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Finding Affordable Housing for Refugees: A Case Study in Ottawa, Canada

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AUTHOR: TORI STEEVES

SUPERVISOR: RAPHAËL FISCHLER

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Abstract

From November 2015 through March 2016 Canada welcomed an unprecedented number of refugees as permanent residents in response to the ongoing conflict in Syria. The refugees were classified into three groups: government assisted refugees (GAR), private sponsored refugees (PSR) and blended visa office referred refugees (BVOR). BVOR was a new category, under which federal funding was combined with private sponsorship in order to bring more refugees to Canada. A number of important questions arose before the arrival of the refugees, including how refugees would integrate, what the effect of such large numbers of refugees would be on the Canadian social services sector, and how refugees would be received and how they would be housed.

The purpose of this research is to understand how service-providing organizations (SPOs) and individuals in Ottawa, Canada, facilitated refugee settlement, specifically how they helped find housing for refugees in a market with limited affordable housing. The research aims to document some of the ad-hoc arrangements, just-in-time planning and informal partnerships that were used to find secure, suitable, affordable housing for refugees.

Information about the refugee resettlement process, federal government resettlement assistance programs and current situation in Ottawa was collected from research articles and reports, government documents and newspaper articles. To understand the work of individual service providers, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with people involved from the very first steps of receiving the refugees at the airport, moving them into temporary shelters or even their family homes, and helping them find permanent housing.

The interviews showed that although there were many successes, the settlement process was not without challenges, including insufficient federal funding to meet the refugees' basic needs upon arrival, the lack of affordable housing in Ottawa for low- and fixed-income earners, the shortage of employees in the housing assistance sector, insufficient methods to streamline and integrate volunteer efforts, and misguided expectations among refugees. Comparing the experiences of the GARs to the BVORs showed that the latter had access to more services, financial support and assistance thanks to networks and flexible arrangements among the sponsorship groups.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations. One is for the Province of Ontario and the City of Ottawa to get involved and take action to improve the state of affordable housing in Ottawa; this is an issue that affects over 10,000 people in the Ottawa metropolitan area alone, and many more throughout the province. In cities where one SPO is responsible for

settling government assisted refugees, it is also recommended that the SPO design the materials and curriculum for context-specific orientations and provide accessible pre-arrival materials to refugees before their departure for Canada. Lastly, more staff should be hired and trained who can speak the native languages of the refugees and interpreters should be able to develop specialized knowledge so they can provide the most accurate translations possible, be able to provide greater assistance to refugees in their settlement in Canada and help ease the workload for the SPO workers.

Résumé

De novembre 2015 à mars 2016, en réponse au conflit qui sévit en Syrie, le Canada a accueilli comme résidents permanents un nombre sans précédent de réfugiés. Ces réfugiés ont été classifié en trois groupes: réfugiés pris en charge par le gouvernement (RPG), réfugiés parrainés par le secteur privé (RPSP) et réfugiés désignés par un bureau des visas (RDBV). La nouvelle catégorie RDBV a été adoptée pour combiner le financement fédéral et le parrainage privé afin d'augmenter le nombre de réfugiés admis au Canada. De nombreuses questions ont été posées avant l'arrivée des réfugiés. Comment les réfugiés s'intègreront-ils ? Quel effet un nombre aussi grand de réfugiés aurait-il sur le secteur des services sociaux au Canada ? Comment les réfugiés seraient-ils accueillis et comment seraient-ils logés ?

Le but de cette recherche est de comprendre comment les organismes qui offrent des services aux réfugiés à Ottawa ont veillé à l'établissement des réfugiés, en particulier comment ils les ont aidés à trouver un logement dans un marché résidentiel caractérisé par manque de logements abordables. La recherche vise à documenter les dispositions prises sur le moment, la planification accélérée et les partenariats informels qui ont été utilisés pour trouver des logements sécuritaires, adéquats et abordables pour les réfugiés.

Des informations sur le processus d'établissement des réfugiés, sur les programmes d'aide du gouvernement fédéral et sur la situation actuelle à Ottawa ont été recueillies dans des revues et rapports de recherche, des documents officiels et des articles dans les journaux. Pour comprendre le travail des prestataires de services individuels, sept entrevues semi-structurées ont été faites avec des personnes impliquées dès les premières étapes de la réception des réfugiés à l'aéroport, de leur placement dans des abris temporaires ou même des logements familiaux, et de leur installation dans des logements permanents.

Les entrevues ont montré que, bien qu'il y ait eu de nombreuses réussites, le processus d'établissement n'a pas été sans défis. Ceux-ci incluent l'insuffisance du financement fédéral pour répondre aux besoins de base des réfugiés à leur arrivée, le manque de logements abordables à Ottawa pour des ménages aux revenus faibles ou fixes, le manque de personnel dans le secteur de l'aide au logement, l'insuffisance des méthodes pour rationnaliser et intégrer les efforts des volontaires, et des attentes erronées chez les réfugiés. Une comparaison de l'expérience des RPG et de celle des RDBV montre que ces derniers ont eu accès à plus de services, de soutien financier et d'assistance grâce aux dispositions flexibles prises par les groupes de parrainage.

Le rapport se termine par un certain nombre de recommandations. La première est de s'assurer que la province de l'Ontario et la ville d'Ottawa s'impliquent et agissent afin d'améliorer la situation à Ottawa en matière de logements abordables. Cette question touche plus de dix milles personnes dans seule la région métropolitaine d'Ottawa, et bien plus dans l'ensemble de la province. Dans les villes où un seul organisme prestataire de services est responsable de l'établissement des RPG, cet organisme devrait créer de la documentation et des programmes d'information qui lui permettront de fournir aux réfugiés une orientation spécifique au milieu où ils seront installés et ce, avant leur arrivée au Canada. De plus, les organismes devraient embaucher des employés supplémentaires qui parlent la langue maternelle des réfugiés ainsi que des interprètes qui sont à même d'acquérir des connaissances spécialisées afin de pouvoir donner des traductions les plus précises possible, offrir une meilleure assistance aux réfugiés dans leur installation et alléger le fardeau de travail des prestataires de services.

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List of Acronyms

BMR	Below market rent
BVOR	Blended Visa Office-Referred
CCI	Catholic Centre for Immigrants
CCOC	Centretown Citizen of Ottawa Corporation
CCTB	Canadian Child Tax Benefit
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CMHC	Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
COA	Canadian Orientation Abroad
CVOA	Canadian Visa Office Abroad
GAR	Government Assisted Refugees
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
IRB	Immigration and Refugee Board
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IRPA	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
LICO	Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs
OCISO	Ottawa Community Immigrant Service Organization
OCRA	Ottawa Centre Refugee Action
OW	Ontario Works
PSR	Privately Sponsored Refugee
RAP	Resettlement Assistance Program
SPO	Service Provider Organization
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency

Chapter 1: Introduction

One of the key polarizing debates during the 2015 election for Canadian prime minister was what to do about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria. Once Justin Trudeau came into office in November, 2015 he announced a new federal strategy to address the crisis in Syria, including a commitment to increase Canada's humanitarian development assistance and to welcome 25,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq that year (CBC, 2015).

There has been research conducted on the three major Canadian metropolitan regions, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver but we find fewer studies focusing on other large urban centers such as Ottawa, which are often important reception sites for refugees and immigrants. Research tends to focus on the refugees' experiences but there is a noticeable lack of research and information about the organizations that do the settlement work and how they coordinate with partners to make arrangements, ad hoc agreements and negotiations in order to successfully secure units for refugees. This research is intended to complement existing research on refugee resettlement in Canada by providing insight into the actions of service providers, focusing on networking, agility and in-situ planning. Therefore, it helps to understand how civil society responds to humanitarian crises, in this case the welcoming of high numbers of refugees. A full-scale, Canada-wide analysis is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, the intention is to show how, despite the high numbers and rapid succession of arrivals, and the limited availability of affordable units, the service providing organizations, volunteers and private sponsorship groups were able to find permanent housing for all of the Syrian refugees brought during the recent influx of Syrian refugees, which is quite an accomplishment.

This introductory chapter will provide background information on Canada's formal commitment to refugee resettlement, explain the classification of refugees currently used by the federal government, and state the research objectives.

Canada's Formal Commitment to Refugee Resettlement and Selection Criteria

Canada is a state party to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, meaning Canada has committed to assist in issues pertaining to refugees and humanitarian resettlement. Canada works with major partner organizations like the United

Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to help administer and support humanitarian efforts.

Refugees are selected to come to Canada in accordance with the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) (S.C. 2001, c. 27). Prior to the 2002 implementation of IRPA, the criteria for government-sponsored refugees were spelled out in the Canadian *Immigration Act (*1 S.C. 1976-77, c. 52) and refugees were selected on the basis of their perceived ability to become established in Canada. Selection was determined by their pre-existing language abilities, work or professional skills and family members already in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). However, this process was a source of concern internationally and was seen as outdated, on the grounds that it does not support the protection of refugees but instead focuses on the benefits a skilled worker would have for Canadian society. Although this criterion may be appropriate for economic immigrants and temporary workers, it is not appropriate for refugees (CIC, 2011). Thus, in 2002, selection criteria were changed to reflect a commitment to protect those most vulnerable and in need of protection rather than those who would demonstrate a greater ability to become established in Canada (CIC, 2011). This change has signified a paradigm shift where refugee resettlement is focused on protection, and affirms Canada's humanitarian commitment by providing government assistance to encourage and facilitate refugee resettlement and integration in Canada (IRCC, 2016). The adoption of IRPA meant that the demographics and needs of the government assisted refugees (GAR) have changed. Comparing 2000 to 2009, five years after IRPA was introduced, the numbers of people coming with no formal English nor French language skills increased by 14%, with no formal education increased by 26%, and people 65 years or older increased by 150% (CIC, 2011). The implementation of IRPA resulted in increased responsibilities and workload for those working in the resettlement sector because the demographic shift warranted increased, specialized attention (CIC, 2011).

Canadian Commitment to the Responsibility to Protect

Canada is known internationally by its reputation for upholding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which was accepted by all UN member states at the 2005 New York UN World Summit. This resolution is a global political and human rights security commitment, to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity:

> …we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner … on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We stress the need… to continue consideration of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and its implications, bearing in mind the principles of the [UN] Charter and international law. We also intend to commit ourselves…. to helping States build capacity to protect their populations… and to assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out. (United Nations Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly, October 2005)

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has continued and renewed this commitment not only by welcoming 40,000 Syrian refugees in light of the crisis in Syria, but by being vocal about Canada's commitment on an international stage. At the UN General Assembly on October 20, 2016 he stated Canada's will to "encourage other countries to help generate forward momentum on Syria, given UN members have a collective responsibility to protect the world's vulnerable and weak when others cannot or will not."

Current Government Commitment to Syrian Refugee Issues

As of January 29, 2017, 40,081 Syrian and Iraqi refugees have been welcomed and are in the process of resettling in 340 communities across Canada since Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a new strategy to address the crisis in Syria in November 2015. Most arrived between December 2015 and March 2016 (Government of Canada , 2017). An additional 4,264 applications have been finalized for refugees now awaiting travel, while another 19,576 applications are being processed (Government of Canada, 2017). The rapid pace and high number of refugees that came to Canada posed new challenges to finding affordable housing. In many cities, the waitlists for housing subsidies and social housing are agonizingly long, market rents are increasing dramatically, and yet wages are stagnant for many low- and fixed-income families. Politicians, service providers, volunteers and members of the general public were concerned about how the Syrian refugees would be housed given their larger than average family sizes, and fixed government income upon arrival in an already hard-to-access housing market. Indeed, a central issue was how to secure suitable, affordable housing for this

abrupt influx of large, low-income households (Appendix A)[1]. Canada has taken on a responsibility and made a commitment to protect refugees, so it is of the utmost importance to identify housing that is affordable, secure and adequate given the needs and resources of refugee households. In this case, the refugees arrived with some of the lowest levels of language abilities, literacy and formal education that has ever been seen amongst refugee groups entering Canada; therefore they rely heavily on the services provided to them upon arrival, including their refugee allowances (Chau, personal communication). Also notable is that refugees, unlike economic immigrants, have fled their homes and arrive with few belongings and meager savings, often after long stays in refugee camps. All immigrants have difficulties accessing credit in the first twelve months in Canada, putting refugees in a situation where it is difficult to access additional funds.

There are many ways that asylum seekers and refugee claimants can pursue refugee status in Canada. This study focuses on households in two of the three categories that have been granted to *prima-facie* Syrian refugees who arrived between November 2015 and March 2016: government-assisted, blended visa or privately sponsored. Since the federal government is contributing to the settlement of the government assisted refugees and the blended visa office referred refugees, this research will focus on the organizations who work with those two groups.

Government assisted refugees (GAR)

Government assisted refugees (GAR)[2] are those whose initial resettlement in Canada is entirely supported by the Government of Canada (or in Quebec by the Government of Quebec). This funding is delivered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada[3] and settlement support is provided through non-governmental service providing organizations (SPO). The GAR refugees are referred by UNHCR after a comprehensive medical exam, security and criminality background check, and in the case of the Syrian refugees, they are screened, processed and selected at Canadian Visa Office Abroad (CVOA).

[1] Amongst Ontario GAR the bulk of the families were between four to six members, however there were a significant number of families with more than six members. Amongst Ontario BVOR the highest numbers were in families of five and six with numerous families with more than six, including one family of fourteen

[2] GAR is a commonly used and recognized acronym within Canadian refugee circles. For this reason GAR will be used throughout this research.

[3] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) was known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) prior to Justin Trudeau coming into office in 2015

The Syrian refugees were designated as *prima facie Convention refugees*, on whom the CVOA does not conduct extensive additional checks on after they have been cleared by UNHCR who works closely on the ground with the CVOA refugee offices and understand their requirements well (CIC, 2011). Those identified as potential GAR were considered to have no durable solution within a reasonable period of time, other than resettlement to Canada as permanent residents (IRCC, 2016). The primary objective of the GAR program is to provide individual protection solutions and plans for resettlement to refugees (IRCC, 2016). Support lasts for one year from the date of arrival in Canada, after which they are welcome to apply for provincial welfare and income support.

Financial support is given directly to the GARs from the Canadian Government, and all other forms of support are allocated by government funded service providing organizations. Some forms of support include: help finding accommodation, clothing, food, and assistance in finding employment. The Canadian government also offers financial assistance and loans to GAR to help cover the cost of traveling to Canada and setting up their new lives. Part of the agreement for the Syrian GARs is that they would not need to repay the travel loan, although GAR from other nations who arrived in the same time period are still contractually obligated to repay the travel loan (Government of Canada, 2016a; Edwards, personal communication).

The amount of funding a GAR recipient receives is based on welfare allowances in their effective province of residence. In many locations across Canada income support for GARs fell below Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's (HRSDC) Market Basket Measure and Statistic Canada's Low-Income Cut-offs (LICO) (CIC, 2011). This means that financial support for GARs does not meet current measures of adequate income. This is troublesome when studies have shown that refugee allowances set the recipients below the poverty line, and are inadequate for settling comfortably (CIC, 2011). Multiple sources have shown living in precarious situations and in poverty may adversely impact settlement and integration through insecurity, and frustration (Wood, et al 2012; UNHCR, 2002; Teixeira, 2009). Access to suitable housing for newcomers is crucial for their settlement and integration (Murdie & Teixeria, 2003). Preparing refugees to start new lives in Canada, yet supplying them with inadequate funding which sets them on an unstable foundation seems contradictory to the rhetoric of protection and compromises their transition into Canadian culture and life, and may also put them significantly into debt early on. Other research on GARs in Winnipeg suggests that providing insufficient funding is a form of offloading the federal and provincial responsibilities to subsidiary levels of government and that civil society has stepped in to fill some of the void through volunteer hours and donations (Silvius, *et al*. 2015). However, this offloading of responsibilities means that the

Canadian government falls short of its obligation to provide a safe destination for refugees (Silvius, *et al*. 2015). The space that civil society is expected to fill can be problematic especially when civil society, volunteer groups, faith-based organizations and so forth have not had the opportunity to carefully choreograph their movements and plan how to fully support each other.

Blended Visa – Office Referred Program – Sponsoring Refugees (BVOR)

The Blended Visa – Office Referred Program – Sponsoring Refugees (BVOR)[4] have been identified by UNHCR as Convention Refugees Abroad and are recommended to Canadian Visa Offices Abroad (CVOA) who then recommend the BVOR to be matched with a private sponsorship group (IRCC, 2016). The BVOR have also been deemed to have no durable solution within a reasonable period of time, other than resettlement to Canada as permanent residents (IRCC, 2016).

Upon arrival, the BVOR receive six months of income support through the RAP program, and an additional six months of income support from their sponsorship group (IRCC, 2016). BVOR are provided six months of financial support from a private sponsor, as well as one year of social and emotional support (IRCC, 2016). They are also provided with supplementary Federal Health Program insurance to complement provincial health coverage. The combination of federal government funding with private sponsor funding is a form of public-private partnerships to encourage community organizations to play a larger role in offering durable solutions to refugees (IRCC, 2016). The sponsors participate on a voluntary basis and are not to be reimbursed by the refugees (Government of Canada, 2016a). The private sponsor groups must have a minimum of five members. The groups interviewed for this research project consisted of 30 or more individuals who have pooled resources, raised funds within their communities, built excitement and worked hard to find, secure and furnish a dwelling for the BVOR refugees. The BVOR are welcomed into a dedicated community which draws on the skills, networks, energy and interests of this self-organized and motivated community.

Privately Sponsored Refugees

Privately-sponsored refugees are individuals or family units who are supported wholly by a sponsorship group who provides them with care, lodging, settlement assistance and support

[4] Like GAR, BVOR is a commonly used and recognized acronym within Canadian refugee circles and will be used here.

for the duration of the sponsorship period, without financial support from the federal government. Sponsorship periods are 12 months, but in exceptional circumstances the visa officer may request an extension up to 36 months. Private sponsors support refugees by: providing the cost of food, rent, household utilities and other day-to-day living expenses, providing clothing, furniture and other household goods, locating interpreters, selecting a family physician and dentist, assisting with applying for provincial health-care coverage, enrolling children in school and adults in language training, providing orientation with regard to banking services, transportation, etc. and helping in the search for employment (Government of Canada, 2016b). The primary objective is to partner with civil society to provide durable solutions to more refugees than would otherwise be admitted under the GAR Program (IRCC, 2016). The program engages ordinary Canadians and permanent residents to take part in refugee protection efforts.

Synthesis

Amongst the visa categories over, 40,000 Syrian refugees have been welcomed into communities across Canada. Table 1 shows the distribution of Sponsored Refugees Visa Classifications.

