

# An Engaged Community. Welcoming Syrian Refugees in Moncton, NB

Chedly Belkhodja, School of Community and Public Affairs  
Concordia University

**Pathways to Prosperity Annual Conference**  
**Toronto**  
**December 16 2017**

# SSHRC-IRCC Research Project on Syrian Refugees

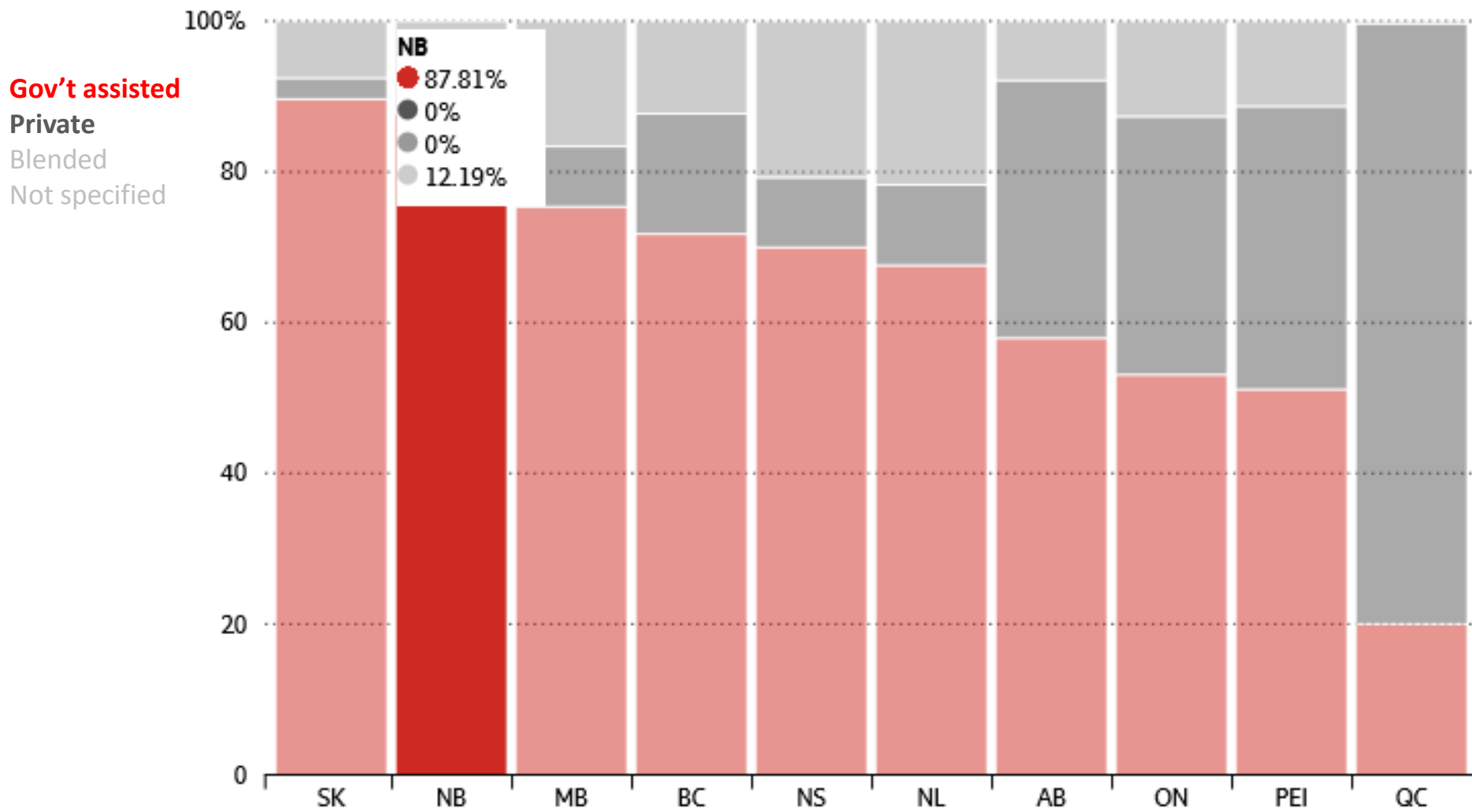
Chedly Belkhodja, Concordia University and Michèle Vatz-Laaroussi, Université de Sherbrooke, 2016-2017

