



Small Town Canada is Perfect for Immigration

We're no longer sponsors, we're friends – maybe even family – after one of the most powerful and satisfying commitments of our lives. Now we'll be there for graduations, babies, weddings and citizenship ceremonies. Above all, we hope one day to join them to quietly celebrate an end to the wars and violence that remain in their thoughts, even as they flourish in their new lives in Canada.

This is a report to our Sponsorship Agreement Holder, The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, summarizing the process and impact of Perth Ontario's decision to sponsor refugees.

We Did It

The result after four years is twenty five people, whose lives had been torn apart by war and oppression, have personally benefitted by finding a home in a safe small Canadian town where adults and children can learn, grow and flourish. The newcomers did it. They are no longer refugees, but permanent residents and contributing members of society.

Integration

Since most people in our small town speak English, the newcomers have been immersed in the English language. The adults, with help from volunteer tutors, are becoming fluent and can communicate well in English. The community, mainly homogeneous, also benefits by experiencing and welcoming these ethnically diverse new members.

The new immigrants are participating in the local community by volunteering their time at the local community food centre, joining sports activities, attending adult education school and working in local businesses.

How Did We Do It?

In the summer of 2015, the horror of the refugee crises facing Syrians, combined with the [picture of three year old Alan Kurdi's body](#) washed up on a Mediterranean beach spurred members of our community to action. A town hall meeting was called and a grass roots organization The Community Alliance for Refugee Resettlement (www.thecarr.ca) was created. Many volunteers stepped forward. An executive team provided leadership. Formal and informal partnerships were made, most notably with the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa as our Sponsorship agreement Holder, the Perth and District Community Foundation, which set up a fund and issued tax receipts and Saint James Anglican Church of Perth, acting as co-sponsor. Volunteers shared their time, talents and treasures, each according to their ability. Working together we were able to accomplish so much more than we had imagined when we began our journey.

An initial goal of raising \$100 000 to support refugees was quickly realized and surpassed. This marvel was achieved with the help of our website which provided information along with an on-line donation function, a social media campaign, the willing assistance of local media and the generosity of our local and wider communities.

We researched and assessed the procedures required to bring families to Perth. This included learning about government programs, organizing the many volunteers who wanted to help and fulfilling the strong belief that 'together we can do anything'.

Family support teams were created. Tasks included: team leaders, housing, health care, documentation, English training (no government programs in our small town), financial guidance, educational support for children and adults, driving (no public transportation in our small town) along with employment assistance. Over the course of four years, four families, three from Syria and one from Iraq have been sponsored. The first two families were identified by the government and arrived as Blended Visa Office Referrals. The second two families were privately sponsored. As each family arrived in Perth a new family support team was created. Members of these

teams volunteered many hours for each family. There were highs and lows. We also were able to offer assistance to three young men from war torn areas.

One important and positive element was the acceptance of the new comers to our community. Open communication was key – to our municipal, provincial and federal political representatives, to local print and radio media, and of course, through all the volunteers. This set a tone of acceptance. The community welcomes the families.

Lessons learned: Listen to and encourage each other, do lots of research, approach and collaborate with others, stay in touch, make being a volunteer a pleasant experience, be transparent about decisions, challenges, objectives. Include and inform the broader community at every step.

For more information please see [Our Journey: Sponsoring a Refugee Family 2016](#) - written after the arrival of the first two families and while we completed the onerous documentation required for the private sponsorship of the third and fourth families. We also drafted a more technical document entitled [Policies and Procedures](#) and a reflective piece titled [Parking the CARR](#), which celebrates the journey of the past few years and outlines our plan to bring our organization to a close. These documents are available on our web site www.thecarr.ca.

We are forever grateful for the opportunity, support, challenge, joy and success of our determination to contribute in this small way to one of the most overwhelming challenges facing all of us in the twenty first century. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in 2017, 65.6 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide because of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations.

SO much more needs to be done. We know that helping people build a new home in small town Canada is possible. We did it - others can too.

Thank you

CARR Executive

Ann Munroe, Gordon Munroe, Elsie Stresman, Colin Stephenson, Margo Bell, Jennifer Dickson.