Table 1 Distribution of Syrian Refugees in Canada by Visa Class, Nov. 2015 – Jan. 2017

Refugee Category	Number of Refugees	Percentage
Government Assisted Refugee	21,876	54.5%
Blended Visa Office Referral	3,931	9.8%
Privately Sponsored	14,274	35.7%
Total	40,081	

Source: Government of Canada, #WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures updated January 29, 2017

The government is involved in the funding and assistance of 64.3% of the refugees including both the GAR and BVOR. Government assistance is allocated through resettlement assistance programs (RAP) and conducted by service provider organizations (SPO). Service provider organizations are those who have been identified and funded by the government to

provide resettlement assistance to refugees. They offer services such as language training, promoting and facilitating the welcoming of newcomers, and help finding housing, among other responsibilities.

The objective of this project is to investigate how the service providing organizations (SPOs) involved in refugee resettlement assistance programs meet the challenge of finding suitable, affordable housing for refugees arriving in large numbers with short notice. The research explored how multiple public and community-based agencies work together to meet the challenge of finding suitable housing for hundreds of Syrian refugees. Initially, how do they identify and secure housing units? How do they coordinate their actions and exchange information in order to assist in resettling refugees into affordable housing while dealing with a complex and sensitive situation for which they may not be well-prepared? When looking into these processes it became clear that within these civil-society organization a number of deals have been struck, ad hoc arrangements made and creative community initiatives put into place in order to house the influx of refugees. This is one of the central findings of this research. The purpose of the research, further, was to understand some of these partnerships and arrangements in order to shed light on the process of securing affordable housing, as well as to identify partners and allies who may be called upon in the future to welcome refugees to Ottawa. Furthering our understanding of successful strategies to secure affordable housing for refugees is relevant given the current state of world affairs and Canada's ongoing commitment to welcoming refugees.

This research was informed by in-depth interviews with people working in refugee resettlement in Ottawa in order to understand how the process works, how the experiences of people working with GAR and BVOR differ, as well as the experiences of the GAR and BVOR themselves, and how the organizations work together, complement and assist each other in making partnerships and ad hoc agreements in order to find adequate housing for refugees. Given how difficult it can be to find affordable, adequate housing, how are organizations in Ottawa going about securing such housing for hundreds of people? This research is intended to contribute to a greater understanding of what steps were and are being taken in Ottawa, provide insight on steps that could potentially be replicable for settling large groups of refugees in the future and compared to findings from other cities who settled large numbers of refugees.

This Supervised Research Project explores how SPOs, non-profit organizations, volunteers, private sponsorship groups and members of the public work together to meet the challenge of finding suitable, affordable housing for hundreds of Syrian refugees in Ottawa, and

by extension thousands of Syrian refugees across Canada. The next chapter describes the research methodology. It is followed by an overview of the refugee resettlement process, a contextual discussion of refugee issues in Ottawa, and a presentation of key actors and organizations involved in Ottawa's refugee resettlement sector. The findings chapter discusses dominant themes that emerged in the interviews with people in the resettlement sector, comparing common experiences and questions. The report concludes with a section discussing a series of recommendations.

To summarize, the objective of this research project is to investigate how the service providing organizations (SPOs) involved in refugee resettlement assistance programs meet the challenge of finding suitable, affordable housing for refugees arriving in large numbers with short notice. The research explores how multiple public and community-based agencies are working together to meet this challenge, how they identify and secure housing units, how they coordinate their actions and exchange information, and how they compose with a complex and sensitive situation for which they may not be well-prepared. Throughout the process, a number of deals have been struck, ad hoc arrangements made and creative community initiatives put into place in order to house the influx of refugees. Understanding these partnerships and arrangements will shed light on the process of securing affordable housing, as well as identify partners and allies that may be called upon in the future to welcome refugees to Ottawa. Furthering our understanding of successful strategies to secure affordable housing for refugees is important given the current state of world affairs and Canada's ongoing commitment to welcoming refugees.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the supervised research project, explaining the author's attendance and participation in conferences, the literature scan, the process of identifying and recruiting interview participants, and the interviews themselves. This exploratory project used a mixed-method approach to discover the strategies, networks, and ad hoc solutions made by service providing organizations, sponsorships groups and volunteers in order to find affordable housing for refugees in Ottawa.

Conferences

Primary research started while the author was attending, volunteering and participating in lectures and workshops at the Mosaic Institute's "Citizen Summit: Refugees in the 21st Century: Who's Responsible? Whose Responsibility?" held in Montreal in October 2016. This was an opportunity to learn about the efforts of the SPO staff, politicians, researchers, academics, doctors, policy makers and more who work to welcome, help transition and integrate refugees into life in Canada. Attendance and active participation inspired the research and questions began forming to better understand the massive, complex set of intertwined and overlapping processes that is refugee resettlement in Canada. This summit introduced some of the complexities and confusion created by trying to define responsibilities. The process of welcoming refugees is context specific and experiences vary greatly across Canada, within provinces and even within cities.

The research continued while the author was volunteering at the 19th Annual Metropolis Conference on Immigration and Refugees, "Looking Forward: Migration and Mobility in 2017 and Beyond" held in Montreal in March 2017. This was an opportunity to attend lectures, roundtables, plenaries, and workshops conducted by some of the leading researchers across a diverse range of organizations, experts, researchers, and civil servants within the refugee resettlement community. The Metropolis Conference also granted opportunities to engage directly with people working in service-providing organizations, people working with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), researchers and people involved in refugee

resettlement in a face-to-face setting. In this setting, questions were asked and expanded upon and discussions which went above and beyond what would be possible to understand in a press file in terms of engagement and detail.

Literature Scan

A literature scan was conducted, which included reviewing scholarly journal articles on issues encountered by service providers, refugee resettlement, government documents, academic publications, and research reports related to refugee resettlement and affordable housing in Canada. This was complemented by a scan of the 'grey literature' including, on the one hand, government documents such as program evaluations and progress reports, conference proceedings, Powerpoint presentations and webinars and, on the other hand, materials produced by the organizations being studied, including their webpages and social media pages. These were necessary to provide otherwise unavailable, current information and perspectives of organizations working in refugee resettlement. Additional materials consulted included pieces in national, local and neighborhood newspapers and radio content..

The literature scan broadly included research on refugee settlement in Canada and more specific material related to refugee resettlement in Ontario, some of which focused on Ottawa. Articles and other publications were reviewed regarding affordable housing for immigrants from non-Western countries, resettlement services focused on housing, issues encountered by service providers, and previously conducted studies on the impact and analysis of resettlement assistance programs directly focused on housing as carried out by service provider organizations. The works reviewed in detail informed the research questions and broadened a practical understanding of the context and complexities of resettlement assistance programs, the roles of sponsorship groups, community organizations, volunteers who work to find suitable, affordable housing for refugees helping them settle and integrate in Canadian communities. Materials for this stage of the research comprised academic studies and official reports.

The aim of the literature scan was to develop an explanation of the complicated process and work that goes into welcoming refugees to Canada. As research progressed, it became clear that there is no single, uniform strategy applied across Canada. It was also clear that much of the research focused on the effects of housing on refugee wellbeing and the impact

that would have on their settlement and integration into society. There was little literature on how the service providing organizations and sponsors worked to find housing for refugees. In Ottawa, managing sporadic influxes with short notice called for new strategies, arrangements, creativity and flexibility. Canada had not seen an influx of refugees at a comparable scale and condensed time period in recent history.

Participant Recruitment

Participants in Ottawa were identified after the literature scan. Participants were chosen to represent workers within organizations, who engage with different groups and classifications as per the Syrian refugee visa categories, including sponsorship groups, as well as community service organizations and unpaid volunteers. Sixteen different organizations were contacted. Methods of contact included by email, by referral, by phone, and by social media outlets.

Groups and organizations of interest were identified in news articles relating to refugee issues, internet and social media searches. Therefore, smaller organizations, groups who do not maintain an online presence or private sponsorship groups may have been overlooked. When contacting organizations, a snowball approach was used to identify other relevant sources. A conscious effort was made to contact groups that would have dealt with government sponsored refugees and blended visa office referral refugees as well as organizations that would be involved at various points during the process of welcoming and housing refugees. This meant contacting reception shelters, housing assistance programs, and transitional houses, representatives from public housing, non-profit organizations and newly created projects. Of the16 organizations contacted, seven individuals were interviewed and seven hours of interviews were transcribed. Interviews were conducted by the author. Initial contacts with the organizations helped identify the most appropriate person to speak to. The selection of participants reflected a desire to obtain a variety of voices including those of sponsors, those working in housing assistance programs, employees at SPOs, volunteers and those working on the front lines.

Participants

Prior to the Syrian refugee crisis, around 400 government-assisted refugees were welcomed to Ottawa annually.[5] Ottawa received a lot of news coverage as a result of bringing over the first Syrian family, along with high profile, innovative volunteer initiatives, which gained attention across Canada. The organizations were contacted in order to obtain a sample from the refugee resettlement sector and actors in Ottawa from the perspective of an individual working in the resettlement sector. The participants represent different levels of experience, length of time working in refugee resettlement and social services, and have different roles which are called upon at different times in the refugee resettlement process. Each study participant represents a different organization and approach, and each had a different level of interaction and relationship with the refugees they assisted.

- The Catholic Centre for Immigrants was chosen because it is the federally contracted organization responsible for providing services to all Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) in Ottawa. Heng Chau, Housing Coordinator, has worked with the organization for over 30 years and welcomes refugees from the time they arrive at the airport and are brought to the Maison Sophia Reception Shelter.
- Representatives of two organizations providing housing support in Ottawa were also interviewed. Although they do provide assistance to refugees, their services are available to anyone in need of assistance in Ottawa. One participant was Mayse Abu-Shaaban, caseworker for Housing Help. Abu-Shaaban was specifically hired to help with the Syrian refugees, and is currently the only front-line housing case worker who is trilingual, speaking Arabic, English and French fluently. The other participant requested anonymity and will be referred to as a "Housing Caseworker" working with a "housing assistance and advocacy organization". This organization is open to all low-income individuals in the Ottawa-area needing help finding housing, tenant advocacy, among other services, and provides insight because it has helped settle numerous refugees in the past. At the time of interviewing, the organization had not worked directly with Syrian refugees, it was asked by Refugee{613}[6] to host a

[5] does not include refugee claimants on arrival, asylum seekers, or undocumented refugees it only includes GARs

[6] Refugee{613} is a coalition of citizens, settlement agencies, sponsorship groups and community partners in Ottawa who work to welcome refugees and help them access services and support.

workshop for BVOR and PSR sponsorship groups to sensitive them and provide them information about housing related issues and challenges that refugees face.

- Sarah Abdul-Hussein, Intensive Case Manager at the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, works with resettlement cases that involve a higher degree of intervention than is typical; she is familiar with the aspects of the housing search and struggle for refugees.
- Representatives of two sponsorship organizations that bring BVOR refugees to Canada were also interviewed: Jennifer Graham, who heads the Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship Housing Group—an organization that brought the first family of Syrian refugees to Ottawa and is preparing to bring three more families—and Deborah Edwards, the Permanent Housing Resource Lead of the Ottawa Centre Refugee Action committee, which has brought 12 families of Syrian refugees.
- Tara Matar, Ottawa Coordinator of Roofs4Refugees--an organization seeking to match refugees with locals in Ottawa who have access to unoccupied units. This represents a creative way to assist in the coordination of providing alternative housing options to refugees.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted over the phone in spring of 2017, after establishing contact via email. The aim was to explore interviewee experiences related to concerns about resettlement and securing housing for refugees, focusing on actions taken to the need to house so many low-income refugees arriving in a short period of time and how effective these have been in their opinions. Some of the interviewees were ready with statistics while others provided anecdotes, but all interviewees spoke with excitement and passion about their experiences. Topics of discussion covered organizational mandates, how the interviewees understand their mandate, how they make use of and build partnerships when organizing resources to find large numbers of suitable units, how they identify and secure housing units for refugees, and lastly recommendations or lessons learned. All interviewees were open to being contacted later in the research process if questions arose that had not been considered in the initial interviews (e.g. a particular issue that was not anticipated). Information collected in the interviews, together with

information gathered from key documents, was then analyzed to identify strategies and common practices for settlement organizations. Standard Tri-Council guidelines for ethics in research were followed throughout the primary research, which was approved by McGill University's Research Ethics Board (REB). In accordance with REB protocol, participant consent was secured in writing for the use of names, titles and excerpts from the interviews. As noted above, one participant requested anonymity.

The interview guide was semi-structured with open-ended questions (see Appendix B). Participants agreed to be interviewed on the phone. All interviews were audio-recorded for clarity and analysis. Five interviews were transcribed verbatim; handwritten notes were taken during and after each interview. The remaining two were not recorded because the content of the interview did not require full verbatim transcripts. Instead, detailed notes were taken during and after the interview. Material gathered by way of interview was supplemented by information obtained through a review of media coverage, relevant municipal policies and regulations, and material available on the organization's webpage. These sources enhanced the material gathered in interviews by providing additional information on issues, strategies and context.

The strategies described in the interviews are not exhaustive; however, they do provide a detailed cross section of the types of strategies which were applied in order to temporarily and later permanently house refugees in Ottawa alongside insider feedback on their effectiveness. Opinions from providers varied based on their roles, worldview and experience, and the point at which their services were activated, inspired and called upon. While this approach proved suitable for identifying organizations to contact as well as suggestions for other sources, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, while participants were asked to convey details and experiences of the work done by their organizations, their personal experience and perspective (as well as individual biases) can influence how they report this information. Perspectives can obviously be shaped by the length of time an individual has worked in a certain position as well as that individual's level of experience, previous experience and skill sets, and specific relationships and connections to the subject matter. Interviewee relationships with their clients varied greatly from one organization to another and should therefore not be seen as representative in the broad sense, but rather as a portrait of their experiences within a particular time, place and sociocultural context. Dissenting opinions and opinions within an organization may not be represented, and responses may not fully reflect the perceptions of collective groups.

The aim was to explore the interviewees' experiences related to identified concerns about resettlement and securing housing for refugees, focusing on actions taken to respond to the need to house so many low-income refugees arriving in a condensed time-frame and how effective these have been in their opinions. Some of the interviewees were ready with statistics and others with anecdotes, but all interviewees spoke with excitement and passion about their experiences. Topics of discussion included organizational mandates, how the interviewees understand their mandate, how they build and make use of partnerships to find large numbers of suitable units, how they identify and secure housing units for refugees, and lastly recommendations or lessons learned. Information collected in the interviews, together with information gathered from documents, were then analyzed to identify strategies and common practices for settlement organizations.

Findings (presented in Chapter 5) were synthesized and compared to the information which was gleaned from the literature scan, including findings from other Canadian cities welcoming large numbers of refugees. These findings were used as the basis for the recommendations presented in the final chapter.

Synthesis

A mixed-method approach was used including attendance at two prominent conferences in Montreal on refugee and migrant issues, reviewing current newspaper articles, interviewing individuals directly involved in refugee resettlement in Ottawa, and a literature scan. These important steps in the research process help to reveal how people working in refugee resettlement in Ottawa collaborated informally as well as establishing formal partnerships and agreements in order to find suitable housing for large numbers of refugees from Syria. In the next chapter, a review of key secondary sources is presented, based on a scan of the relevant scholarly and professional literature.

Chapter 3: City of Ottawa Context

This chapter outlines Ottawa's immigration strategy and the state of affordable housing in the city. Affordable housing has been identified as a major issue for people with low-incomes and fixed incomes in Ottawa. Affordable housing is a challenge faced by many, including refugees. To show the particular challenges for government assisted refugees (GARs), tables are presented to show the amount GARs receives in shelter allowance accompanied by scenarios that show how much the GAR shelter allowance actually covers when factoring in the cost of housing in Ottawa. This comparison is made to show the shelter allowances GARs receive in an organized and straightforward way. It goes further to show the financial struggle that the GARs will face when they are shifted from federal government refugee resettlement assistance programs (RAP) payments to the provincial social assistance, Ontario Works.

City of Ottawa's Municipal Immigration Strategy

The City of Ottawa first adopted a Municipal Immigration Strategy in 2012, which has been updated for 2016-2018. The vision is to attract, retain, and successfully integrate immigrants to Ottawa and provide them with the necessary support to successfully integrate with a sense of belonging (City of Ottawa, 2016).

The Municipal Immigration Strategy is brief document which highlights some of the City's accomplishments and identifies future initiatives and projects. Achievements since 2012 include Housing Navigation Workshops, which helped the settlement workers access more information about the Social Housing Registry. Others include a series of events to promote diversity and inclusion, opportunities to learn about settlement services that are available to all newcomers and Service Ottawa's Language Phone Line 311 which offers assistance in 170 languages (City of Ottawa, 2016).

The City of Ottawa also aims to advance equity and inclusion for its diverse population by planning and implementing changes to infrastructure development and service delivery (City of Ottawa, 2016). This includes a commitment to invest $796,762 in 10 community-based groups that provide social support services to newcomers, including refugees (City of Ottawa, 2016). The City has engaged in consultations with newcomers to learn about what issues are of

concern to newcomers and to have them identify their barriers and needs. The City considers newcomer consultation and feedback a high priority, as about 25% of Ottawa's population are immigrants, and significant percentages of population growth is due to immigration (City of Ottawa, 2016).

The commitment to engaging in consultations and soliciting feedback shows that the Province and City value the input and presence of newcomers, acknowledging that immigration is necessary to sustain growth. Receiving feedback and engaging in dialogue with newcomers shows that newcomer settlement is a two-way process, where the newcomer learns about the host society, and the host society learns about the newcomers, and the need for cross-cultural learning and exchange so welcoming initiatives, including settlement services, can be successful (Hulchanski, 1997).

The Municipal Immigration Strategy cited a recent survey conducted for the Making Ontario Home project, immigrants were interviewed across Ontario and 62% of the participants reported that they had encountered problems accessing settlement services (OCASI, 2012). [7] This figure represents a sample across Canada, and does not distinguish between different groups of immigrants nor differences between provinces, thus the official numbers for Ontario and Ottawa may differ. Nonetheless, the figure is telling and shows disconnect between the settlement service sector and the people they are meant to reach.

The Importance of Housing for Refugees

UNHCR, among others, calls attention to the fact that safe, secure and affordable housing is a fundamental human right as well as being a resource to rebuild lives for refugees and a base from which they can etch out new lives in host countries. From there, refugees who arrive in Canada without much planning nor savings can seek employment, re-establish family relationships, heal and overcome trauma, and connect with the wider community (UNHCR, 2002; Teixeira, 2009; Murdie 2004). Housing is much more than physical protection from the elements; it is essential to one's sense of dignity, health, mental and physical wellbeing, safety, inclusion, identity, access to employment, and ability to contribute to the community, and it facilitates successful resettlement and integration (Murdie, 2008; UNHCR, 2002; OHRC, 2008).

[7] An earlier study of immigrants showed that in first months of settlement only 1 in 11 of the survey participants reported receiving help from a settlement organization (Mendez, *et al.* 2006).

