

An Extraordinary Year



isans | Immigrant Services
Association of Nova Scotia

Annual Report 2015-2016

The vision of ISANS is a community where all can belong and grow.

ISANS is a leading community organization
that welcomes immigrants.

Working in partnership, ISANS offers services
and creates opportunities that enable
immigrants to participate fully in Canadian life.

The dictionary defines “extraordinary” as “exceptional in character, amount, extent, or degree; noteworthy; remarkable”. Clearly, this has been an extraordinary year for ISANS.

Continuing Canada’s long tradition of reaching out to refugees, this year Nova Scotia opened its arms to Syrians who have been forced from their homes by a terrible conflict. The overwhelming support offered by Nova Scotians across the province was not a surprise – hospitality is at the core of our identity – but it was still amazing to witness in action. The urgency and scale of the response and the humanity and compassion evident in every gesture was a demonstration of the best of Nova Scotia. In partnership with government, community organizations, the business sector and hundreds of volunteers, ISANS was there to lead the reception effort and begin the settlement process for these newcomers. We know that this work is not done. The settlement process will take time and there will be challenges to face, however, the resilience and determination of our new Nova Scotians will prevail and ISANS will be here to help.

Looking to the future, it is ISANS’ intention to build on the momentum of community support for refugee sponsorship and work with partners in the private and public sectors to establish a lasting network of support services for ongoing refugee sponsorship in Nova Scotia. It is the right thing to do – for refugees and for Nova Scotia. We remain committed to our goal of making Nova Scotia stronger by welcoming and supporting newcomers.

This past year was also notable for another reason. It was the first year of operation for ISANS’ innovative new pre-arrival initiative. ISANS is providing a framework, tools, expertise and support to settlement agencies across Canada to improve linkages between pre-arrival and post-arrival services for immigrants using a suite of online tools. Immigrants who participate in the program are able to develop job search and communication skills and arrive in Canada better prepared, more confident and able to enter the workforce sooner.

On behalf of the ISANS Board, I want to thank our community partners, funders, the staff and all our volunteers for their extraordinary dedication and commitment. Your generosity, compassion, commitment and stamina are awe-inspiring.

Catharine Penney

Chair, Board of Directors

This was a year like no other. From those first few dark days in September when those terrible pictures of little Aylan Kurdi circled the globe and we all woke up to the most disastrous refugee situation that we have seen since the Second World War, ISANS never faltered. Individuals, communities, governments looked to us for information, guidance and leadership and it was ISANS’ time to step up and show what we could do and have been doing for 36 years. In just over two months, together with an amazing array of partners, communities and volunteers, we welcomed a thousand Syrian refugees into the province. We provided a safe and warm welcome, we reunited families, we gave children a future and we saved lives. It truly was an awesome achievement; we feel honoured to have played such a critical role in this nation-building initiative and we are proud of our accomplishment. We know that this is only the first phase of the settlement journey for these new Nova Scotians but this is our job, this is what we do. We look forward to providing the support that they need, helping them, as we do with all our clients, to find their place and their role in the workplace and in the community that they now call *home*.

It was also a year of extraordinary effort and achievement by others at ISANS. The growth in overall immigration in Nova Scotia, the Syrian refugee arrivals and the dramatic increase in interest in refugees and immigrants generated our busiest year ever. We served a total of 4,921 clients; more immigrants got jobs - mostly in their fields; our language classes saw a 20% increase in clients; we helped immigrants to open 71 businesses; we launched SOPA – Settlement Online Pre-arrival – partnering with settlement organizations from one side of the country to the other; we saw a 60% increase in the number of volunteers who helped with our work and so much more. It truly was a remarkable year, one in which we demonstrated to Nova Scotians ISANS’ depth of experience, professionalism and capability, with each and every staff member contributing to our outstanding success. ISANS’ extraordinary year was only achieved by their extraordinary work and as we move into a new year we look forward to building on partnerships and opportunities to realize our vision of a place where all can belong and grow.

