In our pursuit of justice for refugeeed people, our expertise is sought locally and globally.

In April, we initiated a men’s group in partnership with Saint Columba House, bringing men together from our sponsorship and detention programs.

Our Sponsorship Program Coordinator recalls her participation at a UN resettlement conference in Geneva.

In November, we proudly hosted UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi (on the left) with other local community organizations.
Our phones ring all day long. People like Ahmed* want to know how to sponsor family members who are living in a refugee situation. People like Sofia*, held in detention, need a referral to a lawyer. Refugee claimants who are new to Montreal, like Marie-Pierre*, need to know where to start to get the support they deserve. In all these situations, people question where to get the information they need. For people too numerous to count, the answer is: Action Réfugiés Montréal.

Our goal is to provide support to refugee people by providing information locally; we accompany refugee claimants, accepted refugees, and sponsored refugees from many countries. In recognition of our on-the-ground experience, we were selected to share our expertise at a UN conference in Geneva.

Early in 2017, the Quebec government suspended the submission of new refugee sponsorship files. We were committed to present as many files as possible before the cut-off date and submitted the equivalent of 4 months of work in 2 weeks! Later, we provided the government with specific recommendations for the improvement of the program and strongly advocated for re-opening. While we regret the suspension, we are pleased that 90 sponsored people did arrive during the year.

Remaining true to our core programs, we continued to visit people in detention twice a week to ensure they receive the information and support they require. We matched women newly-arrived to the Montreal area with local residents to help build social networks. The past year saw an increase in the number of persons crossing into Canada on foot and seeking protection here. The refugee claimants, civil society, and journalists were seeking answers and we were determined to ensure everyone received the right information—and we were pleased to step up to the challenge. We strive to ensure refugeeed persons are seen as people, and not stereotyped.

A few short years ago, many Canadians were unaware of refugee issues; now it is top of mind. We ensure refugees are presented as persons having to live through difficult situations. The information we share is more crucial than ever before, especially to the people we serve. Action Réfugiés Montréal is a small organization and we remain grounded in the day-to-day activities of providing support for our clients.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

- PAUL CLARKE

EDUCATION

ARM plays an important role in public education on the topic of refugee rights and policies. In 2017 we spoke to 38 different audiences and were heard by over 2,700 people. We appeared in the media 41 times, both in Canada and overseas, on topics as varied as immigration detention, refugee sponsorship, refugee claimants crossing on foot, and World Refugee Day. We visited numerous Members of Parliament to discuss policy and specific cases. We submit proposals to government bodies in order to improve services to refugeeed people. We hold workshops on financial literacy, ways to support sponsored refugees, and the refugee claim process.
ARM speaks out about the suspension of private sponsorship in Quebec, highlighting the many additional obstacles created by this decision.

Emily Woods, Sponsorship Program Integration Counsellor, leads a refugee sponsorship workshop for congregations awaiting families.

Jenny welcomes a group from the University of Eastern Kentucky wanting to learn about Canadian refugee protection programs (in stark contrast to the current context in the USA).

Emily shares sponsorship expertise in a meeting with the Refugee Council of Australia.

Cathy speaks at key national conferences - Anglican Sponsorship Network, National Sponsorship Agreement Holders Conference and CCR spring consultation.

Jenny participates in a meeting with Public Safety Security Minister Ralph Goodale, raising concerns about detention and CBSA accountability.

ARM participates in regular meetings of Accueil des demandeurs d’asile au Québec (ADAQ), a committee of NGOs, social service providers, and government representatives, to coordinate the welcoming of people seeking refugee status.

UNHCR-Canada selects ARM to host their High Commissioner—a nod to our 24 years of support to refugee people and in recognition of our participation in the ATCR this year.

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What is the ATCR (Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement)?

It is the largest set of meetings on the UNHCR yearly calendar with partners from international bodies, governments, and community organizations that actually do the work involved in supporting people to move safely to a third country. The “Tripartite” in the official name refers to these three groups of partners.

Jenny and Martine, one of our Twinning Program participants, meet with Members of Parliament in Ottawa as part of CCR’s lobby day on family reunification (see photo above with Anne Minh-Thu Quach, MP).