Due to the circumstances prior to arriving in the country where they will resettle, refugees were likely in prolonged states of insecurity where their shelter may have been unsafe, overcrowded and lacked security of tenure. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that they have privacy and safe space to resettle and to establish a sense of place and stability (UNHCR, 2002).

Mendez, Hiebert and Wyly (2006) were the first academics who looked specifically at the first months of immigrants' adjustment and the settlement process in Canada. Newcomers' early housing choices are crucial first steps and have effects that go beyond shelter and into the many other aspects of their lives including the establishment of a home, beyond the basic shelter aspects but also reflecting the emotional, psychological and cultural space that is created within (Mendez, *et al*. 2006; Murdie, 2008). The findings showed that immigrants acquired housing very quickly and this was due to their social ties, highlighted by the finding that four out of five immigrants had made housing arrangements prior to arriving, and of those who did need to seek out housing three out of five reported no difficulties in the process (Mendez, *et a*l 2006). It is important to keep in mind that these findings are for the broad classification of immigrants, and should not be assumed to represent the unique circumstances of refugees who are coming under much shorter timelines, with less planning in place, smaller savings and with little formal preparation[8].

Issues and barriers that immigrants have expressed in the housing search include the cost of rent, the lack of co-signer and credit history, and difficulties finding a unit suitable for their needs (Mendez, *et al*. 2006). The study also showed that immigrants who join family members in Canada are able to tap into richer social networks and obtain access to better housing options much quicker than other immigrants (Mendez, et al. 2006). Refugee families had the highest proportion of lone-parent households, after 6 months in Canada 96% of the refugees had poverty level incomes, 92% lived in rental units and more than 7 in 10 lived in apartments, as well as the highest incidents of large households living in overcrowded conditions (Mendez, *et al*, 2006).

[8] In the case of the government sponsored refugees no pre-arrival orientations were conducted because of the short time lines (Rose&Charrette, 2017)

Affordable Housing

Housing is considered affordable if a household spends no more than 30% of its income on rent including utilities. There is no denying that there is a shortage of affordable housing across Ontario, and Ottawa is no exception. There are many factors contributing to the shortage of affordable public, private and non-profit rental units across the province including rent increases matched with lagging incomes, increased household debt, decreased federal funding for social housing, social assistance and minimum wage rates not keeping pace with rising household costs (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2016b; OHRC, 2008). With rapid population growth and influxes such as that of the Syrian refugees in Ottawa, there is an increased demand for affordable housing. This pattern becomes problematic when there is a parallel shortage of affordable units (Teixeira, 2009). Finding a place to live that is affordable, comfortable, safe, free of pests and within budget is a major cause of concern and source of stress for low-income individuals including refugees.

Rental housing options are limited in Ottawa, with vacancy rates at 3% and lower (CMHC, 2017). There is a dire need for social housing and housing support. The waitlist for the Ontario Social Housing Registry is currently over 10,000 households and estimated wait time is over 5 years, depending on the individual circumstance (Ottawa Social Housing Registry, 2017). Market rate rentals are not affordable for low or fixed income households, including refugees. The average market rate rent in Ottawa are presented in Table 2. Currently, minimum wage is $11.60 in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2017). If a single person makes minimum wage and works 40 hours a week for 4 weeks a month, and they live in a bachelor apartment at the average price in Ottawa, they will need to spend 43% of their total pre-tax income on rent alone. This example illustrates that housing is not affordable for low income earners in Ottawa.

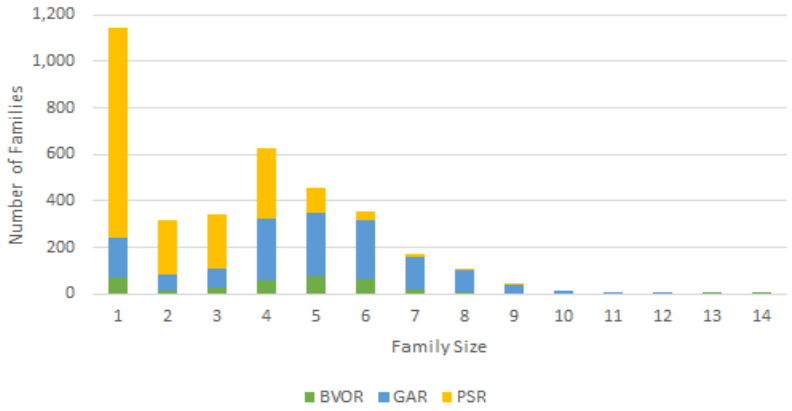
Table 2 Average Vacancy Rates & Rents for Apartments and Row Houses Ottawa, 2016

	Bachelor	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4 bedrooms
Vacancy	2.4%	2.8%	3%	**	**
Apartment Average Rent	$812	$982	$1,201	$1,457	$2,355
Row Structure Average Rent	**	$797	$1,199	$1,332	**

Source: CHMC, 2016 and Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2016a
** data was not available

When looking at the refugees' family unit composition, there is a mismatch between the available units in Ottawa and what is adequate, suitable, affordable and desired for refugees, given their financial means. Refugee families tend to be larger than what is common in Canada, many of the GAR families had 5 or more people (Chart 1). This makes it more difficult for families to find suitable places to live without overcrowding.

Chart 1 Ontario Admissions of Syrian Refugees by Immigration Category & Composition November 2015-July 2016



Source: IRCC August 2016 Data

Shelter Allowance for Government Assisted Refugees

When addressing issues of moving from the temporary reception shelter into long-term or permanent housing the single most important deciding factor for GARs was cost (Chau, personal communication). Initial concerns were whether a government assisted refugee (GAR) could afford the unit on their Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) allowances, but thinking longer term whether GAR would be able to afford the unit when they transitioned over to Ontario Works funding was important as well (Chau, personal communication; Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). When evaluating the RAP income assistance overall, it was determined that the amount received by GARs was less than half of what determined as the low income cut off level in Canada (CIC, 2011). Although progress has been made since RAP was first introduced,

such as the provision of the shelter allowance in 2006, this has not been adjusted to match the rising costs of living. GAR families have been forced to dip into other funds in order to pay for housing, which is illustrated in Table 3 (CIC, 2011). However, stakeholder feedback stated that, in their opinion, using provincial income assistance rates as a benchmark for calculating rates of funding and income assistance for GARs inappropriate (CIC, 2011). The fact that refugees have low earning capacity when they arrive and are on fixed low incomes affects their ability to establish a suitable home base (UNHCR, 2002). On the current RAP shelter allowance refugees are pushed into a "cycle of deprivation" where needs are sacrificed in order to pay for housing, which could have negative effects on their health and wellness (Murphy, 2010). The source of funding that the families tend to dip into is the Canadian Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) which the families rely on heavily, but this also leads to ethical questions as to whether it is right to take away funding that is meant to support children's development, such as opportunities to enroll in sports activities, hobbies, incidentals and more in order for a family to pay their rent. Credit cards were another issue that the refugees were not prepared for. Some families started using credit cards to access funds without fully understanding how credit cards worked and accumulated large amounts of debt in their first few months in Canada (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication).

The rates for the Shelter Allowance, which is a component of the RAP funding, for GAR in Ottawa 2016 is shown in Table 3. It should be noted that in the maximum scenario, the additional funding was coming from the Welcome Fund, which was a form of ad hoc rental supplements that were allocated on a case-by-case basis. This funding was generally provided when families were waiting to receive the CCTB, a wait that ranged from 3 to 6 months (Chau, personal communication; Rose & Charette, 2017; Silvius *et al.,* 2015). The Welcome Fund supplementary funds were also often allocated to singles who face some of the highest costs and financial burdens (Chau, personal communication; Rose & Charette, 2017).

Table 3 Minimum and maximum shelter allowances for GAR in Ottawa, 2016

Rent & Utilities	Min	Max
Additional Single Sharing	376	451
Single Living Alone	376	451
Couple	590	690
Family of 2	590	690
Family of3	641	741
Family of 4	695	795
Family of 5	750	850
Family of 6	777	877
Family of 7	777	**
Family of 8	777	**
Family of 9	777	**
Family of 10	777	**

**Shelter allowance increases on case by case basis as needed and approved by RAP officer and supplemented by the Welcome Fund

Source: Chau, personal communication

Insufficient allowances allocated for housing under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) makes it difficult for the recipients to get by since they are in situations where they pay larger proportions of their household income on rent for inferior housing stock (Murdie, 2004). This inadequacy has been identified as a key challenge for GARs, when you compare income support rates to average cost of housing, the costs were consuming upwards of 56% of their household income, placing them in core housing need (CIC, 2011). Core housing need is defined by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation as falling below a minimum standard of physical adequacy, appropriateness to the size and composition of the household, and affordability[9] (Murdie, 2004; CMHC, 2016b) When comparing the GAR monthly Shelter Allowance to average rent prices in Ottawa, in no case was the Shelter Allowance enough to cover rent (Table 4).

[9] Acceptable housing is in adequate condition, suitable in size and affordable for tenant, and does not require major repairs. Suitable Housing has enough rooms for the families size and composition, according to National Occupancy Standards. Affordable Housing costs less than 30% of before-tax household income (CMHC, 2016b)

Table 4 GAR RAP Shelter Allowance (SA) Compared to Ottawa Rent, 2016

Unit Type	Living Situation	Ave Rent	Min GAR SA	% of rent covered by SA	Max GAR SA	% of rent covered by SA
Bachelor	Single living alone	812	376	46%	451	55%
Bachelor	Couple	812	590	72%	690	85%
Bachelor	Family of 2	812	590	72%	690	85%
1BR	Single living alone	982	376	38%	451	46%
1BR	Couple	982	590	60%	690	70%
1BR	Family of 2	982	590	60%	690	70%
1BR	Family of 3	982	641	65%	741	75%
1BR	Family of 4	982	695	70%	795	81%
2BR	Family of 3	1,201	641	53%	741	62%
2BR	Family of 4	1,201	695	57%	795	66%
2BR	Family of 5	1,201	750	62%	850	71%
2BR	Family of 6	1,201	777	64%	877	73%
3BR	Family of 3	1,457	641	43%	741	51%
3BR	Family of 4	1,457	695	47%	795	55%
3BR	Family of 5	1,457	750	51%	850	58%
3BR	Family of 6	1,457	777	53%	877	60%

Source: Chau, personal communication; CMHC 2016a

In the worst-case scenario, a single person living on the minimum shelter allowance in a one bedroom apartment, the shelter allowance was only enough to cover 38% of the average rental price in Ottawa, meaning the GAR would need to reallocate $606 from other sources, in addition to utilities. The worse-case scenario for the GAR receiving the maximum shelter allowance was also the single living in the one bedroom apartment. The shelter allowance covered 46% of the cost of rent, meaning the individual would need to reallocate $531 from other sources in addition to utilities. It should also be noted that most rental units in Ottawa do not include utilities, so this can significantly increase the cost of living for GAR. One housing case worker reported that GAR families had amassed heating bills exceeding $500, keeping in mind it was the first winter for many of the GAR and they are not accustomed to the climate in

Ottawa (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). The refugees cannot be expected to find housing themselves, as they lack familiarity with the local culture, language skills, climate and knowledge of the housing market. The contributions of service providing organizations and caseworkers are essential to resettlement of GAR.

The best scenario for both minimum and maximum housing allowance was in the case of a couple (or family of two) living in a bachelor apartment. For the couple living on the minimum shelter allowance 72% of their rent was covered, meaning they would need to reallocate $222 to pay the average rent in Ottawa in additional to utilities. For the couple receiving the maximum shelter allowance, 85% of their rent was covered; they would need to reallocate $122 to pay the average rent in Ottawa in addition to utilities.

The average GAR family size was five, and a family of that size receiving the minimum shelter allowance in a 2BR would have 62% of their rent covered, meaning they would have to reallocate $451, in addition to utilities. The family of five receiving the maximum shelter allowance in a 2BR would have 71% of their rent covered meaning they would have to reallocate $351.The family of five receiving the minimum shelter allowance in a 3BR would have 51% of their rent covered meaning they would have to reallocate $707. The family of five receiving the maximum shelter allowance in a 3BR would have 58% of their rent covered meaning they would have to reallocate $607.

Table 5 shows different scenarios that might be configured to accommodate from one person to a family of five. There were many families larger than this, but the data were unavailable to create accurate scenarios. The percentage of family income spent on housing was significant for the GARs and affected family units of all sizes. However, larger families had additional sources of funding that families without children did not have access to:

> "for the larger families, the percentage [of income spent on housing] is lower but for singles it will be over 50% of their income, even [in many cases] over 60% of their [total] income goes toward rent. And for a couple [without children], it's the same thing but when the family size gets larger then there are other components like the [Canadian] Child Tax Benefit which they receive [depending on how many children they have]. So, when you have a larger family of four, five, six [people] the percentage [of their total income] they spend on housing will be less." (Chau, personal communication)

However, there was limited availability in units that would be suitable for these larger families, and this delayed the process of finding housing. While larger families may have access to additional financial resources through the CCTB, they may face discrimination from landlords who have concerns about renting to large families due to the amount of wear and tear that is caused by young children (Murdie, 2004). If one considers that many of the families had children with disabilities, this further complicated the housing search (Abdul-Hussein, personal communication).

These scenarios show that the refugees face high-to-severe degrees of housing stress and this is supported by Mendez *et al*. who found that more than 45% are in severe housing stress[10]. The effects of inadequate housing are well known to the people working in refugee resettlement: inadequate housing can make refugees feel insecure and can prevent them from focusing on other aspects of settling in (Silvius, *et al*., 2015). The gap between refugee shelter allowances and rental prices have been noted internationally as well, notably as what has been called the "accommodation gap" in the research of Hassel and Hugo (1996) in Australia.

Other Housing Assistance Programs: Below Market Rent

Below Market Rent (BMR) is a program where the recipient pays 70% of the market rate (the subsidy covers the other 30%), and Rent Geared to Income allows the recipient to pay 30% of their household income (Ottawa Social Housing Registry, 2017). Low-income Canadian citizens, permanent residents, refugee and refugee claimants are eligible to apply for BMR if they are also on the Social Housing Registry waitlist (Social Housing Registry, 2014). The BMR subsidy made rents more affordable especially for single refugees or those in smaller households. Table 5 above shows the impact of BMR subsidies along with GAR shelter allowances. In many scenarios, having BMR along with the GAR shelter allowance made the rent more affordable.

[10] High Housing Stress is defined as spending 30-49% of family income on rent and having a savings less than the equivalent of 3 months rent. Severe housing stress is defined as 50%+ of family income on rent and less than the equivalent 3 months savings (Mendez et al 2006)

Table 5 Average Ottawa CMHC Rent Adjusted for Below Market Rent (BMR) Compared to GARs Minimum and Maximum Shelter Allowance

Unit Type	Living Situation	Average Rent	BMR Rent	Min GAR Shelter Allowance	% rent covered by min Shelter Allowance	Max GAR Shelter Allowance	% rent covered by max Shelter Allowance
Bachelor	Single living alone	$812	$568.40	$376	66%	$451	79%
Bachelor	Couple	$812	$568.40	$590	103%	$690	121%
Bachelor	Family of 2	$812	$568.40	$590	103%	$690	121%
1BR	Single living alone	$982	$687.40	$376	55%	$451	67%
1BR	Couple	$982	$687.40	$590	86%	$690	100%
1BR	Family of 2	$982	$687.40	$590	86%	$690	100%
1BR	Family of 3	$982	$687.40	$641	93%	$741	107%
1BR	Family of 4	$982	$687.40	$695	101%	$795	115%
2BR	Family of 3	$1,201	$840.70	$641	76%	$741	88%
2BR	Family of 4	$1,201	$840.70	$695	82%	$795	94%
2BR	Family of 5	$1,201	$840.70	$750	89%	$850	101%
2BR	Family of 6	$1,201	$840.70	$777	93%	$877	104%
3BR	Family of 3	$1,457	$1,019.90	$641	63%	$741	73%
3BR	Family of 4	$1,457	$1,019.90	$695	68%	$795	78%
3BR	Family of 5	$1,457	$1,019.90	$750	74%	$850	83%
3BR	Family of 6	$1,457	$1,019.90	$777	76%	$877	86%

Source: CMHC, 2016s; Chau, personal communication

Once the year of federal sponsorship and funding is complete, GARs are eligible to apply for provincial Ontario Works funding, which is lower, overall, than the RAP funding, and the designated shelter allowance is lower as well. Table 6 below shows the difference between the RAP and Ontario Works Shelter Allowance. The difference in Shelter Allowance payments ranges from $63 to $75 (Table 6). The percentage of rent coverage that was lost moving from RAP to OW ranges from 9.2% decrease in rent coverage which affects the singles living in 1BR, to 4.3% decrease in rent coverage which affects families of five or more in a 3BR unit.

Table 6 Comparing RAP and Ontario Works Shelter Allowance

Family Size	Maximum Monthly Shelter Allowance for RAP	Maximum Monthly Shelter Allowance for Ontario Works	Difference
Single	$451	$376	$75
Family of 2	$690	$619	$71
Family of 3	$741	$672	$69
Family of 4	$795	$729	$66
Family of 5	$850	$786	$64
Family of 6+	$877	$814	$63

Source: Ontario Works, 2016; Chau, personal communication

Month 13 has come and gone for the first groups of GARs, meaning that they no longer receive federal refugee allowances, many have shifted over to Ontario Works which is significantly less money overall, although the shelter allowance is not dramatically reduced. Chau said that the majority of GARs stayed in their current units because it would be too costly and stressful to move and potentially have to uproot children from school, and furthermore that they would not find a cheaper alternative (Chau, personal communication).

Barriers to Accessing Affordable Housing

These descriptions of a few of the major services for GAR indicate how resettling refugees is framed as a priority of the federal government, the City of Ottawa, the SPO community and among the general population. However, after looking at the statistics, the cost of rent and the allowances that the refugees are expected to live on, it seems difficult to make ends meet and it appears that refugees face many barriers to adequate, suitable, affordable housing options. This is a challenge for both the refugees and the people assisting them. It is

crucial to understand what the barriers are, as they can have a negative effect, even standing the way of settlement. Failing to have access to adequate housing could prevent refugees from becoming productive members of society, because it would have negative effects on the access to employment, education and services (Hulchanski, 1997). This is echoed in the work of Teixeira (2009) which shows from interviews conducted in Kelowna, BC amongst immigrants that they express similar barriers, the four most common cited were the high cost of housing, lack of reliable housing information and insufficient access to organizations that provide housing assistance. Hulchanski identifies two different types of barriers that newcomers face, as demonstrated on Table 7.

