

Community Sponsorship: Civil Society at the heart of Refugee Welcome



Refugee Sponsorship in Essex, Ontario, Canada

Bekele Woyecha, Churchill Fellow 2018

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Contents

Contents	Page 2
Acknowledgment	Page 3
About the author	Page 4
Executive Summary	Page 5
The Global Refugee Crisis, The Refugee Welcome movement in the UK and the Introduction of Community Sponsorship Of Refugees scheme	Page 6-8
Stories, case studies (Travels across Canada)	Page 8 - 25
Learning, reflections, conclusions, recommendations and next steps	Page 26 - 29
Resources / References	Page 29

Acknowledgment

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Neil Jameson CBE, Founder, and former Executive Director of Citizens UK, who has been encouraging me and many other colleagues to go for Churchill Fellowship. I would also like to thank former Churchill fellows Zrinka Bralo and Imogen Moore, who extended their kindest help and advice.

Being a Churchill Fellow brings a lifelong experience and it would not have happened without the support of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, which has a great team that goes extra miles to support. Thank you, WCMT. Special thanks also to Linbury Trust for their kindest support for the Migration – Living Well Together Category. I would also like to thank my organisation, Citizens UK, for the kind cooperation during my fellowship. Thanks also to my wife, Alem Assemu, who has been incredibly supportive.

My trip to Canada was a success because of the many inspirational people I met and also the many organisations, cities, and towns I visited. Grateful to all the following individuals and organisations for their kindest support and hospitality: -

1. Louis Century, Goldblatt Partners Law firm, Toronto
2. Jim Estill, CEO of Danby Appliances, Guelph, Ontario
3. Linda Tripp, Guelph, Ontario
4. Professor Anneke Smit, University of Windsor, Ontario
5. Gilbert Iyamuremye, Diocese of London-Refugee Ministries, Windsor, Ontario
6. Senator Mobina Jaffer, Senate of Canada, Ottawa.
7. Chris Gregory and team at Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Ottawa.
8. Refugee Hub, Ottawa
9. Bahir Kemal, Ottawa
10. Michelle Manks, World University Service of Canada, Ottawa
11. Brian Dyck, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, National Migration & Resettlement, Winnipeg, Manitoba
12. Arisnel Mesidor, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council; now at Mesidor Canadian Immigration Services, Winnipeg, Manitoba
13. Seid Oumer and colleague at Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organisations (MANSO).
14. Trudy Dueck and Audrey Hicks, Arborg, Manitoba
15. Anila Lee Yuen, CEO, Centre for Newcomers, Calgary
16. Office of the Mayor of Calgary
17. Fariborz Birjandian, CEO of Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
18. Anoush Newman, Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, Calgary
19. Hailegebriel Yimer, Calgary
20. Wilna Parry and Dave Parry, Vancouver
21. Tracey Maynard, Lead Organiser, Metro Vancouver Alliance
22. Deborah Littman, Toronto
23. Barbara Treviranus, Toronto

About the author

My name is Bekele Woyecha. I was born and raised in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I have been working as a community organiser with Citizens UK since March 2011. I am now a Senior Project Manager at Sponsor Refugees, a foundation set up by Citizens UK to promote Community Sponsorship of Refugees.

I was the human rights defender fellow of the University of Nottingham in 2009, where I studied International Human Rights Law. I also studied a short course on Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict, organised by the International Centre on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Boston, USA. Furthermore, I attended the Global Change Agents Program at Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University. Before moving to the UK, I held senior managerial positions in government departments in Ethiopia. Outside of work, I serve as a trustee for a charity and also as a chair of the local school's parents council. I was also one of the Games Makers at the London 2012 Olympics.

Since 2015 I have been highly involved in the Refugee Welcome movement in the United Kingdom and have travelled across the country to build Refugee Welcome teams and work with groups built to welcome refugees locally. This opportunity gave me chance to learn how folks around the country were ready to welcome and integrate refugees into their neighbourhoods. My experience of the Refugee Welcome movement and the fact that I was able to see readiness from people around the country to get involved in Refugee Welcome and integration, encouraged me to do a bit of research on Canada's Refugee Sponsorship Programme. Hence it has been a while since I started to develop interest in Refugee Sponsorship program. Since Community Sponsorship of Refugees was introduced in the United Kingdom in 2016, I have been at the forefront of its promotion as I have always wanted to see the scheme succeed in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Executive Summary

The Community Sponsorship scheme in the United Kingdom is limited only to Syrian refugees, those affected by the Syrian crisis and those who are close to the camps around Syria. Canada's refugee sponsorship experience is different from this; hence the project is intended to help me see that experience in depth.

Furthermore, as Community Sponsorship is relatively new in the UK, there is cautiousness both by the government and civil society. Nobody wants to get it wrong. Everybody is still learning how best the project is working. That is why we need to have informed experts that will help the scheme succeed, but also work to diversify the scheme and bring civil society on board whilst also working on any challenges that may arise through the process. As I write this report, sponsors cannot choose who to sponsor and the scheme is limited in scope. That is not the experience in Canada. Hence there will be many policy areas we will be campaigning on in the future and the learning has been massively helpful to shape our policy ideas. Years from now, the scheme could be diversified or extended or even people may be able to sponsor privately as in Canada.