Gerry Mills, *Director of Operations*
Claudette Legault, *Director of Programs & Services*

As we close this extraordinary year, we say goodbye to an extraordinary individual. Claudette Legault, ISANS Director of Programs and Services who has been with the organization for 15 years, will retire in June. Claudette has been the rock, the standard bearer, the compassionate ear and the conscience of ISANS for many years. Her reputation across the country for professionalism, innovation and caring is only equalled by the reputation of the organization that she has helped to build. She will be sorely missed by so many, but as she moves into this new adventure, we say a huge thank you and wish her all the very best.

An **Extraordinary** Year

4921 clients served	2468 new clients	15,708 visitors to the font desk	113,228 website visitors (15% increase)	800% increase in media interviews
147 staff: 117 permanent, 30 short contract	Staff are from 43 countries of origin and provide services in 65 languages	654 active volunteers (58% increase)	23,079 volunteer hours logged	30 community meetings and 38 Community Capacity Building workshops delivered
1454 government-assisted refugees (GARs) served	173 privately sponsored refugees served	100% refugee families have settlement plan within 6 weeks of arrival	379 clients participated in the Introduction to Nova Scotia workshop (125 pre-arrival)	100+ collaborations with partner organizations
1872 clients received employment services	668 (known) jobs secured	71 new businesses opened 22 registered, 49 non-registered	267 employers registered on Skills Match	66 English in the Workplace clients at 45 work sites
476 Community Language clients	530 children in short-term care in the ECE Centre 87 children in long- term care	4346 formal interpretations	324% increase in pre-arrival clients	53% clients access ISANS programs & services pre-arrival, online or by distance

Syrian Refugee Initiative **Phase 1 Timeline**

A photo of the drowned body of a little boy, Aylan Kurdi, creates global awareness about the crisis in Syria and the desperate attempts of Syrians to reach safety

ISANS settlement staff set up Welcome Centre at Best Western Chocolate Lake Hotel, which serves as temporary accommodations for new GAR arrivals

Halifax Transitional Health Clinic for Refugees sets up exam area for physicians at hotel Welcome Centre

City provides *Welcomed in Halifax* pass, which gives all new refugees free access to Halifax Transit and HRM-operated recreation facilities and programs for one year

Government of Canada commits to bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by end of February

First GARs, 13 Syrians, arrive at Halifax airport

The first group, 30 Syrian children, register for school

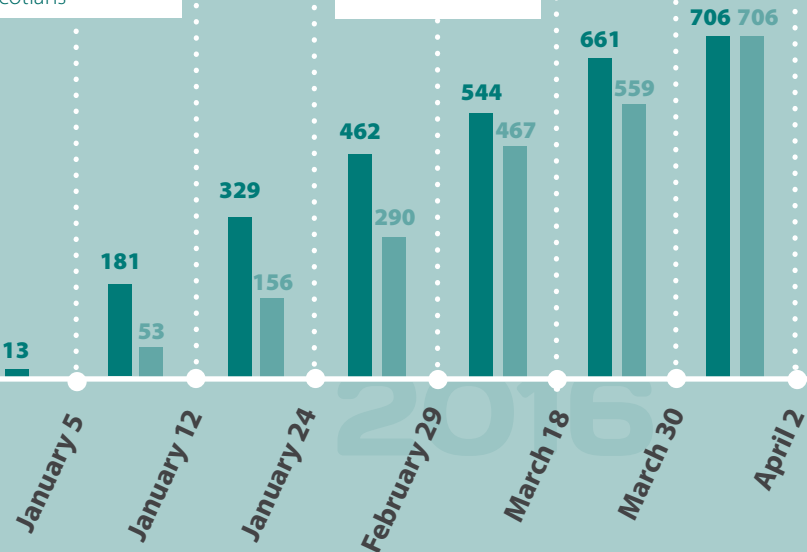
ISANS closes Welcome Centre at Best Western Chocolate Lake Hotel

All government-assisted Syrian refugees are in permanent housing

Donations Centre opens in Bayers Lake at old Rona location

Donations Centre no longer accepting donations due to overwhelming response of Nova Scotians

Nova Scotia has welcomed 133 Syrian families



■ Total number Syrian GARs arrived in Halifax
■ Total number Syrian GARs moved into permanent housing