Table 7 Primary and Secondary Barriers to Housing Access

Primary Barriers	**Secondary Barriers**
Social construction & social characteristic	***Characteristics which can, and often do change over time***
Race	Level of income
Ethnicity/culture/religion	Source of income
Gender	Knowledge of housing system
	Language skills/accent
	Household type and size
	Knowledge & experience with host countries institutions and culture

Source: Hulchanski, 1997

Comparing Hulchanski's barriers with the barriers refugees face in Ottawa (Box 1), it could be argued that refugees overtly face more forms of secondary barriers than primary barriers. This means that the barriers are likely to be overcome in the long run. Although this might not ease the struggle for refugees at the present moment, it does mean that things will get easier as the refugees adjust to life in Ottawa. Immigrants lack information on and understanding of their housing rights and housing laws. This is due in part to the complex language used on leases (Murphy, 2010). Many of the Syrian GARs are illiterate in their native language and are from rural areas (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). The refugees need help gaining cultural competency to understand how different concepts, understandings and norms of land tenure and acquisition work in Canada (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication;

Graham, personal communication). In short, the refugees need help finding their first home in Ottawa, and that help is available from sponsors, SPO's and volunteers.

The next chapter presents the findings from the interviews with representatives from the refugee resettlement community in Ottawa to find out the strategies and arrangements they used to find permanent, adequate, suitable, affordable housing for refugees.

Box 1 Main Barriers to Affordable Housing for Refugees

- Affordability: extremely high percentage of household income going toward rent
    - Concerns that families will not be able to afford their units when they transition to Ontario Works, provincial income supports
- Size of Unit: rental units available are not large enough to comfortably house the family sizes common amongst the GAR
    - Small units leads to crowding in the home and can cause tension with neighbors due to limited space for children to play
- Refugees unfamiliar with issues such as bedbugs, unaware of how to manage them
- Limited quantities of affordable units and low vacancy across the city
- Extremely long waitlists for social housing
- Refugees lack of knowledge and advocacy about housing rights
- Landlords subjecting refugees to unfair, discriminatory practices and procedures

Source: Abu-Shaaban, Abdul Hussein, Chau, Edwards, Caseworker & Graham, personal communication

Chapter 4: Resettling Refugees in Ottawa: Who is Involved?

The objective of Chapter 4 is to explain what service providing organizations (SPOs) are and how the resettlement assistance program (RAP) works. The general responsibilities of the SPOs are explained along with a summary of the process the government assisted refugees (GARs) go through before arriving in Canada. The chapter then introduces a few of the major actors in Ottawa's refugee resettlement community, explaining their roles and mandates.

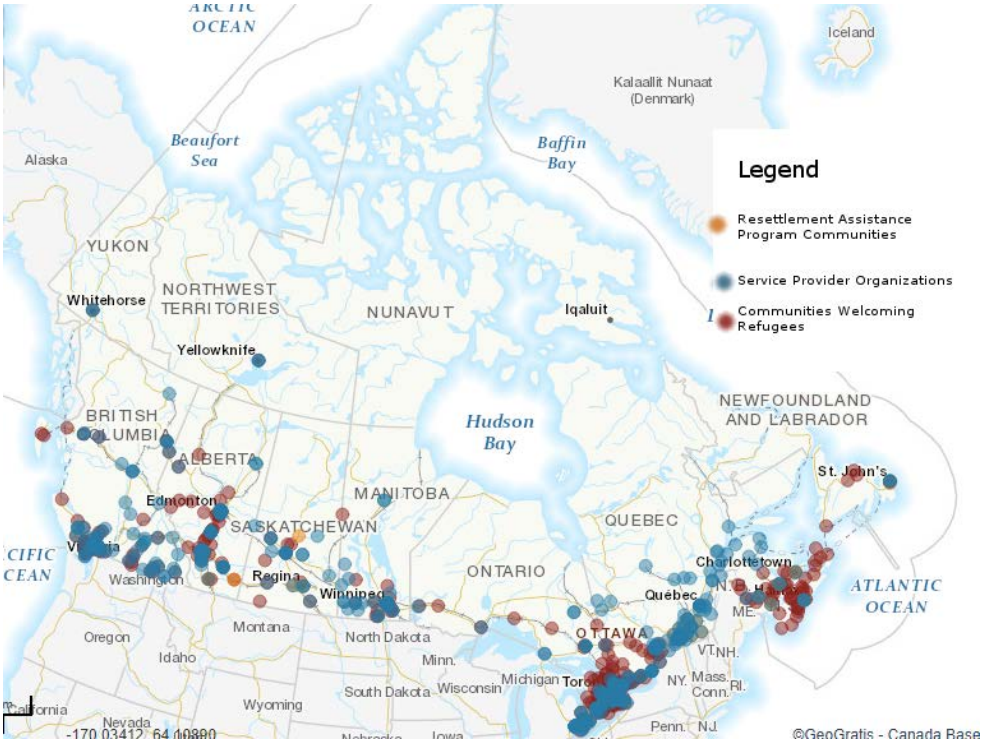
What are Service Providing Organizations?

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) was introduced in 1998 as a more comprehensive approach to refugee resettlement allowing for dedicated refugee resettlement services which were contracted out to be the responsibility of third-party agencies (CIC, 2004). Prior to RAPs, all official settlement services had been administered directly by the federal agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The sub-delegating of responsibilities was carried out through the establishment of the "Service Providing Organizations" (SPO). SPOs are community groups and organizations that were hired to administer the Resettlement Assistance Programs (RAPs) which were deemed as essential by the government in order for the GARs to adjust to life in Canada and help them learn about the culture, norms and life in Canada. This has been framed in the literature as a privatization and neoliberalization of a public service, which shifted the responsibility from the federal and provincial government to the contracted parties, community resources and assistance as well as to unpaid volunteers (Silvius, *et al*., 2015). Under the RAP all services administered by the SPOs are provided on the municipal level, with the exception of the direct allowances to the government assisted refugees (GAR), which is administered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada[11] (IRCC) on the federal level. Services are provided on the municipal level so that they are context-appropriate.

The government of Canada has delegated responsibilities for resettlement services to hundreds of IRCC-funded SPOs across Canada. At the time that this research was conducted (January 2017), there were 36 communities with RAP SPOs and hundreds more supportive SPOs (Government of Canada, 2017) (Fig 1).

[11] IRCC was formerly known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)

Figure 1 Refugee Welcoming Initiatives Across Canada



Source: Government of Canada, 2016

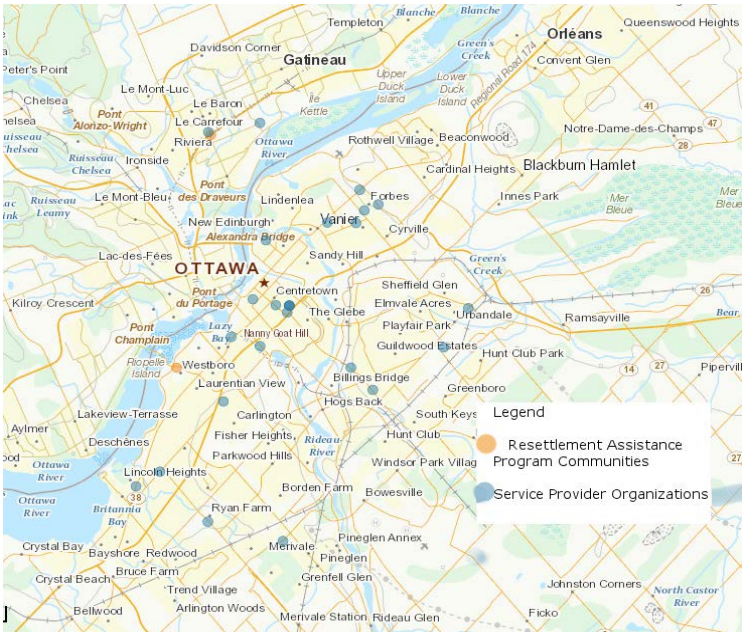
The RAP is designed so that the SPOs are involved with the refugee resettlement from the beginning. The RAP begins upon arrival and SPOs provide informational orientations, and access to services deemed essential by both the Canadian federal government and UNHCR, including programmed.

Provincial social assistance guides the amount of RAP funding that refugees are allocated for shelter, food, transportation, assistance and necessities in each province (Government of Canada, 2017). Services that are provided by the Resettlement Assistance Program include welcoming GARs at the airport, helping find temporary accommodations, helping find permanent accommodations, assessing their needs, providing them with necessary orientations and information, helping them file documentation for crucial documents such as social insurance, Canadian Child Tax Benefit, and provincial health care and federal interim health coverage, and providing referrals to other settlement services that are not within their realm of expertise (Government of Canada, 2017). The RAP is meant to be structured and intensive resettlement assistance, including help accessing medical attention, needs assessment and settlement support (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Additional services offered through the Resettlement Assistance Programs include providing refugees

travel loans to reach Canada, social and financial assistance upon arrival, cultural orientation, counseling, information sessions, translation and interpretation, referrals to community resources, language training and classes and job-related services (Government of Canada, 2016). The RAP community support is its most intensive for the first 4-6 weeks upon arriving and continues at a lesser degree for the remainder of the first year, although there is still support that extends beyond that period (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011).

The only Government of Canada Resettlement Assistance Program service providing organization in Ottawa is the Catholic Centre for Immigrants (CCI)[12]. However, there are many community organizations and community services who also receive funding from the Canadian government, as well as organizations funded by the provincial government and the City who provide assistance and access to resettlement and community services that complement the services offered by CCI. The services provided by the SPOs and through RAP, along with volunteers and community organizations, are indispensable to GAR resettlement and are crucial components to refugee welcoming, integration, and settling. In the Ottawa-area there are thirty-four SPOs and one RAP provider (Fig 2).

Figure 2 Service Providing Organizations in Ottawa



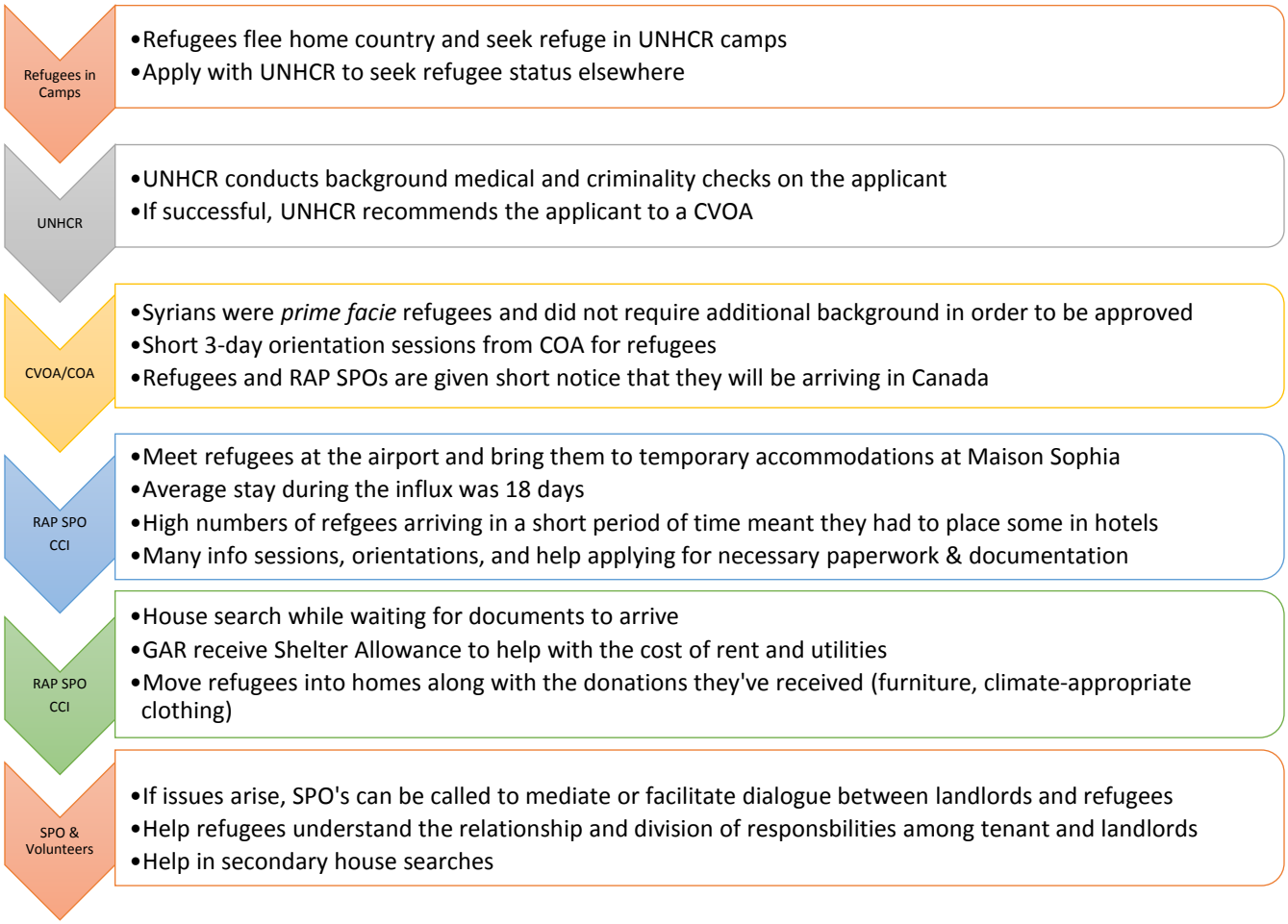
Source: Government of Canada, 2016

[12] There is another resettlement assistance service providing organization in nearby Gatineau, Quebec. However, it will not be discussed in this paper because it falls under different provincial and federal jurisdiction

Summary of Government Assisted Refugees to Canada

Although the RAP SPO has a contract to work with and settle the GAR, the work is eased, strengthened, and supported through collaboration and partnerships in order to resettle large groups of refugees. Figure 3 summarizes the process of GAR coming to Canada and moving into their first home. The left side shows the main actor and the right shows the steps at that phase.

Figure 3 Process of Welcoming Syrian Government Assisted Refugees to Canada



Source: CVOA, IRCC, Chau, Matar, & Abu-Shaaban

Figure 3 summarizes the process of GAR resettlement, highlighting the major phases and transitions, and shows that responsibilities are distributed across many different organizations within the SPO community. The SPO workers manage hundreds of complex,

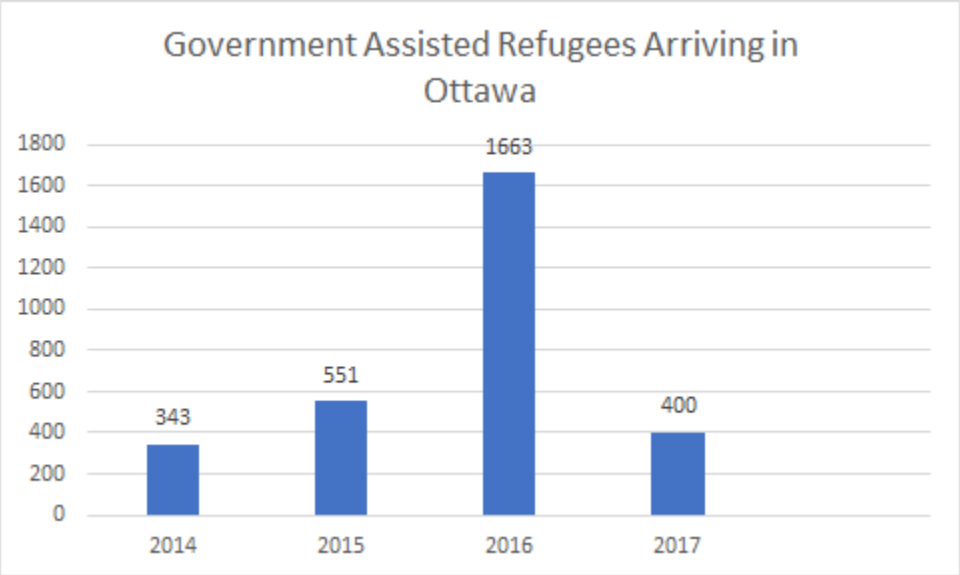
intertwined, sensitive cases at one time, which will be explained in greater detail throughout this chapter.

Ottawa's Resettlement Assistance Program Provider: The Catholic Centre for Immigrants

The Catholic Centre for Immigrants (CCI) was founded in 1954 in Ottawa and is a large organization that has welcomed thousands of refugees and immigrants over the years and forged countless partnerships within the community. CCI's mandate is to offer settlement services to promote and facilitate the reception of newcomers, including refugees and immigrants, to sensitize the Ottawa community to address newcomers' needs and invite it to respond, and to assist newcomers in realizing their full potential in Canadian society (CCI, 2017). CCI offers many activities and services that range from a pre-arrival online workshops, to provision of temporary accommodation and housing search assistance, assistance applying for important documents, job skills workshops, information sessions to help GARs adjust to life in Canada, counselling, youth programs, language classes, assistance, counseling, and referrals to access other services (CCI, 2017). CCI welcomes hundreds of GAR each year, but by the end of 2015 and well into March 2016 they welcomed unprecedented high numbers of GARs (Chart 2).

CCI are the leaders in helping newcomers settle in Ottawa and have been hired by IRCC to be responsible for welcoming all Ottawa-bound GARs in addition to providing support for sponsorship groups who are settling refugees. Despite the wide array of work that CCI does to resettle refugees in Ottawa, the focus in this research is specifically their mandate to provide housing assistance for GARs. CCI has two main housing-related responsibilities: first, providing temporary shelter upon arrival, and second, providing assistance to find GARs permanent housing.