- The smaller city perspective: Moncton, Granby, Sherbrooke
- Two provinces: Quebec and New Brunswick
- The approach (\*Moncton)
  - Interviews with key stakeholders (n=19)
  - Interviews with volunteers (n=10)
  - Focus groups with Syrian refugees (n=2)
  - Media analysis
  - Some observations (e.g. Moncton and Dieppe Markets, Codiac Soccer)

# Research Team

- **Moncton:** Chedly Belkhodja, Concordia University and Leslie Cheung, McGill University
- **Sherbrooke and Granby:** Michèle Vatz-Laaroussi, Université de Sherbrooke and Javorka Serenac, Ph.D candidate, Université du Québec à Montréal
- **Interpreters :** Zahia Agsous, Mounir Al-Shami and Ahmed Zneiber

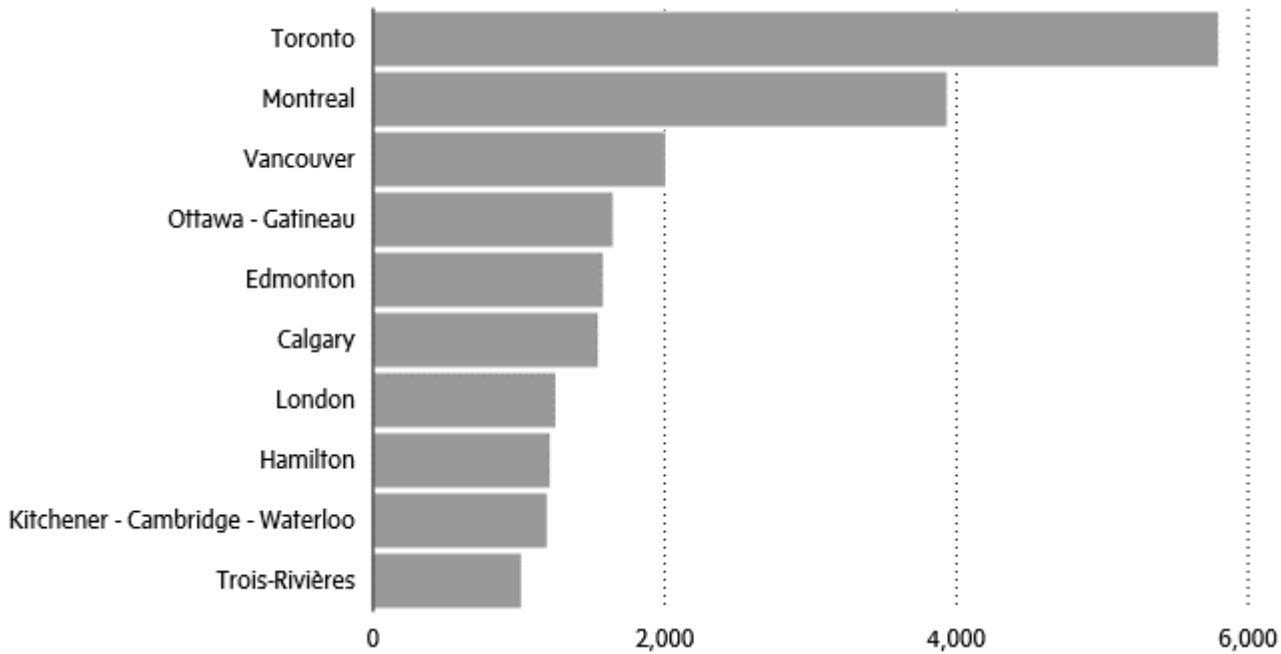
# Syrian Refugees: category by province



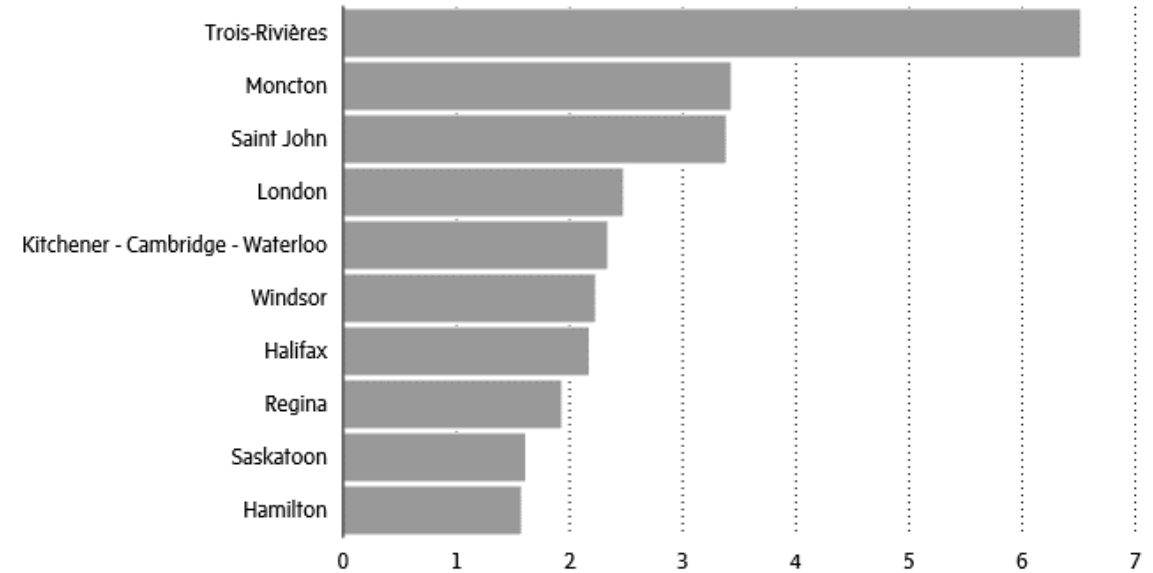
- Quebec**
- 20.01%
  - 79.64%
  - 0.35%
  - 0%

“In Quebec, where roughly half of Syrian-Canadians were believed to reside, about 80 per cent of Syrian arrivals were privately sponsored. By contrast, in Saskatchewan, only a very few have been privately sponsored and the overwhelming majority are government sponsored”.