Airport Arrivals



Temporary Accommodations
Chocolate Lake Best Western Hotel



Community Activities



Settlement Staff

Halima Omar, Denise Scott, Zrinka Seles-Vranjes, Melissa King, Farida Miri, Narine Mosesova, Vesna Miroslavljevic, Wenche Gausdal



Last October when Wenche Gausdal, ISANS Manager of Settlement and Community, heard about Syrian refugees coming to Canada, she reflected on an earlier experience— the 1999 Operation Parasol that settled 5,000 Kosovars fleeing war in their homeland. “A few of us who were involved asked what we learned. What was that all about?”

Their answers proved invaluable for the hectic months to follow. From late December until mid-March, 694 Government-Assisted Refugees arrived in Nova Scotia – equal to numbers that would normally arrive over four years. They stayed temporarily at the Best Western Chocolate Lake Hotel in Halifax where at its peak there were 228 Syrians, 150 of whom were children.

Wenche recalls the week when 100 people arrived. “We were working with people who had just come, moving others out and having other staff support them. And, of course, there was a snowstorm, flights were rescheduled and furniture came late.” But ISANS staff met the huge challenge.

“Many people didn’t have Christmas or weekends off. It was always about how are we going to do it, not can we do it.” The initial phase of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), which usually takes one month, was offered in 11 days. Team members acted as coordinators for health, volunteers, hotel accommodations, housing and settlement assistance. ISANS hired 25 new

staff with about 15 at the hotel. Some worked overnight to handle health emergencies and early morning arrivals, allowing others to sleep worry free. Hotel staff efficiently and happily went far beyond basic service.

ISANS’ partnership with the Transitional Health Clinic for Refugees was vital. A clinic that sees 200 to 300 clients was now dealing with 1,100. “Someone arrived New Year’s Eve with serious medical issues and we had a system in place,” says a proud Wenche. They had no advance notice of health issues and disabilities, and flight notice was sometimes just 24 hours. Staff from the YMCA and ISANS - along with volunteers - provided activities for children, allowing parents to attend orientation.

Families moved from the hotel within two to three weeks. “We are one of very few places in Canada able to settle them this quickly,” says Wenche, adding that local landlords’ support was essential.

Wenche’s most profound memory is the appreciation shown by new arrivals. “People kept saying ‘thank you, thank you.’ They weren’t expecting to be respected. It made me think about how they were treated before they got here.” She believes the community now has a better understanding of the refugee experience. “Their resilience and skills and wish to start a new life, that positive energy, will be quickly noticed. That’s very rich for the community. We just need to give them the space to do it.”



Maher Al Helwani will always remember his first day in Halifax. After arriving at 3 am, he slept, ate breakfast and left his hotel for a walk. “A woman in her fifties came toward me, asked if I was Syrian and then gave me a big hug,” he says. “I felt like my mother was hugging me.”

That encounter confirmed that life in Canada would be good for Maher, his wife Hanadi Sallouha, and children, Dania, 14, Ahmad, 11, and Youssef, five. They had fled Damascus, Syria, after Maher’s sweater factory was destroyed and conflict moved into their neighbourhood. “My wife would leave the house to get something and she’d see broken glass from bullets on her way back,” says Maher.

The family was often harassed at roadblocks because Maher had the same name as someone with a violent history. “We can live on bread only but we need security,” he says. They flew to Alexandria, Egypt, living for 18 months in an apartment, receiving aid from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Maher worked as a tailor and took computer networking courses. Several months after being approved to move to Canada, the family was on its way.

They arrived in late February with one suitcase missing. “Everything I had, all my memories were in the suitcase,” recalls Hanadi. “For two days I didn’t eat.” Luckily it was returned to the hotel where the family stayed for eight days.

ISANS found them an apartment in a quiet and convenient neighbourhood and also matched them with a couple who visit weekly and help them settle. “We are like brothers and sisters now,” says Hanadi.