The Aims of the Fellowship

1. To learn from Canada's decades of experience of welcoming refugees through private sponsorship and share that experience here in the United Kingdom.
2. To come up with a project proposal and work with civil society to see the scheme being diversified as in Canada.
3. To see how associations like Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holders operate and come up with a recommendation.
4. To bring on board not only charities as is still the case here in the United Kingdom, but also private individuals, Businesses, Universities, Schools, and others who might be interested to welcome and integrate refugees.
5. To influence policy makers and effect policy changes through recommendations, presentations, and campaigns.

Project Objectives

Visiting 4 of Canada's provinces, namely Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia to learn from the experiences of civil society; produce a project report with proposals that will bring on board businesses, universities, colleges, schools, and different civic groups to diversify the Community Sponsorship scheme in the United Kingdom.

As Canada has been at the forefront of Refugee Welcome movement in the past many decades through its private sponsorship scheme, it has been my chosen country for Churchill Fellowship.

The Global Refugee Crisis

2015 was undoubtedly the tipping point in the global refugee crisis in our generation. September 2015 saw the worst of the crisis. The death of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy whose photo made global headlines after he drowned in the Mediterranean Sea on 2 September 2015, had impact on many people around the globe. People around the world were challenged to do something to address the refugee crisis. There was a big shift of attitude globally.

Addressing the refugee crisis in the United Kingdom

As the news of the death of Alan Kurdi spread around the world, people across the United Kingdom were outraged and were more than ready to act. There were lots of people that were ready and willing to go extra mile to address their anger through action. Citizens UK, where I work, convened what is called The National Refugee Welcome Board which brought together faith and non-faith institutions and those who actively campaign in the Refugee Welcome movement. The purpose was to work together and find solutions to address the worst refugee crisis of our generation. It was also to take bold decisions and act to deliver on those bold decisions.

Yes, that time needed some bold decisions and we have never been shy from taking such decisions. It was important to step in and do our bits to see change happen. Yes, it was not enough to feel sorry about the worsening refugee crisis; we had to do something about it. But we could not do it on our own. That was why we had to organise, organise, and organise. It was all about creating a movement out of the moment. After all it takes us all to address the crisis.

We have gone a long journey since then. The time in between has not been an easy ride. It has had its ups and downs. But we know that life is not a bed of roses and we should stand up to challenges and use these challenges as opportunities to organise and change the course of history.

But for me it was beyond a call of duty. I have the experience of fleeing my home country Ethiopia. Seeking asylum and adjusting to life in my new home – Britain. I am a living testimony that Britain is a more humane and one of the most welcoming countries in the world. That is what I saw when I travelled up and down the country to work with people that were keen to welcome refugees. From Lewes to Totnes, from Petersfield to Cheltenham, from Bath to Crawley, from Leicester to Devon and many more places I had the opportunity to go to, people were keen to welcome and integrate refugees. They were ready for more practical work. People ready to get stuck in. That life changing experience taught me that we

needed a scheme where communities could take charge of refugee welcome and become part of the integration process.

Hence the introduction of the Community Sponsorship scheme in July 2016 was a commendable first step. For people like me, getting it right on arrival is more than important. The first few years have impact on the lives of newcomers, especially for integration. And I believe Community Sponsorship can give that opportunity to newcomers as Civil Society is at the heart of Refugee Welcome and Integration. It also brings unique and long-lasting experience for community sponsors. Hence it is a win-win situation.

Many people tell me that they are sad to see fellow humans denied the right to a decent life which strips people of their dignity as human beings. And the same people tell me that we all have a humanitarian responsibility to allow refugees the freedom to get sanctuary and rebuild their lives.

Welcome Summit September 2016

The culmination of the first phase of our Refugee Welcome work was 10th September 2016, when we had a welcome summit in Birmingham which brought together more than 550 community leaders from the four nations of the United Kingdom. By the end of the summit, it was important to prioritise where to concentrate on in the coming months and years and luckily promotion of Community Sponsorship was one of the three areas. And for me, it was once again an exceptionally good opportunity to work with communities across the country to promote Refugee Welcome through Community Sponsorship.

The journey has gone from strength to strength and I am learning a lot through the process. It is more than encouraging to see newcomers resettled in different parts of the country. To see places like Narberth in Wales welcoming a new refugee family through the scheme and helping them through integration is extraordinary. We now see people keen to explore the scheme and do practical work. This is heart-warming.

The Launch of Sponsor Refugees Foundation

To keep the ball rolling and to promote Community Sponsorship further, the arrival of Citizens UK's new foundation, Sponsor Refugees, has been more than a bonus. This foundation, where I am one of the founders, was founded with generous support from Volant Trust. The foundation has been instrumental in the promotion of the Community Sponsorship scheme in the United Kingdom and beyond and will hopefully remain so in the future. At the launch of the foundation in October 2017, it was encouraging to see more than 25 groups and organisations pledging to welcome 42 families. As I write this report, more than 400 refugees have been resettled through the scheme by about 80 community groups and organisations. This is only the beginning and it will not be long until Community Sponsorship becomes an established tradition in Britain as it is in Canada. Luckily, there are lots of organisations promoting the scheme nowadays including, Caritas, Church

of England, Salvation Army, The Greater London Authority, Charis in South West, and many other local and national organisations. The scheme is also practically supported by an organization called Reset, which was founded for this purpose.