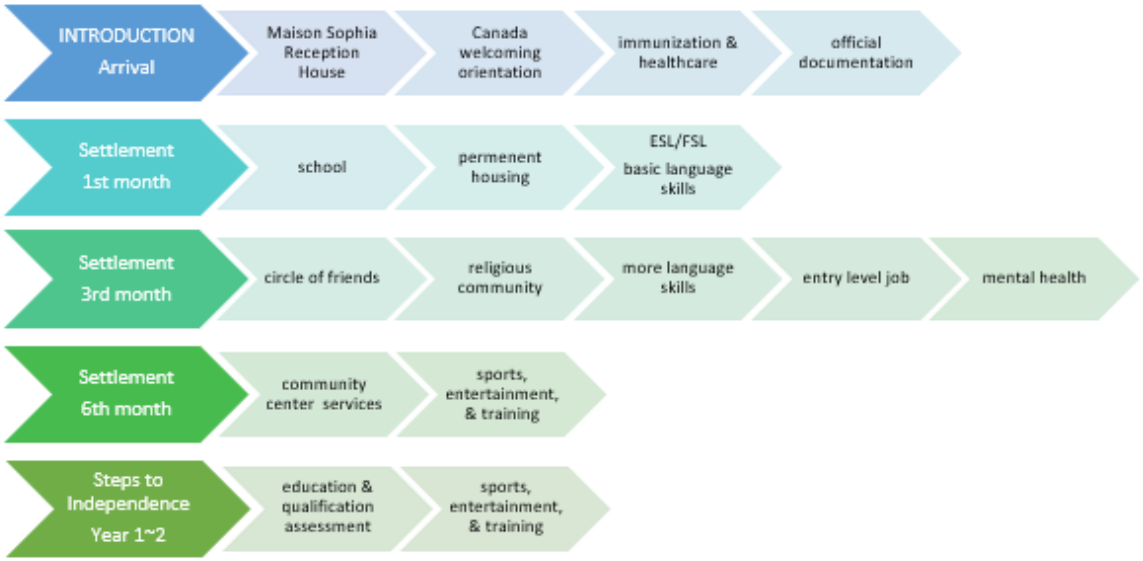
Chart 2 GARs Arriving in Ottawa 2014-2017



Source: Chau, Personal Communication
*numbers include both Syrian and non-Syrian GARs
**2017 is the estimated maximum for 2017 (as of interview in April 2017)

Figure 4 shows a diagram of CCIs "Path to Independence for Government Assisted Refugees" which displays a simplified version of the process of coming to Canada as a GAR, where the first stop is the temporary shelter. Maison Sophia Reception Centre will be the GARs first shelter, home base and address in Canada. They provide a place to land and prepare to start a life in Ottawa. Maison Sophia has space for 96 people in simple rooms, and serves 3 communal hot meals daily (Fig 5). Generally, refugees spend two to four weeks in Maison Sophia, although there have been longer stays in the past.

Figure 4 Path to Independence for Government Assisted Refugees



Source: CCI

The Catholic Centre for Immigrants is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade, the City of Ottawa, ScotiaBank, and the Catholic Centre for Immigrants Foundation. They also received funding from the Community Foundation of Ottawa's Canada's Welcome Fund (Venn, 2016). CCI has a core group of dedicated staff, some who have been with CCI for over 30 years. The Maison Sophia Reception House staff are particularly knowledgeable about the process, and struggles of being a refugee in Ottawa, as several staff came through Maison Sophia as refugees and have navigated immigration, integration and adaptation firsthand.

From the Shelter, into Permanent Housing

Maison Sophia's housing coordinator, Heng Chau, is no stranger to the reality and severity of issues faced by GAR. Chau came to Ottawa from Cambodia as a refugee in the 1970's and has been working in refugee resettlement for over 30 years (Chau, personal communication; Ireton, 2015). Chau spoke about the importance of temporary housing, beginning with GARs time at Maison Sophia, and the orientation period that the refugees attend

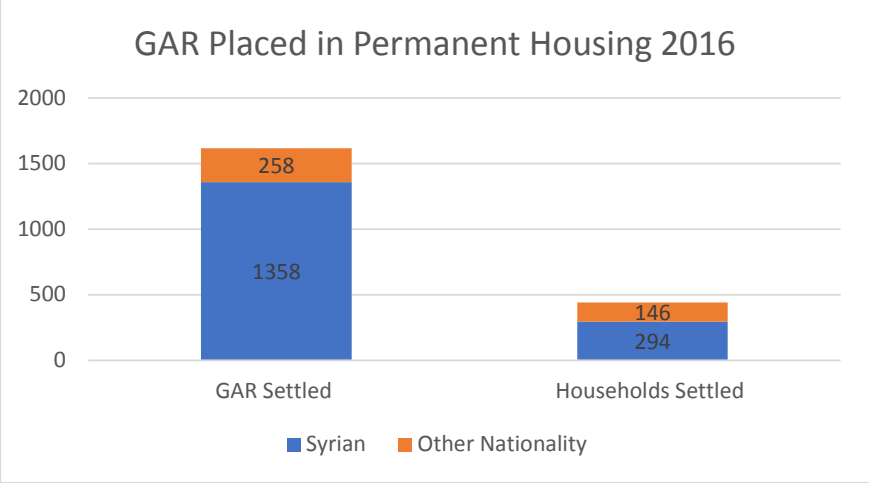
their first weeks in Canada. The first weeks and the orientation are crucial to their settlement journey:

> . . . They need a place to stay once they arrive here, then they need to understand the [resettlement] program [with CCI] before they actually move out to their own housing… after spending [about] three weeks. . . at the temporary accommodation they're ready to move into their own house . . . the resettlement assistance program at Maison Sophia is very basic, very short term. . . after that they move out to another program that we call the community support services that link them to services in the community [it is] like the medium term plan. (Chau, personal communication)

The process of arriving, staying in the temporary shelter, and then moving into the refugees' own housing is expected to take about a month, and is followed by many other steps to settlement and integration (Fig 4). This also establishes a home base for the GAR so that they can more comfortably shift into their next phase of settlement which involved enrolling in school, and starting ESL classes.

Once the GARs paperwork is filed, the housing search can begin. At this point designated workers from Maison Sophia, along with partner organization like the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO), Housing Help and Roofs4Refugees get involved. CCI and Maison Sophia had a very successful 2016 placing 1,616 GARs, representing 440 families into permanent housing (Chart 3).

Chart 3 Ottawa GAR Placed in Permanent Housing, 2016



Source: Chau, personal communication

The task of finding suitable housing for such a large numbers of GARs was not easy, but CCI along with their partners ensured that GARs were placed in their own homes as soon as

possible. During the influx from December 2015 through March 2016, the average time spent in the shelter was 18 days (Chau, personal communication).

Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization

Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) is a community based non-profit organization that is designated as a refugee service-providing organization by the Government of Canada. OCISO provides a wide range of immigrant services, including conducting information sessions for newly arrived refugees, case management, youth services, counseling, and assistance in over 50 languages. As an SPO, they provide hands-on assistance for the Syrian refugees from the moment they arrive, including conducting many of the GARs mandatory information sessions. OSICO believes in an inclusive city, where Canadians, new and old, are able to contribute to society. As well, they provide support in helping immigrants in their journey to make Canada their home with a specific focus on dialogue, healing, inclusion and respect (OSICO, 2017).

OSICOs major funders are IRCC, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade, and the City of Ottawa (OSICO, 2017).

Non-profit Housing Advocacy and Assistance Services: Housing Help

Housing Help is a non-profit charitable agency aiding low-income individuals and families, the homeless, at risk of homelessness access to appropriate, safe and affordable housing (Housing Help, 2013). They provide assistance to prevent evictions, settle landlord and tenant disputes, house search, and educating tenants about housing rights and responsibilities. Housing Help was founded on the belief that every person has the right to safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing. Housing Help has a small but dedicated staff, including one worker who was hired as a direct response to the Syrian refugee influx and is the only case worker who speaks English, French and Arabic (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Housing Help works with many of the service providing organizations throughout the city including CCI and OSICO, but they are stretched quite thin as the demand for help finding an

affordable unit is far more than there is supply of available case workers. Funding for Housing Help is provided in part by The Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Ontario and The Homelessness Partnering Strategy of Canada, the City of Ottawa and United Way (Housing Help, 2013).

Housing Help brought on their only Arabic-speaking, trilingual frontline case worker, Mayse Abu-Shaaban, in September 2016. Although she is available to work with any Arabic speaking person who needs help, she was hired specifically in anticipation of the Syrian GARs reaching the end of their federal funding. “There are some refugees from Yemen, from Libya and from Iraq, but since the influx of Syrian refugees or newcomers there has been some funding [provided to SPOs] for more Arabic [speaking] workers, [especially] for housing… [my position was created due to the fact that] there are so many newcomers from Syria” who were nearing the end of their RAP funding and would be switched over to Ontario Works income support, which is less than the refugee allowance. The looming threat of month 13, when the Syrian GARs would end their RAP funding sent ripples of concern through the service-providing organizations. The tension was especially high for those involved in housing. Since housing constitutes one of the most important facets of settlement as well as one of the largest household expenditures, the resettlement community was worried that once the federal funding stopped that the GARs might not be able to afford the housing that they had secured.

Volunteer Initiatives: *Roofs 4 Refugees*

The influx of refugees has inspired people to reach out and help in many capacities to welcome newcomers into their communities. This has come in the form of volunteering at community centers, service providing organizations, food banks, as tutors, and through cash or in-kind donations. One interesting initiative that arose as a response to the influx and concerns about the state of housing in Ottawa and concern for the refugees was Roofs4Refugees. Roofs4Refugees is based on the model of Refugees Welcome International, a creative initiative founded in Berlin, Germany through which people can offer housing options to refugees by offering their spare room, unoccupied flat, or other habitable spaces for rent. A group of likeminded individuals was inspired by this model, which has successfully matched many units and refugees in Europe, and has started a chapter in Ottawa. Many of the group's leaders have personal connections to the project, as many are either immigrants or first-generation

Canadians (Matar, personal communication; CBC, 2016). Roofs4Refugees partnered with CCI to focus on finding homes suitable for families of 5 or more, for at least one year, at an affordable cost to refugees (CBC, 2016).

Roofs4Refugees showed initiative and was unlike any housing services offered at the time, as they started to appear across Canada on the news prior to the arrival of the first refugees. The shortage of affordable housing has been well-documented in Ottawa. In anticipation of the influx, Roofs4Refugees organized a group of volunteers, launched a webpage, forged partnerships, held press conferences and started to try finding units for the refugees before they arrived. Once Roofs4Refugees received media coverage on the national and local news and radio, offers for rental units came rolling in (Matar, personal communication).

Blended-Visa Office Referral Sponsorship Groups: *Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship*

The Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship was formed in response to the influx of refugees coming to Canada under the guidance of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, who are a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) with the federal government. The Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship relies on the work of around thirty dedicated volunteers and numerous casual volunteers who are divided into various committees and share the work that is required to settle the blended-visa office-referred refugees (BVOR) that they are sponsoring. Participant's duties include gathering winter clothes for the family, fully furnishing the BVORs apartment, and funding their urgent medical care. Participants also provide emotional and social support, including recruiting translators and interpreters, assisting with paperwork, practicing English, playing with children, touching base regularly, and taking the family on outings. "A lot of friendships were created" says Jennifer Graham, housing coordinator. The Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship became well known in Ottawa because they were the sponsors for the first Syrian family to arrive in Ottawa (Graham, personal communication).

The Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship is funded by cash and in-kind donations. Many of the committee members are retired, while others are still working and

represent diverse backgrounds and skill sets such as an imam from a local mosque, teachers, and more. Subcommittees include finance and funding, material acquisition, clothing and furniture, education, health, and employment.

Ottawa Centre Refugee Action Sponsorship Group

The Ottawa Centre Refugee Action (OCRA) is a grassroots organization of private sponsors that was formed in January 2016 in Ottawa's The Glebe neighborhood. OCRA's focus is to empower the BVOR sponsored families and to provide them with opportunities to form friendships and become engaged in their communities (OCRA, 2016). They operate under the guidance of the United Church of Ottawa and Jewish Family Services, both of which are Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) with the federal government. At the time of research interviews (May 2017), OCRA had welcomed and settled twelve families and was in the process of organizing to welcome additional families. Additionally, in order to reunite families, they are expanding their program to support the private sponsorship of their sponsor's remaining family members in refugee camps or in dire situations in their home country (Edwards, personal communication).

OCRA is staffed entirely by volunteers. They have a dedicated group of 18 leaders from various backgrounds including lawyers, teachers, retired federal servants, planners, consultants, and more, representing an array of professional skill sets. OCRA is funded by private donors. It is possible that since the sponsorship groups are deeply involved in their sponsored family's interests, and have invested a lot of time and money into this process, that they are working in different capacities to ensure the success of their sponsored refugees.

Synthesis

This chapter has outlined the work that the different organizations that work with refugees to find housing, including descriptions of where their funding comes from and who they work with. The next chapter examines what happens on the ground, the agreements that have been made and where flexibility comes into play, as informed by the interviews.

Chapter 5: Findings

The previous chapter explained the process and the major organizations involved welcoming refugees to Ottawa, it also outlined the work, duties and responsibilities of the organizations while introducing some of the challenges and barriers they face. This chapter presents the interview findings, providing further insight into how the organizations, sponsors and volunteers conceptualize their mission, values, responsibilities, clientele and reflect on the commitments, arrangements and partnerships that were forged to find affordable housing for the influx of Syrian refugees (Table 8). In each case, relevant contextual information is presented, followed by an explanation of some of the strategies used, addressing common themes and notable differences.

The seven interviews provide rich, detailed accounts from people who worked on the ground with Syrian refugees during the influx and who continue to do so. The mandates and responsibilities of the organizations varied, but there was a common shared vision of social inclusion, integration, and a belief that housing is a foundation on which the refugees settle and build their lives in Canada. This chapter summarizes the organization's responsibilities and relationships with their clientele, and the common themes that emerged from the interviews with the people who were directly involved in settling refugees. The interviews showed that the sponsorship groups and the people working in the SPOs expressed similar themes and concerns but the scope of their issues differed. The size of their social network and their access to resources varied greatly. For this reason, interviewees will be distinguished by the type of refugees that they work with; either government assisted refugees (GARs) or blended visa office-referred refugees (BVOR) .

Table 8 Organizations Working to Find Housing for Refugees in Ottawa

Type of Organization	Name of Organization, Person Interviewed, Title	Responsibilities
Resettlement Assistance Program Service Providing Organization	**Catholic Centre for Immigrants** **Maison Sophia Reception House** Heng Chau *Housing Coordinator*	Provide short-term accommodation for GARs Assist GARs filing important paperwork Help GARs find a permanent home Help GARs move into permanent home
Service Providing Organization	**Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization** Sarah Abdul Hussein *Settlement and Integration Team* *Intensive Case Manager*	Help Arabic speaking newcomers settle Help with housing search Help clients understand and navigate a new cultural landscape Offer referrals to other settlement services
Non-profit Housing Advocacy and Assistance Services	**Housing Help** Mayse Abu-Shaaban *Case Worker* **Housing Assistance Group in Ottawa** *Housing Caseworker & Supervisor*	Educate tenants about their rights Help Arabic speaking newcomers Help with housing search Work to prevent evictions, resolve landlord and tenant disputes Help clients understand the procedures and housing culture in Ottawa
Volunteer Initiative	**Roofs4Refugees Ottawa** Tara Matar *Ottawa Coordinator*	Match refugees with landlords Manage online application portal Process applications and match Share host information with SPOs
Blended-Visa Officer Referral Sponsorship Group	**Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship** Jennifer Graham *Housing Committee Lead* **Ottawa Centre Refugee Action** Deborah Edwards *Permanent Housing Resources Lead, Co-lead for Family Support Group*	Raise money & donations to assist family Find & furnish home for sponsor family Orient family so they can choose a neighborhood and apartment Cosign apartment lease Facilitate communication between landlord and tenant Educate committee members about the realities of low-income housing

Be ready, they're coming!

Organizations were given short notice about when refugees would be arriving. Although the Catholic Centre for Immigrants (CCI) needed to make preparations in advance (for example, identifying units, and training additional workers and volunteers), the limited notice meant that in the end they were planning and making final adjustments at the last minute (Rose & Charette, 2017; Chau, personal communication). However, this is not new for the workers at CCI, whenever GARs arrive at CCI's Maison Sophia, they are given short notice (Chau, personal communication). There have been incidences when CCI were only given a couple of days notice that they will be receiving new GARs. In the case of the Syrian GARs the number of arrivals and speed at which the refugees were arriving was unlike any influx of refugees they had received before, short notice and in situ planning is a tactic that CCI uses each time they receive GARs (Chau, personal communication). The reason CCI usually operates on short notice is that the visa approval process for GARs can, and often does, take longer than expected and delays are the norm (ibid.). This necessarily means that they cannot start finding housing for specific families before the GARs arrive, although they do begin contacting partners to start forming a list of potential sites and units. One example was making agreements with property managers like Capital Towers and Minto who had committed early on to provide units to refugees which helped increase the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) service providing organizations (SPO) housing readiness (Abdul-Hussein, personal communication). Another issue related to preparedness was that although CCI received information on the refugees prior to arrival, there were many cases where there has been unanticipated changes in family arrangements, such as extended family being added to a GAR family group, and a much higher prevalence of special needs than the welcoming SPOs had expected (Abdul-Hussein, personal communication).

An intensive case manager said that the majority of the clients she works with have at least one child with a disability; these range from developmental delays, learning disabilities and other circumstances related to inadequate access to health care living in refugee camps for extended periods and malnutrition (Abdul-Hussein, personal communication).

The blended visa office referred (BVOR) refugees situation was similar, although the sponsorship group had worked more personally in the visa process and knew from more personal details about the BVOR refugee they were sponsoring, there were often delays causing uncertainty for the sponsorship committees making it difficult to plan the logistics of the

arrival and initial settlement (Graham, personal communication). This meant that if they were eager to have a unit ready for the BVOR family, that they also had to consider the cost would it be to have the unit sitting empty waiting for the family to arrive or whether it was better to wait until the family arrived and hope that landlords who were holding units would be patient and empathetic (Graham, personal communication).

Welcoming Refugees to Canada: First Stop, Temporary Shelter

The first place a refugee stays is a temporary shelter, this is not considered the same as their first housing experience in Canada. For the Ottawa GARs their first accommodation is a group home housing 96 people or if there are more GARs than Maison Sophia can house, the overflow will be placed in hotels or motels (Chau, personal communication).

The BVOR get a different welcome, for both the Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship and Ottawa Centre Refugee Action (OCRA) committee members host the refugees in their own homes immediately on arrival (Graham, personal communication; Edwards, personal communication).

The Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship described their situation:

> "We didn't really have any competition trying to find housing. So, it was fairly easy, I'd say. I looked at a bunch of places that I felt were within their price range, something the family would like and could still afford after the year of sponsorship was up, but still met the family's needs. I found something, truthfully, after only looking for 2 weeks, and we found housing in an apartment complex that was really great at the time. Like I said, it was really easy! ...[Now] we're running into the challenge [when preparing for our next groups of refugees] where a lot of otherwise low-income housing has been scooped up by the influx of refugees that came..." (Graham, personal communication)

Members of the Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship are aware that finding housing for their next sponsored family will be more difficult, and there will be far fewer options. The committee is sponsoring more refugees who are expected to arrive in the coming months. Graham anticipates that the organization will rely more heavily on temporary housing while they search for more permanent homes, and this will likely be by enabling refugees to stay for longer periods of time in the home of the committee members (Graham, personal communication). When the Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship's first family

arrived they only stayed with a committee member for two or three nights before moving into their own apartment which had been prepared and furnished in advance and was ready for them (ibid.). The committee was surprised that the BVOR family was so eager to move out into their own apartment (ibid.).

