



PARKING THE CARR

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Introduction

On a sunny Thursday morning, 30 May 2019, the CARR executive hosted a town hall meeting for CARR volunteers. It was fitting that the meeting was held in Perth's Town Hall, the same venue of a meeting on 25 September 2015, which sparked the concept of the CARR. There have been countless meetings since. The number does not matter. What does is the incredible journey which CARR volunteers have experienced, a journey which has changed so many lives: the lives of the four sponsored families who now call Perth home and the lives of the amazing number of people who committed to help newcomers settle into our community. We made the commitment, not knowing what we were getting into or what the end result might be. We had all the elements to ensure success: generous donors, willing and dedicated community partners, talented, tireless and selfless volunteers, a welcoming and supportive community, and above all, a shared goal.

The design, development and delivery of The CARR has served as a model for other groups aspiring to resettle refugees in rural communities, one in our local area and others far afield. With representatives from Mississippi Mills and Arnprior we presented the rural experience to delegations from the UK, Amnesty International and Ireland. As well, CARR and the Holy Name of Mary group in Almonte were invited to SKYPE with church officials in Ireland. We referred these groups and others to the CARR website. (www.thecarr.ca) It is a professional, informative and useful site that tells a story, provides resources and shares the framework of an effective organization, including policies and procedures. It inspires through its friendly, welcoming presentation.

The purpose of this article is two-fold: to reflect on and celebrate the journey of the past few years and to present plans to park The CARR.

Reflections from September 25, 2015 Town Hall

In the summer of 2015 the news that carried many stories of the refugee crises facing Syrian families escaping war alarmed many Canadians and others around the world. The horror was brought home when we saw the body of a young boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on a Mediterranean beach. We needed to help!

At a local discussion group, The Open Circle, talk centered on the topic of using local 200th anniversary celebrations to grow support for and develop a plan for contributing to a difference for refugees in crises. An email was circulated inviting members to create/develop a 200th anniversary refugee assistance project. The concept mushroomed. The result was a meeting at the Perth Town Hall organized by the Perth and District Community Foundation.

There truly was a grass roots beginning – a broad base of interest, lots of enthusiasm, few ego agendas, no particular ‘political’ intent, no controlling of information, tons of energy, curiosity and good will.

Early priorities and approaches included:

1. The project would have the intent to welcome Syrian families to the Perth area. Another option considered was to raise funds to contribute to other projects, which would require fewer volunteers and be less work.
2. Learn about and assess all available government assistance options to proceed. (There were many acronyms, BVOR, SP, CG, Group of 5, SAH)
3. Organizational structure. Experienced organizers were recruited, an informal executive was created, several teams, each with its own leader to work with the growing numbers of volunteers evolved. Meetings, collaboration, teamwork were all part of the action and ‘buzz’ around the cause. Incorporation as a non-profit was considered. Perth and District Community Foundation (PDCF) and St James the Apostle Anglican Church agreed to help with the financial management of collected funds.
4. The various teams, which were created included: fund raising, housing and furniture, clothing, health, translation, education, transportation, English language learning, finance, education, welcoming committee, documentation, employment, cross cultural adaptation and communication.
5. The importance of communication was recognized. We needed a brand name and The Community Alliance for Refugee Resettlement (The CARR) was created. The local print and radio media were invited and welcomed our story and goals. Support for The CARR was requested from local, provincial and federal politicians.

We learned to listen and to encourage each other; do lots of research; approach and collaborate with others who might be helpful at the government

level; stay in touch; make becoming a volunteer a pleasant experience; be transparent about ALL decisions, challenges, and objectives; to include and inform the broader community every step of the way; to be open to accommodating fast change the processes at UNCHR and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) evolved.

By the time the first family arrived in the middle of a snowstorm on Valentine's Day in February 2016 our amazing community was united – and ready to welcome them.

The poem 'No One Leaves Home Unless' written by Warsan Shire, a Kenyan-born Somali poet based in London reaches the heart of the refugee plight:

*"no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well"*

The entire poem can be found at <https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/warsan-shire-home>

Tribute to the Volunteers

Each volunteer has generously contributed time, talents and treasures to provide support and encouragement for our cause - to make a difference for people whose lives in their native countries have been torn apart by war and oppression.