I believe we should take the opportunity Community Sponsorship brings to us and take charge of refugee welcome and integration. We can do it and we can do it now. After all, if not us, then who? If not now, then when?

News, Stories, and case studies

Predeparture preparation

As I applied for Churchill Fellowship, all my wish was to be awarded the fellowship so that I could speak to some of my inspirational people and travel across Canada. I was keen to speak in person to the likes of Jim Estill, who have been very inspirational for me. Hence, I had a list of people to speak to and a list of cities to travel to. As soon as I knew that I had been awarded the fellowship, I contacted most of the people I wanted to see and made some provisional arrangement.

Sharing the News of my Churchill Fellowship award

Following the award, I wrote the following news on my [Churchill Fellowship BLOG](#).

Churchill Fellowship – an opportunity of a lifetime

"Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."- Winston Churchill

The above quote means a lot for me. I first applied for the Churchill Fellowship in 2014 and was not even invited for interview. I thought I would give it sometime and comeback. That was what happened in 2017. I remember getting an email from one of the most successful Churchill Fellows, Citizens UK's Executive Director, [Neil Jameson](#) encouraging staff to apply. His encouragement was echoed by my ex-colleague and former Churchill fellow [Imogen Moore](#) and [Zrinka Bralo](#) of Migrants Organise who is a seasoned civic leader with extensive links with Citizens UK and of course a former Churchill fellow. All the three mentioned that the fellowship was one of the most useful things they did and encouraged us to apply.

I kept the emails flagged and took time before I applied. I thus decided to put in application, but I wanted to make sure that I gave it my best so that I would succeed this time around. Hence, I spent a few evenings doing a research and being clear on what I wanted to do. Once I submitted my application, I wanted to switch off, but I kept thinking about it. I thought I had done my bit to get the fellowship and if I did not get it, it would have meant that there were better candidates. Luckily, I got the email I was eagerly waiting for. Yes, I was shortlisted for interview. Loved it, but I was cautious and not celebratory. In life we do not

always win as we do not always lose. Hence, I had to prepare for the interview and be once again clear with what I want to achieve if offered the opportunity.

Now that I am a Churchill Fellow I will travel to Canada, one of the most welcoming and beautiful countries in the world, to study about its refugee sponsorship program, especially to see how businesses and schools are engaged in sponsorship. Hence, I am revisiting my plans and planning my next steps meticulously. I feel privileged to know many people who can help me organise meetings or connect me with those I am keen to meet in Canada. As a Churchill fellow, I aim high and aspire to meet some prominent figures and I very much hope I will be able to meet some of these amazing people and some good old friends.



Old and new Churchill fellows, Amanda, Neil, and Bekele of Citizens UK

I still recall that very email from Neil and subsequent emails from Zrinka and Imogen. They were fellows that pushed boundaries. They were also folks who showed many of us why Churchill fellowship was a good thing. They travelled to learn and came back and inspired us. Yes, I say us as there are two of us from Citizens UK as 2018 fellows. My good colleague Amanda Walters is also a fellow this year as we keep the connection of Churchill fellowship and Citizens UK alive. The most inspirational Neil Jameson was a 1977 fellow who travelled to the US. Of the back of that great opportunity, Neil founded Citizens UK. That great opportunity Neil had and his tenacity to make a difference meant we have a strong guild of Community organisers, who are all striving to make a difference. I am a Churchill fellow now because my organising career helped me to build my confidence; it helped me to challenge established norms and see the world from different angles. Now that I am a Churchill fellow, I am determined to be even more ambitious and get the best out of it. I very much hope this great opportunity, of course a once in a lifetime opportunity, will be useful for me, the communities I am working with and the wider public. It will also be an opportunity for me to share about my experiences in the UK.

Yes, I am fired up and ready to go. I will sometimes in the future sit down and reflect on my journey. Imogen Moore has shared the following as she reflects on her fellowship, "I cannot exaggerate how important my Churchill fellowship experience was for both personally and professionally. I visited neighbourhood-based projects in Brazil and the US that were organising their communities to improve children's health and educational outcomes. The projects I visited and the things I saw gave me profound insight into what we needed to create to give children the best start in life in Southwark, South London, where I was working as a community organiser. The people I met and the space I had to be creative and reflect gave me the impetus to come back to the UK and grow the Parents and Communities Together Project which has since grown to work with hundreds of families and it is now scaling to different parts of the UK. I have no doubts that what I learnt will continue to have ongoing importance and relevance throughout my career."

I am ready to travel, learn and share; come back to share and inspire others to act. Churchill fellowship, an opportunity of a lifetime!

Travels Across Canada – Stories of Welcome

5th June to 3rd July, Travel across Canada

After a big dream realised, the travel began. Hence to mark the beginning of my Churchill Fellowship, I wrote the below [BLOG](#) post

The wait is over; Churchill Fellowship travel has started.

