

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

Germany Launches Sponsorship Pilot "NesT"

Germany has **launched** its pilot program for the sponsorship of refugees. Officially known as "Neustart im Team (NesT) - Staatlich-gesellschaftliches Aufnahmeprogramm für besonders schutzbedürftige Flüchtlinge," the kickoff event took place in Berlin on May 6, 2019.



Tweet on the launch of the pilot from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community

NesT was designed by the government in close cooperation with civil society representatives, churches, and the UNHCR. They plan to resettle 500 refugees through the pilot. Congratulations to Germany on this remarkable achievement! We look forward to seeing the pilot take off in the coming months.

In Conversation with Michael Molloy

In light of the 40th Anniversary of Canada's refugee sponsorship program, GRSI recently sat down with Michael Molloy to hear his reflections on 40 years' experience in refugee affairs. Mike was director of refugee policy from 1976-1978 and led design of the refugee provisions of Canada's 1976 Immigration Act, including the sponsorship program, as well as senior refugee coordinator for the Indochinese refugee operation of 1979-80. An in-depth historical account of the early years of Canada's sponsorship program can be found in Running on Empty: Canada and the Indochinese Refugees, 1975-1980. Excerpts from the interview have been condensed below for clarity.

How Canada's sponsorship program came to be

Canada had forms of sponsorship before and after World War II; however, these were *ad hoc* and had died out by the late sixties. The successful launch of the refugee sponsorship program we know today came about because of a convergence of different interests, events and objectives at the right time: with the new *Immigration Act* in 1976, refugee sponsorship became rooted in law, and program design took place in 1978/79. The Government directed the Immigration Department to promote the new program in late 1978 just as Canadians and their political leaders saw the first images of the Indochinese crisis and began looking for ways to respond. In the fall of 1978, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops began encouraging Catholic parishes to sponsor refugees. In February 1979, the Mennonite Central Committee and the Immigration Department negotiated the first sponsorship "Master Agreement," and agreements with the Christian Reformed, Lutheran and Presbyterian churches quickly followed. The Master Agreement holders, now called Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), took responsibility for authorizing their local bodies (mainly congregations and parishes) to sponsor refugees, monitoring progress and providing assistance as needed. The launch of the sponsorship program in the face of the Indochinese refugee crisis of 1979-80 saw over 7000 groups sponsor nearly 40,000 refugees. In many cases, sponsors became repeat sponsors, and sponsorship took root in communities across Canada.

The important thing to remember is that the sponsorship program was introduced to increase the number of refugees admitted to Canada, as sponsored refugees are admitted over and above the government's quota. It also permitted Canada to resettle a broader spectrum of refugees and gave various constituencies a voice in deciding who was resettled in Canada. One of the challenges of the relationship between the government and civil society at the time was a suspicion that the government wanted to dump the costs of resettlement on civil society. The government's program design therefore included the promise of additionality in order to gain the trust of civil society.

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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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Looking ahead to the next 40 years

The key to sustaining the program is an ongoing celebration of its virtues in a way that touches emotions. People react emotionally when they perceive victims of persecution and violence. Sponsorship gives them a practical way of doing something about it. Outreach in Canada through town hall events – not unlike GRSI's roadshows in other countries – could also help to maintain public interest and grow the sponsor base beyond those mostly involved in supporting family reunification through private sponsorship.

There is nothing magical about the nitty gritty of sponsorship; settling people into a community is bread and butter stuff. The magic is in people's attitudes. When individuals come together to rescue people from terrible situations through sponsorship, they act locally but their impact is global. Sponsorship benefits refugees but it also strengthens receiving communities and changes attitudes. Sponsorship is a community-building, nation-building act.

Practically, government needs to ensure that the system is sponsor-friendly. Paperwork should not be too much of a burden, and processing should be streamlined and efficient – user-friendly for both operations officers and refugee sponsors.

Workplace Sponsorship Case Study

Seva Food Bank and Sikhs Serving Canada

In 2018, a group of volunteers and employees with the Seva Food Bank and Sikhs Serving Canada created a sponsorship group to sponsor four families (20 people). This interview is excerpted from a larger case study by GRSI on workplace sponsorships.



How did your workplace sponsorship begin?

Seva translates to 'selfless service,' and it's not only a core value for Seva Food Bank, but of Sikhism, as well. Our organization upholds values such as inclusiveness, diversity (culturally and with respect to life experience), the wellbeing of all, and eternal optimism, all of which are a huge part of why it made sense to sponsor through our organization.

How did you engage colleagues at your workplace?

It was really all word of mouth and who we knew within our own networks. We have four board members involved in the committee providing oversight and leadership. Former clients of the foodbank are also volunteering to support, particularly when we need translation help. There is one special volunteer from Honduras who, six years ago, when she and her sister-in-law

Evaluation of New Zealand's Pilot

New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) has released their evaluation of New Zealand's first community-based refugee sponsorship program, the "Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category (CORS)," which was piloted in 2017/18. The evaluation concludes that the pilot successfully brought communities together to support refugees, and also considers areas requiring attention to ensure scalability.

were new to Canada, was coming to the Food Bank. Now she volunteers, sharing her experience as a newcomer, volunteering at the food bank, and supporting the sponsorship group with translation.

What were some key factors for your successful workplace sponsorship?

We assign two different people to each family who meet at least biweekly with each family. The coaches sit down and look at mail, budgets, and discuss any questions that arise for the family, particularly questions related to immigration paperwork that are time sensitive. It works well and makes sure that nothing falls through the cracks.

Seva Food Bank uses a communication tool called Slack, through which we have created communication channels for each settlement topic, using hashtags such as housing and finances. Volunteers and employees find it is fundamental to our communication with each other.

We created and organized an excel document that contained the key information about the families. Any time we received information about the families, such as a notice to travel, we were sure to include it in the excel document. We created profile tabs for each family with date of birth, gender, education, visa number etc. This way it was easy to share necessary information with team members as they filled out documents with the families. We also created a work plan through excel with a huge list of tasks, and logged when they were completed and by whom.

How are you moving forward?

Seva Food Bank is unique in that we have incorporated private sponsorship into our programming. We tried it this year, and hopefully we can grow it under the initiative of settlement in Canada. Now we are assessing what is sustainable programmatically and doing some high-level strategic planning before moving forward. That said, we are all very enthusiastic about the future of sponsorship in our organization and we are having informal discussions about entering into a formal sponsorship agreement with the Government of Canada.

Quotes from sponsors in the group

"Last year, I felt stagnant, like I was being pulled to do something bigger. The refugee settlement project motivated me and gave me the fire I needed.... The work has been challenging, but I have made super friends. It has been a loving experience."

"For me, one of the added benefits of sponsorship was that my son has been able to experience the process first-hand... He was learning about refugees at school. Now he is experiencing refugee sponsorship through me, has come to meetings, and has helped set up a home for a family."