

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

GRSI AT A GLANCE

GRSI on the move

It's been a busy spring for GRSI - a reflection of the growing enthusiasm for community-based refugee sponsorship in many countries. Here's a snapshot of a few GRSI activities not covered in previous newsletters.

New Zealand & Australia

A GRSI delegation visited both countries from March 23 to 28 to learn more about their new community sponsorship programs and to offer technical support. GRSI was represented by Professor Jennifer Bond (Managing Director of the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub), Kate O'Malley (UNHCR's Senior Consultant on Resettlement Partnerships), and Kirsten Mlačak (Counsellor at the High Commission of Canada in Canberra). In New Zealand, the GRSI team held meetings with the Minister of Immigration, Hon. Iain Lees-Galloway, a group of sponsorship organizations, and officials from various government departments responsible for refugee resettlement. They also made a presentation at a special event on community sponsorship hosted by the New Zealand Human Rights Parliamentary Network. New Zealand launched its pilot in December 2017, with the introduction of the [Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category](#).

Highlights of the tour in Australia included a presentation at the Welcoming Cities Symposium in Adelaide, a meeting with officials of the Home Affairs and Social Services departments, and a working lunch with members of parliament. Australia inaugurated its [Community Support Programme](#) in July 2017, following a four-year pilot.

ERN+ Conference on Complementary Pathways

Kate O'Malley (UNHCR Senior Consultant, Resettlement Partnerships) and Mary Coulter (Counsellor, Mission of Canada to the European Union) gave a presentation at a meeting held by the European Resettlement Network (ERN) in Brussels on April 12. At the event, IOM, UNHCR and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), presented the outcomes of a project to develop new models of refugee protection in the EU, including private sponsorship.

EU-FRANK workshop

IRCC helped EU-FRANK deliver a seminar on refugee resettlement at the Mission of Canada to the European Union on May 30 and 31. The meeting allowed participants to take an in-depth look at various approaches to program monitoring and evaluation. EU-FRANK is a project of the European Union that provides capacity-building support to Member States in the field of refugee resettlement.

International Refugee Rights Conference 2018

Chris Gregory (Refugee Affairs, IRCC) represented GRSI at a meeting organized by the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) from June 7 to 9 in Toronto. Chris vaunted the merits of community sponsorship during a panel discussion entitled Sharing Refugee Sponsorship Experiences. The other panelists were Jonathan Cox (Citizens UK), Brian Dyck (SAH Council) and Petra Hueck (ICMC).



Inside My Heart

The Radcliffe Foundation's compelling new film about the global refugee crisis premiered at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on May 7. Directed by Debra Kellner, *Inside My Heart* is a full-length documentary that tells the story of three refugee families as they search for safety in Europe. The Radcliffe Foundation was established in 1997 by Canadian businessman and philanthropist Frank Giustra, and is one of the five GRSI partners.

Here are a few reactions to the film.

- [Global News](#)
- [The Globe and Mail](#)
- [Twitter](#)

"The intent is to reach millions of viewers throughout Canada and around the world, to let them understand this #humanitarian crisis through the eyes of ordinary #refugees – the pain, the fear, the courage & bonds of family." - Debra Kellner

Learn more

Sponsorship Agreement Holders
Inside the Student Refugee Program
The story of a refugee student at McGill
Capital Rainbow Refuge - Testimonials

Sponsoring a Syrian refugee in Argentina

Argentina is building a sustainable community sponsorship program, based on the humanitarian visa program it established for Syrian refugees in 2014. As part of this process, community organizations and everyday citizens are becoming increasingly involved in sponsoring refugees. Here is a glimpse into the experience of one such sponsor. Names have been withheld to protect the refugees' identities.



Representatives of Argentine sponsorship groups meet at the Canadian Embassy in Buenos Aires during a GRSI visit in March 2018

What kind of support did you and your group provide?

Aside from financial backing, we helped the refugee we sponsored learn Spanish and find his way around the city. We also introduced him to other people so he could build his own circle of friends. We assisted him with paperwork, like getting his academic transcripts validated.

I remember on his second day in Buenos Aires I invited him along to my doctor's appointment. We had to take the subway and make a few transfers. On the way back I asked him to lead us home using the web app I had showed him. We got completely lost, but eventually we made it home. He was from a town in Syria where you could hop on the bus and get anywhere in town in ten minutes. Buenos Aires is a huge city, but eventually newcomers find their way around.

We also provided emotional support. We were there to lend an ear when he wanted to talk about his concerns, his needs, his aspirations. We understood he had gone through a traumatic experience. He had arrived in a strange land where he didn't understand the language, where he had no job or family.

Fortunately, we got along famously. It felt like he and his friends were part of our family. We did everything together: watched movies, went out dancing, spent Christmas together, went shopping, cooked meals.

What were the biggest challenges you faced in welcoming refugees to your community?

One of the major challenges we faced was the attitude towards refugees we encountered among some of the sponsors and institutions in charge of welcoming them. We noticed some people expected Syrian refugees to be like the Italian immigrants who arrived many years ago. A lot of people

didn't yet understand the difference between a refugee and an immigrant. Nor did they grasp the unique nature of the Syrian context. But I'm sure we can eventually overcome these prejudices and build goodwill.

Another issue was the lack of guidelines on economic support. The word 'necessity' can mean something different to a refugee than it does to a sponsor. On top of food, there are other costs such as transportation and cash for emergencies. After a few months we agreed on a budget that included his basic needs. Obviously we kept it flexible, but this approach led to better understanding. Tools like this would be really useful.

What was the best part of your sponsorship experience?

It was a life-changing experience. We made new friends. We learned a lot about others. And we learned a lot about ourselves. The British anthropologist Tim Ingold said, "No way of being is the only possible one." We tried to act with this in mind. With respect and empathy and open-mindedness. The refugees we befriended reminded us of this during our daily lives. Happiness could mean something different to them than it did to us. Of course, holding a job and resuming their studies were important to them. But other things were more important. Like being free. And not being in danger due to your political beliefs or your choices as an individual. The most important thing for them was the freedom to make their own decisions.

How are the refugees you sponsored doing today?

Really well, I'd say. They all speak good Spanish. They've found jobs. Not all of them in the same field they used to, but they're working. This allowed them to move out on their own and become financially independent. They know parts of Buenos Aires I've never even seen because they've made all kinds of friends and are involved in different activities. Some days are harder than others, but we're always there to help each other.

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 international narrative on refugees in the process.

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