I have been waiting for my travel to Canada for quite a while. Planning diaries, organising meetings, researching where to stay whilst in Canada, how to travel around in this big country, planning fall-back positions in case things go as not planned. Sometimes an email or emails were not enough. Needed to pick up that phone to firm meetings and get better deals. Yes, it was all to travel and meet folks of different experiences, expertise, and stories about the Refugee Sponsorship in Canada. What made the scheme a success? Why are those ranging from a small group to big law firms, schools, universities, faith institutions and companies get involved in this? What keeps some of those involved in this for decades motivated? Why them? From Toronto to Guelph, Windsor to Ottawa, Winnipeg to Calgary and Vancouver there are lots of stories to hear and share in the long run.

5th June 2018 travel to Toronto

It all started on June 5. Finally, the long-awaited day arrived, and I was at Gatwick Airport early in the morning. To make things even more exciting, I was joined by my colleague Jonathan Cox, Deputy Director of [Citizens UK](#), who was travelling to Canada as a speaker at the International Refugee Rights Conference, where I would take part as a Churchill Fellow. Great coincidence!



The journey to Toronto was long, but I had lots of energy to cope with as I was excited and have been waiting for this day for months. Once I arrived there, it

did not take me long to find my ways and adjust to situations in Toronto, which undoubtedly is an international city.



Deborah Littman, Bekele, and Jonathan Cox

June 6

Meeting with Deborah Littman, a veteran community organiser was in the agenda. Stories of organising from London to Vancouver and Toronto - ordinary citizens doing extraordinary things. The stories were simply fascinating. In organising, there is nothing called small win. A win is a win. A win can happen only when we sit around the table for negotiations with those who have power. That is what Deborah and her fellow colleagues do. Organise to build power and negotiate to win.

The second on the agenda was meeting with Louis Century of [Goldblatt Partners LLP](https://www.goldblattpartners.com/) based in Downtown Toronto. This is one of the most inspirational meetings I have had so far. The law firm was able to sponsor a Syrian family and resettle them in Toronto. One of the questions I raise to Louis was, 'why should businesses engage in refugee sponsorship?'. The answer was: - "Refugee Sponsorship gives businesses opportunity to show leadership and can bring sense of pride within the organisation". Powerful message.



Bekele & Louis Century

The Churchill Fellowship travel continues across Canada. Lots of heart moving stories to share in the coming days and weeks. Once thing for sure, Canada is a truly welcoming country. That is what I have seen be in a big city like Toronto or small town like Arborg in Manitoba.

Even more inspired. All happens because of the Churchill Fellowship. Kudos to all!

7-9 June 2018 - The Global Refugee Rights Conference, York University, Toronto

As part of my Churchill Fellowship, I took part in The Global Refugee Rights Conference that took place from 7-9 June at York University in Toronto. The Conference brought together about 650 participants from 36 countries from across the world to discuss how to address the needs of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. The theme of the conference was "*Networking, advocating, strengthening NGOs*", whereas its goal was to enhance the effectiveness of NGOs in promoting the human rights of refugees.

The objectives of the conference were: -

To promote ongoing cross-border networking, knowledge-exchange, strategizing and collaboration among NGOs committed to the rights of refugees and vulnerable migrants, and between NGOs and academics.

To enhance NGO advocacy for better global protection for refugees and vulnerable migrants, including by giving input into the Global Compacts on refugees and migrants.

To enhance efforts to educate and engage the public, in order to energize support for policies respecting the rights of refugees and vulnerable migrants.

To increase knowledge of the inter-connections between policies and practices affecting refugees and migrants in different regions of the world.

To support the development of NGOs in the Global South committed to the rights of refugees and vulnerable migrants.

To support the inclusion of the voices of refugees and vulnerable migrants in discussions concerning them.

The conference was immensely helpful for me as it brought some important ideas that are cross border and that I can share with individuals and groups that work to welcome refugees through the Community Sponsorship scheme. The conference also gave me chance to meet with people from around the world, some of whom I only knew by name for a while. The fact that I was asked by the event organisers to help with the organising of The Refugee Sponsorship workshop was a bonus. This happened because of the Churchill Fellowship.

11 June 2018 – Guelph, Ontario

Having had a good time on Sunday 10th June at the famous Niagara Falls, the next trip was to Guelph, Ontario to meet with Jim Estill and Linda Tripp.

The below was the piece I wrote following my visit to Guelph and the successful meeting I had with Jim and Linda.

My days in Guelph, Ontario - Refugee Sponsorship Changing lives

As someone who enjoys travelling on a train in the United Kingdom, I thought I could easily travel similarly across Canada. That was only a dream in a country as big as Canada is. In fact, I even sought travel advice from colleagues at the Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada office and asked how easily I could jump from train to train whilst travelling from East to the West of Canada. It was good of them to advise me on time so that I could organise my travels in the best possible way – flying more than 5 times across 4-time zones. One thing for sure, Canada is big; it also has many bighearted people.

The first leg of my journey to Canada took me to Ontario. After spending a few days meeting refugee sponsors, attending The International Refugee Rights Conference at York University in Toronto and a good time in the beautiful Niagara Falls, the next step was to travel to Guelph, where I was going to meet one of my inspirations, Jim Estill, CEO of [Danby Appliances](https://www.danbyappliances.com/). In fact, Jim was one of the reasons why I wanted to go back to Canada. Ever since I saw his interviews about the sponsorship of 200 refugees, I was keen to meet with him and learn from his experiences.

