

Hundreds of refugees to settle in Canada by year's end after receipt of \$3.5 million in donations ensures community sponsorship spaces are filled

NEWS PROVIDED BY
The Refugee Hub →
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OTTAWA, Nov. 14, 2018 /CNW/ - 685 refugees will be settled in 49 Canadian communities by the end of this year thanks to the rapid combined efforts of sponsors, private donors, and government.



A sponsoring group at the dining room table in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan (CNW Group/The Refugee Hub)

More than 150 sponsoring groups from across Canada have stepped forward since August to sponsor refugees, after a handful of philanthropic leaders committed a combined total of nearly \$3.5 million to cover the costs associated with settling 175 families. The cost to sponsor a family of four for a year under the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) program is approximately \$18,000. This amount is normally fundraised by sponsor groups wanting to volunteer their time and energy to welcome refugees to Canada, but can take time to generate.

With that in mind, the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub and Jewish Family Services – in partnership with founding donors the Shapiro Foundation, an American-based charity, and the Giustra Foundation in Vancouver – launched a unique, time-limited fund to support the sponsorship of hundreds of refugees identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The UNHCR, the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, over 35 Sponsorship Agreement Holders, and many community organizations across Canada were also integral partners in this rapid mobilization.

The fund was created August 7, 2018 to encourage participation in sponsorship and ensure no spots in the BVOR program remained unused. The Canadian government offered 1,500 spaces in 2018 through the BVOR program, which matches Canadian sponsorship groups with refugees the UNHCR identifies as needing resettlement. Over 1,000 spots were still unclaimed as of August. Unused spots would have disappeared at year's end without the quick action of the groups and people involved.

Under the BVOR program, settlement costs are shared between the government of Canada and sponsors. Sponsor groups are also responsible for all aspects of welcoming and integrating the newcomers into their communities. The deadline for Canadian sponsors to apply to the fund was September 17, 2018.

The fund mobilized hundreds of Canadians across the country. From large centres such as Vancouver, B.C., to small towns like Antigonish, N.S., Canadians came forward to sponsor, ready and eager to volunteer their time supporting newcomers for their first year in Canada after generous donations were made possible by the fund. The refugees resettled by the program are coming from a variety of countries, including Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and others.

The lead donations from the Shapiro Foundation and the Giustra Foundation stimulated other generous donations from others seeking to support community sponsorship. Donors include Barrie Landry, Landry Family Foundation, Harald & Sharlene Ludwig, the Aquilini Group, Sean McCoshen, and Brian Paes-Braga.

In a time of enormous global need, Canadians have again demonstrated their generosity and compassion towards some of the world's most vulnerable people.

BY THE NUMBERS:

- \$3,479,696.60 was donated by eight philanthropists to cover the costs of sponsorship.
- 685 refugees will arrive in Canada before December 31, 2018 thanks to the BVOR fund.
- The cost of sponsoring a family of four for 12 months under the BVOR program is approximately \$18,100. The cost of sponsoring a family of 6 is approximately \$22,650.
- The Canadian government offered 1,500 spaces in 2018 through the BVOR program. Over 1,000 spots were still unclaimed as of August. Unused spots would have disappeared at year's end without the quick action of the groups and people involved.

QUOTES

"Canada has a long history of welcoming refugees from all around the world. We have seen how the generosity of Canadians has changed the lives of refugees for the better and the success of this initiative is a testament to that generosity. I would like to thank everyone involved as this will make a difference for so many."

The Honourable Ahmed D. Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada

"I am incredibly grateful for the support of sponsor groups across Canada who have helped make this program a success. These groups have risen to the challenge and once again demonstrated to the world Canada's compassion and leadership in refugee resettlement. I am hopeful that the success of this program will lead to additional sponsorship opportunities in the future, both in Canada and around the world. "

Ed Shapiro, Trustee, The Shapiro Foundation

"It makes me incredibly proud to know our efforts have changed the lives of nearly 700 people who can now call Canada home. Thousands of Canadians have contributed their time, energy and money to make this country's refugee sponsorship program a success. They have shown a tremendous generosity of spirit. Individuals can and do make a difference."

Frank Giustra, Founder and President, The Giustra Foundation

"The Refugee Hub is tremendously grateful for the generosity of the Fund's donors and the partnership of the many community organizations that have been so integral to this rapid mobilization. Most of all, we are thrilled by the commitment and kindness of the hundreds of sponsors who will collectively welcome over 175 families to neighbourhoods across Canada. Committed, empowered, compassionate individuals are at the heart of sponsorship. It is a privilege to support their work."

Jennifer Bond, Managing Director, uOttawa Refugee Hub; Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative

"Canadians have a long tradition of welcoming refugees to Canada through sponsorship. For refugees it amounts to a lifeline. With doors closing around the world on refugees, as UNHCR - the UN Refugee Agency - who identify the refugees ultimately admitted through Canada's BVOR programme, we are only too well aware of how every resettlement space makes a difference. This also makes a difference in the lives of Canadians who welcome them. A win-win that was made possible by the generous funding provided by donors to the Fund - in practical terms, they helped save lives."

