

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

GRSI AT A GLANCE

Workshop held for government champions of community sponsorship

GRSI teamed up with the United Kingdom's Home Office to hold a two-day workshop for civil servants involved in planning and implementing community-based refugee sponsorship systems in their home countries.

The *Technical Workshop on the Development and Implementation of Community Sponsorship Programs* was held in London, England, on May 9 and 10. It was attended by representatives of eight nations: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Spain, Uruguay and the UK. They were joined by several UNHCR officials currently working in those countries.

The symposium was led by GRSI experts Jennifer Bond (University of Ottawa Refugee Hub), Kate O'Malley (UNHCR), Gregory Maniatis (Open Society Foundations) and Chris Gregory (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). The United Kingdom's Minister of State for Immigration, the Rt Hon Caroline Nokes, gave the keynote address.

Discussion centered on the main challenges facing the government champions who are responsible for developing community sponsorship models in tandem with civil society players in their own countries. The themes covered included policy design, feasibility assessments, sponsor engagement, oversight mechanisms, resourcing, and program evaluation.

The schedule also featured a visit to the Salvation Army Community Centre for a series of meetings with British sponsorship groups. This exchange underscored the community-building aspect of private sponsorship, as sponsors explained how their work with refugees has put them in contact with local institutions such as neighbourhood schools. The experience of many sponsors has been so positive that they plan to take in more refugee families. United Kingdom's Community Sponsorship Scheme has welcomed dozens of refugees since its launch in July 2016.

The workshop highlighted the growing momentum around community refugee sponsorship worldwide and

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gave the forty participants a chance to compare notes on best practices, strategy, and consensus-building.

GRSI affiliates meeting

On April 10, GRSI held a seminar for some fifty community, business and religious leaders keen to explore alternative models of private refugee sponsorship. The full-day symposium was hosted by GRSI partner Open Society Foundations (OSF) at its headquarters in New York. The meeting was chaired by Gregory Maniatis (Director of OSF's [International Migration Initiative](#)) and Jennifer Bond (Managing Director of the [University of Ottawa Refugee Hub](#)).

The event featured speakers from organizations such as [World University Service of Canada](#), [Amnesty International](#), the [Shapiro Foundation](#), [Airbnb](#), the [Center for Global Development](#), the [UNCHR](#) and [Oxfam International](#).

They explored topics such as educational sponsorships, business-based sponsorships, humanitarian corridors, financing, housing, and strategic partnerships.

The experience of a business sponsoring refugees

Here is an excerpt from an *interview* with Jim Estill of Danby Electronics. The full interview can be found in the Case Studies section of the *GRSI Guidebook*.



What motivated you to support refugees?

It is a humanitarian crisis. I did not want to grow old and say I stood by and did nothing. One of the phrases I repeat all the time is "Do the Right Thing." It is actually how we try to run Danby Appliances. So I am simply trying to "Do the Right Thing."

What advantages do businesses have in sponsorship of supporting refugees over other sponsors?

Business people know how to organize and structure things. They know how to get things done. I always tell people "if you can run a company with 800 people, you can run a volunteer organization with 800 people." In our case, we organized it like a business with a director of health, director of education, director of housing, director of jobs, etc. The director of mentors assigned each family an Arabic speaking mentor and family and 4-5 English speaking mentors. Each mentor group had checklists – set up a bank account, get a doctor, get a Health Card, get a bus pass, ride the bus, get a library card, set up a computer with Duolingo, etc. And then there are bi-weekly scorecard check-ins to see what is needed; for example, a family might need a Skype tutor or a soccer team for the child.

How can businesses be leveraged in support of refugees?

Businesses have resources – not only cash, but staff, trucks, warehouses, etc. Businesses have contacts. One of the most important things for refugees is jobs and business people can influence other business people to give these people a break and offer them work.

What sorts of measures can businesses take to integrate refugees into the workplace?

The most obvious is hire them. However the most important is helping them learn English. Implementing English as a Second Language training, English word of the day, English lunch buddies, English learning programs with Skype tutors, TV, Mango Language, Duolingo, tea circle, etc. are all helpful.

What is the best part of your sponsorship experience?

Seeing someone start a new life and blossom is very fulfilling. Seeing children grow and thrive. Knowing you have made a difference.

How are the refugees you sponsored doing today?

Success is families working, speaking English, supporting themselves, some degree of integration. From where we are now, I think that over 80% of the 58 families we sponsored are successful using this definition. Progress varies from family to family, and learning English is still a hard part for some.

Learn More

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Guelph CEO Jim Estill sponsoring 50 refugee families

How one man runs refugee sponsorship like a business

Sponsoring refugees as a workplace is good for business

This amazing man paid for 58 refugee families to resettle in Canada

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, strengthening local communities and improving the narrative on refugees in the process.

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