Hence as soon as I met with him my question to him was, 'why are you sponsoring refugees?'. His answer was simple – "I have to save people. I do so in cooperation with others". Jim continues, "I organise the refugee sponsorship as if it was a business. There are volunteers with roles. They know what is expected of them

and deliver accordingly. We have 800 volunteers working with us. For some, it is about saving the world.”



Bekele and Jim Estill

Jim was right and I can testify that he has done an amazing work to save the lives of many and transform their lives. One of the newcomers sponsored by Jim in 2017 is a Syrian called Firas, who now drives Uber. I and my colleague Jonathan had a lucky encounter with Firas as he picked us from our hotel and took us to Danby Office. As soon as we were in his car, we started to chat. Firas was so friendly and started to chat with us and he mentioned that he was sponsored by Jim last year and that he has been studying English, working, and now driving Uber thanks to the support from Jim. Firas did not stop there. He said, “My wife never spoke English when she came to Canada. She is now at level 6. All because of Jim’s encouragement”. This was so heart-warming. For Jim Estill and his company Danby Appliances - it is all about doing the right thing. Yes, doing the right thing at the right time!

Following the meeting with Jim at Danby Appliances, the next on the diary was a meeting with Linda who has direct experience of welcoming a Syrian family through sponsorship. Linda is proud of the progress of the family they have sponsored through their church. She said, “We had a wonderful experience as a church and the Syrian family is doing extremely well.”

Guelph might not be as big as Toronto or other big cities, but it is globally known for its refugee sponsorship. That is mostly attributed to Jim and his team. Lucky me to have met Jim and other great people like Linda whilst in Guelph. The Churchill fellowship travels continue. Next stop, Windsor!

12-14 June 2018 - Windsor, Ontario

Following successful and inspirational meetings in Guelph, my next trip was to Windsor to meet with Sponsors, Sponsorship Agreement Holders, students, community groups and organisations to hear stories of refugee welcome through Refugee Sponsorship. The first day long meetings were organised at Armouries, University of Windsor, by Professor Anneke Smit and Gilbert Iyamuremye. The meetings brought very moving and extremely emotional stories of refugee welcome.

Series of meetings

Dr. Pierre Boulos, Windsor Welcomes Refugees. Pierre was able to inspire me with his passion and commitment. Asked why he was in this, Pierre said, "We have a shared responsibility to address the global refugee crisis. For me, it does not matter which family my group sponsors. What matters is that we sponsor and give hope. I started this project with the \$5000.00 (five thousand Canadian dollars) left for me when my dad died. When we organised an event on 30th May 2018, 200 people came. What is interesting even more is the businesses that are partnering with us."

Rhea Eady – The meeting with Rhea was one of the most engaging and once again one of the most inspirational ever. When asked why she was in this, Rhea said, "Alan Kurdi was my turning point. I knew I had skills that I could bring people together. Hence, I started my campaign within 24 hours of the news of Alan's death. I thought I had to do what I could as I was deeply saddened. At our first event we had about 60 people for a meeting, which was very encouraging. In a short period of time we able to raise \$16000.00. We made a choice to do it. We have a responsibility to see it through. It gave us a platform to act together. That is what keeps me motivated.



Rhea & Child, Gilbert, Pierre, and Bekele (Right to left)

Sarah Voegeli and Dee Cham, WUSC/University of Windsor – The next to meet were Sarah and Dee, sponsor, and sponsored student newcomer, respectively.

Sarah – “To be involved in the World University Service of Canada and be able to sponsor a refugee student is an amazing journey. Despite the time shortage, this has been an exciting experience for me.”

Dee – “I am a student welcomed by WUSC to Windsor. It took me about 9 months from the first call to being able on a plane to Canada. My life now is different. What is interesting more is that Project Syria, a local group in Windsor, is working to welcome my family through sponsorship. I am grateful.”

As the travel and learning around Windsor continued, I was able to meet lot of inspirational people at different places in Windsor among which include meetings at the Diocese of London, Windsor organised by Gilbert Iyamuremye. Gilbert also took me to Essex, Ontario which helped me to see local group in action. So passionate folks working together to welcome a family into their community. The following link form my tweeter account captured some of the moments in Windsor.
<https://twitter.com/BekeleWoyecha/status/1007223411964301318>



Refugee Sponsorship meeting, Essex, Ontario

14 – 17 June, Ottawa, Ontario

Following another successful and busy moment in Windsor, the next trip was to Ottawa.

Meetings in Ottawa 15th June

Senator Mobina Jaffer- The first meeting in Ottawa was with one of most passionate human rights advocates, [Senator Mobina](#), who herself left for Canada from Uganda when very young. I had a lot to learn from the Senator and also was able to visit Parliament of Canada, which the senator's team organised for me. The visit to the parliament was also a great opportunity not only to see such a great architecture and beautiful parliament, but also to talk to folks who are proud to do their bits on a daily basis at the parliament. Reading a badge of a policeman on his vest that reads, 'I protect democracy with or without a contract' was enlightening about the depth of democratic traditions in Canada.