Each person giving what she/he could has made CARR a success in our community.

Together the group has been strong and accomplished much more than imagined when the journey began in the fall of 2015.

People stepped up by:

- Donating funds;
- Facilitating partnerships with local organizations;
- Finding and furnishing accommodations;
- Teaching our newcomers English;
- Guiding people through Canadian medical/dental/vision care procedures;
- Assisting with shopping for food & clothes;
- Providing leadership;
- Helping to understand Canadian banking, pay stubs, child benefits, budgeting and income tax;

- Being a family team leader or team member;
- Assisting children and adults with school protocol and expectations – being a family advocate, liaison between the school and home, assisting in the classroom, checking backpacks for messages from school written in a language not yet understood.
- Keeping track of donated funds as they make their way from the donors to the newcomers;
- Driving/escorting people to appointments in Perth, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto;
- Organizing documentation;
- Providing legal services;
- Interpreting/translating between Arabic and English
- Pursuing leads for jobs resulting in employment;
- Organizing and providing driving lessons;
- Laughing with, crying with, encouraging and challenging individuals;

A silent yet vital contribution of every single volunteer continues to be setting the community tone of ‘welcome to Perth’. Being accepted into our world - a safe small town, in our peace filled country where children can learn, grow, and flourish, is a gift each person continues to give to 14 children and the 8 adults who are their parents.

Together and individually we are making a difference.

Tribute to the Community

With the encouragement of those attending the September 25, 2015 meeting and the positive response of volunteers who signed up, The CARR Executive proceeded to develop formal and Informal partnerships essential to moving forward.

Formal Partnerships

1. The Perth and District Community Foundation (PDCF) – to process donations, issue charitable receipts and manage our funds
2. St. James the Apostle Anglican Church - to serve as co-sponsor with charitable status to receive funds from PDCF and channel them to The CARR and to provide liability insurance coverage for our volunteers
3. The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa to serve as our Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) and Liaison with the Government of Canada – we are indebted to Don Smith, Chair, Refugee Ministry Working Group, Anglican Diocese of Ottawa and our wonderful advisor.

With these formal partnerships in place, a large number of informal partnerships came into being. These arrangements are significant as they reflect the generosity of our community.

Informal Partnerships

1. St. Paul's United Church – space for large group meetings and workshops, storage of clothing, household items and furniture for three years
2. St. John the Baptist Catholic Church –Temporary accommodations for two families at the Mother House for three months
3. Jewish Family Services, Ottawa – workshops for our volunteers and personal counselling in Arabic for newcomers
4. Additional Storage Spaces for Furniture – Centennial Trust, Lanark, Store N Lock, McAdoo Complex and Ann McMahon's Garage
5. Executive Team Meeting Spaces - Commonwell Insurance, Urban Hearth, Leo Adam Investments Inc. - The Factory
6. The Table – work experience opportunities and programs for Newcomers
7. Perth Library – space for the ESL class and childcare in conjunction with the TR Leger School
8. The Perth Professional Community – Drs. Kennie, Popiel, Orser, McIntosh and Bain –inviting our families into their practices.

This lengthy list speaks well of the individuals, businesses and organizations that welcomed our newcomers and supported the CARR in many ways. Consequently, we have not had any administrative costs. Our volunteers have not submitted claims for personal expenses related to their support of the families. We can say with confidence that all money donated to support the newcomers has been used for that purpose.

PDCF

The initial goal of the Fundraising Committee was to raise \$100,000. The general public in our communities and beyond quickly rallied to the cause reaching the target within three months. Since we began, our generous donors have given \$153,000. Perth District Foundation did a stellar job of investing The CARR funds along with their other funds. Over the four years The CARR has received just over \$24,000 return on investment, making our grand total \$177,703.

The Table

The Executive Director of The Table approached CARR regarding a provincial grant opportunity which would assist the families settling into our community. A grant of \$50,000 was awarded.

