

# GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

## GRSI AT A GLANCE

### GRSI pays its first visit to Portugal

A GRSI team met with senior Portuguese government officials in Lisbon on October 23 to explore the possibility of developing a community sponsorship program in Portugal. During the meeting, GRSI reps Jennifer Bond (University of Ottawa Refugee Hub), Kate O'Malley and Elzbieta Gorska (UNHCR) and Chris Gregory and Caroline Guimond (IRCC) answered numerous questions about how sponsorship works and offered their support if Portugal decides to experiment with refugee sponsorship.

### Amnesty International study tour

The directors of Amnesty International's country offices in Denmark and Iceland visited Ottawa from October 29 to November 2 to learn more about how community refugee sponsorship is practised in Canada. Annette Stubjkaer (Denmark) and Anna Lúðvíksdóttir (Iceland) met with representatives of several civil society organizations that work with refugees. Amnesty International is playing an increasingly active role in promoting private sponsorship in many countries, particularly in Ireland, which is about to launch its own pilot program.

### Chilean delegation visits Canada

On November 1, IRCC's Dennis Cole gave a presentation on GRSI to officials of Chile's Interior Ministry during their visit to Ottawa. Chilean government and civil society representatives have been exploring the concept of community sponsorship over the past two years. They participated in GRSI's study tour for Latin American countries in May 2017 as well as the recent regional roundtable on resettlement held by the UNHCR and IOM in Buenos Aires. Chile receives support from the Emerging Resettlement Countries Joint Support Mechanism (ERCM).

### GRSI leader wins award

Frank Giustra, founder and head of the [Giustra Foundation](#) (formerly known as the Radcliffe Foundation) has been honoured for his philanthropic work by the [International Crisis Group](#). He received the Chairman's Award at the [In Pursuit of Peace Award Dinner](#) held on October 3 in New York. In his [acceptance speech](#), Mr. Giustra described how witnessing firsthand the plight of refugees landing on the shores of Greece three years ago changed his life and motivated him to get involved in helping refugees.

### Community Sponsorship around the World

[How Frank Giustra is Turning Business Savvy into Private Sector Support for Refugees](#)

[Local volunteers and council win awards for work resettling refugees](#)

[The HOME Project Announces €4 Million Grant from the IKEA Foundation](#)

### Canadian expert advises Germany on community sponsorship

Melissa Fama, Director of Resettlement Policy and Programs at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, visited Berlin from October 30 to November 4 to provide guidance to her counterparts at the German Interior Ministry on the intricacies of community sponsorship. Germany recently announced its intention to receive 500 privately sponsored refugees in 2019 and is currently working with several civil society organizations to co-design a workable system. Melissa had the chance to watch many of the key players in action. "It's amazing to see how quickly the German program is taking shape," she said upon her return to Ottawa. "Welcoming privately sponsored refugees to Germany under the pilot will be a big task. But the officials and community reps I met with are eager to take on this exciting challenge."

### New report on community sponsorship in the EU

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs has released a major study on the feasibility of sponsorships schemes in Europe. Prepared by [MPI Europe](#) and [ICF](#), the report acknowledges the growing interest in community-based refugee sponsorship across Europe. It also looks at possible ways forward, such as developing training opportunities, financing sponsorship activities, and exploring possible legislative action.

Link to full report: [Study on the feasibility and added value of sponsorship schemes as a possible path](#)

Link to MPI commentary: [Three Things the European Union Can Do to Support Private Sponsorship of Refugees](#)

## GRSI interview: Mennonite Central Committee - one of Canada's first sponsorship groups

Kaylee Perez works as a Refugee Sponsorship and Settlement Associate at the *Mennonite Central Committee of Canada* in Kitchener, Ontario. The MCC was among the first organizations in Canada to sponsor refugees when the *Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program* was launched in the late 1970s. Kaylee is an avid supporter of GRSI, having travelled to Buenos Aires twice this year to provide guidance and training to Argentine refugee sponsorship groups.



### What does your job involve at the MCC?

My role at MCC is multi-faceted. It includes connecting and matching ordinary groups of Canadian citizens to refugees in need of resettlement from around the world. I walk alongside these private sponsors and newcomer families as they learn and grow, and engage the community in public education on welcoming refugees.

### What kinds of sponsorship groups do you work with?

Over the past three years, I have helped a variety of different groups - churches, interfaith groups, neighbourhood associations, ethno cultural communities, municipalities, mayors, law offices, rotary clubs, university institutions, and groups of friends. MCC is open to equipping and assisting any group of people willing to engage in this life changing work.

### What are some of the challenges your sponsorship groups face?

Managing expectations is an ongoing challenge in sponsorship. Both newcomers and sponsors approach this relationship with their own expectations of what it will be like and how success will be defined. Add in language barriers, cultural differences, trauma and stress, and this is not always an easy road to navigate. Grace and patience is required every step of the way. Navigating the financial support role is one of the most challenging aspects of the sponsor-newcomer relationship. It is where the power dynamics are most evident and where the greatest tensions can arise. Newcomer families arrive with varying levels of financial literacy and willingness to benefit from the guidance sponsors can provide. Shifting from survival mode to long-term planning takes time and can make the concept of budgeting difficult for some newcomers. Making use of certified interpreters when discussing finances, especially at the beginning, is suggested to ensure clear communication. Many of our sponsors communicate that

some of their greatest joys have come out of their greatest challenges. When you are able to get through the hard times together, trust is established and relationships are deepened in the long run.

### What has been the best part of your sponsorship experience?

Seeing individuals and communities learn how to live at peace together, across racial, religious, and socio-economic lines, is the incredible power of this experience. Private sponsorship is a long-term peacebuilding initiative in a world where choosing welcome has become controversial. It is not only refugees who need this program. Every individual living in a globalized world needs to understand what it means and looks like to live at peace with those we perceive as being "different" from us. When individuals choose to purposefully build relationships with the "other" they do not know, perhaps fear, and don't fully understand, it is a year that unfailingly provides mutual transformations that impact individuals, families, communities, and our countries for years to come.

### What advice would you give to someone interested in becoming a refugee sponsor?

Gather a strong and committed core committee with clearly defined roles based on individual experiences and strengths. We often suggest no fewer than five people, to avoid burnout. Communicate your expectations as a team before the family arrives. Be clear on how you will handle challenges as they arise and develop a code of ethics you will all commit to abide by. A wise man once told me sponsorship is an art and not a science. Prepare as much as you can, then let it go and meet the family you have been matched with. Every individual is unique.

*"The Spanish government, together with the regional government of the Basque Country, and with the collaboration of the GRSI, is working to develop a community sponsorship programme, building on the solidarity with refugees shown by the people of Spain."*

- Consuelo Rumí Ibáñez, State Secretary for Migration, Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security, Spain

### 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.

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

[GRSI ONLINE](#)

[CONTACT US](#)