Chris Gregory and team- The second meeting of the day was at the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) head office with Chris Gregory and his team that are actively supporting the Global movement to promote Community Sponsorship of Refugees. For them, it is all about how Canada could be of help and could extend its decades of refugee sponsorship

experience to all those who are exploring Community Sponsorship of Refugees including the United Kingdom.

Refugee Hub - the next meeting of the day was at the Refugee Hub, which is at the heart of the Global Refugee Sponsorship movement. The Hub, as we often call it, has many passionate people who are globally connected and keen to share their expertise and experiences as Community Sponsorship of Refugees spreads around the world. Refugee Hub, which is the home of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, has been very instrumental in shaping the global refugee sponsorship movement.

Michelle Manks, World University Service of Canada (WUSC)– The fourth meeting of the day was with Michelle Manks, who has been at the heart of refugee sponsorship movement and working on how students stuck in refugee camps around the world could be sponsored through the WUSC network and fulfil their dreams. Through the WUSC network, students could be sponsored and brought to Canada to pursue their higher studies. WUSC gives opportunities to talented students that are forced to live in refugee camps, but if given the opportunity can flourish and be contributing members of societies.

Having spent some wonderful time and also visiting some wonderful people including with the Ethiopian Canadian Bahir Kemal, who was so welcoming and hospitable, my next trip was to Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, 18-21 June

The travel to Winnipeg was equally interesting as I was going to meet one of the most inspirational Refugee Sponsorship advocates, who has been at helm refugee sponsorship for decades.

Meetings in Manitoba

18th June

Brian Dyck – The first meeting in Winnipeg was with Brian Dyck, one of the most experienced refugee sponsorship experts with decades of experience. Brian served as a chair of Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holder Association from 2012 to 2019 and had been to the UK and other European countries to promote Refugee Sponsorship. Hence, he has been instrumental in the promotion of Refugee Sponsorship globally and there was a lot to learn from him. His passion for Refugee Sponsorship and keenness to support others was second to none. Despite his busy schedule, he helped me schedule most of my meetings in Manitoba and I am so grateful. In fact, we remain friends and he is in my home country Ethiopia as I write this report.



From left to right - Brian, Bekele & Arisnel

The Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO)

– The second meeting of the day was at MANSO, which is an umbrella organization for settlement service providers in Manitoba. Most organisations, including Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders, that work with newcomers in Manitoba have connection with MANSO. MANSO brings different voices together and provides important practical support to organisations that are members and through these organisations to newcomers that are resettled in Manitoba. This type of organisation makes it possible for resettlement organisations to work collaboratively whilst encouraging integration of newcomers through the process.

Welcome Place (Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council) – The third meeting of the day was with Rita Chahal, Executive Director of Welcome Place, and her senior team. Welcome place is proud to be refugee's first home in Manitoba as they transition to permanent housing. Its services are especially important as newcomers start their journeys in Canada. The services start from welcoming newcomers at the airport to helping them find their ways and adjust to permanent life in Canada. Their services are mostly available to government sponsored refugees, referred as newcomers in Canada.

21st June – Travel to Arborg, Manitoba

One of the smallest towns, by the size of Canada, I was able to visit when in Manitoba is called Arborg, which has less than 1500 population. The visit to Arborg was organised by Arisnel Mesidor, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council; now

at Mesidor Canadian Immigration Services, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Despite Arborg being small and further away from Winnipeg, by the time I visited it, it had already welcomed 2 families and the community groups led by the indomitable Trudy Dueck and Audrey Hicks was very inspirational.

"People that never met in the past were able to come together to sponsor a family and extend support. Sponsorship brought the community together as one. The churches, the community at large, the schools, the businesses, almost everybody have all put time and energy into this. Glad to see this happen in Arborg and we are encouraged to do more" - Trudy Dueck, a remarkable community leader leading the sponsorship on behalf of ConneXion church and in cooperation with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba.

As a Churchill Fellow, I was not only there to make connection, learn and come back, but also share the best of the United Kingdom and what we are doing here. As a follow up, therefore, Audrey Hicks visited London and took part in October 2018 Community Sponsorship Awards Ceremony which I organised at the Royal Society.



From left to right - Trudy, Bekele & Audrey

Meetings in Calgary, Alberta, 22nd – 27th June

The next stop on my Churchill Fellowship adventure was going to Calgary, Alberta.

The journey to Calgary was even more exciting as I was going to meet my childhood friends in addition to the meetings, I was going to have with those involved in Refugee Sponsorship and resettlement. As I arrived on Friday 22nd June, I thought it was good to have some peaceful and recreational time and enjoy the best of Calgary and its surroundings in the weekend. Luckily, I had the privilege of being looked after by my childhood friend Hailegebriel Yimer, close family members and friends. The trip to Banff was one of the best trips I had in my entire life. Banff is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful places on earth which I would not have seen had it not been for Churchill Fellowship.

25 June – 27 June

My first meeting of the day was with Anila Lee Yuen, CEO of Centre for Newcomers and her colleague Admasu Tachble to hear about their work, the role of businesses and schools to welcome newcomers in Calgary.

The centre for Newcomers provides major resettlement services for newcomers; it works to address the needs of immigrants and refugees to make a successful transition to their new home in Calgary; it supports newcomers to find work; it helps the young participants to reach their highest future potential, regardless of their past; and it also provides English language and training services by offering clients qualified instructors and practical training in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as life skills, and Canadian cultural awareness. There was a lot to learn from the centre and bring back to the UK.