Maher and Hanadi study English in Bedford while the children go to school. “I like every subject, but for me the best is music,” declares Dania, who takes weekly guitar lessons. Ahmad loves mathematics and playing ball with his friends. Little Youssef happily says he enjoys school too. Unlike the others, Dania had already learned some English and French before arriving.

Happiness and relief is written on this family’s faces. “My teacher asks me why I am always smiling; I tell her I am living my dream of studying English,” says Hanadi. She is impressed with Nova Scotians. “People speak slowly to us and help us at the mall and on the street. “Even the bus drivers help us,” adds Maher. “If you smile and tell them you’re Syrian, they will help you.” On Saturdays the family assists other Syrian refugees at the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs and they swim at the Canada Games Centre on Sundays.

Hanadi’s future might include nursing, while Maher’s goal is to work in computer networking. “The main thing for us here is that we have security,” says Maher. “And the children have an opportunity to go to school and study.”

Al Helwani Family



Thank You Volunteers!

925
individuals across
Nova Scotia offered to
volunteer through
211

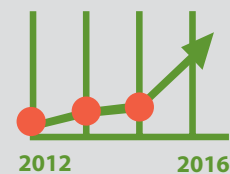
215
volunteers received
a free criminal record
check through HRM
(fees waived)

440
new volunteers
registered and active
in volunteer roles

559
volunteers were
involved in the
Syrian Refugee Initiative



Privately Sponsored
Refugees to NS



answered 1000+
calls & emails!



300+
information
packages
distributed



15 Information Sessions
to 300+ people on
Private Refugee Sponsorship

The Amazing **Private Refugee Sponsorship** Surge OF 2015-2016



Set up new
filing system
& Excel tracking



Settlement workshops
delivered to
170 people in 50 groups



Private Sponsorship
applications submitted
for 150 people

Private Refugee
Sponsorship



team grew to 8

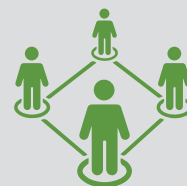
Matching System



85 Syrian families on the list
73 matched with sponsors



45 new parishes
sponsoring



32 new ISANS
community groups
sponsoring



120
new groups
in Nova Scotia

Evelyn Jones, ISANS Coordinator of Refugee Sponsorship, has had a year like none other. ISANS has always witnessed some interest in private sponsorship of refugees – perhaps 20 people attending an annual workshop – but nothing like the community involvement since autumn.

Intense media coverage of the Syrian crisis, in particular the photo of Aylan Kurdi on a Turkish beach, led many Nova Scotians to form private sponsorship groups. “It was a powerful photo but people didn’t suddenly wake up; so many said, I’ve been meaning to call you,” explains Evelyn.

“I came into work the next day and the phone just rang and rang.” Both she and her colleague could no longer work part time. “We were coming in earlier and earlier and leaving later and later. It didn’t really change until February when the government announced that 25,000 refugees were here.”

ISANS, as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), worked closely with 32 community groups from across Nova Scotia, 30 of which were new to refugee sponsorship. They needed support, so Evelyn and her team quickly organized information sessions. “We kept adding more. Usually you talk to a group and they come back six months later. My first group came back in six days and said we have all our money; and right behind was another group and another.”

Local Syrian families wanted to bring relatives from Syria here, but Canada could only welcome those who were in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. “This work is

really hard on the heart and on the head,” says Evelyn. There are so many barriers to reuniting people with their families.” ISANS however matched more than 70 families from the local Syrian community with loved ones.

Evelyn received arrival news at all hours – even on Christmas Day and New Year’s Eve. “We had a fantastic team of people.” Volunteers arrived to help, including a retired manager. “She just sat there and answered the phone so I could read emails, hundreds of emails; they just kept coming.”

Evelyn, who has been at ISANS for 13 years, says she doesn’t want the good will, motivation and excitement to be lost and hopes more Syrians come, as well as those from other countries. She was delighted to welcome a Rwandan family, a sponsorship that had been in the works for three years.

“Two years ago I was at a conference, a reflection about the movement of 64,000 Vietnamese here. That was the birth of private sponsorship in Canada. I said ‘we’ll never see that again.’” She was happy to be mistaken. “Canada is at its best when we’re helping other people. The motivation ranges from Christian faith to repopulating a rural area. The fact that people were calling to help a complete stranger gives me hope.”