# Top Destinations

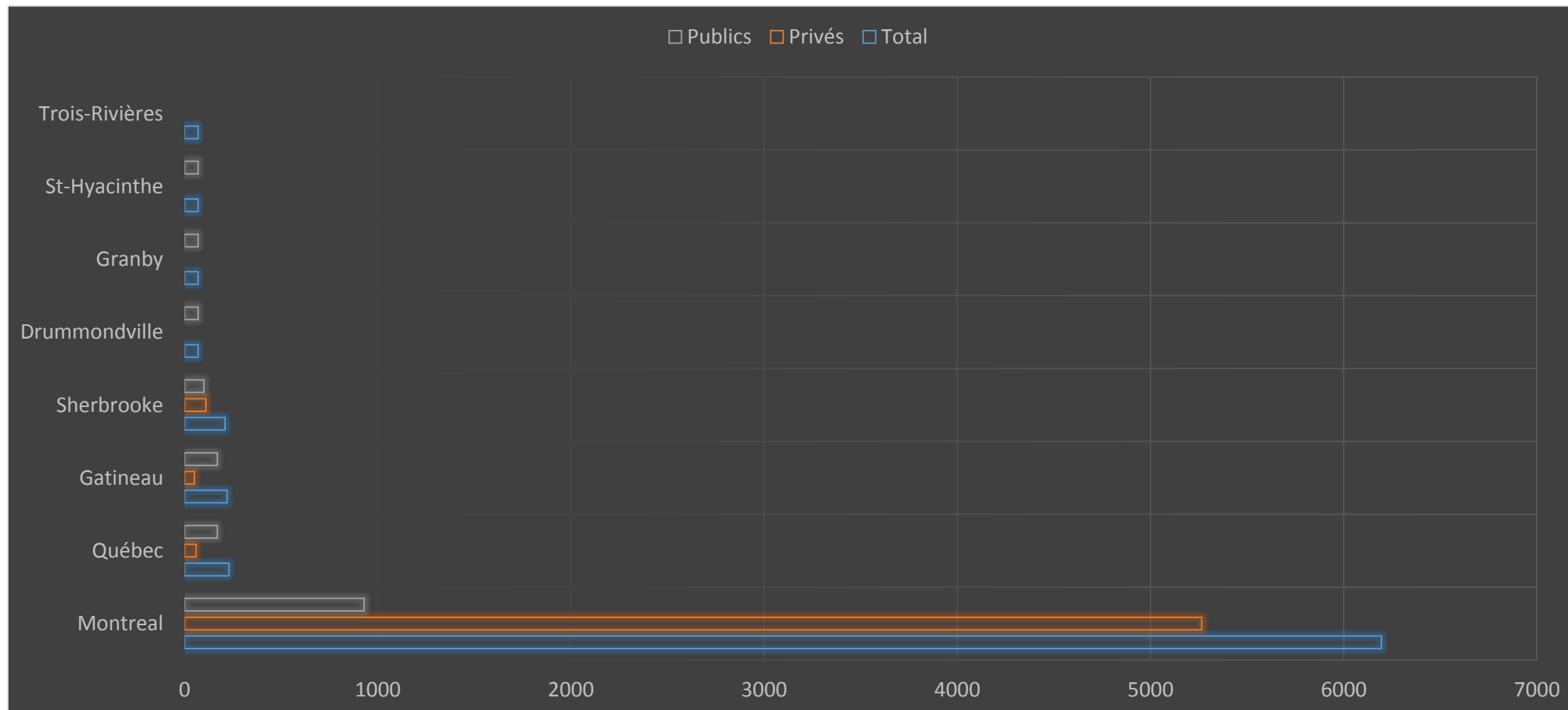


# Most Refugees per capita