The Ottawa Centre Refugee Action (OCRA) committee took a somewhat different approach to temporary housing and finding housing for the sponsored refugee. They prepare for a "soft landing" for the BVOR refugees, where the refugee spends the few weeks in the home of a committee member so they can be welcomed warmly and have people around to assist in whatever they may need (Edwards, personal communication). The OCRA committee decided prior to bringing any of the sponsored refugees over that the refugees should be actively involved in choosing where they live, OCRA believes that housing is important element to one's settlement and wanted the families to feel empowered and to make this choice (Edwards, personal communication). This strategy would empower refugees to be active participants in their resettlement process and not mere observers (Simich, 2003). In the first week or so committee members would take the sponsored family out to visit different neighborhoods and help them arrange and navigate apartment visits (Edwards, personal communication).

Finding the Right Place: What matters when searching for a unit for a GAR or BVOR refugee?

All interviewees agreed that price and affordability were the most important factors when searching for refugee housing. Many acknowledged that the funding provided by RAP payments was not enough to comfortably pay rent, this was also examined in the previous section comparing average rents to refugee shelter allowances. Other commonly stated important factors are outlined in Box 1 and Box 2, the information in both reflects and is supported by both the literature and interviews. These key findings underscore the long-term importance of proximity to public services such as libraries and community programs (Caidi & Allard, 2005)

The GARs were given little choice in their permanent housing options because CCI needed to place the GARs quickly. It was believed that if they were given many choices that this would delay the process (Chau, personal communication). The BVOR sponsorship group OCRA believed families would be happier living in a neighborhood and unit that they had

chosen for themselves once they had become familiar with the City (Edwards, personal communication). Unlike the other groups, they did not seem to feel as much pressure to settle the families right away. OCRA believed in the value of assisting the refugees to seek out amenities that believed were important to them and furthermore that as a committee that they should not assume that they know what is best or right for the people they sponsored (Edwards, personal communication). Edwards explicitly stated that security was a major concern; the refugees OCRA sponsored did not want to live in a ground floor unit and many requested to live in buildings that have buzzer systems, as they saw these as more secure (Edwards, personal communication). Other interviewees stated that the GARs were uncomfortable in neighborhoods that had many people loitering (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Other factors that were identified as important to consider in finding the right unit for settling a refugee can be found in Box 2.

Box 2 Important Housing Factors for a Refugee Family

- Location: close to schools for children, community/rec centers, shopping centers, mosques, parks, libraries
- Transportation: access to major bus routes
- Privacy: curtains for all windows, locks on all windows and doors, self-contained unit
- Security: real and perceived, in an area without people loitering and units with alarm systems, good locks
- Management: landlords who were patient and understanding that the refugees are newcomers and learning how things are done in Canada, responsive to tenant's concerns, who understand their circumstances and do not insist on credit history nor references which would be impossible for newcomers
- Utilities included: newcomers are not accustomed to the variability of the seasons and incurred very high utility bills during the first winter, including utilities for the first year would help them greatly

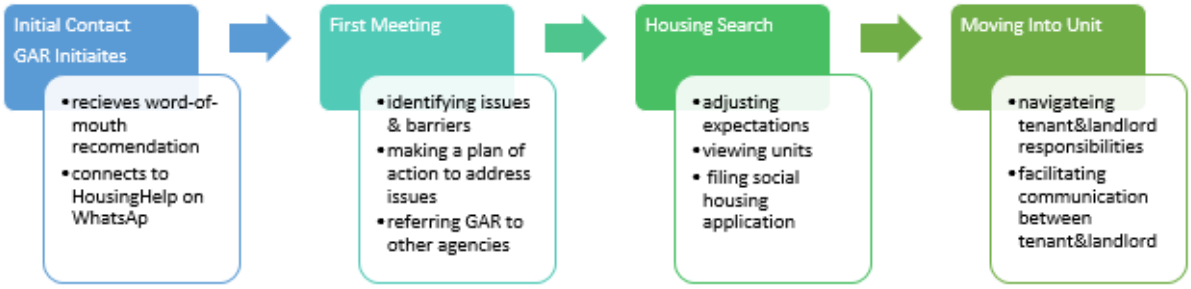
Source: Edwards, Abdul-Hussein, Graham, Abu-Shaaban, Chau, Matar, personal communication

Housing Assistance and the Search for Homes

The process of seeking assistance finding a longer term or permanent home from Housing Help, a non-profit housing advocacy that works with GARs generally starts with a word-of-mouth recommendation for trilingual caseworker and by contacting work number or WhatsApp (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Soon afterwards, an initial meeting is arranged. This first meeting is usually quite lengthy and emotional, as clients express the multiple barriers and struggles they are facing, both housing related and otherwise (ibid.). From there, Abu-Shaaban goes through their list of concerns and separates housing concern from the others, referring them to the right organization for the non-housing issues. In cases where their needs require a social worker, she will introduce the client to the social worker herself and attend the first few meetings to make sure that the client is comfortable, although this is generous and helpful for easing the clients transition, it also cuts into time that should be allocated to other cases (ibid.).

Abu-Shaaban then starts the housing search, which generally takes two to three months and is a process of not only of looking at units, but giving time for the client to adjust their expectations to what is realistic given their budget and income (ibid.). Unit visits are arranged and Abu-Shaaban often accompanies clients due to their limited language abilities and to assist them with applications for social housing (ibid.). Even after the client has moved in, they continue to contact Abu-Shaaban for issues related to the unit. Moving into their first home in Canada is a learning process for the client, the process and culture is very different from what the GARs are accustomed to and therefore Abu-Shaaban must explain to her clients what is the responsibility of the landlord, what repair time lines are acceptable and what tasks and maintenance are the responsibility of the tenant (ibid.). She considers her job done when clients are being proactive in their housing situation and not relying on her for everything (ibid.). (Fig 6)

Figure 5 Housing Search for GAR with Housing Help



Source: Abu-Shaaban, Personal communication

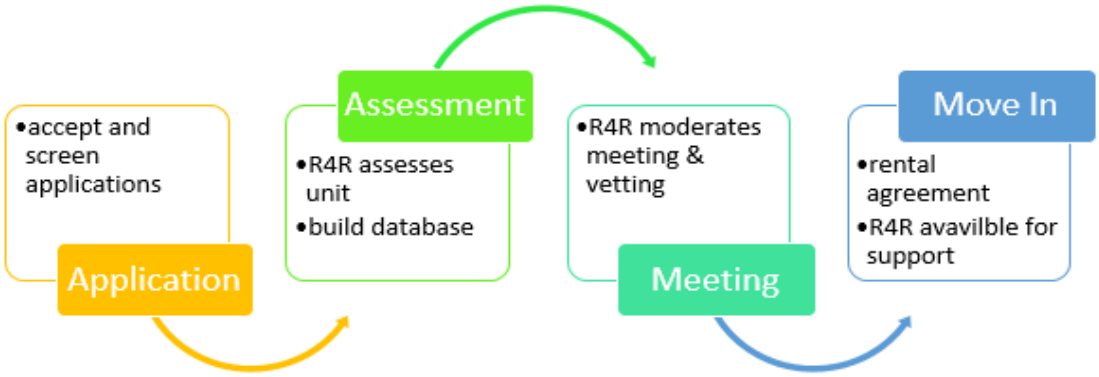
Generally, the housing assistance services operate on a much longer time line than the initial move from the temporary shelter to the permanent housing. Although they help in that process, they also see many people who are unsatisfied with the home that was found for them and the clients often want to play a larger role in choosing their home than they had been permitted to when they were first settled.

What to do with volunteer time and effort

In theory, Roofs4Refugees vision and idea was fairly simple, Roofs4Refugees would receive applications from people wanting to rent out their units (for the remainder of this section they will be called *landlords*) and they would also receive applications from refugees looking for housing (for the remainder of this section they will be called *tenants*).

Roofs4Refugees envisioned process was described by Matar (personal communication) as follows: Roofs4Refugees would receive applications from both tenants and landlords and process these into a database. They would only accept tenants who are already in Canada. After receiving the application, the unit was then screened by one of Roofs4Refugees volunteers in order to assess for whom the unit would be most suitable, documenting details such as furniture, amenities included, etc. If the unit was recommended by the volunteer, Roofs4Refugees would moderate a vetting process in the form of a non-binding meeting between the landlord and the tenant. If the parties agreed that it was a good match, they would draw up a rental agreement. Once the tenants moved in, Roofs4Refugees was available to provide support if needed (Matar, personal communication) (Fig7).

Figure 6 Roofs4Refugees Settlement Process



Source: Matar, personal communication

Roofs4Refugees Matching Process

The idealized matching process and account of how Roof4Refugees operates are presented in Fig7, However, the process did not go so smoothly. According to the original vision, Roofs4Refugees was meant to bypass “red tape” and to streamline and simplify the process of housing refugees by matching them (Matar, personal communication). However, in practice, the process was more complicated than the Roofs4Refugees team had anticipated and did not fit in seamlessly with established routes to settle refugees, such as CCI. The original vision was to reduce some of the barriers that refugees face when trying to find housing by having people offer their units for rent with an awareness of exactly who their tenant would be and having been sensitized and educated about their situation and needs as refugees (Matar, personal communication). When a landlord is offering their unit for rent on Roofs4Refugees, they are in essence actively proclaiming that refugees are welcome in their City and in their home. By association, Roofs4Refugees is an initiative that works to fill vacant units, allows community members to rent out rooms, and opens new opportunities for affordable housing for refugees. Roofs4Refugees shows an attitude of tolerance amongst the landlords, and a desire to help within a community. Benefits to the tenant included helping them settle by having a welcoming environment to live in that is secure and affordable and would allow them to integrate easier with closer interactions with Canadians and community connections (Matar, personal communication).

However, the place and role of Roofs4Refugees along with the process which unfolded on the ground did not match their original intention nor vision. Table 9 summarizes how the process differed in practice.

Table 9 Roofs4Refugees Settlement Process

	Intention	In Practice
Step 1: Application Process	Potential landlords and tenants apply online from Canada	Both applied, but many letters and requests were submitted asking R4R to help them obtain a visa
Step 2: Build a database	To match potential landlords and tenants	Landlord information was given to CCI ***** At this point R4R was basically out of the picture
Step 3: Assess the Unit	R4R volunteers assess the rental unit and recommend or reject it	CCI had their own metrics for assessment and this process became redundant for R4R and bothersome for potential landlords
Step 4: Meeting & Vetting	*R4R moderates meeting & vetting with landlord and tenant	This step was cut in practice because it was deemed too time consuming & logistically complicated
Step 5: Rental Agreement	Rental agreement drawn up for 2 months or longer, preference given to longer	Rental agreements only accepted for 1 year agreements
Step 6: Move In	Tenant moves in and R4R available for continued support	R4R has not had contact with neither tenants nor landlords after passing the landlord info onto CCI

Source: Matar, personal communication

This shows that Roofs4Refugees had much less involvement than had been planned, and that they encountered obstacles preventing the project from coming to fruition in its original vision. Despite their efforts, they never matched any landlords to tenants themselves, although

they believe the information on available units was used by CCI (Matar, personal communication). Due to the scale of the influx, it was complicated to coordinate such large numbers of refugees, and became further complicated by introducing new actors and systems that overlapped pre-established methods that the resettlement groups were using (Matar, personal communication). CCI preferred to place the GAR close to each other for logistical reasons: however this was not possible with Roofs4Refugees recruiting strategy (Matar, personal communication).

Despite straying from the initial vision, Matar remained enthusiastic about Roofs4Refugees and offered suggestions to other volunteer groups starting up: do not get too attached to the model of your organization, it will need continual revision of the model and flexibility to meet the needs and requirements of the specific context and expressed the difficulty of keep. Roofs4Refugees is a good example to show the importance of adapting a project to the context. Although the model was successful in Europe, perhaps needed more fine-tuning to suite the context in Canada, specifically within Ottawa. It highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptability, but also to understand how projects aimed at the same beneficiaries need to harmonize and understand how work together to get the most from their combined skill sets, energy, enthusiasm and time.

Spatial Concentrations of Refugees

Studies have shown that refugees in major Canadian cities such as Vancouver and Toronto are more likely to settle in multi-ethnic neighborhoods where their ethnic group is predominant (Murdie, 2008). The interviewees suggested that this was also the case in Ottawa, which, although smaller than Vancouver and Toronto, has a significant immigrant population (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication; Abdul-Hussein, personal communication; Graham, personal communication). However, the consequences of spatial bias and concentration may go beyond the logistical ease for administering services to the refugee population, and perceived benefits may include a sense of comfort residing in a community with similar background. Spatial bias in resettling refugees may also contribute to ethnic or racial segregation and would have pernicious effects on the housing market and reinforce segregation (Teixeira & Murdie, 1997; Novac *et al*. 2004).

Several of the interviewees saw both the pros and cons of spatial concentration of refugees. As was expressed in the literature, refugees rely on the support of people with similar backgrounds, and cultural and linguistic experience to interpret, understand and navigate the merging of their two worlds (Simich, 2003). Refugees can benefit from having interactions with community members and friends who can relate to or even share their experiences and life prior to immigrating. This support can ease the transition into a new life in Canada and help refugees build social competence (Simich, 2003). Logistically, it was beneficial for the settlement agencies to cluster the GAR so SPOs could deliver their information sessions and support more efficiently (Chau, personal communication; Matar, personal communication). Furthermore, many (although not all) of the GARs expressed a desire to be placed in close proximity to people they had met on their journey, extended family members, or Arabic speakers and this was not completely based on logistics, but in many cases was bolstered by the wishes of the GARs (Chau, personal communication; Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). GARs felt a sense of belonging and perceived safety when they were in a community that they were familiar with (Chau, personal communication).

Capital Towers, a large apartment complex in the outskirts of Ottawa, was being renovated when the influx was announced and they reserved 150 newly renovated units for refugees. They also offered other incentives such as one to three months rent free, or $3,000 gift certificates with which to furnish their new home (Miller, 2015; Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). This was announced about two weeks prior to the first arrivals. Chau acknowledged that the Capital Towers units had been filled by the GARs but did not mention the additional incentives, such as the gift cards or free months rent. Later, he added that they did not have a formal agreement to place the GARs there, but did take advantage of the high number of vacancies at a price the GAR could afford. A newspaper article published after the GARs had been settled dubbed the area “Little Syria” and stated that 400 Syrians living in the complex faced isolation, had little contact with caseworkers, and lacked crucial information such as how to see doctors and enroll children in school (Miller, 2016).

CCI’s preference for spatial proximity was one barrier to operationalizing Roofs4Refugees as it was difficult to limit applicants to areas that would be close to other groups of refugees in order to be close enough to make placing a GAR there logistically compatible with the model of service provision that was in place but into place by CCI . Roofs4Refugees received many applications from around Greater Ottawa, had an online and social media presence, and got news coverage across Canada. However, their approach to

identifying units for housing was not necessarily complimentary to what CCI was looking for in securing housing for the GARs. The spatial concentration that Roofs4Refugees could arrange was not comparable to what could have been done in an apartment complex, such as Capital Towers, and perhaps this is why the relationship between CCI and Roofs4Refugees was not as strong as had initially been anticipated. Roofs4Refugees did not recruit people looking to rent their rooms in this way and, given their mission and organizational model, could not ensure a density of units comparable to what would be possible in a high-rise complex.

High spatial concentrations could also be seen as a barrier to integration, because GARs would be surrounded by people speaking Arabic, which, although comforting and easier for refugees adjusting to life in Canada, could limit their opportunities to speak English and could lead to isolation from the broader community (Abu-Shaaban, Abdul-Hussein, Graham & Chau, personal communication). High concentrations of refugees caused tension at times. For example, there was an apartment complex that housed many Syrian families, and tenants complained about the amount of noise, especially late at night around Ramadan season (Chau, personal communication). The families were not accustomed to Canadian apartment building etiquette, for example observing and respecting quiet hours or what level of supervision and boundaries should be set for children in public spaces such as hallways and elevators (Chau, personal communication).

Setting Boundaries and Cultural Difference

A theme that emerged in interviews with housing assistance and Arabic speakers was boundaries. Three of the participants interviewed were female immigrants and native Arabic speakers, and their experiences and point of views were distinctly different from the other interviewees, perhaps because they interact with refugees in a more direct manner.

Abu-Shaaban is stretched thin as the only trilingual Arabic speaking housing assistance caseworker, “Right now I am fully booked for the next couple months, so the capacity is much bigger than the services that I can provide and the time that I can give to these refugees… right now I see 400 [cases for] housing search, applying for subsidized housing, following up on any major repairs, they may need in their home, seeing if there is a language barrier and they want to communicate with the landlord …” Despite attempts to set clear boundaries and explaining

her work mandate, area of expertise and knowledge, her clients quickly build trust in her and ask her to go far above and beyond what she is trained and able to do (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Abu-Shaaban and Abdul-Hussein believe that GAR clients feel more comfortable and are more honest about their speaking with them. Abu-Shaaban says that her GAR clients come to her with more concerns than she has the ability to help with.

The client's persistence, and perhaps desperation, asking for, and later demanding services becomes problematic when clients insist on receiving services that they feel entitled to, or had been told in the camp they would be receiving (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). In cases where clients are demanding services "… [she] must create a barrier to tell them [what she is qualified and authorized to] help with and refer them elsewhere for additional assistance." The clients were in a safe space and were able to express themselves without the filter of an interpreter (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Once the clients were comfortable enough to express their concerns and the true degree of the problems they were facing, they felt a bond of friendship with their caseworker that extended beyond what was professionally appropriate (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Helping newcomers navigate a new cultural landscape was complicated for Abu-Shaaban as a caseworkers and trying to express cultural differences and negotiable boundaries was difficult to convey and to enforce (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). GAR clients had a hard time understanding Abu-Shaban's approach, which would be considered strange and cold in Arab cultures:

> When I help a client, we get really close in a sense that I've helped them a lot [and they have opened up and told me a lot of personal details about themselves]. They right away think that all of this work has been done because we've created a connection and now [I am] invited over for dinner because now [it's] more than just [work], we're friends. That's the toughest part, "No… I'm not your friend, I'm actually [no more than] your [case] worker" and they feel disappointed but begin to understand the boundaries. (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication)

Housing careers and housing arrangements are different in Syrian culture, and many of the clients have a hard time understanding how things work in Canada, "sometimes their expectations are a bit higher and they're a bit [needier]. Other things [they want fixed] don't really qualify to have fixed by the landlord and [I] have to explain the regulations… it's a lot of learning and adapting [for the refugees]." (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). From the interviewees, it was clear that housing assistance caseworkers go above and beyond helping their clients search for housing. They also become de facto social workers, counselors, and in

some cases emergency food providers (Abu-Shaaban; Caseworker, personal communication). Clients felt relief being honest and vulnerable and expressed a lot of desperation, disappointment and frustration that they had not expressed openly before (Abu-Shaaban; Caseworker, personal communication). This is further complicated by the fact that the GARs are regularly redirected or referred elsewhere, and due to the decentralized nature of the resettlement process and subcontracting of responsibilities, GARs see many different people who assist them, but they are often communicating through interpreters, so it is possible that information and nuances are lost in this process.

