

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

New Website for Argentine Sponsors Unveiled



Argentina's Support Network for Community Refugee Sponsorship launched its new [website](#) (in Spanish) at the end of 2018. The website offers sponsors valuable guidance in a centralized online location for the first time – covering an array of topics on providing support to refugees, including accessing legal aid, language learning, validation of academic and professional credentials, finding a job, and integration in general. The website is also designed to encourage institutions (NGOs, schools, universities, local governments, businesses) as well as the public at large to get involved in Argentina's growing community sponsorship program. For more information, see the [UNHCR press release](#) (Spanish only).

Spain to Launch Community Sponsorship Pilot



The Spanish Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security, together with the Basque Country Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), will implement a community sponsorship pilot project in partnership with civil society organizations and local communities. The GRSI looks forward to continued work with the UNHCR office in Spain to provide technical assistance to community partners and government officials in the next steps of program design and implementation. For more information, see the Spanish government [press release](#) (Spanish only).

UK Parliament Hosts Event on Community Sponsorship of Refugees

Labour MP Helen Hayes hosted a Parliamentary Event on Community Sponsorship of Refugees at the House of Commons in London, United Kingdom, on December 4, 2018. Organized by [Sponsor Refugees](#), the [Citizens UK](#) Foundation for Community Sponsorship, and [Reset](#), the gathering aimed to raise the profile of community sponsorship of refugees with London MPs and peers and to build political support for community sponsorship across all party lines.

Proud to host an event organised by [@SponsorRefugee](#) & [@ResetUKorg](#) in Parliament to promote & celebrate [#communitysponsorship](#) Moving stories from community groups & sponsored refugees, inspiring to hear Muteb who wants to be next Stephen Hawking & Hatem whose children are now safe



Tweet from British parliamentarian [Helen Hayes](#)

The sponsors and refugees who participated in the panel discussion - including Moutab, a twelve-year-old Syrian boy (see [video](#)) - provided moving and inspirational stories of the positive impact on the individuals as well as on the participating communities. The event also featured the [#ExtendTheWelcome](#) campaign, which calls on the UK Government to extend the [Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme](#) (VPRS) beyond 2020.

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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GRSI Interview with Lucila Spigelblatt

Deputy Executive Director of Catholic Centre for Immigrants in Ottawa, Canada

In November 2017, Lucila Spigelblatt was part of a GRSI delegation to Spain, and in June 2018 she travelled to Argentina to train sponsorship groups in Buenos Aires and Cordoba. Lucila will soon be retiring after 34 years of service at CCI Ottawa and the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO).

How did CCI Ottawa get involved in community sponsorship? What is its role as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder?

CCI Ottawa evolved from the original Catholic immigration Service established in 1952. In 1985 it became a non-profit, non-denominational agency working hand-in-hand with the established community to welcome, support and celebrate the achievements of refugees and immigrants as they integrate to life in Canada. CCI is the main support for the Sponsorship Agreement held by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa, signed in 1979. CCI Ottawa is also an agreement holder on its own. A Sponsorship Agreement signed in 2016 allows us to recruit volunteers and organize sponsorship teams. Prior to the arrival of a refugee family, we assist the community sponsors with the paperwork. We also offer practical advice on things like housing, budgeting, cultural competence and general preparation to deal with the day-to-day tasks that await them. Once the sponsored refugees arrive, we collaborate with the volunteers and the new arrivals to ensure they have access to up-to-date information and a safe third party to help them navigate and resolve any issues arising.

What kinds of sponsorship groups do you work with? How many refugees have they welcomed?

We want them all! We are extremely lucky to manage a long-established Sponsorship Agreement and a fairly new one. Refugees and staff benefit from the mix of knowledge and new ideas arising from volunteers who have sponsored multiple times and volunteers who are just joining in. Since 1996, over 1,200 refugees have been privately sponsored through the diocese. During the Syrian refugee crisis, 40 parishes sponsored over 230 Syrian refugees. In addition, during Project 4000, churches welcomed over 1,500 Vietnamese people. Since 2016, 43 persons have been sponsored through the new Sponsorship Agreement signed by CCI Ottawa.

What are some of the challenges you and your sponsorship groups face?

It is difficult to overstate that a bit of flexibility, a lot of patience and parking your assumptions at the door are fundamental building blocks for most sponsorships. Some sponsorship groups find it frustrating when things do not go according to plans and timelines. Most of them adapt to the constantly evolving reality and become stronger because of it.

Global Momentum

GRSI's role in promoting community sponsorship featured in the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) as part of UNHCR's planned three-year strategy to boost resettlement capacity.

Community sponsorship was also highlighted at the 12th annual [High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges](#) on December 18 and 19 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

What has been the best part of your sponsorship experience?

It has been a privilege to collaborate with so many sincere and determined people. I love that a great diversity of styles, knowledge, means and expectations can be gathered for the sole purpose of helping other human beings in a very direct manner. I love that their actions increase the possibilities for peaceful and harmonious communities now and for the future.

What advice would you give to community groups or individuals interested in becoming refugee sponsors?

I sometimes compare the journey of the sponsors and newcomers to my own path as a new mother: I listened to the advice offered by my elders and contemporaries. I read a lot. I made all kinds of plans. I knew it would be hard work and I thought I was ready. All the preparation was helpful, but nothing could have equipped me for the intensity of actually living through it. A lot more work, a lot more challenges but also more joy than I ever thought possible. It is not for everyone, but it is a wonderful journey.

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP IN THE NEWS

- We can make a difference for refugees, one family at a time
- The case for expanding community sponsorship of refugees
- Refugee sponsors welcome Syrian family to Canada
- Hundreds of refugees to settle in Canada by year's end after receipt of \$3.5 million in donations ensures community sponsorship spaces are filled



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