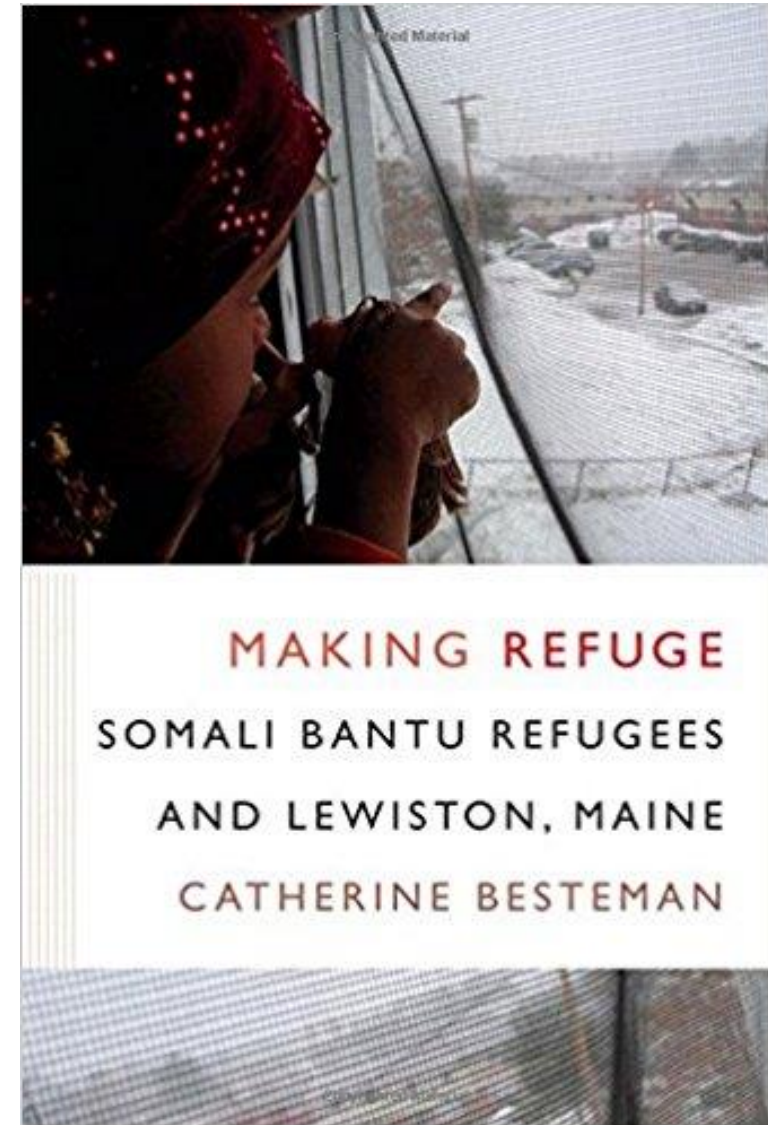
The Globe and Mail, January 5 2017 (IRCC Numbers)