Adjusting Expectations: When expectations and reality do not meet

Another common theme in interviews was expectations. The following section gives an overview of some of the expectations that were expressed by GAR and BVOR refugees, as they were presented through the interviewees and speculates where these ideas came from. In some cases, the family had been wealthy before the war, so they expected the same standard of living upon arrival in Canada. In other cases, it was because they had the belief that Canada was a rich country, so by default when they arrived they too would be rich. Some reported that they had been told by workers in the camps that they would have a home waiting for them upon arrival and still for others, the image was conjured from media representations of life in Western countries.

Many refugees were grateful to have arrived in Canada but expressed dissatisfaction for their housing situation and aspired to have more modern units and furnishings for their homes (Abu-Shaaban; Graham, personal communication). Upon starting a search for a new home, some GARs who had already been placed and were dissatisfied became picky and unyielding, not grasping that their means could not fulfill their wishes. This delayed the housing search process because the clients do not understand that they could not afford the standard of living they had hoped for (Abu-Shaaban; Graham, personal communication). There were also cultural differences involved, such as refugees not understanding the negotiating culture in Canada and disappointment when landlords did not agree to cutting the monthly rent by $300 (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication).

Many GARs go to Housing Help with the hopes that the caseworker will be able to find them a better unit than the one they had before or than they had been shown previously. Often,

once they express their expectations, it is clear to Abu-Shaaban that they do not match their budget:

> "I think they were mostly expecting the "dream home", the ones you see on TV I guess, where there's five bedrooms, beautiful basement, beautiful whole backyard, nothing wrong with the unit, brand new, and they didn't get that. They're mostly in older, aged homes and apartments, and sometimes they have issues that they never had to face in their home country. [Bedbugs, cockroaches and rats] are things they had to face [in Canada because homes back home aren't built out of wood… [my clients often ask me] how could Canada be so great and have such problems?" (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication).

This view also expressed in the research out of Winnipeg, where refugees expected high quality housing which was unattainable on their income. This meant that the settlement workers had to try and convince the refugees that the quality of the unit was not as bad as it appeared and explain that conditions improve over time, while simultaneously trying to strike a balance between what is acceptable and livable in a dignified way and what might be considered humiliating for the refugee (Silvius, et al., 2015).

Refugees expressed frustration to the Arabic speaking caseworkers and had difficulties understanding that the standard of living they were expecting was first of all not universal across Canada, second did not match what they saw on TV, and third were unclear of about how to solve these issues or where to turn for help. They were unaware of issues like bedbugs and a caseworker expressed that a number of her clients got bedbugs from furniture they had salvaged from the streets, not knowing about the threat of bedbugs and ended up with severe infestations (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Caseworkers expressed in various interviews that refugees had very high expectations and had been misinformed or misunderstood what their situation would be upon arrival:

> "[GARs] come here clueless. They're expecting us to do everything. I don't know who gives them information before they come. A lot of people I've heard back from [say] before coming they [were] told 'Everything is ready for you'. And then they [are upset] when they [are] set up in shelters or hotels for months. [They're] tired. They are promised something before they come and when they get here, the size [and needs of the families] are different [than what the housing available here can comfortably hold]. We don't know [much information about the family's housing needs or preferences] prior to their [arrival]... it's difficult. So they come here with expectations that as soon as they come to the airport that the house is ready, everything is ready for them and that is not the case. Reality is different." (Abdul-Hussein, personal communication).

These unrealistic expectations can cause stress, dissatisfaction and confusion, and in exceptional cases, risk of homelessness for the refugees, in turn leading to more work for the caseworkers. This also delays the housing search process. Abu-Shaaban has clients who have extended housing searches over a seven month period before they are willing to accept that they simply cannot afford what they are looking for, and are willing to lower their expectations (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). She also relayed some of the desperate measures people have tried in order to get access to better housing, which included going into a shelter based on inaccurate information that they would be given a home if they went there (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication).

Unrealistic expectations were addressed by caseworkers with GAR as well as BVOR settlement committees. The family sponsored by the Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship had been well-off prior to the war, and Graham explains their reaction to the apartment that the committee members found, cosigned and furnished for them:

> "When they first saw their apartment, they were overjoyed! They were crying happy tears and felt like they finally had somewhere safe to live. They were overjoyed and overwhelmed with the place they had but the honeymoon period wore off quickly. Before the war started and they ended up in a refugee camp, they had been quite well off. They were used to a certain type of life… [they] told me stories about how [they had lived in] a really big house with cleaning ladies and a lot of expensive, nice furniture. The apartment we set up for them was nothing like that… they really aspire to get back to where they were." (Graham, personal communication).

Unrealistic expectations were also mentioned in the literature scan, for instance in the case of GARs in Winnipeg, where a manager of settlement services says:

"People come from overseas with the perception that they have been selected because they are special in some way; it is a lottery. So when you win that lottery, you are special: 'I thought I won the lottery, and all of a sudden the housing picture is not what I could get with my lottery ticket. It was not at all what I expected. This was not the Canada I expected.' "

(Carlos Vialard, MIIC Manager of Settlement Services; quoted in Silvius *et al*, 2015)

Box 3 summarizes some of the initial housing expectations as identified by people working to settle refugees in Ottawa. This summary is based on what the interviewees learned in interactions with their refugee clients. It may not reflect the expectations of all GAR nor BVOR refugees in Ottawa.

Box 3 Refugees' Initial Housing Expectations

- False hope from the camps: refugees claimed they had been told that upon arrival that they would have a furnished home waiting for them
- False expectations based on media representation: expected a dream home like they had seen on TV
- Inaccurate timelines: refugees expected a quick process and to find a unit within a week
- Inadequate funding: unrealistic shelter allowances given to GARs
- Unrealistic Expectations: homes within budget were unappealing to the refugees, generally smaller and older units than they expected in Canada
- Unrealistic Expectations: refugees thought that if they been wealthy in their country that they would maintain a high standard of living in Ottawa, this was not possible on refugee allowances

Source: Abu-Shaaban, Abdul Hussein, Caseworker & Graham, Personal communication

Agreements and Partnerships : Formal and Informal

During the interviews, no respondents initially acknowledged the existence of agreements nor special arrangements that were in place to secure housing during the influx of Syrian refugees. However, upon analyzing the interviews it became clear that, in fact, many informal arrangements, negotiations and ad hoc solutions had been made. At first, they all stated that the overall strategies for finding a home were basic; caseworkers or committee members would go about the normal methods including walking around neighborhoods, and searching online through sites such as Kijiji and Craigslist to see available units, price ranges and pictures. This process also included training people to identify what their standards were and what would pass for a suitable unit for rent (Caseworker, Abu-Shaaban, Edwards & Graham, personal communication). The housing assistance organizations have an employee who is responsible for maintaining a list which they share, and landlords they have built history will call to notify them when units are available (Case worker, personal communication).

Over time, the SPOs built relationships and history, and extended networks with other organizations and property management companies within the city. It was common for SPOs to call them and ask if they had vacant units. Maintaining good relationships and connections was

key to finding housing for refugees (Chau, Abu-Shaaban, & Caseworker, personal communication). One of these partnerships was between CCI and the housing assistance organizations who maintained lists of available units, but there were instances where private market landlords were more lenient, for example not taking first and last month deposits upon lease signing, offering from one to three months free or in forms like a $30-50 monthly reduction (Abdul-Hussein & Abu-Shaaban, personal communication).

Another arrangement, which was planned but did not fully come to fruition was with CCI and Roofs4Refugees, as is explained in more detail earlier in this chapter. Roofs4Refugees still accepts applications from both landlords and tenants, and are still in contact with CCI, but their relationship has changed. Now Roofs4Refugees keeps a list of landlords available units, and they are occasionally called upon by CCI to help find a unit. At this point, they go through their database and see if anything matches. If there is a match, the information is given to CCI and they do the rest of the work (Matar, personal communication).

Perks of a Personal Network: Relationships Between Organizations and Refugees

As has been previously described, the ratio of people working in resettlement to the number of people being resettled is very different when comparing GAR and BVOR resettlement relationships. The BVOR has more direct contact and continuous, longer term, committed relationships with the refugees being settled. There are fewer actors and agencies involved in settling the BVOR, and the ratio of sponsors and committee members to the refugees is dramatically different. At Maison Sophia Reception House, there would be 96 GAR at maximum capacity, and it is almost always at capacity, if not over capacity and housing GARs at hotels with a small team of people helping them with housing (Chau, personal communication). In the example of Housing Help, when interviewed in April 2017, Abu-Shaaban had 400 active cases she was managing at once (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Whereas in the BVOR group, there was a family of five, whose needs were met directly, and funded by, a committee of volunteers and funders, such as the Ottawa South Committee for Refugee Sponsorship. This committee has approximately 30 dedicated members, with additional members in the hundreds, who are then split into groups of 2 or 4 to take care of clearly defined tasks. “It was nice because we were able to focus and do a really good job on one thing instead of being spread too thin and just trying to manage everything at once.”

(Graham, personal communication). The ratios for OCRA were similar, but subdivided further. They had a committee of five to eight people responsible for each group being settled and within that group, each member has clearly defined responsibilities. The sponsored refugee group ranged in size from a single person to a family of 5 (Edwards, personal communication).

The close and personal relationship and nature of the committee members and the refugee means that they have more time and funding available than the GARs, as well as more flexibility, discretion, and control of how funds were allocated. If the committee found the funding was too modest, they had the power and resources to provide more (Edwards, personal communication; Graham, personal communication).

From the interviews, it was clear that the BVOR had access to a wide array of skills and opportunities from the sponsorship committee, which means that they had access to attention, advocates, and allies and were tapped into a personal support network that were simply not possible for the GARs (Edwards, personal communication; Graham, personal communication). Private sponsor groups worked closely within their groups, and knew of their skill sets, which included professional skills and soft skills that were called on throughout the welcoming process. The sponsorship committees had extensive networks, built over years, like the GARs, but it was advantageous to be working with a smaller number of BVOR refugees because they had connections, and were tapped into a network where they could “call in favors” that would not have been accessible to GAR, such as pro-bono legal aid (Edwards &Graham, personal communication).

In both of the BVOR sponsorship groups interviewed, the group had co-signed leases for their sponsored refugees (Graham, personal communication; Edwards, personal communication). Surely, this is not an opportunity that was available to GARs. Edwards was hesitant to go ahead with this arrangement, although in the end they did, because of her knowledge of low-income housing issues. She knew that the landlord and property managers’ demands for a guarantor or cosigner were discriminatory practice (Edwards, personal communication). The reason this was discriminatory was due to the fact that co-signers were not required of all tenants, only of the refugees. Edwards was vocal in her committee that she did not stand behind the cosigning, despite the willingness of the organization’s SHA partner, the United Church, to do so (Edwards, personal communication). Cosigning was, of course, meant to help the refugee gain access to the home they desired, but Edwards had a moral issue with this and expressed dissatisfaction that they had not fought it. This was also a way to set a precedent that landlords should respect the rights of the tenant; failure to do so was not only

discriminatory but an illegal action toward vulnerable tenants. The BVOR had the benefit of being able to have a guarantor or a co-signer, but this could be seen as legitimizing a discriminatory practice that would harm those not fortunate enough to have a personally dedicated support system. There are reasons for concern about GARs who are new and do not have this type of support, do not have a credit history in Canada and lack language abilities and knowledge to advocate for themselves. Since they are not always familiar with their rights and do not yet know how to navigate available resources, the GARs can be considered particularly vulnerable. Access to a cosigner was a benefit that cannot be understated and surely made it possible for the refugees to have more independence and less vulnerability. Graham and her housing committee partner co-signed for the first year of the lease. At the time of renewal, the landlord approved having their names taken off the lease because they had no issues with the family in their first year and felt that they were trustworthy (Graham, personal communication).

Access to Non-Profit Housing Without a Wait?

Personal connections and networks also came into play in helping to find units for the refugees that OCRA sponsored. One clear example of that was an agreement made with Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation (CCOC). CCOC is the largest private, non-profit housing corporation in Ottawa, and they own and manage approximately 1,600 units of affordable housing in Centretown (CCOC, 2016). Edwards, OCRAs permanent housing resources lead, runs a private planning consulting firm and has worked in affordable housing for over 30 years. Hence she is very knowledgeable about the realities of affordable housing and has access to extensive personal and professional network. She reached out to her professional network and arranged a presentation for CCOC tenant committee about the families that OCRA was bringing to Ottawa and asked them if they would be interested in a partnership (Edwards, personal communication). This was successful, because CCOC has flexibility in their federal program portfolio and are not under an operating agreement, so they were able to offer five units for OCRA families (Edwards, personal communication). The agreement went further to say that after the first year of occupancy, if the families could not afford the market rent, then CCOC would provide an internal subsidy so that they could have secure tenure (Edwards, Personal communication).

Three families took advantage of this offer, but some were not interested because all of the CCOC properties are located in Centretown which is not close to the mosque and do not have a sizable Arabic speaking community (Edwards, personal communication). Edwards believes that access to the CCOC units would make a significant difference for both large families and single individuals. One example is that OCRA was able to secure a bachelor apartment with CCOC for one of the BVOR OCRA sponsors that they would not have had access to nor been able to afford without this agreement (Edwards, personal communication).

Dedicated Support After Month 13

When BVOR sponsorship committees were asked about month 13, they mentioned relationships extending what was contractually required in their sponsorship agreement (Edwards, personal communication). Edwards said OCRA could not and would not drop their sponsors at month 13 and if the sponsored refugee required additional support that they would provide it (Edwards, personal communication). The BVOR groups have more control over how they delegate funds for the refugees. Both participants said that the RAP funds were insufficient for the refugees that they were sponsoring, so they topped up the funds, making them more feasible and realistic. There were times when this meant up to $700 more than had been identified by RAP and does not include the services provided by their extended networks (Edwards, personal communication; Graham, personal communication).

OCRA also has plans in the works for OCRA 2.0 with the objective of bringing family members to be reunited with their loved ones who are in precarious situations, such as in their country of origin stuck amidst a war or in a refugee camp (Edwards, personal communication). The family members would be brought over as private sponsors so that family members could reunite. This would also empower the first set of refugees to share the knowledge that they have gained to help their families (Edwards, personal communication). This could affect their housing search, as Edwards said that when they had a single come with extended family in Ottawa, that they would often go to live with the family member, ultimately costing less for housing (Edwards, personal communication). Presumably, a similar situation could be worked out, at least in the short term when OCRA 2.0 is debuted, so that the PSRs could take their time getting familiar with the city and have a supportive, soft landing with their family and the committee members and volunteers of OCRA. Needless to say, this process is not as straightforward for the GARs

and many come to Canada accepting the heartbreaking reality that they may never reunite with their family members who remained in Syria or camps elsewhere.

Through the interviews with BVOR sponsorship groups, it was clear that due to their experience, skill sets and personal connections they, are able to gain access to deals, agreements and arrangements with regards to housing that are not possible for GAR. Furthermore, it is possible that some of these arrangements are done as personal favors to committee members but could not be replicated on a larger scale, such as the scale to suit the GAR population. This sample of people interviewed, which is not meant to generalize to the entire resettlement sector, shows that there was greater access for BVOR refugees to housing options, benefits and, alternatives than there was for GAR. This is not a representation of all BVOR group. There is potential for further research on this topic as well as longitudinal studies seeing how both fared and whether this has any impact on their housing trajectory.

Synthesis

This chapter presented the findings from the seven interviews with service providers and showed a great capacity for just-in-time planning, flexibility and an ability to be nimble, creative and adaptive in their work. The interviews showed the importance of temporary shelter to help the refugees settle. But differences emerged in how this was administered. For the GARs, temporary shelter was in a large facility with tightly scheduled activities and many other GARs going through the same experience. The BVORs had a more personalized temporary shelter experience where they were welcomed into the private homes of their sponsors with their families. The act of searching for a home was different among the GARs and BVORs and even within BVOR groups. The service providers to GARs had far more people to process than those dealing with BVORs and they had less human resources, flexibility of financial resources, staff, and volunteers to do the work. This means they had higher levels of stress and needed to act much faster because they did not have resources in excess, nor space in the temporary shelter. Price and affordability were the main criteria for unit suitability, although others were identified, as identified in Box 2. The housing search was mainly done in conventional ways including doing neighborhood walks to identify available units, consulting online classified ads as well as relying on established relationships with landlords and property managers. The chapter also explores volunteer initiatives and some issues that people working in the SPOs encountered for

example refugees being hesitant to settle in older homes or mismatched expectations along with how to manage so the homes that have been found are affordable for the refugees.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

In this work, I studied the settlement of convention-approved and government-sponsored Syrian refugees who arrived in Ottawa from December 2015 through March 2016. Interviews with seven individuals in Ottawa helped to understand how service providing organizations (SPOs), sponsors, volunteers and the public worked together to find housing for the Syrian refugees. These interviews were used together with contextual background information on refugee resettlement in Canada and a description of the main actors in refugee housing in Ottawa. When comparing and analyzing the interview findings, many special arrangements, for example landlords waiving credit checks or providing free months' rent, and ad-hoc agreements, for example placing high numbers of refugees in an apartment complex in exchange for a discount on monthly rent, became apparent that were crucial to securing adequate housing for refugees. As needs, political climate, the housing market, funding for resettlement services, and priorities change it is possible that the tactics and agreements made in this case might not be replicable in the future

Canada's response to incoming refugees has been overwhelmingly positive. Countless Canadians have contributed their time, energy and money to assist in the resettlement of the Syrian refugees. This strengthens Canada's reputation as a country that welcomes large numbers of refugees. While there is a longstanding and well developed focus in the literature on the resettlement of refugees, specifically thanks to an active and dedicated group of researchers who focus on housing, there is little academic research that looks at the strategies used by resettlement groups. This project took steps toward addressing this gap by exploring the points of view and experiences of SPO staff, sponsors and volunteers who work to settle the refugees. It examined the urban and institutional context in which they work, the processes they follow, who they partnered with, and what strategies and arrangements they make.

All the interviewees rely on existing networks. The SPOs working to find housing with GARs rely on pre-established relationships with landlords and property managers. The BVOR sponsorship groups rely on connections they had made with organizations such as CCOC. They also used their ability to co-sign leases, allocate extra funds, secure pro bono legal advice and call in favors amongst their professional and personal networks in order to find housing for the refugees. Access to a network was therefore crucial to finding housing. However, specific experiences varied depending on the status of the refugees and on their relationship to the service provider. BVOR refugees seem to have access to more personalized services and receive more personalized attention from their sponsorship groups, and to benefit from networks

and opportunities that are not possible for GARs to access. BVOR sponsorship groups are able to provide higher levels of assistance because they have a greater capacity to raise funds and greater discretion over how funds are allocated. In addition, they have more volunteers and committee members available to help when needed; i.e., they have a larger pool of people to draw from than the SPOs.