Following the meeting with the CEO of Centre For Newcomers, I held a meeting with senior advisor of Naheed Nenshi, Mayor of Calgary, where I discussed the role of the mayor in the promotion of refugees welcome and sponsorship.

The next meetings in Calgary was with Fariborz Birjandian CEO of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and Anoush Newman, Refugee Sponsorship Training Program. Talking to Fariborz was so refreshing. Hearing his stories of fleeing Iran along with his family was so moving. Since arriving in Calgary in 1988, he has been extremely involved in refugee and migrants issues and has been leading Calgary Catholic Immigration Society for over 25 years.



Bekele with Fariborz Birjandian

The visits to a few newcomers support centres under the guidance of Anoush Newman from the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program Calgary helped me to exchange ideas with newly arrived newcomers that are building their lives in their new home – Canada, which is undoubtedly one of the most welcoming countries.

Following a remarkably interesting time in Calgary, my next trip was to Vancouver, British Columbia.

Vancouver, 27-29 June

The last leg of my travel to Canada was a visit to Vancouver to meet some inspirational community sponsors and exchange ideas with Community organisers and leaders of Metro Vancouver Alliance, which is a sister organisation to Citizens UK.

On the evening of 27th June, I had the opportunity to hear stories of welcome from some of the most generous people I met in Canada, Wilna and Dave Parry, my hosts in Vancouver. At the meeting we were joined by Mambo, originally from DRC and who has made Canada his home. Mambo Masinda is actively involved in settlement works in Vancouver. Wilna and David are members of a North Vancouver multi-church Refugee Sponsorship group, which has been welcoming newcomers. But in 2016 they did something exceptional. They opened their home to a 24-year-old blind Somali refugee, Bukhari, who was unable to live on his

own as he had lost his sight; Bukhari had other medical challenges and was not also proficient in English. With the help of many people from the sponsorship team and members of the local Muslim community, Wilna and Dave were able to get the necessary treatment for Bukhari and help him adapt to life in Canada whilst also keeping in touch with people in his home country, Somalia. Their work was recognised locally and brought them recognition as Lynn Valley's Good Neighbours for 2016.

Wilna is the face of the group and often welcomes newcomers at the airport. She often writes about her experiences. Here is a note in one of the websites, <https://www.stclementschurch.ca/news/airport-arrival-brings-much-joy>



from left to right - Bekele, David, Wilna and Mambo

Learning and sharing - Metro Vancouver Alliance

Another interesting and engaging event was organised by Metro Vancouver Alliance, which is a broad-based alliance of community groups, labour, faith, and educational institutions working together for the common good and a sister organisation of Citizens UK. This event organised by Tracey Maynard brought together community leaders, activists, union leaders and those involved in refugees welcome movement. We had a lot to discuss and prepare for actions including 'How we could use Refugee Sponsorship as an opportunity to do Community Organising?' How we could build our power whilst working together on an issue?' This event was one of the most engaging and inspiring. Lots to take from.



James Cavalluzzo
@tendercomrade

Leaders from [@MetVanAlliance](#) came out to hear from [@BekeleWoyecha](#) of [@CitizensUK](#) about community organizing and supporting [#refugees](#). Inspiring and challenging words! We're organizing for the common good! [#vanpoli](#)



👤 Timothy Stacey

21:29 · 29/06/2018 · [Twitter Web Client](#)

Following discussions with Metro Vancouver Alliance

Learning, reflections, conclusions, recommendations and next steps

Learning and Reflections

My Churchill Fellowship has given me opportunities to have first-hand information on Canada's Refugee Sponsorship scheme. After spending 4 weeks in Canada, I had a lot to learn about its decades old Refugee Sponsorship program and why different sectors get involved in refugee sponsorship. Many people in Canada know about Canada's Refugee Sponsorship program. Many people are involved in Refugee Sponsorship in one form or other or know someone close to them who is involved in Refugee Sponsorship. Hence when one talks about Refugee Sponsorship, Canadians are not strangers to the issue, and they know what one is talking about. Canadians told me that when the Syrian Refugee Crisis got from bad to worse at the end of 2015, it did not take long for them to organise and step in. The decades old experience of Canadians makes it easy to spontaneously organise and welcome newcomers. That was why Canada was able to welcome nearly 30000 newcomers over a course of a few months in early 2016.

Reflections

I have observed that different sectors of society get involved in Refugee Sponsorship for different reasons. The following are among the reasons: -

1. **Sponsor Refugees wherever/whoever they may be-** There are those who are engaged in Refugee Sponsorship because they believe they have to do their bits to address the refugee crises. They don't necessarily choose who to sponsor.
2. **Saving the world and part of global movement** – On a couple of occasions, I was told by sponsors that they want to save the world. Sponsors saying 'we are part of the global movement and have to take our share by sponsoring refugees'.
3. **Corporate social responsibility and employee engagement** – There are businesses that deliver their corporate social responsibilities through the scheme. For them, it is not enough to be concerned about the Refugee Crises, rather it is vital for them and their employees to do Refugee Sponsorship and build strong bond through the process.
4. **Saving talents and skills** – The Refugee Sponsorship programs through the universities help those who have very promising potentials and are stuck in refugee camps. They get sponsorship so that they are able to help themselves and consequently contribute constructively in the not too distant future. This is mostly for young refugees with potentials to succeed.
5. **Family and family friends** – There are those who engage in Refugee Sponsorship to sponsor their family members or family friends.
6. **Different civic, religious, and other groups**– Here people engage in Refugee Sponsorship for a specific reason based on their social and individual interests.

