

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

Workplace Sponsorship Case Study

Goldblatt Partners LLP

Lawyers and staff at Goldblatt Partners LLP built an intergenerational group of current and retired employees, their families, firm clients and law firm partners to sponsor a family of five in Toronto, Ontario.

How did your workplace sponsorship begin?

In the summer of 2015, a few lawyers at our firm were already talking about sponsorship in Toronto, but we didn't see how sponsorship was going to scale to meet the urgent need for Syrians to be resettled. The tragic photo of Alan Kurdi was an important moment, because it motivated all of us at the law firm to act, and leadership immediately became invested in making it work.

What were some key factors for your successful workplace sponsorship?

Our group is an intergenerational group of volunteers, including everyone from senior partners at the law firm, lawyers, support staff, clients, retirees from the firm, and their spouses and children, among others. We found that the variety of people involved expanded the skill set of the group, as well as grew the network that we could tap into when we were raising funds, finding housing, etc.

For example, housing is notoriously expensive and difficult to find in Toronto, and it was only through the expanded network of our group that we were able to secure affordable housing for the family. The Aunt of one of the firm employees, who had recently downsized, offered her apartment to the family for free. The sponsorship group took on responsibility for repairs and maintenance, such as painting, cleaning, etc. When the family later moved into their own home, one of the sponsor group members co-signed the lease and was indemnified by the firm.

One of the reasons our group was successful was because it was organized from the bottom-up, with millennials taking the lead in instigating the sponsorship, supported by senior colleagues. We saw that sponsorship became a prideful aspect of their job. It was an opportunity for younger employees to take leadership in the workplace.

What challenges did you encounter? How did you resolve them?

Work-life balance is always a challenge in a law firm, but especially when taking on sponsorship activities on top of the work load. Thankfully, leadership was also involved in the sponsorship and invested in making it a success, so we had the flexibility we needed to respond during the more demanding periods of sponsorship.

What has been the impact of workplace sponsorship on you and your colleagues?

Sponsorship has been good for firm morale and for spreading Goldblatt Partners' reputation as an attractive place for socially conscious lawyers. It gave many lawyers and support staff at the firm a sense of social purpose in their workplace. It also helped strengthen meaningful relationships with key clients who supported the initiative.

GRSI Interview: Hannah Feldman

Project Manager at Sponsor Refugees, UK



Hannah Feldman, pictured above (front right) at the University of Ottawa's Refugee Hub, visited Canada in June 2019 to study the sponsorship experience across the country and bring back lessons learned to the United Kingdom, where she works to support sponsors in the UK's growing sponsorship program. She shared some of her observations after the trip below.

How did you become involved with Sponsor Refugees?

I was originally working with our umbrella charity, Citizens UK on a different project, and in my lunch breaks, helped to found a staff Community Sponsorship group. I was so taken by the idea – it was a chance to do something practical and tangible in the face of such overwhelming need. It was also a fantastic way to get to know the local community where we work. I loved the project, so when a job opportunity arose in the team, I jumped at the chance to work on sponsorship full time.

What is your role at Sponsor Refugees?

I promote Community Sponsorship across the UK – through online media, and by meeting communities face to face. I then support groups throughout the process – help them to build a strong team, write their application forms, develop policies, and so forth. As a team we organise networking events, so that groups can meet and share their joys and

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP IN THE NEWS

- Intercambio de buenas prácticas con Canadá
- German civil society-driven resettlement program for vulnerable refugees enters next phase
- Sponsoring refugees called a 'win-win' for workplaces
- Strengthening a community through refugee sponsorship (also available in French)



challenges - and celebratory events, like the Community Sponsorship Awards. We also call the government to account and lobby for changes to policy – we're delighted that we won the #ExtendtheWelcome campaign, which has extended refugee resettlement for at least one more year, and now all sponsored families are *additional* to government resettlement numbers.

How has the community sponsorship scheme in the UK changed in the last year?

The first "Pioneer groups" were cutting their way through thick jungle – they had to develop resources, tools and approaches from scratch. Now they have carved a path for others to follow. We have welcomed more than 60 families to the UK, so we have some great blueprints of policies, plans, etc. that we can share with new groups. The Home Office have also been great at learning from pioneer groups and is always looking at ways to improve the process, to make each step quicker. So of course it's still a huge challenge to take on – but it is getting easier.

There is a great network developing, everyone is sharing their ideas and experiences. There is always such a buzz when groups get together.

And of course, the government's announcement in June that sponsorship is now *additional* to government resettlement numbers – this makes a huge difference to the scheme. It means that every new person resettled through sponsorship would not have been here otherwise. What incredible motivation for prospective groups!

What do you think the future of community sponsorship in the UK might look like?

We hope that one day, when you mention "Community Sponsorship," people will know what you're taking about, and that almost everyone will be involved in a sponsorship group – or at least knows someone who is. It is a difficult time for migration in the UK – the narrative isn't always positive – but this is one program that has genuine cross-party support. And it really can change the narrative of migration in a positive way. So I am confident that it will continue to grow.

Right now it takes on average more than a year to get through the application process – so I also hope that, as we

get more experience and resources, the time it takes to sponsor a family will shorten significantly.

Why did you decide to visit Canada? What have you learned?

I came to learn from Canada's 40 years of experience and to be inspired by what the UK program could become. We are so impressed that so many Canadians are involved in welcoming newcomers through sponsorship.

I was hoping to get answers to specific challenges we're facing in the UK – such as housing and transitions at 'Month 13'. What I realised is that, even after 40 years, challenges will be there – but that does not stop each group from finding their way over each hurdle. What I was particularly impressed by is how quickly a group can sponsor. It can take just a few months from saying you will welcome a BVOR newcomer to meeting them at the airport. I think this is largely due to courage – this is still new to us, and so we have a tendency to plan a *lot* and can be quite risk averse. It seems that Canadian groups are ready just to jump in and meet each challenge as it comes!

I was also struck that every newcomer arrives with Permanent Residency – from day one, they are considered Canadian. This completely changes the psyche of the program and the newcomers, and is certainly something that I am advocating for in the UK.

Any advice for civil society organizations involved in sponsorship or organizations interested in becoming involved in their own contexts?

Every context is very different. You have to adapt the program to work for your country or region. What works in London won't work in rural Wales – similarly, what works in Canada often doesn't work in the UK, or Spain, or Argentina. But wherever you are based, if you are considering community sponsorship – stop thinking, and do it! The number of displaced people in the world is rising, yet more and more doors are closing. And it is not just transformative for those families you help to resettle – it transforms your life, and the life of your community.

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.