



Community Alliance for Refugee Resettlement Parking the CARR

More than a hundred and fifty gathered last Saturday September 14th, to celebrate four successful years and four happy families as together we formally brought our community organization to a close. It was a beautiful day, with smiles, stories, thanks, children laughing, delicious food, photographs, goodbyes, hello's and a welcome new announcement.

Richard Schooley and Doug Burt planned the event, with Doug keeping everyone on track for the celebration and Richard as our Master of Ceremonies. Richard began by reminding us of the global crises that hit home in September 2015 – as our community was engaged in celebrating 200 years since refugees arrived to establish safe futures and build this exceptional Canadian community.

Yes, the Community Alliance for Refugee Resettlement (CARR) was a success – entirely due to the generosity, creativity, kindness, resourcefulness and commitment of members of this community. Individuals, organizations, businesses, the media, churches, schools...the list goes on.

And of course the reason for the mission was the four families who tore themselves from their homes to come to Canada – with no possessions, no English, often violent homelands, and yet love, shared values, optimism and determination to make a contribution to their new home here.

Ahmad Almdhe, from the first family that arrived, smiled when he expressed their astonishment when, on the day they arrived, Ottawa had the biggest snowstorm of the winter – streets were closed, no taxis, no one could drive to the airport from Perth, so they spent their first night at the home of Don and Therese Smith. Don, senior Refugee Ministry Officer, has been an angel behind all CARR activities and only couldn't attend on

Saturday because they are in Africa on another refugee resettlement project.

After Ahmad spoke, other newcomers expressed thanks to the community, including Steve Hido, Roula Bizrah and Zhyar M. Saeed.

Then came a welcome announcement. Jean Dunning (President) and Lynn McIntyre (Executive Director) of the Perth and District Community Foundation (PDCF) told the gathering about a gift from artist Robynne Cole. She gifted to the PDCF her award winning artwork entitled 'Ageless Migration'. This led to discussions within the PDCF that resulted in the creation of a new endowment fund – the Ageless Migration Fund. You'll hear more about this from them soon. CARR has contributed \$10,000 from our remaining funds to help initiate this new endeavour.

Ann Munroe, Chair of CARR, thanked the families, now permanent residents, for having the courage to come to Canada and allowing us to become part of their lives. Like them, we also didn't know what the future might hold, yet on Saturday we all found ourselves celebrating their successes. Learning a new language, finding employment, settling children in school, attending school, learning to drive, making friends, making a positive difference here in their new home.

Ann then described a key to the success of The CARR - relationships. Three partners, the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, the Perth and District Community Foundation, and St. James the Apostle Anglican Church were fundamental. The Diocese served as our Sponsorship Agreement Holder and liaison with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada – and most importantly, on a personal level, our confidante and guide. We cannot thank Don Smith adequately for his wise counsel and support.

The Community Foundation and St. James have been integral to the management of the generous contributions from the community and from afar, since we were a grassroots organization with neither charitable or not for profit status.

Yet another group who cannot be forgotten is the Perth professional community who welcomed our families into their practices. We thank Drs Kennie, Popiel, Orser, McIntosh and Bain for their contributions. As time passed, others stepped up, so many that we cannot begin to name them all.

We would be remiss, however, not to thank Ramsey Hart from The Table for accessing a provincial grant to support newcomers in the community. The funding provided after school support for children, assistance with homework and reading skills, childcare enabling the adults to attend an ESL class at the library, resources for cooking classes, drivers' education classes and driving lessons.

And Ann then thanked the volunteers. They were the heart and soul of The CARR, generously contributing time, sharing talents, encouraging and supporting the families and the executive. Whether they helped with a short term project, served as ambassadors promoting CARR activities in the community, devoted their time to tutoring, documentation, translation, interpretation, financial, health or judicial matters, accepted a leadership role, joined a family support team for the mandated one year or committed to helping beyond that period, they played a significant part in CARR accomplishing much more than we could ever imagine.

Together we have demonstrated that a rural community with heart can accomplish what seemed like a momentous task four years ago. The road has not always been smooth. With perseverance we addressed the challenges and moved forward to smoother days. We may have come together as acquaintances. We close this journey as friends. Our families arrived in Perth as strangers. For those who have worked closely with them they are now members of our extended families. We can now park The CARR.

So we gathered Saturday to recognize our new families and the timely stepping back of the executive who helped realize a collective community commitment.

Have we saved the world? no. Have we solved the displacement of the millions today in our world? no. But we helped.

We feel good seeing our newcomer children smiling on their way to school, playing basketball, soccer, hockey, serving coffee and lunches in local businesses and we feel good being invited to their birthday parties and seeing their parents walking safely home from work.

It's been a joy...

Submitted by the Community Alliance for Refugee Resettlement CARR
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Photo by Craig Greenwood