With these funds The Table and CARR:

- Ran an after-school program two days a week, which assisted the school age children with homework and reading skills. St John's elementary school provided the use of a classroom, library and outdoor space. Computer tablets were purchased for use in the program. A tutor and two assistants were paid to organize and run the after-school program. During the summer each of the children were enrolled in swimming classes – a necessary skill for children to have for any school trips on/near water. During the March break the children enjoyed a field trip to Ottawa.
- The public school board was able to provide an ESL class for adults. The grant paid for two childcare providers to look after the pre-school aged children while their parents were in the classroom. Both the ESL class and the day care were located in the local library, which donated the space with books and toys available for the children.
- The final portion of the grant paid for driving classes and lessons for the adults. Being in a small town with no public transportation, a driver's license is important.

Updates on the Families

After four years, twenty-five people, whose lives had been torn apart by war and oppression have found a welcome in Perth, where both adults and children can learn, grow and flourish.

Our town, our province and our country are ongoing beneficiaries of the presence of these former refugees. The new arrivals are paying taxes, thus contributing to the federal and provincial economy. They are working in jobs with an ongoing demand for reliable employees, thus benefitting the local economy. They are spending their wages locally for housing, food and services, benefitting local businesses. The children and some parents are enrolled in our schools and local children's activities, benefitting the local cultural community and our school boards.

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 citizens are participating in the local community by (for example) volunteering their time at the local community food centre, joining sports activities, attending adult education school and working in local businesses.

The Road Forward – Parking The CARR

It has been an amazing 4 years filled with rewards and challenges. We salute all the volunteers, partners and leaders. The families you have supported are now well on their way to becoming totally independent. Our financial legal obligations will cease on 10 July 2019. The executive has been thinking about and planning the way forward by parking The CARR.

The CARR will wind up in 2 phases: the operational phase and the financial distribution of remaining funds phase.

Phase 1 will be a shutdown of the structured hands-on operational phase allowing people to step back from their operational roles – including the Executive Committee – once the government's month 13 responsibilities have been met. This will likely occur in the 3rd quarter this year. Members of the various family support teams are encouraged to continue to assist families on an informal friend basis.

The executive was concerned that there may be issues with some family members that could require additional financial assistance. For this reason, the Second Phase was added.

Phase 2 includes the creation of The CARR Trust Fund to receive remaining funds. Three trustees appointed from the executive will administer the fund. This will provide continuity.

The CARR Trust Fund Agreement has been drafted. The beneficiaries of this trust fund will be all the members of the four families who are currently here in Canada plus any further children they may have, as well as one other refugee living in the community who has been supported by the CARR.

The purpose of the CARR trust fund will be to continue to support the compelling financial needs of any of the beneficiaries, should situations arise prior to the dissolution of the fund. We are hoping that volunteers who continue to support the beneficiaries will notify the trustees of situations that may merit financial support. Trustees will also monitor financial needs. It is expected that the trust fund will wind up operation in December 2020.

Prior to dissolution of The CARR Trust Fund, the trustees will transfer the remaining funds to the Perth and District Community Foundation's Ageless Migration Fund, a fund designed to provide additional support for refugees and immigrants who come to live in the community, which is being set up as a

legacy fund to honour the CARR's volunteers and donors. An initial transfer of \$10,000 has already been approved by the Executive to launch this Fund.

MOU extensions have been signed with our partners PDCF and St James to allow the Trust Fund funds to flow in the same fashion as they have been under The CARR operations.

We believe this plan honours the wishes of the donors in that all of their donations will be used to support the successful integration of the refugee families we have sponsored and other refugees and immigrants who come to the community.

14 September 2019 WRAP UP CELEBRATION

A simple, family style potluck gathering of all those associated with CARR is being organized in order to celebrate our journey and our destination.

Closing Remarks

We have come full circle. As we park the CARR, we take satisfaction in knowing that as a team we have made a difference. Four families who left conditions that we cannot fully understand are happily settled in this community. Their children are thriving as are they. They look to the future with the knowledge that they made the right choice in coming to Canada, a country so unfamiliar to them. And that was the mission of the group who assembled in this room in September 2015.

Our thanks go out to all who joined The CARR team. We may have come together as acquaintances. We conclude this story as friends. And for those of us who have worked closely with the newcomers, we now have extended families that will continue to be part of our lives.