Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative

GRSI at a Glance

Concordia

Kelly Clements (UNHCR), Minister Hussen (IRCC), Frank Giustra (Giustra Foundation), Patrick Gascard (OSF)

GRSI at Concordia Summit 2018

GRSI leaders gathered on September 24 to promote community sponsorship on the global stage at the Concordia Annual Summit in New York, on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Frank Giustra profiled GRSI in a discussion about how cities and the private sector can become leaders in the refugee and migrant space during the opening plenary session moderated by OSF President Patrick Gascard. (video). Minister Hussen gave the opening address at a strategic dialogue moderated by Gregory Maniatis entitled Investing in Newcomers and Host Communities (video). Kelly Clements (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) gave remarks on the power of community sponsorship to expand global resettlement during the sponsorship component of the strategic dialogue chaired by Jennifer Bond. The sponsorship panel also featured Jim Estill (President & CEO of Danby Appliances); Lisa Button (Policy Advisor, Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, Australia); Russell Rook (Partner, Good Faith Partnership, UK); Charlotte Phillips (Advisor on Refugee and Migrants’ Rights, Amnesty International); and Le Luong (Business Consultant, Vietnamese Canadians for Lifeline Syria). GRSI also hosted a private roundtable at Concordia bringing together participants from several countries to strategize on how to coordinate global efforts to introduce and grow community sponsorship programs around the world. With GRSI named in the final draft of the Global Compact on Refugees, community sponsorship was top-of-mind for leaders from all sectors thinking about responses to the global refugee situation during UNGA week.

Argentine hosts regional conference

On September 14, a GRSI team delivered a workshop highlighting the main components of community sponsorship during a two-day roundtable on resettlement in Buenos Aires. Organized by the UNHCR, IOM and the Government of the Republic of Argentina, the roundtable was attended by government officials and civil society representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. All four countries are participating in the Emerging Resettlement Countries Joint Support Mechanism (ERCMT), an initiative launched in 2016 and run jointly by the UNHCR and IOM. Representatives of the ERCMT donor countries (Portugal, Sweden, UK and the USA) also attended the conference and later travelled to the province of Salta to meet with sponsors and refugees participating in Argentina’s evolving community sponsorship program. The conference’s organizer, Kate O’Malley of the UNHCR, was pleased with the event’s outcome. “It was great to see the four South American countries working together closely at this event, sharing their experiences and know-how”, she said. “It bodes well for the future of community sponsorship in this part of the world.”
Community Sponsorship and the Workplace

GRSI teamed up with civil society partners in the United Kingdom to hold a roundtable on how businesses can connect with their communities to help transform the lives of refugees. Held on October 3 at Open Society Foundations’ offices in London, the meeting was co-hosted by Reset: Communities and Refugees and Sponsor Refugees. Both organizations play a key role in recruiting and training sponsors who are interested in participating in the UK’s Community Sponsorship Scheme, which is now in its third year of operation. Three Canadian business leaders – Jim Estill, President and CEO of Danby Electronics, Louis Century of the law firm Goldblatt Partners, and Tareq Hadhad, Founder and General Manager of Peace by Chocolate – attended the event. Jim and Louis shared their experiences in piloting innovative ways to support refugee sponsorship, while Tareq described how Canada’s sponsorship program supported his success.

The roundtable in London was preceded by a breakfast event hosted by Lord Dr. Hastings of Scarisbrick CBE (KPMG Global Head of Corporate Citizenship) together with Good Faith Partnership and GRSI. The meeting was attended by a select group of business leaders who discussed how significant organizations in the United Kingdom might play a major role in welcoming and integrating refugees into UK communities.

New Zealand forges ahead with community sponsorship program

Canada’s Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Hon. Ahmed Hussen, visited New Zealand from August 25 to 27. During his meeting with the Hon. Iain Lees-Galloway, New Zealand’s Minister of Immigration, the two ministers discussed the merits and challenges of community refugee sponsorship. New Zealand is piloting a Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category (CORS). This initiative is designed to boost the number of resettlement places and help refugees become more self-sufficient. About two dozen refugees were welcomed under the pilot in July 2018. During his visit, Minister Hussen attended a traditional welcome ceremony (Pōwhiri) for refugees held in the city of Hamilton.

Community Sponsorship Awards in the UK

Citizens UK held its first Community Sponsorship Awards in London on October 2. Organized by Citizens UK’s Sponsor Refugees foundation, the ceremony recognized the extraordinary efforts of the many ordinary citizens who have welcomed dozens of Syrian refugee families to the United Kingdom over the past year. The event underscores the remarkable progress of the UK’s Community Sponsorship Scheme, which was launched in July 2016. An interview with Khairunissa Dhala, a member of the Welcome Committee and winner of the Volunteer of the Year award, is available on the website of Migrants Organise. Other winners include Raynes Park Community Church in London, for Community Sponsorship Group of the Year, and the Batak family of Narbeth, Wales, for Newcomers of the Year.

Community Sponsorship around the World

A couple uses their wedding as a fundraiser to sponsor a refugee family

Toronto couple’s wedding vows included gift of new life to refugee family

We Became Fragments - NY Times documentary on refugee family in Winnipeg in running for Oscar

Community sponsorship could transform refugee resettlement – and Australia

Why Canada will lead the charge on the UN’s global refugee plan

New pilot programme trialled to help integrate refugees into Kiwi culture

U.S. donors send money to Canada to support ‘model’ refugee resettlements

VIDEO - UK Community Sponsorship Awards ceremony

“We felt we should practice what we preach” – Supporting refugees via community sponsorship

GRSI meets academic community

A teleconference hosted by the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub on September 17 brought together two dozen university researchers from across Canada. The meeting allowed GRSI partners to update the academics about progress in promoting community refugee sponsorship in other countries. It also gave researchers the chance to share their latest findings on a wide variety of issues affecting privately sponsored refugees in Canada, such as family reunification and transitioning to self-reliance.

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.