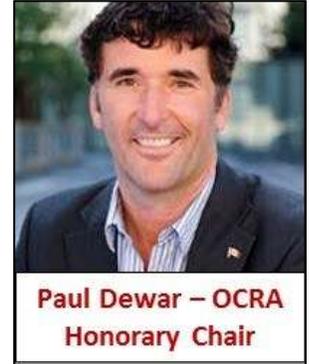


Ottawa Centre Refugee Action (OCRA)

Frequently Asked Questions



Building a life in a new country takes more than a healthy bank account. Refugee families need friends and a community to help them navigate through the first few overwhelming weeks and months. Because we know that supporting these families is important, a group of us decided to form Ottawa Centre Refugee Action (OCRA).

Interested in helping? Here are a few questions and answers to get you started.

What is OCRA?

OCRA is a grassroots group of volunteers who came together to welcome and help refugees settle in our community. We work with a broad base of partners that includes community organizations of all kinds – anyone interested in working together to provide much needed help to refugees fleeing conflict or persecution in their home countries.

Who can participate?

Anyone can get involved – individuals, couples, families or groups of friends. It doesn't matter where you live or whether you have experience settling refugees. We are looking for youth to participate as well so they can form youth peer groups for the family.

We're looking for people willing to help either financially or with in-kind support (or both), such as volunteering your time and expertise, or sharing your Ottawa-based networks. It will take a tremendous community contribution to settle these families. One thing we'll surely need as OCRA continues to grow is people who are great organizers. Let us know if you're interested in leadership tasks.

How do I participate?

Take three easy steps:

Step 1: Get on the distribution list.

Send a message to OCRA613@gmail.com. We'll put you on our mailing list and get in touch with you.

Step 2: Make a commitment.

Once you're on our mailing list, we'll give you access our pledge form. At that point, if you decide you're interested, you can make a financial pledge and/or identify the special skills, talents, or goods or services that you could contribute. Are you a great fundraiser or networker? Can you take family members to appointments? Help with banking? Perhaps you can provide a space for the family to live temporarily or assist with interpretation if you have the right language skills. Or maybe you can take them to the Gatineau Park on a canoe excursion.

There will be lots to do in the months ahead. We can certainly use whatever talents you bring.

Step 3: Use your networks

Many of us have found that our personal and professional networks provide a wealth of additional volunteer and financial support. Once you send the word out to your network of friends and colleagues, you might be amazed by how many of them are willing to donate and participate.

Once you're involved

How do I donate money?

Send an email to OCRA's donations coordinator, Karen Hill, with the amount of your pledge. Karen will give you instructions on where to send your cheque. It will be to one of our partners that is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (see below under "The settlement process" for details). You can email Karen at OCRADonations@gmail.com. She will keep your information confidential.

Note that the OCRA pledges/donations all go into one big pot that then supports all the refugees/refugee families that OCRA sponsors. Pledges are not tied to any one refugee sponsorship or family support group.

Is my donation tax deductible?

Yes. Please note that OCRA is not a registered charity or a legal entity – we are a volunteer group of individuals. That is why we ask that you write cheques and make e-transfers to one of our partners, which will issue a tax receipt.

Is there an administrative or overhead charge?

No. We are currently a 100% volunteer powered community organization. All financial donations will benefit refugees directly.

What if there is money left over at the end of the one-year sponsorship obligation?

If there is money left over after all contingencies and our financial obligations to our sponsored families have been covered, we will direct our partner organizations to apply it directly to other refugee sponsorships.

I don't have money to donate. How else can I help?

No worries! There's lots to do beyond making a financial pledge. Some of the help we need includes the following.

For the refugee family:

- Housing on arrival before they are settled into an apartment
- Financial planning and banking
- Help with social contact, including registering kids for school and grocery shopping
- Employment advice and job planning
- Connecting to doctors, dentists and psychologists
- Language interpretation and ESL practice
- Setting up a new home and managing in-kind donations
- Seeking out Ottawa-based services such as second language classes

For OCRA:

- Coordinating with settlement and educational agencies
- Helping coordinate volunteers, answer inquiries and help with communications
- Fundraising

Will I have to attend a lot of meetings?