# Distribution of the Syrian Refugees in Quebec

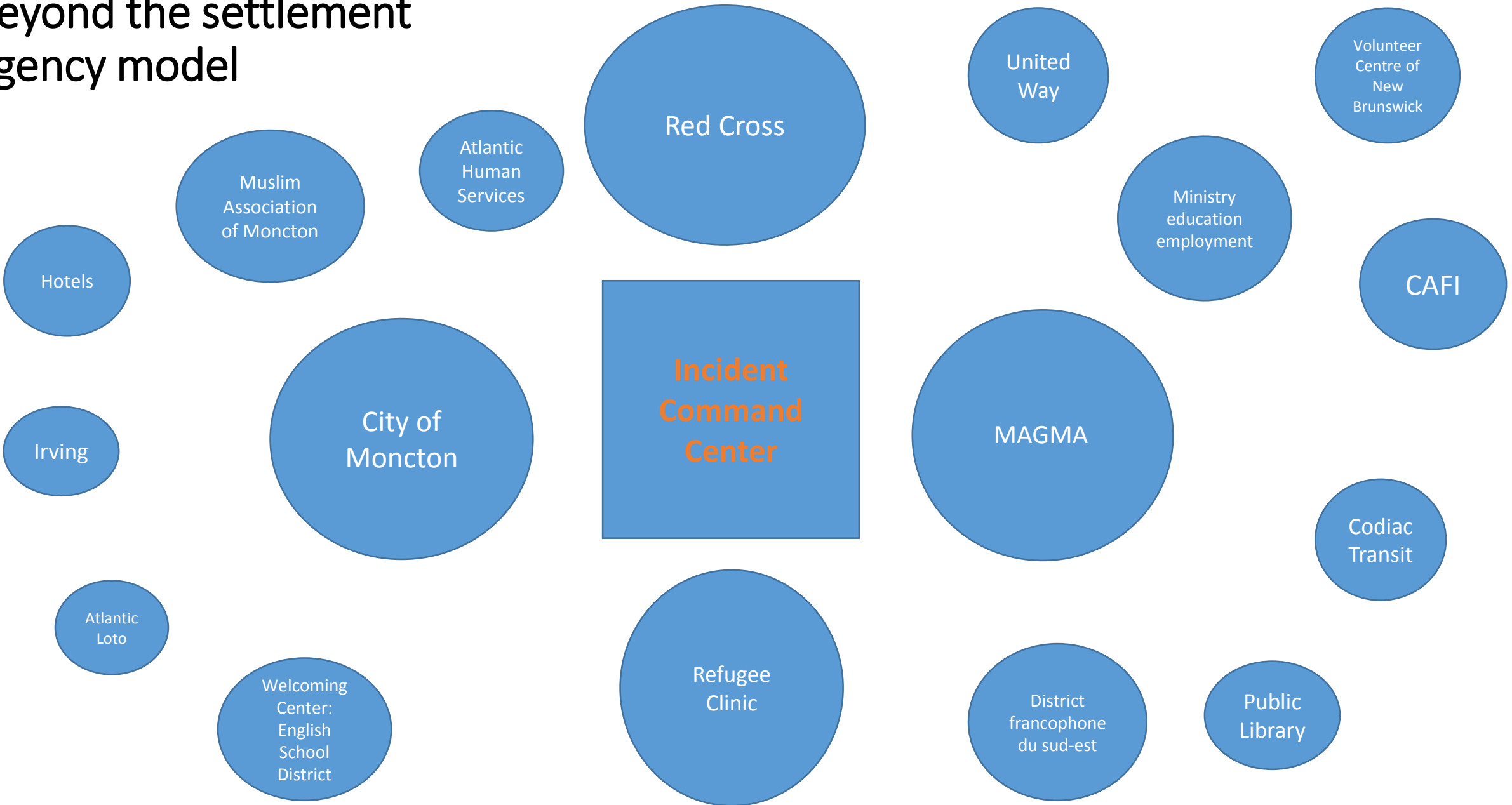


# Outlining Moncton's Stories

- Welcoming and accommodating a large number of refugees
- The engaged community
- The hostile-passive community



# Beyond the settlement agency model





# So what happened in Moncton?

- New Brunswick in need of population: 1500 Syrians Refugees
- Total Refugees for Moncton (434 GAR and 6 PSR)
- Moncton getting organized: role of the mayor; public meetings
- The mandate of MAGMA: family connector program
- An “overwhelming” situation: January 2016
  - Last minute information = no ability to plan
  - Number and speed of arrivals
  - Large families = inadequate housing options
  - Language barriers = additional challenges
  - Health issues

# An Analysis of the Process

- The contract: IRCC-MAGMA
- The City of Moncton
  - Getting involved and taking leadership
  - Working with other Stakeholders
  - Taking leadership
- The Incident Command Center (ICS)
  - Department of Natural Resources
  - Dealing with large logistics
  - Building processes
  - April 30 2016: considered crisis completed
  - “It’s like fighting a fire with no houses and without water. Resources had to constantly be built on the fly.”



Eric Arseneau, Fire Chief, Moncton Fire Department

# Incident Command Center



DASHBOARD as of WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30

ACCOMODATION (for all refugee arrivals - Syrian & Other origin)			
Number of Persons in Hotels	C=27	C <sub>0</sub> =20	47
Number of Persons in Apts.			277
Total number of Families in Apts.			52
Total number of Families in Hotels	C=7	C <sub>0</sub> =9	16
Families with Units Selected (in process of finalizing move to hotel to apartment)			12