Abdel Karim Musa

Evelyn Jones

Settlement Online Pre-Arrival

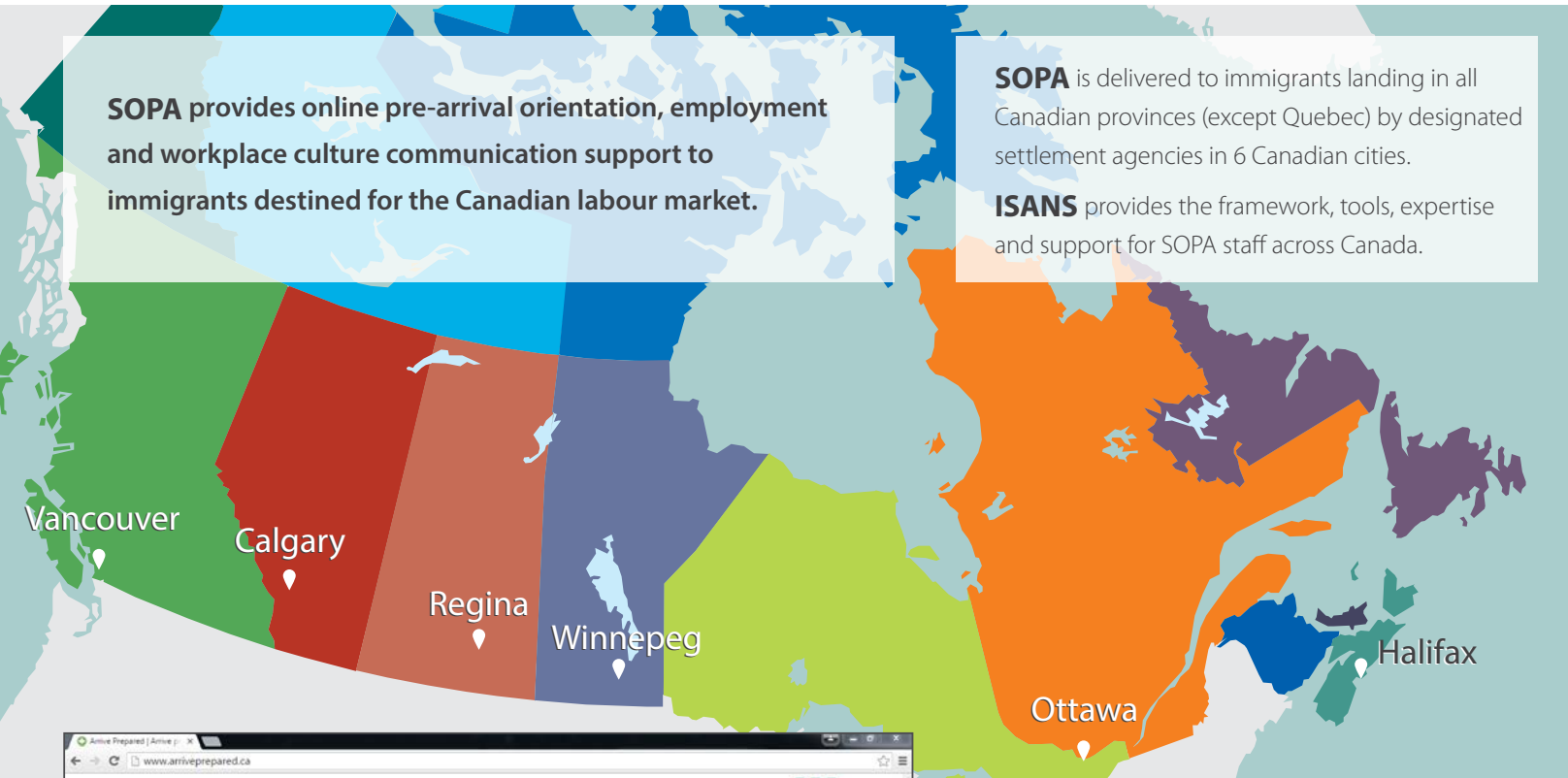
SOPA was created to improve connections between pre-arrival and post arrival services

An **Extraordinary** Year
Ongoing Work

SOPA provides online pre-arrival orientation, employment and workplace culture communication support to immigrants destined for the Canadian labour market.

