

Community Sponsorship Coming to Ireland

Ireland [recently announced](#) its commitment to develop a community refugee sponsorship program, joining the growing ranks of countries worldwide promoting this important way of resettling refugees in need of protection.

At recent meetings with GRSI leaders in Dublin, Immigration Minister David Stanton said he fully backs the idea. Community sponsorship of refugees has also been [endorsed](#) by Ireland's Refugee & Migrant Coalition. Both government and civil society organizations have voiced their commitment to working together to co-design and implement community sponsorship in Ireland.

The GRSI team was in Ireland from November 1st to 3rd to offer advice to government and civil society representatives on community refugee sponsorship. Workshops covered technical program design, how to overcome challenges, and the importance of co-design and partnership between government and community.

GRSI partners also exchanged ideas with an impressive array of public interest groups at a half-day seminar organized by the Immigrant Council of Ireland. Various universities, trade unions, faith organizations and sports associations were represented at the event.

GRSI delegates included Jennifer Bond (University of Ottawa), Gregory Maniatis (Open Society Foundations), Kate O'Malley (UNHCR), Chris Gregory (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada), Brian Dyck (Canadian



Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association), and Melissa Tam (Canadian High Commission in London).

They were joined by Tim Finch, the director of [Citizens UK's](#) new [Foundation for Community Sponsorship of Refugees](#). Mr. Finch was able to share valuable tips on how to get started based on his experience with the United Kingdom's [community sponsorship scheme](#), introduced one year ago.

Ireland will look to both the Canadian and British sponsorship models as inspiration for developing their own system. At the same time, GRSI partners will be learning from Ireland's experience, as the country's government and community leaders seek out novel solutions to the many complex issues surrounding refugee resettlement.

WHAT IS GRSI?

The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative is a partnership of five organizations – the Government of Canada, UNHCR, the Open Society Foundations, the Radcliffe Foundation and the University of Ottawa. It aims to help other countries set up their own community-based refugee sponsorship programs – in the process strengthening local communities and improving the narrative on refugees.

Refugee Sponsorship in a Rural Community

Here is an excerpt from an [interview](#) with Pauline Mahoney, member of a sponsorship group in Smithers, British Columbia. The full interview can be found in the Case Studies section of the [GRSI Guidebook](#).



Are there any special considerations for a group sponsoring refugees to come live in a small, rural community?

Small towns can be very welcoming, open, and resourceful. It was easy to meet with social supports and plan for our newcomers' arrival. Local businesses and individuals were generous in their help with funding and donations; e.g., a local dentist provided free care, and an optometrist offered to assist with eye exams. We were also able to arrange both formal and volunteer language training services. We recommend that groups contract the services of a professional interpreter and not rely on Arabic speakers within the community. Volunteers, while meaning well, do not always interpret correctly and can add their own biases. We had regular meetings with a trained interpreter over the phone.

What was the experience of arrival and the refugees' first weeks like?

It was a mix of excitement, relief, anticipation, and anxiety. We had a strong desire to reassure the newcomers that they were welcome, that we were committed to their well-being, and we wanted them to know they were safe. We also recognized how terribly confused, bewildered, and frightened these families might be – not to mention exhausted! The initial weeks were harder for Family B as Family A had relatives in Smithers. The first few weeks were intense and busy. There was so much work to do, but our preparation helped ease the way as we knew who to contact and had completed as much paperwork in advance as we could.

What was the best part of your sponsorship experience?

The profound experience of “walking alongside” a family as they struggled to adapt and adjust to a new life forced upon them.

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP AROUND THE WORLD

- [‘I like the rain’: the only Syrian family in a Welsh village](#)
- [Syrian refugees in Narberth: ‘Wales reminds me of home’](#)
- [Group of Ottawa women welcomes Liberian refugee](#)
- [Syrian refugees reap benefits of Argentina’s new visa rules](#)
- [El Corredor Humanitario San Luis realizó una jornada sobre recepción e integración intercultural](#) (SPANISH)
- [Demandes d'asile - 150 migrants syriens accueillis en Belgique en 2018 par les communautés religieuses](#) (FRENCH)



Community-based, private sponsorship is a powerful tool to help bridge the ever-widening gap between resettlement needs and places available.

— Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

SUGGESTED READING

- Judith Kumin, [“Welcoming Engagement: How Private Sponsorship Can Strengthen Refugee Resettlement in the European Union”](#) (Migration Policy Institute, 2015)
- Ariane Rummery, [“Harnessing citizens’ goodwill can help solve refugee crisis”](#) (UNHCR, 2017)

VISIT THE GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE AT: WWW.REFUGEESPONSORSHIP.ORG