Families Requiring Units to be identified & Selected			4
Families in Hotels > 4 weeks			16
Families in Hotels > 3 weeks			n/a
Families in Hotels > 2 weeks			n/a
FAMILY CONNECTIONS (for all refugee arrivals, Syrian & Other origin)			
Families matched with FVC			57
Minimum Number of Additional Matches Required			11
CHILDREN ENROLLED IN SCHOOL			
			112
			76%
COMPLETION OF RESETTLEMENT PROCESS (for all arrivals, Syrian & Other)			
Families in Moncton > 6 weeks			42
Families completed			0

# Tools for Better Welcoming and Settlement

- Family connector program
- Housing team
- Depot center
- Refugee Clinic
- Hotels and catering: Safety and Security
- Economic development
  - Southeast Employment & Training Services for Newcomers
- Social activities
  - Syrian Women's Economic & Social Development Initiative
  - Art therapy
  - Sports: Cordiac Soccer League, YMCA
  - Resurgo

# Francophone Stakeholders

- Le désir de s'impliquer dans le dossier et de travailler en collaboration avec les autres intervenants
- L'expertise et l'accompagnement: le personnel du CAFI, des bénévoles arabophones dans le réseau du CAFI, les étudiants maghrébins de l'Université de Moncton et le CCNB
- Des ateliers de sensibilisation à la vie canadienne
- De l'information sur la réalité francophone de Moncton: écoles francophones, services plus directs pour l'intégration scolaire et l'employabilité
- Trois axes: école; employabilité; atelier de life skills: culture, conversation en français
- Le français comme une opportunité pour évoluer dans un environnement bilingue: **il existe une dynamique francophone à Moncton et certains réfugiés syriens l'ont bien compris.**

