

Dear OCRA Friends and Supporters,

Perhaps like it has been for you, 2021 has been a different type of year for us at OCRA! The full year has truly been a “managing during the pandemic” type of endeavour for everybody, us included. That said, we have truly bright spots to report this year!

But first, let’s turn to the refugee topic that is top of mind in Canada this fall, the plight of Afghan refugees, particularly those who helped the former Canadian military missions and those who worked for or at our embassy.

I. AFGHAN REFUGEES – WHAT CAN OCRA DO TO HELP?

There are three ways that OCRA can help:

1. OCRA volunteers can help support Afghan refugees who arrive in Ottawa as Government Assisted Refugees. This does not require any fundraising or a sponsorship application. It does require a partnership with a settlement organization, such as the Catholic Centre for Immigrants, and finding an Afghan family interested in settlement support from a group of community residents. If folks are interested in forming a group to volunteer in this way, let us know by email at ocra613@gmail.com and we can see if we can make something happen. This may take some time as the settlement agencies are concentrating on finding housing for the Afghans who arrived in Ottawa earlier this summer and fall and likely will not be able to onboard volunteers until early 2022.
2. The opportunity to help Afghan refugees through private sponsorship is not clear yet. To do so, the Principal Applicant and family must have exited Afghanistan, qualify for refugee status and be known to us at OCRA. This requires significant fundraising, as Afghan families are typically larger. The estimated cost for private sponsorship of a family of 6 is **\$40,000**. Most Afghan families will be larger than this, Afghan refugees are afforded urgent processing when a private sponsorship application is made.
3. BVOR Sponsorships – The BVOR stream of refugee resettlement involves the government accepting a referral, usually from UNHCR, of a refugee in a country like Pakistan or other place where Afghan refugees have fled, then sharing the cost with private sponsorship groups for settlement in Canada. The BVOR stream is what OCRA used to settle the 12 groups of Syrian and other refugees who came in 2015 – 2017. The government is expected to re-open the BVOR stream, which has been suspended due to Covid, and to include Afghan refugees in early 2022. Sponsoring a family of 6 would require **\$22,650** for start-up and 6 months of financial support.

We think it would make most sense to sponsor Afghan families through the BVOR stream at this point, because of the length of time it takes to raise the money for a private sponsorship.

Don't hesitate to contact us if you'd like to learn more about how you can help.

SEEKING VOLUNTEERS AND DONATIONS!

- Volunteer for support group duties
- Make a pledge of financial support for a BVOR application

Contact us: ocra613@gmail.com

Please specify what you're able to do and/or how much you're able to pledge in financial support.

We will assess the level of support and help organize any groups if there is sufficient interest.

II. 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Ahmed Abdurhaman Arrives – April 2021!

At the beginning of 2021, it was apparent that nothing was moving on our application to re-unite young Ahmed Abdurhaman with his family in Ottawa. You may recall that Ahmed was left behind when his parents made it to Canada, and that we had, with Herculean help from the Afar community in Ethiopia and Ottawa, re-located him from Eritrea to the Ethiopian refugee camp of Aysaita, so that he could be sponsored to join his family in Canada. But that was in 2019, and two years later, nothing had moved.

The internal strife in Ethiopia, to put a mild term on it, was increasingly dangerous. Here in Ottawa we were really worried. Our MP's office was diligent in getting information to us, and in March 2021, after numerous entreaties from us, they arranged an opportunity for me to write to the Visa Officer handling Ahmed's case. This I did in early March. And lo and behold, it worked!

Travel for Ahmed was arranged, including a journey by plane from Asaita to Addis Ababa due to the dangers on the road. Ahmed arrived in Ottawa on April 22nd, much to everyone's relief! Quarantine for two weeks followed, and finally, on May 6, Ahmed re-united with his family, who he had not seen since he was twelve years old (he is now 17). Ahmed met his youngest sister, age 4, for the first time in person on that day. Ahmed is now enrolled at Woodroffe High School and is busy being a Canadian teenager, although a shy one.

Getting Ahmed here and re-united with his family was hard work, required a great deal of advocacy, but was hugely gratifying. We are immensely grateful that he made it to Canada before the troubles in Ethiopia precluded refugee resettlement and travel.



Ahmed when he first arrived at the refugee camp at Asaita



Ahmed reunited with his family upon his release from quarantine



Ahmed after a good bike ride in Ottawa this spring



Ahmed with his mom, Myriam

Single Mom and Family from Syria

Badrieh, the beloved sister and aunt of the Othman Agha clan, was sponsored way back in early 2019. Her application was delayed by the pandemic, and we have just received word that Badrieh and family will travel to Canada in mid-December!

She and her children (ages 24, 20 and 14) are hugely excited to begin a new life in Canada. Housing has been secured near the family and plans for school are underway. It has been a long wait, almost 3 years, for this application to have been processed, but their arrival is joyfully anticipated by OCRA's settled families who are close relatives.

As a postscript, we were happy to find out that this family was vaccinated against Covid in Jordan, and assuming they have negative pre-departure Covid tests, should not have to quarantine in a strange, unknown country when they get here!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY!

If you would like to volunteer to help **Badrieh** and her family settle once they arrive in December, please contact us:

ocra613@gmail.com

III. FUNDRAISING REQUESTS FOR SPONSORSHIPS

OCRA recognizes that not all groups can fund, or raise funds, to support a refugee sponsorship. If our OCRA families present a case for sponsorship of close relatives, we have tried to respond where this is feasible, and if we see a good chance for successful integration in Canada, with effective and primary involvement by the OCRA family themselves. Here is the sponsorship for which we are seeking donations this year.