Not necessarily. We hold community meetings roughly every 4-6 weeks and all are encouraged to attend. We also hold steering committee meetings every couple of weeks and Family Support Groups meet as needed. But the extent of your involvement is up to you.

I don't have a lot of extra time. Can I just donate money and leave it at that?

Certainly. Send Karen Hill an email at: OCRADonations@gmail.com and she'll give you instructions.

Will OCRA publish the donors' names?

We are currently not planning to publish donor names and the amounts of donations are held confidential.

What about corporate sponsorship?

Businesses small or large are welcome to donate financially or with in-kind support. We would be pleased to recognize your contributions on our website. Please contact OCRA613@gmail.com.

The settlement process

Why is OCRA needed? Doesn't the Government of Canada already settle refugees?

The refugee settlement process is complicated and the need for assistance is great. In Canada, settlement support for refugees can come either from government funding, privately sponsorship or a combination of both. Because private sponsorship draws on private resources it allows more refugees to be resettled in Canada. Research shows that privately sponsored refugees do much better. For example, 50% of privately sponsored refugees reported earnings in their first year in Canada compared with 14% of government-assisted refugees (Source: Citizenship and Immigration data as reported by Globe and Mail, December 22, 2015).

How does refugee settlement work?

A number of avenues exist for enabling individuals, organizations and governments to bring refugees to Canada and support them as they build new lives. One such avenue is the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. This is the program that OCRA is currently using. Our research tells us that BVOR is the quickest and most efficient route to settling refugees in our community.

Here's how it works: The BVOR program matches refugees previously identified for resettlement by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) with private sponsors in Canada. BVOR is a cost-sharing arrangement by which the Government of Canada provides six months of income support for refugees (at social assistance rates) while private sponsors such as OCRA provide start up costs and the remaining funds for one year as well as a year of social and emotional support.

So OCRA is working in partnership with the Government of Canada?

Yes, but indirectly. OCRA is considered a "cosponsor" to a "constituent group" and is working under the auspices of an organization that has a sponsorship agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (new name of Citizenship and Immigration Canada). Working with an experienced Sponsorship Agreement Holder, or SAH, eases the bureaucracy of sponsorship applications and enables OCRA to get families here more swiftly than if we work alone. To settle our first family, we are working with the United Church of Canada as our SAH. For our second family we are working with Jewish Family Services.

Although the SAH assumes formal financial responsibility for the family, OCRA as co-sponsor has to 'demonstrate' our commitment to the sponsorship undertaking through our pledges and donations put in trust with the SAH. Financial support (via a monthly settlement allowance) is given to new arrivals for one year from the date they arrive or until they become financially independent – whichever comes first. Refugees have permanent resident status so they are legally allowed to work.

Our aim is to deliver much more than financial support. We will connect them with the resources of settlement agencies and also provide the families with community support, which gives them the best chance for succeeding in a new country and new culture.

You can read more about refugee settlement here: <http://bit.ly/1JYGyan>

Will OCRA undertake all the planning?

For each sponsorship undertaking, OCRA's community support is organized through a family settlement plan. For each incoming refugee family, OCRA is organizing a dozen or so of our members into a family support group who engage directly with the family. Each family support group is led by two coordinators.

If I know of a refugee family that needs sponsorship can OCRA sponsor them?

No. The avenue that OCRA is pursuing for refugee sponsorship (the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program) does not allow us to refer specific refugees for sponsorship. Refugees are referred to Canada and our visa offices overseas by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

What are our future plans?

At time of printing, OCRA was working on our eleventh sponsored family financing, welcome host location and building the Family Support Group. We understand that needs are great and hope to bring together resources for more. Because we can.

Learn more about refugee settlement and the BVOR program

Watch a short video about the BVOR program: <http://bit.ly/1kmifyj>

Read this fact sheet about BVOR: <http://bit.ly/1jyu8A>

Find more information about refugee sponsorship in general: <http://bit.ly/1JYGyan>

Contact

To get involved, please contact us at: OCRA613@gmail.com

Or visit our website at: www.refugeeaction.ca

Join us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/OttawaCentreRefugeeAction