Canada's Refugee Sponsorship program is successful because

1. It is decades old in experience and hence lots learned through the process.
2. It is not limited in scope as there is flexibility in the system to accommodate private sponsors to do their bits.
3. It brings businesses, universities, and schools on board widening the scope.
4. It brings partnership between the state and private sponsors through its sponsorship system.

Why Should Businesses do Community Sponsorship

1. Businesses are organised, they have organised people and money, and it is easier to bring together work colleagues once businesses are convinced to do it.
2. Community Sponsorship could bring a sense of team spirit in an organisation as it could bring people in different departments and levels together for a common cause of welcoming newcomers.
3. Community Sponsorship makes it possible to make friends. There is a saying, 'you can't hire friends, rather you make friends'. As the relationship between colleagues could be strengthened through the process, they could move onto friendship because of working on this issue.
4. Community Sponsorship helps people to interact with one another and through the process have common purpose. When implemented in businesses, the interaction is much better as observed in Canada.

Recommendations for the UK Community Sponsorship Scheme

Lots could be done to widen the scope of the Community Sponsorship of Refugees scheme and build the Community Sponsorship movement in the United Kingdom. Doing the following should be considered thoroughly: -

1. Bringing Businesses on board. This is vital on many grounds
 - 1.1. Businesses could join local groups as sponsors.
 - 1.2. Businesses could provide financial support to groups.
 - 1.3. Businesses could be potential sponsors on their own when the scope is widened.
 - 1.4. Businesses could provide job / internship opportunities to newcomers.

Hence there should be concerted efforts to bring businesses on board.

2. Universities and higher education- learning from Canada's WUSC experiences, building a sponsorship family in Universities needs to be given due attention. This could include: -

- 2.1. Looking for talents and future generations builders. There are many people who are young, talented, and ready to take up studies and flourish if they get opportunities. Often, they get stuck in refugee camps for years as they may not meet the 'vulnerability criteria'. Hence there should a refugee sponsorship program and pool of sponsors to support these individuals. The benefit is mutual and needs to be thought through. This is not of course at the expense of the most vulnerable, but sponsorship done by a different category of sponsors.
- 2.2. Sponsorship in schools - this helps the future generations to understand the global refugee and migration challenges in depth and helps to take practical steps to be part of solution finders. Bringing schools ultimately brings families of pupils and consequently inter-generational sponsors. Hence there should a system to support these.
3. Widening the multiple sponsors and challenging onlookers to join the movement and deliver. There should be organising work done to bring potential lead - principal sponsors to support local sponsors. This is all about supporting each-other and through the process addressing the global crises in a coordinated and accountable way.
4. Long term Investment in Community Sponsorship of Refugees - If we are convinced that Community Sponsorship of Refugees benefits both sponsors and sponsored families, as testified by both, there should be multiple funders to support those who are promoting the scheme, those giving practical support, those organising locally, nationally, and globally. Hence there is a need both for government, philanthropy, trusts, and foundations to provide financial support to see a successful Community Sponsorship program.

The success of the project

For me, the success of the fellowship and the project is when I see changes in policy. When the scheme is diversified, which of course is not an easy job and could take some time. The first success is when we have businesses and universities saying we want to do it and come up with Register of Interest. The other success is when we are able to have strong Community Sponsorship voice to campaign for the policy changes that are being suggested.

Next steps

For the recommendations to succeed there will be a series of next steps

1. **Official report lunch.** There is a plan to have official launch of the report in partnership with a prominent business firm. The travel fellowship's findings are to be shared with policy makers including the UK Home Office, organisations and groups working on Community Sponsorship of Refugees, businesses, and universities so that there could be discussions and debates on the issues.

2. **Roundtables** – There are plans to organise a series of round tables to discuss on the outcome of the fellowship. These roundtables would help us to discuss the outcomes and take some of the issues forward.
3. **Distribution of the report** – Distribution of the report to the wider sector is important. Hence in addition to electronic mails and social media outlets, we will also have printed reports distributed as and when needed.

Useful Resources/References

4. [Death of Alan Kurdi](#)
5. [Citizens UK](#)
6. [Community Sponsorship – UK government](#)
7. [Community Sponsorship of Refugees - where it all be begun for me](#)
8. [Goldblatt Partners LLP](#)
9. [The 2018 Global Refugee Rights Conference](#)
10. [Niagara Falls](#)
11. [Jim Estill's refugee work coverage on BBC](#)
12. [Senator Mobina](#)
13. [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada](#)
14. [Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative,](#)
15. [WUSC - World University Service of Canada](#)
16. [Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration](#)
17. [Mennonite Central Committee Canada](#)
18. [Sponsor Refugees Foundation](#)
19. [Reset](#)
20. [Metro Vancouver Alliance](#)

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