

# GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

## GRSI AT A GLANCE

### GRSI interview: A Sponsorship Agreement Holder brings people together in Victoria, British Columbia

*Sabine Lehr is the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Manager at the [Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria](#) in British Columbia, Canada. She also serves on the Council of the [Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association](#). Sabine has lent her expertise to various GRSI-related events, including presentations on Canada's community sponsorship model at workshops in France, Switzerland, Malta, and the Netherlands.*



#### How did the ICA get involved in community sponsorship? What is its role as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder?

The Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) is a settlement agency that has served newcomers to Victoria, including refugees, for the past 40 years. In early 2015, in light of the escalating numbers of refugees globally, ICA made a strategic decision to apply to the Canadian Government to become a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH). We decided to get involved in community sponsorship to make a contribution towards offering more resettlement spaces for refugees, while at the same time expanding our community engagement with other service delivery partners, non-profit organizations, and the general public. As a SAH, we conduct outreach to help new sponsorship groups form in our community, and we then guide these groups in the sponsorship process – all the way from group formation to

sponsorship application, preparation for the refugees' arrival, and post-arrival support during the one year of sponsorship.

#### What kinds of sponsorship groups do you work with? How many refugees have they welcomed?

ICA works with many different types of sponsorship groups: Faith-based groups of different backgrounds and traditions; neighbourhood groups; groups of colleagues who work together; groups of friends; organizations intentionally formed for refugee sponsorship; and groups of persons who did not previously know one another, brought together by us for the purpose of refugee sponsorship. Between fall 2015 and now, ICA has authorized 63 sponsorship groups for 75 specific cases (some groups have taken on two or more cases), representing a total of 247 sponsored refugees. Of these, 134 refugees have already been welcomed to Greater Victoria, and more are arriving every month.

### Community Sponsorship around the World

[Q&A: Philanthropist Frank Giustra Talks Refugee Crisis, Charitable Giving and Advice for Fellow Billionaires](#)

[Smith Family Enjoying Sponsorship of Syrian Refugees](#)

[Peckham set to welcome refugee family into local community after raising over £16,000](#)

[Refugee Sponsorship boosted by private donations](#)

[Syrian refugees now call South Canterbury home](#)

[York researchers launch Syrian refugee archive for scholarly use](#)

[World premiere of \*Inside My Heart\* at Vancouver International Film Festival](#)

[Living on One & Global Citizen produce a video about a Syrian refugee family being welcomed in Nova Scotia](#)



## What are some of the challenges you and your sponsorship groups have faced?

ICA signed its sponsorship agreement with the Canadian Government one week before the photo of a drowned Syrian child galvanized our nation and caused unprecedented numbers of people to engage in refugee sponsorship. We were definitely not prepared for the level of interest, but we rose to the challenge. Our main challenge now is to keep the momentum going. The crisis for refugees globally, and the lack of resettlement spaces, is worsening; yet, this topic does not have quite the same prominent place in news reports as it did in 2015. As a result, we have to step up our outreach efforts. In July, we organized a community event with speakers from the UNHCR, a resettled refugee, and a panel of sponsors to motivate new sponsors. On a more practical level, sponsorship groups mostly struggle with helping the newcomers find affordable housing beyond the sponsorship year. Finding family physicians has also proven difficult in some cases.

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

The moment another refugee or family arrives at the airport is the highlight of my work. Whenever I can, I accompany the sponsorship group to the airport for the welcome. It marks the transition for the new arrivals from being refugees to starting their new lives, with all the uncertainties and anxieties that this entails. Another great aspect of the sponsorship experience is meeting so many wonderful people from my community who are willing to embark with the newcomers and with me on the sponsorship journey in an act of solidarity and togetherness found in meeting and embracing the stranger.

## What advice would you give to community groups or individuals interested in becoming refugee sponsors?

Be open to an experience unlike anything you have experienced before. Expect the unexpected. Give yourselves permission to laugh and to cry; to be saddened and awed; to

### Learn More

[RSTP: Sponsorship Agreement Holders](#)

[IRCC: Sponsorship Agreement Holders – Sponsor a Refugee](#)

[Amnesty International: Canadian Refugee Champions](#)

[RSTP: Settlement Experiences of Iraqi Refugees](#)

[Canadian Council for Refugees: Refugees Welcome Here – Toolkit resources](#)



teach and to learn. Plan well but do not over-plan. Never forget that refugees do not choose to start a new life in your community – they come because they have no other choice. They are victims of circumstances beyond their control – yet, this victimhood does not define them. They have overcome challenges beyond our wildest imagination. Refugee sponsors are enablers of persons with demonstrated resilience to overcome great adversity. Walking with refugees on their journey into a new part of their life is a privilege.

*"Ireland, in partnership with UNHCR, has a long-standing programme of refugee resettlement. The addition of community sponsorship as a further durable solution will enhance the capacity of societies to respond effectively to the resettlement and integration needs of refugees through a partnership approach between states, civil society, the private sector and, most importantly, local communities. We look forward to working collaboratively with colleagues in Canada, the UK and elsewhere to make this approach a shared reality."*

- *David Stanton, T.D., Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration, Ireland*

## GRSI update: Dutch NGO visits Canada

Delegates of **Justice and Peace** in the Netherlands visited Toronto from August 7 to 10 to experience how refugees and asylum seekers are received in Canada. They were hosted by the **Global Migration Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy** @ University of Toronto, which has developed a community based integration model that is well suited for the European context, with the aim to build stronger, more integrated communities. Justice and Peace is setting up a series of pilot projects in the Netherlands that will match newcomers with Dutch communities to favour their integration into society. The delegates also met with representatives of the **Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP)**, the **Toronto Newcomer Office, Ontario Works, COSTI, AURA**, and the **University of Ottawa Refugee Hub**.

### 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 narrative on refugees in the process.

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