were led by CitySpaces, SPARC BC, and

Human Capital Strategies. The crucial refugee research project was led by Simon Fraser University, Surrey Campus. We are grateful for the insights and recommendations that each of their projects provided, and for their collective contributions.

We also wish to thank our project consultants, Trevor Van Eerden and Jody Johnson, of PEERs Employment & Education Resources who have worked with us throughout our three years of existence and spearheaded the development of this Strategy.

This project would not have been possible without the financial support of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. We gratefully acknowledge their contribution and look forward to working with the federal government on the improved settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees in Surrey for years to come.

Lastly, we wish to acknowledge the leadership and support provided by the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership Co-Chairs, Councillor Judy Villeneuve and Surrey Board of Trade CEO Anita Huberman. Their commitment to community-wide immigrant and refugee integration has helped elevate the work of the Surrey LIP and ensured that we work towards not only addressing the challenges faced by new immigrants and refugees, but toward creating a society where everyone belongs!





Learn more about  
Surrey LIP and  
our work:

[www.SurreyLIP.ca](http://www.SurreyLIP.ca)

#### SURREY LIP PROJECT TEAM

Aileen Murphy  
*Senior Social Planner (Contract Manager)*

Olga Shcherbyna  
*Surrey LIP Coordinator*

Ashleigh Rajala  
*Surrey LIP Project Assistant*

#### SURREY LIP CONSULTANTS & CONTRIBUTING PROFESSIONALS

Jody Johnson & Trevor Van Eerden, *PEERs Inc.*  
Doris Cheung, *Graphic Designer*  
Selected photography: Jinaa Kim

Surrey Refugee Forum,  
January 2016.