# Entrevue CAFI



Photo: Chedly Belkhodja

Maha Imazitene, Former Director General

- Moncton was not prepared for this...volume was overwhelming
- Des familles venaient frapper à la porte du CAFI
- Mise sur pied d'une équipe de bénévoles arabophones
  - 10-15 bénévoles
- La question de l'école: faire prendre conscience aux gens
  - qu'ils ont le choix. "Ils étaient automatiquement orientés vers l'anglais.
- 10% de familles ont inscrits leurs enfants dans le réseau francophone
- Camps d'été
- Financement par IRCC pour le CAFI
- "On fait partie de l'éco-système"

# Entrevue avec Ahmed Zneiber

Conseiller à l'accueil et au recrutement, District scolaire francophone Sud



- Magma not presenting the francophone option
- Forcing the door to be more visible
  - Meeting syrian families in Moncton and Saint-John (YMCA)
  - Je passais le message: je suis francophone et j'ai appris l'anglais à l'extérieur
- Bilingualism as an added value
- **Les trois écoles francophones qui ont le plus de Syriens :**
  - Samuel de Champlain (St-Jean) : 46
  - St-Henri (Moncton) : 22
  - des Bâtisseurs (Fredericton) : 13

# The Role of the Volunteers





# Michel Agier, 2017

- Comment nous sentir solidaires de personnes dont la vie quotidienne est si éloignée de la nôtre et en même temps physiquement si proche voir apparemment invasive, des personnes qui nous sont étrangères et nous semblent devoir (ou vouloir) le rester parce qu'elles n'ont ni où, ni comment, ni pourquoi, s'intégrer au pays d'accueil?
- Quel est le pouvoir donné aux citoyens? quelle est la norme?

# Why Help?

- Understanding the decision to get involved
- Hospitality, compassion, generosity...
- The ideal refugee...
  - From excitement to deception...to exhaustion

# Some quotes...

- **MAGMA ne répondait pas...c'était *too much***
- **C'est lourd comme expérience. Je n'ai jamais eu une relation comme cela dans ma vie. C'est incroyablement riche. C'est vraiment émotif. Ces gens sont vraiment importants pour moi...mais je n'ai pas toujours le temps. Si j'avais *ma way*, je les mettrai dans un appartement près de chez moi. J'aime leur compagnie et j'espère qu'ils vont rester à Moncton.**
- **C'est dur à comprendre. C'est ma famille mais ce n'est pas ma famille.**
- **On est *cold*...ils sont chaleureux**

# Changing the Landscape of Smaller Cities



## TOGETHERNESS BLOSSOMS WITH A LADLE AND A SMILE



**Newcomers**  
**Ammar Al Asmi**

Every Saturday a group of Syrian women arrives early at the farmer's markets in Dieppe and Moncton. Their many culinary offerings are a way to introduce eastern dishes through Syrian cuisine. Their efforts have been well received and are very popular at both locations.

I recently spoke with Sophie Malenfant and others who have worked alongside the women of the Syrian Women's Economic and Social Development Initiative (SWESDI) group. I learned that the purpose of the market project was to help the Syrian women to become involved in Canadian society, to learn more English and to socialize, all while gaining self-confidence. The culinary project gives them the

opportunity to use cooking – something they are passionate about – to connect with others. It provides a wonderful opportunity to make good use of their energy and skills.

The thought of cooking and bringing their love of it to the market, and Monctonians in general, motivated and excited them from the beginning. The Syrian ladies continue to work diligently to prove themselves while providing a selection of good quality foods at the markets.

Market-goers are responding positively to this project and have expressed appreciation for it. The new food choices available have drawn a steady flow of visitors, and we noticed many smiles on their faces as they ate and bought samples to try at home.

I have no doubt that this small enterprise will grow bigger in the future as Syrian cuisine becomes more familiar to people in the area.

Food is an important factor in any culture as it reflects its country's culture and history. In this way, we can see the richness of each country as we experience the different cuisines of the world and how each one gives insight into its people and traditions. It also provides an opportunity for positive interaction and communication with

others, whether friends, strangers or colleagues.

And so it becomes a way to cross cultural barriers, which is so important in our fast-changing world today.