Private sponsorship groups have commitments that they must fulfill as per the agreement made when they signed up to be sponsors. They have been known to go 'above and beyond' what is contractually required—something mentioned in several interviews, but highly variable in ways specific to the different groups. Most participants were quick to say that they did nothing out of the ordinary, perhaps due to the wording of the question or possibly because they generally believed this statement. The interviewees all spoke of special circumstances (which most observers would see as exceptional or out of the ordinary) that made a significant difference in the process of securing the resettlement of refugees. These include incentives such as gift cards when renting from particular landlords, rent reductions, access to special co-signers and guarantors and *pro-bono* legal work among others.

Discussion and Recommendations

The resettlement of Syrian refugees who arrived in Ottawa from December 2015 through March 2016 has thus far been considered highly successful. The preceding chapters discussed some of the agreements, ad-hoc arrangements and partnerships that were crucial in settling high numbers of refugees. The findings indicate that the cost of living is a major source of concern for both the refugees and the people guiding their search for housing.

The experiences of the people working in refugee resettlement depend on their role and the organization for which they work. The people working with GARs tend to be managing a high volume of cases and tend to be specialized in a single field, such as housing. This means that refugees need to be referred elsewhere for additional services and support beyond what the case worker is qualified to do, which can be frustrating for the GARs. The BVOR committees have far fewer cases to work on at a time, but are responsible for all tasks associated with resettlement. The networks of the BVORs are made up of smaller groups of people who work closely with each other and who develop what appears to be more personal relationship with the refugees to be settled. The close relationship with refugees and the vested interest in the refugees lead to more opportunities as the BVOR sponsorship groups are able to combine their

networks to arrange for accommodations, resources, and services that would not be possible on a wider scale, or for GARs. Although the resettlement and securing of housing for the Syrian refugees in Ottawa has been successful, it was not without significant challenges at several scales.

How can access to affordable housing be improved?

Affordable housing is an issue that affects a much larger part of the population than the relatively small proportion of refugees. Therefore, a clear commitment should be made to investing in more social and affordable housing for all low-income and fixed-income earners. The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has outlined major steps that should be taken to move toward the goals, stated in the *Updated Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy* (2016) of fostering social inclusion and providing housing in which everyone can feel safe, comfortable and secure to live their lives, settle families, plant roots and participate actively in their communities. The lack of affordable housing and resulting housing need is an issue that affects all low-income and fixed-income individuals, putting them into stressful and precarious situations. That being said, there is a great deal of finger-pointing with respect to who is responsible for the provision of affordable housing. The federal government has not invested in the construction of social housing since the 1990s; this has led to waitlists surpassing 10,000 people and wait times estimated at up to 10 years in some cities, including Ottawa. In Ottawa, making special exceptions or giving higher priority to refugees to access social housing would not be warranted or appropriate. Such preference, coming in addition to the allowances paid by the federal government, may generate general antipathy toward refugees, causing uneasiness and even tension among stakeholders striving for common goals (UNHCR, 2002).

The province's *Updated Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy* also suggests creating more opportunities for the provision of affordable housing in the private sector, for example by introducing inclusionary housing regulations in new construction. In late 2016, the Ontario provincial government passed Bill 7 of the *Promoting Affordable Housing Act*, requiring development proposals to include affordable units and to guarantee an affordable price for a set period of time to ensure security of tenure for the tenants in the affordable units. At the time of writing, the City of Ottawa had not yet implemented inclusionary zoning regulations. Ontario's *Updated Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy* also suggests possibilities for private homeowners to build secondary units in basements, accessory structures, retrofitted garages and coach suites which would serve the dual benefit of allowing the homeowner to generate

rental income and of enlarging the market for affordable units. The provincial guidelines suggest that secondary suites should be encouraged to offer new opportunities for affordable housing in dwellings that are being renovated and retrofitted. The City of Ottawa has had zoning by-laws in place for over ten years allowing the construction of secondary units, but it has generated little supply of new housing. A CMHC study showed that there was not enough public education about the process of obtaining the correct permits to build secondary units legally and that homeowners were not aware of tax incentives or legal processes (CMHC, 2017). This gap has been acknowledged by the City of Ottawa planners, and the City has expressed a renewed commitment to public education about secondary units. Homeowners should be encouraged to invest in legal secondary units and to spread awareness that secondary units benefit society at large and do not necessarily change the streetscape nor the overall character of neighborhoods. Furthermore, secondary units encourage more diversity in an area by making units available to people of a different incomes and ages and makes for a more efficient use of resources (ibid.). A public education strategy should therefore be activated to encourage homeowners to build secondary suites, raise awareness of the positive impacts on a community, and curb potential NIMBYism.

Initiatives to promote affordable housing construction would improve access for all in Ottawa or in Ontario and would reduce waitlists. None of these initiatives would be refugee-specific, but they would have benefits for refugees nonetheless. The government assisted refugees, in particular, rely on federal government refugee allowances in order to survive, and have fixed incomes while needing to start a new home from scratch, overcome trauma, adapt to a new cultural landscape, learn a new language and navigate a new set of social norms. This is difficult, to say the least, and is exacerbated by worrying constantly about money. Housing is just one of many sources of stress for low-income and fixed-income individuals and refugees.

Resettlement expectations ad pre-arrival orientations

Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funds a variety of pre-arrival resources offered in countries around the world, including online resources, in order to ease the adjustment into life in Canada. Orientations, per-arrival workshops, and consultations are supposed to be available to refugees, including both GAR and BVOR, and are provided in or around the refugee camps through the Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) program. COA operates 20 permanent training sites overseas, including permanent locations where Syrian refugees are likely to be, including Amman, Jordan; Istanbul, Turkey; and Beirut, Lebanon, as

well as temporary mobile units at the Manssa border between Syria and Jordan (COA, 2016). The COA generally hosts three-day orientation workshops in the refugee camps (ibid.). As the process of doing paperwork in the Canadian Visa Office Abroad (CVOA) is usually lengthy, the COA orientations are usually conducted while paperwork is being processed. However, pre-arrival orientations were not conducted in this particular influx of refugees due to the condensed time period and speed at which refugees were being brought over to meet the federal government's target (Rose & Charrette, 2017). Skipping the pre-arrival orientations was a choice made to save time that was scarce under the emergency circumstances; however, this decision may have been a source of confusion and inaccurate expectations for this cohort of refugees and also likely created more work for the SPOs and caseworkers.

An important issue that arose in the interviews was that many refugees have unrealistic expectations about their living situation upon arrival in Canada (Graham, personal communication; Abu-Shaaban, personal communication; Abdul-Hussein, personal communication). For this reason, one of the recommendations put forward here is to have accessible pre-arrival orientations for *all* refugees and, to the extent possible, to ensure that they are not overlooked or bypassed. Since refugees know which city they have been assigned to in advance, it would be fitting to provide city-specific information that is provided by the RAP SPO in that city. For example, in the case of Ottawa, there would be information and materials specifically designed by the Catholic Centre for Immigrants (CCI) and partners for all GARs destined for Ottawa. CCI and the Canadian government have a wide range of pre-arrival online resources, but these may not be accessible to all GARs, many of whom lack formal education and have higher-than-average rates of illiteracy; moreover, they may not have reliable access to the internet or computers.

Suggestions for Service Delivery: A Place for Interpreters and Volunteers

A recurring concern among representatives of housing assistance organizations and NGOs is that their resources are being stretched too thin, with too many clients to manage at once (Caseworker, personal communication; Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). One study participant noted that because the organization's funding had been cut, a reduction in its already small team was made necessary (Caseworker, personal communication). In this case, management was concerned with employee well-being and feared the possibility that staff members might get burnt out and quit because they were taking on additional cases on top of their already heavy work loads (Caseworker, personal communication). When caseworkers are

juggling 400 on-going cases and receiving calls at all hours of the day and clients are demanding immediate attention and calling up to 30 times a day, it is difficult for the caseworkers to allocate their time and attention equally amongst their clients (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication & Caseworker, personal communication). Caseworkers do not have enough time to see all of their clients as regularly as either party would like. Part of this was because the housing caseworkers became de-facto counselors and sounding boards for refugees; taking the time to listen to various concerns and complaints cut into time that they ideally would spend on other cases (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication; Caseworker, personal communication).Caseworkers offered suggestions that could help ease the workload, including increasing the number of Arabic-speaking caseworkers for the refugees, if possible. Some participants suggested having interpreters who could be assigned to particular organizations that need them, or who could deal with a particular topic, instead of having intermittent and often changing interpreters for a given household. The interpreters would thus work exclusively in one field so that they could build a working knowledge of the topic and perhaps help in a greater capacity, becoming versed and experienced in the subject and able to help the SPOs with basic issues, without needing the caseworker (Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). Some changes have been made, including hiring one trilingual caseworker. However, given the scale of the issue, one additional employee is not sufficient, and funding for additional trilingual staff should be provided by the State.

Although the housing assistance organizations have all had volunteers at some point, they expressed difficulty in using and retaining volunteers, citing a lack of staff resources and capacity to train and coordinate volunteers on top of their already busy schedules, although they do rely on the work of student placements and internships (Caseworker, personal communication; Abu-Shaaban, personal communication). The fact that they can benefit from the work of interns and student placements shows that they are able to delegate tasks to short-term workers, although they may not have the financial means to hire more paid employees. For this reason, the role of volunteers within their organization should be re-evaluated. Perhaps a combined effort to recruit, train and organize volunteers with other volunteer organizations would be of benefit to the housing search organizations.

Concluding Comments

This research has examined how groups of RAPs, SPOs, volunteers and sponsors managed to make networks and agreements in order to secure many units of affordable housing for Syrian refugees in a relatively short period of time. This research is relevant and timely and as the dust settles, it can perhaps contribute to longitudinal studies on the housing trajectory of a group of Syrian refugees. Strengths of this study include its focus on a single city and its development of a cross-section of processes by which housing was found for Syrian refugees during and after the influx. The research documented the perspectives of seven individuals working in distinct positions and who were involved at different points in the settlement process. It is one of few research projects that focuses on people working in refugee resettlement in Canada, and of the strategies they use in their work. The focus on actions taken, partnerships forged, networks extended and agreements made is not one that has been widely shared but it helps to complement other studies on the topic.

This study has several limitations. It examined the resettlement of a particular group of refugees at a specific time, and it does not represent practices across Canada. It therefore cannot be generalized to the experiences of all refugees, which vary greatly over time, in circumstances in their home countries, in the capacity of the welcoming organizations at the time of entry, and in the socio-political climate in Canada, from coast to coast. This research does not address the experience of asylum claimants, nor of GARs from countries other than Syria. The organizations examined do not have specific mandates regarding Syrian refugees and assist in refugee resettlement in general; however, the influx of Syrian refugees has been their primary concern in the last two years. Another group of refugees who are coming in notable numbers at present are from Burundi and a few participants, including OCRA and CCI, mentioned working to help them resettle as well. The study was limited by difficulties in making contact with other relevant actors in the resettlement of refugees in Ottawa and, therefore, to interview people from additional volunteer groups and not-for-profit community organizations. Future research could involve the RAP SPO, another SPO in Ottawa, two housing groups that would have seen GARs after they had moved into their accommodations, two private sponsorship groups and a group that held information sessions for the sponsorship groups, and a volunteer initiative. It would be useful to speak with at least one more volunteer initiative and to a group that has privately sponsored refugees to see if their experience was any different from those dealing with BVORs.

Due to the small number of interviews, it is unwise to extrapolate the results of this study to describe similar situations across Canada. Rather, the research provides a place-specific snapshot, from seven different perspectives, of what happened in Ottawa when the government assisted refugees came from December 2015 through March 2016. Findings from similar research will probably vary in other contexts across Canada. For example, not all private sponsorship groups may be willing to co-sign for their sponsored families, and not all private sponsors may have networks that would give them access to specialized professional knowledge. It is also possible that not all sponsorship groups would be willing to supplement the funding beyond the minimum required and it should not be assumed that all groups are willing to extend their support beyond the agreed-to duration of a year. Future lines of inquiry might also assess whether strategies used in Ottawa are also being used in other cities that settled large numbers of refugees and how the specific context, the unique networks and human resources available and the particular individuals involved play a role in the choice and implementation of strategies.

Moreover, this research has not evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies from the recipients' point of view; further longitudinal research would be required to determine rates of satisfaction in the long term and would allow more time for reflection on effectiveness. As identified in the literature (Teixeira, 2009), it would also be useful to see what the arrangements were that the refugees themselves made in order to make housing affordable so that they can cope with the challenges of starting life in a new country. Such arrangements might include sharing accommodations with friends or relatives from the same ethnic background, choosing to live in an overcrowded unit in order to save money, subletting parts of a residence such as a basement, attic, garage or second suite, or couch surfing in times of insecurity. If these arrangements were better understood, they could perhaps be considered and worked into the strategies that the SPOs use, with regard to what may be appropriate given the characteristics and background of the GARs. More generally, further research is needed in order to understand the logistical complexities of the settlement process.

SPOs, housing assistance organizations and volunteers are helping Syrian refugees make a new life in Canada. In their efforts, people in the settlement sector have shown a great capacity for organizing, spreading information and in-situ decision making. Participants in this study showed that they approached their work with patience, generosity, flexibility, and tireless effort. The experiences they shared touched on trials and tribulations, struggles and triumphs. They spoke of welcoming, integrating, learning and understanding, and they displayed compassion, empathy, vulnerability and resilience. Their participation in this research

furthermore demonstrates the importance of self-reflection in practice, of taking the time to reflect on what has been done in order to build on the tremendous personal and collective capacity of the individuals, groups and networks working in refugee resettlement.

When the State responds to a humanitarian crisis, it calls upon civil society and volunteers to help. In this case, civil society, including the service providing organizations and volunteers and countless extended networks, responded to find solutions to house large numbers of refugees in decent housing to rebuild their lives in Canada. These networks extended beyond what was obvious on the surface and their flexibility along with their relationships made their effort a success in helping refugees take their first steps in their new lives in Canada.

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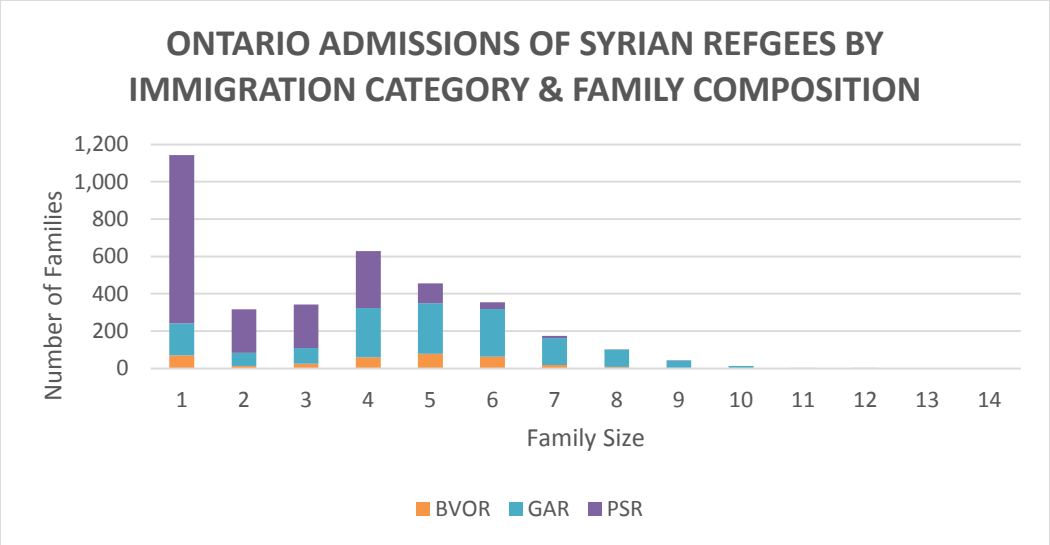
Appendix A: Ontario Refugee Admissions November 2015 – July 2016

Ontario - Admissions of Syrian Refugees* by Immigration Category and Family Composition, November 4, 2015 - July 31, 2016**

Family Size	Blended Visa Office-Referred refugees		Government-assisted refugees		Privately sponsored refugees		Total	
	Family Count	Total Person Count	Family Count	Total Person Count	Family Count	Total Person Count	Family Count	Total Person Count
1	70	70	172	172	900	900	1,142	1,142
2	13	26	70	140	233	466	316	632
3	26	78	84	252	232	696	342	1,026
4	59	236	264	1,056	306	1,224	629	2,516
5	78	390	272	1,360	105	525	455	2,275
6	63	378	256	1,536	36	216	355	2,130
7	19	133	143	1,001	12	84	174	1,218
8	9	72	92	736	1	8	102	816
9	4	36	38	342	1	9	43	387
10	4	40	10	100			14	140
11	2	22	1	11			3	33
12			3	36			3	36
13	1	13					1	13
14	1	14					1	14
Total	**349**	**1,508**	**1,405**	**6,742**	**1,826**	**4,128**	**3,580**	**12,378**

* Data includes persons processed under Canada's Syrian refugee resettlement commitment between November 4th, 2015 and July 31st, 2016.
** Data for 2015-2016 are preliminary estimates and are subject to change.

Source: IRCC, August 2016 Data



Source: IRCC August 2016 Data

Appendix B : Sample Interview Questions

[This is a general template for interviews; specific subjects will also have questions asked of them that pertain to their specific area of responsibilities.]

Sample Interview Questions for

People working in Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) and Volunteer Organizations

Main Research Question

What are the SPOs service providing organizations doing to secure housing for Syrian refugee immigrants?

What strategies do they use to find and secure housing? How do they interact with other stakeholders? What challenges do they face and how do they try to overcome them?

1. What is your mandate?
2. How do you define success in fulfilling this mandate?
3. How successful do you think you have been at fulfilling your mandate?
4. Who are your partners in fulfilling your mandate?
5. To what degree do you rely on volunteers in order to find housing for refugees?
6. How do you interact with these partners?
7. Does social housing play a role in addressing the problem of finding housing for refugees?
8. How do you ensure all needed resources that are within the mandate of your organization are available to refugees?
9. How do you as a service provider learn about your clients needs in terms of housing?
10. When looking at the units that have been secured, do they match the factors that have been identified as crucial for refugees?
11. What are challenges /barriers in finding and securing housing units for refugees?
12. What positive factors/resources/assets can you identify that have helped you search for housing?
13. Ideally (in your opinion) what makes for a good housing unit for refugees you've worked with in Ottawa? (this can be as simple as access to transport, safety, neighborhood ambiance, etc)
14. How do the housing units you've been able to secure align with these ideals?
15. What has been your best strategies in securing housing that you would recommend to other SPOs?
16. What do you find difficult in your work? (personally, or as an organization or both)
17. What do you find must uplifting or positive about your work?
18. Should any further questions arise, may I contact you via e-mail or phone to follow up?