We share expertise on refugee claimant issues in numerous media interviews.

Paul Clarke, Executive Director, speaks in public meetings in Havelock and Hemmingford, near the US border; participants include people from various parts of Quebec, Ontario, and New York state.

ARM organizes a World Refugee Day walk and activity at St. Jax Church, attended by 200 participants.

ARM issues five pages of key recommendations to the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion for the reopening of the sponsorship program.

ARM participates in UNHCR workshop in Toronto on Alternatives to Detention and Best Interest of the Child in detention decisions.

Jenny Jeanes, Detention and Twinning Program Coordinator, continues as co-chair of the Inland Protection Working Group of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) throughout the year.

Camila Sanchez Lancheros, Detention Program Assistant, enables us to continue supporting people in detention while increasing our advocacy.

Emily pays a visit to the Regional Office of Public Safety in Havelock and Hemmingford to discuss the increasing number of people in detention.

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Through our twice-weekly visits to the Laval Immigration Holding Centre, we provide assistance to over 400 detained people each year. Even when this support is short-term, it is crucial: assistance in finding a lawyer, understanding the complexities of immigration law, obtaining documents, and contacting loved ones. The support is often in-depth, such as intervening with people who fall through the cracks.

Susan* is the mother of four young children. They made the journey across the US-Canada border to seek refugee protection, and were immediately detained for lack of sufficient identity documents. One of her children was hospitalized due to a medical emergency, and the family was transported daily from the detention centre to the hospital to care for the child, under supervision of security personnel. Susan was unable to access legal assistance or make arrangements to obtain identity documents. Thanks to another family in detention, we heard about Susan and immediately took steps to communicate with her. We provided her with calling cards and connected her with a lawyer. Susan expressed immense relief that we had reached out to her. Thanks to our intervention, Susan and her children were released from detention just a few days after we first spoke. We keep in touch and, thanks to a local family, were able to offer a Christmas gift basket to Susan’s children.

In the fall of 2017, we met Malik* in detention. Malik is a documentary film-maker from Egypt, who flew to Canada seeking protection. As a journalist and activist, he faced imprisonment for his work. Upon arrival in Canada, he was barred from making a refugee claim due to a legal loophole and faced immediate deportation. Due to the tremendous amount of online evidence in support of his case, he was eventually allowed to remain in Canada to try to seek protection. We helped him gather documents for his case and accompanied him throughout his time in detention. We have continued to support him since his release, as his legal status prevents him from accessing financial, medical, and other assistance normally accessible to refugee claimants. We helped him obtain a work permit and continue to provide him with regular administrative and psychosocial support. He also attends our new men’s group.

Throughout 2017, we met refugee claimants who had been detained after crossing the border on foot at Roxham Road, near the Lacolle border post. Fortunately, relatively few of the thousands of refugee claimants who crossed into Canada were detained. Those who were arrested included some families with young children, who lacked the necessary documents to confirm their identity. We supported many individuals and families in finding lawyers and obtaining documents to secure their release. We also heard many harrowing stories of people travelling northward through the Americas in search of safety, including the dangerous trek through the Darien Gap separating Colombia and Panama. Some lost documents along the way; some nearly lost their lives.

*(Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality)
Sponsorship Program

Facts and figures 2017

What does the suspension mean for ARM’S sponsorship program?

Q : When did the suspension start?
A : On January 9, 2017, the Quebec Ministry of Immigration announced they would no longer accept new applications for refugee sponsorship after January 27, 2017. Sponsorship groups in Quebec had only 17 days to submit paperwork.

Q : Does this mean that ARM’s sponsorship program is closed?
A : No. We continue to welcome and accompany newly arriving sponsored people (on average, about 100 per year) throughout their first year in Canada.

Q : What does the Sponsorship Coordinator do now?
A : The lifecycle of a sponsorship case can take anywhere from 2 to 9 years (!!!). Before refugeed people arrive in Canada, ARM responds to urgencies overseas (such as people who have been detained, newborns, threats, and harassment) and follows up with various levels of government.
**TWINNING PROGRAM**

Our Twinning Program is built through relationships—the bonds formed between each pair of “twins”, the sense of community and belonging that grows from each group activity, and the relationship between Action Réfugiés Montréal personnel and participants. Our contact with each woman allows us to get to know them as individuals, along with their strengths and the challenges they face.