Jean-Nicolas Beuze, Representative in Canada, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

"The BVOR Fund has been instrumental in activating our organization around the cause of refugee settlement. The more we have learned about the global refugee crisis from the Refugee Hub, the more compelled we have become to act. The financial support has allowed us to focus our efforts not on fundraising, but on how best to support the five families upon their arrival. If this pilot project goes well, we will certainly explore establishing a more permanent settlement organization."

Kulvir Singh Gill, Board Chair, Sikhs Serving Canada Association, Mississauga

"Sponsorship has been an enriching experience in Brockville. New and lasting friendships have been formed with newcomers as well as among the volunteers and between sponsorship groups. The newcomers are taking active roles in our community and, most inspiring of all, are now reaching out to sponsor other refugee families – in large part because of the generous funding provided by the special BVOR Fund.

Agape Brockville brought in three families of refugees in late 2015. Recently, the group had been discussing sponsorship of extended family members of the original families. However, the fundraising involved for a full private sponsorship, as well as the time this process takes, is daunting. In August 2018, when we heard that the University of Ottawa's Refugee Hub was providing special funds for BVOR sponsorships, our group jumped on it! Although the time frame was short, we knew we had to take advantage of the opportunity. There are too many refugees worldwide in dire need. A rural parish was keen to join Agape Brockville's efforts, so now we are four churches working together to welcome a family of eight. We look forward to it!"

Julie Case, Sponsor, Agape Brockville, Brockville

"As five sponsored Syrian refugee families in Brockville, we appreciate our sponsors and we wanted to show them our appreciation in action. So, we followed their steps and did exactly what they have done by sponsoring us. Now, and across North America, we are some of the first Syrian refugees to be sponsors in the BVOR program. Without the fund, we would not think to be here as we all are unable to fund it ourselves. Therefore, thank you for all of those who made the fund available for us."

Ahmad Khadra, Former Refugee, Sponsor, Blessed Brockville, Brockville

United Welcome is a collaboration between local area United Churches in and around Brockville Ontario. It is not an understatement to say that our lives have been blessed by the two sponsorships we have already done that have resulted in six new people arriving in Canada and contributing to the community in ways we could never have imagined. As we await five more newcomers thanks to the new BVOR fund, we cannot wait for the new adventure that this family will bestow on us as a group, but more importantly, on the community as a whole. Brockville is truly a better, more diverse, and more happily full community with the arrival of each newcomer who calls Brockville home.

Jacqueline Shoemaker Holmes, United Welcome, Brockville

"We have met so many new people through this process. It unites generations, brings you closer to neighbours and makes you realize what a wonderful open community we live in. We have also received an important education on the challenges and issues facing so many people around the world. We feel it is our responsibility to reach out and help where we can - BVOR provides a tangible way to do this.

I wish every new Canadian could be welcomed to Canada with open arms, having a supportive community in place to help them navigate their new life. BVOR provides this support, an instant community is created with people willing to help in all areas of resettlement."

Liz Burgess, Sponsor, Brighter Future, Ottawa

"Our family has always been involved in supporting refugees in our community and we were involved in Canada's HOST program several years ago. We had never considered sponsorship because of the significant costs associated, but this unique and generous fund made it all possible. Now, we are looking forward to welcoming a newcomer family to our small community in the coming weeks with our friends and family, and we are proud to say that three other groups have come forward to sponsor in our city because of the funding, as well. The city of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, will be the richer for it!"

Tony Brennan, Sponsor, Moose Jaw Refugee Sponsorship Committee

ABOUT

Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program

The Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program matches refugees identified for resettlement by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) with private sponsors in Canada.

- The UNHCR identifies the refugees.
- The Government of Canada gives up to six months of income support.
- Private sponsors give another six months of financial support. They also give up to a year of social and emotional support.

<https://www.unhcr.ca/sponsoring-refugees-for-resettlement-in-canada/>

The Refugee Hub

The Refugee Hub was founded at the University of Ottawa in 2012. Its mission is to foster justice and human rights for refugees at local, national, and international levels through innovative research, programs and partnerships. The Hub's six flagship projects include the Refugee Sponsorship Support Program, which supports Canadian sponsors, and the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, which encourages and supports the adoption of community sponsorship programs in countries outside of Canada.

www.refugeehub.ca

The Shapiro Foundation

The Shapiro Foundation, founded by Barbara and Edward Shapiro in 2001, is a U.S. charitable foundation focused on improving the lives of the world's most vulnerable populations. The foundation's primary focus is on children, refugees, and immigrants, as well as education, global health, and humanitarian aid. Support is provided for organizations in Boston and throughout the US, as well as Canada, Israel, Greece, Rwanda, Bangladesh and Liberia.

www.theshapirofoundation.org

The Giustra Foundation

The Giustra Foundation (formerly the Radcliffe Foundation) was established in 1997 by Canadian businessman and global philanthropist Frank Giustra. The Giustra Foundation brings an entrepreneurial approach to philanthropy to catalyze new ideas and innovations that can be scaled and shared. The Foundation supports a variety of causes on a local and international level. Most recently, the foundation has become actively involved in the refugee crisis by providing humanitarian aid in Greece, along with being the founding partner in both The Ascend Collaborative and the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative. The Giustra Foundation

has been dedicated to improving the quality of life for those in need worldwide for two decades.

www.giustrafoundation.org

SOURCE The Refugee Hub

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<https://refugeehub.ca/>