SOPA is delivered to immigrants landing in all Canadian provinces (except Quebec) by designated settlement agencies in 6 Canadian cities.

ISANS provides the framework, tools, expertise and support for SOPA staff across Canada.



Build Your Business on the Tall Ship Silva

networking event was sold-out for the 3rd year running. Under full sail and blue skies immigrant business owners connected with members of the broader business community and learned about ISANS supports and services



Networking in Motion Immigrant Business Crawl for Small Business Week

Our business team, along with 30 participants, spent the afternoon discovering immigrant businesses in downtown Halifax



23
new staff deliver
36 SOPA
programs & services

SOPA
Settlement Online
Pre-Arrival
Arrive prepared.

225
new pre-arrival
SOPA clients

73
client source
countries

Community Language
students celebrated
Canada Day at Flynn
Park - it's become an
annual tradition to have
a multicultural potluck
and party



Community Language classes held a **mock election** in October to learn about the Canadian voting system. 75 votes were cast: Liberals 41, NDP 16, Conservative 15, Green 3

**ISANS acknowledged
Dexter Construction**

for their commitment to
training and hiring refugees
to Nova Scotia



Outgoing program director Claudette Legault's path to ISANS can be traced to her childhood in a Northern Ontario mining community. "My parents never traveled, but I had a world view," reflects Claudette. "You can't grow up in a mining family and go through strikes and layoffs without having some sense of what's fair."

After finishing school she built homes in Métis communities, earned her undergraduate degree and traveled to Central America. She even picked tobacco in PEI and then became a social worker, earning her Master's in Social Work at Dalhousie University.

Claudette, fluent in French and Spanish, worked with Canada World Youth as group leader in Labrador and Colombia, and regional director in Halifax. She became Oxfam-Canada's project officer for Central America and the Caribbean. "I was working with people as they were literally fleeing, being part of the context that creates refugees," she says. "When I returned home I wanted to connect with them again." After a stint in the South Pacific with the International Centre for Ocean Development, and in Cuba working with NGOs, she did just that.

Her list of what she is most proud of includes: MISA merging with Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre to create ISANS; being on the list of Canada's best workplaces in 2014; becoming a Sponsorship Agreement Holder, allowing greater refugee support work; and creating the Transitional Health Clinic for Refugees – years of work that culminated just before the mass Syrian arrival.

After travel and relaxation, Claudette will re-engage in the community through volunteer social justice work. "I came in on the Kosovars' arrival and I'm going out on the Syrians' arrival. It brings closure as it comes back to the refugees." She leaves the organization in good hands. "There's an incredible staff who have demonstrated over and over their ability to do the work with passion, integrity and respect for everyone they work with."

Leaving is bittersweet. "It's a cliché to say I'll miss the people, but it is the people," says Claudette. "The world comes in that door every day with stories and challenges and opportunities. It has been a profound and humbling experience. There is not a day I didn't feel honoured and proud to do this work."

Claudette became a volunteer and board member at ISANS, then MISA – Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association. After replacing the director on two maternity leaves, she was hired fulltime as Executive Director in 2000. She describes her job as ensuring that the conditions, funding and organization are in place to support the staff. "You make decisions based on what people need to do their jobs." Claudette's symbol is a simple eraser. "You see the table covered with eraser specks; it means that in that room there were people working hard to read and write, maybe for the first time. I'm not teaching, but I made sure there was a teacher."