In March 2017, we were contacted by a professor at the Law Faculty of the University of Sherbrooke who offered the opportunity of a special bursary for a refugee to pursue postgraduate studies in law. We recommended Micheline, one of our “twins” who had a law background in her home country. We accompanied her through the application process, and Micheline was awarded the bursary. In the fall, she moved to Sherbrooke to pursue a Master’s degree in International Law and Applied International Politics. Her “twin” Antonia also supported her through the process and they keep in touch from afar, as Antonia has moved overseas for work. We are so proud of Micheline!

**Martine** has been participating in the Twinning Program since 2013, and has a deep, longstanding relationship with her “twin”, Laurence. In the years we have known her, Martine has lived a difficult journey towards family reunification. Forced to leave her son with family in the DRC while seeking refuge in Canada, Martine was not even able to begin the process of bringing him here until after her refugee claim was heard. First facing long delays for her refugee hearing, then even longer delays in the processing of applications for dependants of refugees overseas, Martine turned to us for help. From advocating to Members of Parliament, securing special targeted donations for the enormous expense of medical exams, travel and documentation, to providing moral support, we saw Martine through this long journey until the joyous day in August 2017 when Jonathane finally arrived! Just a few weeks later, he joined us for a day of apple-picking and family fun.

17 new matches made in 2017 between newly arrived refugee women and women from the greater Montreal area.

Participants include refugee claimants, accepted refugees in Canada, and people ARM has sponsored.

60 active participants from 2017 and years past.

16 group activities throughout the year including apple-picking and a sugar shack visit.

Many thanks to Emilia, (picture second from right) our 2017 social work intern and summer employee, whose energy and creativity boosted the program and created many special moments.
My first year as Chair of the Board of Directors followed a period of significant growth for the organization. ARM was able to adapt very quickly in response to the rising global need thanks to an outpouring of public generosity and hard work on the part of our staff. Board membership has remained stable throughout this period. We are privileged to have many long-term board members. Several new members have also emerged to provide fresh perspectives and take on key roles in leadership, fundraising and financial planning.

The Board is intent on making use of the diversity of its expertise, which draws from the legal, business, immigration, clerical, and not-for-profit communities, to devote more time to vision casting and strategic planning for the organization. The Board held a productive Fall retreat to discuss challenges and successes, and to consider future opportunities. On behalf of the Board, I wish to thank you for helping make Action Réfugiés Montréal a strong voice in Montreal and the wider community.

- PHILIP DAWSON, Chair

We are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from their homes. Our work has become even more crucial. We provide valuable information to vulnerable people and that need has become greater than ever. This need convinced us to adopt a budget that anticipated a large deficit. Thanks to generous gifts from our donors, we exceeded our revenue forecasts and registered a small surplus.

We appreciate receiving renewed funding from some loyal foundations, as well as individual donors. Part of our growth has come from people who organized fundraisers on our behalf. Thanks to all who support our cause, we were able to commit to our headcount of six employees.

Our main challenge remains maintaining or increasing our level of services. It is significant that our sponsorship activities have a lifecycle that spans several years. As of December 31, we had just under 300 people awaiting interviews overseas. These applications require our follow-up throughout processing, as well as after the sponsored family or person arrives. This requires a financial structure that can support such long-term commitments.

In addition to its operating account, ARM manages a segregated in-trust account containing funds provided by Canadian residents applying to sponsor refugees. $311,678 was disbursed from our in-trust account to refugeeed people who arrived in Canada. A total of $235,582 was deposited for new sponsorships, given the suspension of the program in January. At year-end, this account held $1,136,678 for a total of 299 people.

ARM does valuable work helping refugees, refugee claimants, and detained people in the greater Montreal area. We would like to thank all our generous donors and look forward to even more collaboration.

- VESNA MILICEVIC, Treasurer

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Action Réfugiés Montréal is a strong voice for refugees in Montreal and beyond. We seek justice for refugee claimants and refugees.