The Levantine cuisine (Eastern Mediterranean) is well known worldwide, with many varieties of excellent food. Unique flavours are achieved in Middle Eastern cuisine through the use of many different spices that awaken the senses and taste buds. Careful blending of specific seasonings with the main dishes produce magnificent recipes which, along with their distinctive taste, are known to be healthy as well.

And so as Syrian foods join the many other Maritime choices available in our new country, it will lead to a better understanding of our cultures and enable us to more easily integrate into the society which so warmly welcomed us.

For market days, some of the typical foods that were prepared were: Kibbeh Maklieh, and different kinds of Fatayer (pastry) containing meat, cheese and spinach, in addition to the tasty sweets that are hard to duplicate in another country where familiar ingredients are not readily available. While these might be the most popular dishes, there are many others to be tried. Those with a palate looking to sample this cuisine can find them at the local market.

Below are other positive comments from some involved in this project:

"It is an experience all of us will learn from together and never forget," says Gerry Nishikawa. "Making and selling food at the farmer's markets has given us a great opportunity to socialize

with our community. I think Monctonians really like the food that the Syrian women are preparing and selling at the local farmers' markets. The baklava, falafel and fatayer are particularly popular. I think the fact that they are 'finger foods' helps them sell well. Perhaps savoury foods are more popular because the markets are open in the mornings. Sweets may sell better later in the day."

"The business is more than fantastic," adds Dumooa Alwaeri, "many efforts are done for its success. We have a group of some Canadians who donate a lot of their time and effort to help in this project's success and present the Syrian food in a way that suits the Canadian taste. Moreover, because Canada is a multicultural country and Canadians welcome everything that is different and new, we reached a high rate of popularity on the Syrian food and sweets in a short period.

"I think that we will witness a huge spread of the Syrian cuisine in Canada in the near future."

Through this project they are proving themselves to Canadians and are gradually adapting to the culture and life outside of their home. They are moving forward despite the difficult conditions and challenges that they faced during the long journey from Syria to Canada.

They are making tremendous progress.

**Ammar Al Asmi**

amm.1966@hotmail.com

Ammar Al Asmi lives in Moncton and is the former director of a weekly newspaper in Daraa, Syria. His column appears on alternating Fridays.

# Immigrant population and recent immigrants by non-official language spoken most often at home, Moncton, 2016

		2016	
Language	Number	Percent	Rank
Immigrant population	7955	100.0	
Arab	650	8.2	1
Korean	485	6.1	2
Mandarin	365	4.6	3
<b>Recent immigrants (2011-2016)</b>			
Arab	520	18.3	1
Mandarin	340	12.0	2
Korean	240	8.5	3

Census 2016, Focus on Geography

# Moncton



Photo: Chedly Belkhodja



Photo: Chedly Belkhodja



Photo: Chedly Belkhodja



- A **Halifax school** has a bullying problem, but it's not your typical light pushing and taunting. It's **Syrian refugees**, fresh off the plane. According to parents and school kids, the refugees are threatening, attacking and even choking the Canadian kids. That's shocking. But even worse: the school is turning a blind eye in the name of multiculturalism and political correctness!
- **Syrian migrant men** in their twenties — some with full beards — are being dumped into classrooms at **Fredericton High School**, next to Canadian schoolgirls as young as 14. And the results are what you'd expect. Sexual harassment. Bullying. Picking on the Jewish kids. Threatening and swearing at teachers. Talking about terrorist weapons, like rocket propelled grenades. Demanding that men and women be separated, sharia style. Refusing to speak English.

# Final Remarks

- How do the Syrians are living Moncton?
- Are they staying?
- Are they working?
- So what about Moncton?
  - The Resilient City: Coping with adversity (e.g. 9/11, Justin Bourque and the Moncton Shootings)
  - Eric Arseneau: “Failure is not an option. We must succeed. Our community is strong, resilient and welcoming.”
  - Red Cross: “I have nothing but pride to live in greater Moncton because we are a community that wants to help other and give back – that is our focus, our focus is how to help others. I had never done an immigration and refugee response in my life, but I took the principals from that and what the red cross stand for and applied to this”.