Claudette Legault



**Prince George Hotel
recognized with
2016 Employer Award
for Refugee Employment**

for their outstanding efforts to
help refugees settle in Canada
by finding jobs and obtaining
employment skills



**Evening EAL
Class**

- outings to
the Emera Oval & Art
Gallery of Nova Scotia



**Walk with Refugees for
a Stronger Canada**

took
place on World Refugee Day
and saw 150 participants walk
from Grand Parade Square to
the Halifax Central Library for a
celebration with music & dancing



**Making Nova Scotia Stronger
Book Launch**

- 200 invitees and
guests came to the Halifax Central Library
to celebrate stories of community builders

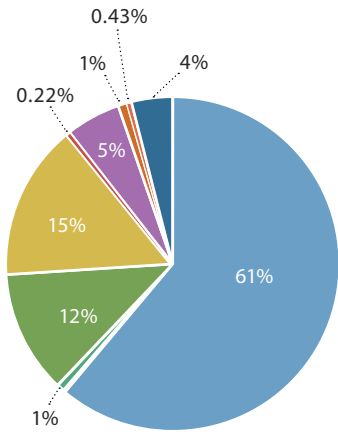


Highlights from the ISANS Financial Report

For the year ending March 31, 2016

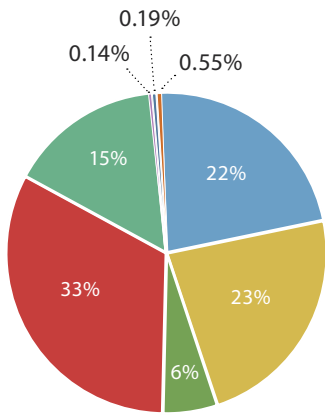
Revenue

	2015-2016	2014-2015	Increase/Decrease
Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada	\$6,263,902	\$3,694,573	69.54%
Employment & Social Development Canada	\$22,134	\$198,630	-88.86%
Nova Scotia Office of Immigration - Job Fund Agreement	\$1,216,570	\$1,516,760	-19.79%
Nova Scotia Office of Immigration - Settlement Funding	\$1,578,277	\$1,631,167	-3.24%
Nova Scotia Department of Labour & Advanced Education	\$544,885	\$473,879	14.98%
Nova Scotia Department of Health & Wellness	\$90,960	\$91,830	-0.95%
Status of Women Canada	\$77,947	\$72,218	7.93%
Nova Scotia Department of Seniors	\$0	\$9,978	-100.00%
United Way	\$44,154	\$38,748	13.95%
Other Funding Sources	\$407,978	\$170,394	139.43%
Total	\$10,246,807	\$7,898,177	29.74%



Expenses

	2015-2016	2014-2015	Increase/Decrease
Language & Skills Development	\$2,268,584	\$2,480,409	-8.54%
Employment & Bridging Services	\$2,333,275	\$2,701,455	-13.63%
Business & Workforce Integration	\$558,051	\$434,749	28.36%
Settlement & Community, Communications & Outreach	\$3,228,037	\$2,165,011	52.24%
Settlement Online Pre-arrival	\$1,568,485	\$0	new
Strategy Implementation	\$14,367	\$26,489	-45.76%
Refugee Emergency	\$19,641	\$5,206	277.28%
Amortization & Others	\$55,501	\$30,370	82.75%
Total	\$10,105,941	\$7,838,483	28.93%



Excess of revenue over expenses	\$140,866	\$59,694	135.98%
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ISANS Board Members

2015-2016

Alan Blyth	Dianne Taylor-Gearing
Alex Atiol	Dick Miller
Basia Dzierzanowska	Gerry Mills
Brenda Rowe	Lilani Kumaranayake
Catharine Penney	Maya Churbaji
Colin MacLean	Merlin Fownes
Claudette Legault	

Thank You to our Funding Partners

Association of Canadian Community Colleges
Bank of Montreal
Bank of Nova Scotia
Employment and Social Development Canada
Employment of Nova Scotia
Family Learning Initiative Endowment Fund
Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada
Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia
Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency
Nova Scotia Department of Education
Nova Scotia Department of Health & Wellness
Nova Scotia Department of Labour & Advanced Education
Nova Scotia Department of Workplace Innovation and Productivity Skills Incentive
Nova Scotia Office of Immigration
Royal Bank of Canada Foundation
Status of Women Canada
SUCCESS
United Way Halifax

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