

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

Argentina Expands Its Community Sponsorship Program

The last months have seen exciting new developments in Argentina's community sponsorship program. *Programa Siria* has sponsored over 400 refugees since the pilot launched in 2014, and government and civil society partners in Argentina have been hard at work to grow the program. The pilot initially facilitated family reunification for Syrians with links to Argentine sponsors, but eventually broadened to include other Argentine residents wishing to sponsor Syrians without family ties.

Over the last two years, Argentina has sent representatives to multiple GRSI-led technical workshops to study the options for expanding the pilot. Additionally, in March 2018, a [GRSI team visited Argentina](#) to share lessons learned from Canada's experience and offer technical assistance to Argentine stakeholders from government, civil society, and the sponsorship community. GRSI partners have also delivered several workshops specifically designed for Argentine stakeholders. Argentina has taken on a regional leadership role, co-hosting with UNHCR and the IOM a [roundtable on resettlement](#) for government and civil society representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay last year.

In February of this year, the Migration Directorate (*Dirección Nacional de Migraciones*) [announced](#) new measures to expand the community sponsorship pilot: *Programa Siria* will now be open to more refugees and sponsors, enabling groups of three individuals to sponsor UNHCR-referred Syrian refugees and their family members. Sponsors – including those without family ties – will be able to sponsor Syrian and Palestinian nationals referred by the UNHCR, including those currently residing in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar. Notably, the Argentine government has also said that they are considering expanding community sponsorship to other refugee populations.

Argentina's community sponsorship network is also building the infrastructure for program expansion. New videos showcasing the experiences of refugees and sponsors involved in *Programa Siria* will be disseminated via the website and events promoting community sponsorship will be organized outside of Buenos Aires to widen the network's reach. Through these efforts, Argentina is aiming to establish a scalable program that has the potential to last for many years to come.

Celebrating 40 Years of Sponsorship in Canada

- [Stories of sponsorship \(IRCC\) & From Far and Wide \(UNHCR\)](#)
- [IRCC news release & Refugee Hub press release](#)
- [Canada's programs \(IRCC\)](#)
- [Canada's PSR program turns 40 \(CBC\)](#)

Strengthening the Foundation for Community Sponsorship in Europe

With the launch of several community sponsorship programs in Europe over the past few years, states and communities are strengthening foundations to support the growth and longevity of sponsorship. On February 25-26, 2019, over sixty government and civil society representatives from more than a dozen countries gathered in Brussels to collectively explore ways of strengthening these foundations in Europe. Organized by GRSI, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the Migration Policy Institute in Europe, the event was designed to help formalize a European "community of practice" for governments and civil society organizations developing sponsorship programs.

Two years ago, a similar event was also held in Brussels, shortly after the launch of GRSI. At the time, Canada was the only country with a mature sponsorship program, and the United Kingdom was in the process of launching their nascent program. Now, six countries are designing and implementing sponsorship programs, with the support of GRSI.

At this year's conference, participants from Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Spain shared their own experiences with sponsorship thus far. This included leading sessions and offering insights into their respective program designs and the opportunities and challenges they have come to understand exist with different approaches.

The growing knowledge base and network of new adopters in Europe will continue to be an important resource for information exchange and collective learning for those in the region and around the world developing sponsorship programs. This second conference in Brussels confirmed the increasing interest in sponsorship globally, and the continued need for sharing lessons learned as the concept evolves and is adapted in more and more communities.

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: Nick Regnault

Sponsor in Christchurch, New Zealand

Nick Regnault is a sponsor with South West Baptist Church in Christchurch, New Zealand. The church was one of four organizations selected by the New Zealand government to participate in their pilot, the [Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category](#). In July 2018, New Zealand welcomed 23 refugees under the pilot. A few weeks after the initial interview took place, we were deeply saddened to learn about the terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, and that amongst the many victims were two refugees sponsored by Nick's group. If you would like to send a message of hope, please visit this [website](#). You can also support Nick's sponsorship group [here](#).

How did your church get involved in community sponsorship?

We work globally and locally, to help people build stronger relationships - with each other, with themselves, with God and with the world. So we saw this as an opportunity to further build relationships in our community as people come together around a shared purpose.

A few years ago some churches in NZ approached the Government offering to accept Syrian refugees but nothing came of it. So we had some awareness. Community sponsorship was a new avenue for us. We didn't know anything about the programme but someone saw it advertised and brought it to our attention, and we thought, "This looks interesting, let's give it a go."

How many refugees have you welcomed? Where are they from? When did they arrive?

We have sponsored three families, all from the Middle East. They arrived in late July 2018.

What are your group's responsibilities under the pilot?

We have a Sponsorship Agreement with the New Zealand Government. They selected the refugees (although it was possible to nominate refugees), brought them into the country and had a two-week orientation programme in Auckland. The refugees are granted Residency status which means that they get welfare which largely pays them a survivable income while they get settled and seek employment. The Government has also supported us by being a sounding board, and giving advice as things have come up.

Our role starts by flying the families to Christchurch and settling them into houses that we had found and furnished. We are responsible to help them connect into all the things needed for a life here, like schooling, health care, orientation, transport, training, and when they are ready employment. We had to fund their set-up costs but we were inundated with household goods, and the money was simply not a problem.

What are some of the challenges you have faced?

We walk alongside the family each step of the way, giving them information for them to make choices. It's not always easy but we try to empower them rather than create dependency. So for example, we take buses with them, rather than drive them places. Or at least we try, but when it's raining and so much easier to take a car, then generally that's what happens.

There were a couple of things early on where we didn't think to tell them about stuff. Like what it means to rent a house. They had the idea that they could be kicked out of their house so they always had their passports ready. We had to reassure them that tenants have rights in New Zealand.

We also had to have a conversation with them about the programme and that it was a hand-up to get them started in a new country. That our friendship would always be there, but that they had to make their own way financially. They certainly have done that and now 7 months on each family has at least one person working part-time alongside English language learning.

What has been the best part of your sponsorship experience?

Laughter. New friendships and deepened ones. Shared meals. More laughter. And always the knowledge that we have played a small part in helping someone out of an impossible situation into a chance for a new life.

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

With a bit of forethought and planning it's entirely doable. There is a bit of hard work in the early stages to get them set up, and it helps to have a team of people who already know each other. It also helps to have sponsors living nearby so that people bump into each other. The refugee families have told us that the casual interactions help them feel like this is their place.

It's actually a lot easier than we thought it would be. They're just people like you or me, and they have the same challenges, questions and issues that we would have going to a new country. Where will I live? Where is the school? How will I survive financially? How can I get a job? Our experience has been that the refugees are very resilient and we simply have to act like a friend would, talking about things and helping the refugee families to settle themselves.

Recognizing that this interview took place prior to the attacks in Christchurch, is there anything you would like to add?

The terror attacks of March 2019 were completely unexpected. Two of our families suffered loss and injury, and the third family were terrified. We sat beside hospital beds, we walked side by side to graves. Children were looked after, halal meals made, and a thousand other practical details seen to. It is a terrible time for all of New Zealand. I cannot say that our friendship and support lessens the pain and grief but our hope is that by being there and being alongside, the sponsored families know that they are not alone, that we too share their grief, and we too mourn for what we have all lost.

