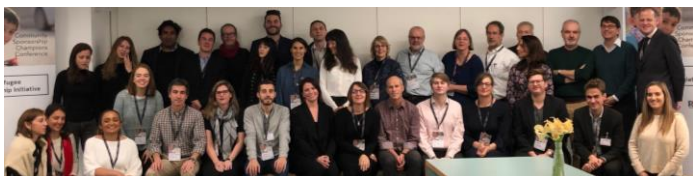


GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

GRSI AT A GLANCE

Community Sponsorship Champions Summit

As interest in community-based refugee sponsorship continues to gain momentum around the world, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, [Good Faith Partnership](#) and [Reset Communities and Refugees](#) co-hosted a three-day workshop with civil society champions. Participants represented prominent actors from states that are implementing or exploring the feasibility of community sponsorship programs. The meeting provided a unique opportunity for insightful conversations about the challenges of community sponsorship and laid the foundation for continued knowledge exchange.



Participants at GRSI's Champions Summit in London, England

Held at Amnesty International's international secretariat in London from November 28 to 30, the meeting brought together about forty civil society participants from nine countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, Germany, Spain, United States and Canada). Discussions included themes such as program design, sponsor mobilization and support, the role of philanthropic and private sector actors, coalition-building, and working with government.

The summit also highlighted the expanding role of UK's civil society in promoting community sponsorship worldwide. The valuable experiences of UK actors during the first two years of the [Community Sponsorship Scheme](#) make them ably suited to serve as models for community sponsorship champions in other countries and to pass along lessons learned.

Reset @ResetUKorg · Nov 29

The #CommunitySponsorship family is growing internationally. More countries are getting involved. Powerful and amazing stories from all around the world of communities coming together and providing homes, friendships and hopes for #refugees. It's the power of communities! #GRSI



Daniel Gonzales @dancolumbia

First Global Community Sponsorship Champions Conference! #GRSI @RefugeeHub @GiustraFdn @CitImmCanada @Refugees @OpenSociety

Community Sponsorship in the News

- [Housing needed for 18 refugee families coming to Guelph](#)
- [Meet the volunteers saving thousands of refugees: "There's not one day I don't feel guilty"](#)
- [The future of Private Sponsorship in Europe](#)
- [Community Sponsorship and all that jazz](#)
- [Private fund helps sponsor 685 refugees across Canada](#)



Tim Dixon, Co-founder of [More in Common](#), summed up the spirit of the conference: "Community sponsors are trusted messengers, seen as credible and independent. They can shift perceptions of refugees by speaking to values and emotions, and there is huge creative potential for power storytelling that unites people."

Sabir Festival in Italy

[Sponsor Refugees'](#) founding director Tim Finch was a guest panelist at the [Sabir Mediterranean Cultures Festival](#), held from October 11 to 14 in Palermo, Italy. Tim spoke about the evolution of the United Kingdom's [Community Sponsorship Scheme](#), which is now in its third year. Founded in 2014, the festival brings together Italian and international civil society representatives for workshops and cultural events. The theme this year was the Freedom of Movement of People, Ideas, Cultures and Rights. Jacqueline Kalisz, a migration officer at the Canadian Embassy in Rome, also participated in the event as a panelist.

Mobilized to sponsor more refugees

More than 150 sponsoring groups sponsored 685 refugees to settle in 49 Canadian communities by the end of 2018, after philanthropic leaders committed nearly CAD\$3.5 million toward settlement costs. The [University of Ottawa Refugee Hub](#) and Jewish Family Services – with founding donors [the Giustra Foundation](#) and [the Shapiro Foundation](#) – launched a unique, time-limited fund to accelerate the sponsorship of these refugees identified by the UNHCR through the Canadian resettlement stream called [Blended Visa Office Referred](#). This rapid and country-wide mobilization was a result of the efforts of sponsors, private donors, government, many community organizations, the UNHCR and the [Refugee Sponsorship Training Program](#), who worked together to ensure that all available Canadian resettlement spots for refugees in 2018 were filled.

Sponsoring a refugee family in the United Kingdom

Community sponsorship relies on individuals committed to welcoming refugees. GRSI interviewed Nick Coke, Refugee Response Coordinator for The Salvation Army and co-leader of Raynes Park Community Church in London, England. His team was named Community Sponsorship Group of the Year at Citizen UK's Community Sponsorship Awards 2018. The church was one of the first community sponsors in the UK to welcome a refugee family under the United Kingdom's Community Sponsorship Scheme. You can read more about their story in their booklet *Home from Home*.



Members of the Raynes Park Community Church with the family they sponsored

How did you get involved in community sponsorship?

I first heard about refugee sponsorship from my friends at Citizens UK – a community organising network my church is involved with. They told me that the British government were interested in exploring a form of refugee sponsorship and asked if I would like to attend a meeting to hear more. Going along and learning all that had been achieved in Canada felt like discovering the world's best kept secret! I immediately knew that this was something my church would want to be involved with and pioneer in the UK.

How many refugees has your group sponsored?

My church has sponsored one family of five Syrians. As we've shared the story of our sponsorship we've been excited to see new sponsorship groups forming and been happy to offer advice and assistance. This has included six new Salvation Army sponsorship groups in various locations around the UK, and five organisations in our locality, including a synagogue, a mosque and a school.

What are your group's responsibilities under the UK's community sponsorship program?

The group's key responsibilities are to source housing for a minimum of two years and to provide support for a family for one year in accessing benefits, medical services, language classes, education and employment, as well as befriending and well-being assistance. Groups are required to raise funds of £4500 per adult member of the family to support the resettlement.

What are some of the challenges you have faced?

Finding a suitable property in our neighbourhood was particularly difficult in the early days. Housing is very expensive right across London. Now the family have been here for a while, finding alternative, sustainable long-term housing continues to pose a challenge. Otherwise, there have been difficult days when the family have heard bad news about family and friends back home.

What has been the best part of your sponsorship experience?

When we started out on the sponsorship journey we thought we were doing this for someone else and didn't really consider how much the experience would fundamentally change us! We can honestly say, twenty months on, that the family has helped us to see the world differently. We now understand what true hospitality looks like, for example, because every time we visit their home, from a day or two after they arrived, we receive a true welcome and plenty of Syrian food. We've also had the joy of seeing one member of the family who arrived with serious health problems, receive life-saving medical care. Every day her health improves and we are all so thankful for this.

What advice would you give to people or organizations interested in becoming refugee sponsors?

Just go for it! Make a start even if you're not entirely sure how your sponsorship is going to come together. The process of building a team, raising money and sourcing housing all comes with a little bit of patience and perseverance. Once you get going and start sharing your plans in your community or organisation the right people will emerge and pieces will start to fall into place. I've been astounded time and again at just how many people are desperate to help and play a role if only we give them the opportunity.

"We firmly believe that we must search for creative and innovative ways to boost our humanitarian support to refugees and the countries that are receiving and assisting people in need of protection."

- Rogelio Frigerio, Minister of the Interior, Public Works and Housing, Argentina

What is GRSI?

The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative is a partnership of five organizations – the Government of Canada, UNHCR, the Open Society Foundations, the Giustra 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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