Hind Agha Family

This family of 3 is from Syria and currently resides in Irbid, Jordan. Her husband was taken away by Syrian intelligence in 2012 and has not been heard of since. Hind then helped her brothers and sisters to find shelter in Damascus during the bombing of the southern suburbs.

After Hind and her family fled to Jordan during the aerial bombardment of Damascus suburbs, she arranged housing for herself, then sheltered her siblings and their families until they could get places to live in Irbid.

Cost to sponsor: \$34,000.

Left to raise: \$7500

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY AND DONATIONS NEEDED

If you would like to volunteer or make a pledge of financial support to help the **Hind Agha family** settle once they arrive in Ottawa, please contact us:

ocra613@gmail.com

IV. DONATIONS FOR OCRA REFUGEE SPONSORSHIPS

All donated funds are used for the financial support of sponsored refugees. OCRA does not pay employees or volunteers and does not use contributions to reimburse administrative costs.

TO DONATE VIA CHEQUE/DRAFT

Please make a cheque or draft out to:
First United Church Ottawa

And deliver to OCRA at:
**164 Glebe Ave.
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 2C5**

Notes:

- Tax receipts are issued for donations of \$100 or more
- We will make sure the cheques are delivered to the church and allocated to OCRA sponsorships

TO DONATE VIA E-TRANSFER

E-transfers for any amount can be sent to:
treasurer@firstunitedchurchottawa.org

Notes:

- Please specify “For OCRA sponsorships” in the message line
- If you have not donated before, please also provide your address so a tax receipt can be issued
- Please email us at ocra613@gmail.com to let us know you have made an e-transfer, so we can keep our records in good order

Our OCRA website is currently under re-construction and should be back up soon. Until then we cannot accept website donations.

V. STATUS OF OTHER APPLICATIONS - FUNDED APPLICATIONS

In the fall of 2020 and early 2021 OCRA filed 4 sponsorship applications with First United Church Ottawa and the United Church of Canada. Each of these applications is funded. All 4 OCRA applications were approved by the United Church of Canada and sent to IRCC in Ottawa in September 2021. They are currently being processed for approval at the sponsorship level, and we hope to obtain those approvals before the year end.

After the sponsorship level approval, the applications are referred to the Canadian Embassies in the countries to which the refugee applications have fled, in these cases, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Australia. In each case, we are hopeful that the refugee applications will be accepted and that travel to Canada can take place by the end of 2022 or by mid-2023. A brief description of each application is set out in Appendix A.

VI. OCRA 2.0 SPONSORSHIP STATISTICS AND FUNDRAISING PROGRESS

Here is a brief point form overview of OCRA 2.0 sponsorships and fundraising progress:

- 12 OCRA 2015-2016 BVOR sponsorships (over \$200,000 in donations raised)
- 1 OCRA 2.0 BVOR sponsorship 2018 - 2019 (\$20,400 grant through Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative)
- 7 OCRA 2.0 private sponsorships applications for close relatives of OCRA BVOR families 2017 -2021
- 7 of 7 privately sponsored OCRA 2.0 families landed and re-settled in Ottawa in 2018 – 2021. (7th family will arrive in December 2021.)
- 4 new sponsorship applications submitted to the government by the United Church of Canada in 2021
- **1 new request for OCRA 2.0 sponsorship – this request is not fully funded and is the reason we are seeking to raise funds. Amount Needed: \$7500.** (See “New Requests section of Report).
- A total of **\$308,780** raised to fund 11 OCRA 2.0 sponsorships and the new request for OCRA-sponsorship. (Includes \$20,400 grant for 1 BVOR Sponsorship).
- **\$7,500** in donations is needed to fund the 1 new sponsorship request.

See Appendix A for a description of the current sponsorship applications and a few updates from our OCRA families.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

**WE HOPE YOU HAVE A
HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE
HOLIDAY SEASON**

**WE WISH YOU THE VERY
BEST FOR 2022!**

STAY WELL, EVERYONE



APPENDIX A

STATUS OF CURRENT SPONSORSHIP APPLICATIONS – Funded Applications

Each of the sponsorship applications below has been accepted by the United Church of Canada and has been sent to the federal government in the fall of 2021 as part of the United Church Sponsorship Agreement Holder Annual Allocation of refugee spaces. We are waiting for sponsorship level approval and referral to the Canadian Embassies in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Australia.

Al Khouli - OCRA FSG3 members are sponsoring the sister and family of Amer Al Halak. Amer's sister and husband have 3 children, and are currently in Turkey, where conditions have deteriorated over the course of the pandemic.

Farhani/ Navaseri - OCRA has formed a new support group, FSG 21, to support the Farhani/ Navaseri family, who are from Iran. OCRA was asked by a refugee support organization in Australia to take on this case. The Farhani / Navaseri family had to flee Iran after the father, Kamal, was tortured twice for workplace advocacy on behalf of Arab-speaking workers. They fled from Iran in 2012 and went to Indonesia, then set out for Australia by boat.

While they were at sea, the Australian government announced a policy to never let refugee arrivals landing by boat settle in Australia. The Farhani / Navaseri family were taken to the notorious Christmas Island prison, a year later to locked detention on the island of Nauru, where they obtained a refugee determination from the Nauruan government. They were remitted to community detention on Nauru, then sent to Australia, outside Melbourne, for compassionate medical reasons when the Mom, Elham, became dangerously sick while pregnant with their youngest child.

They remain in community detention outside Melbourne. Their child born in Australia cannot be a citizen of Australia, their children can attend school, but the Dad and Mom cannot do so, nor can they work. They are constantly inspected to ensure they do not have contraband, and if they breach any laws, they will be deported. They live in constant fear that they will be issued a "bridging visa", which would allow them to work, but would require them to leave Australia within six months.

This application involves a race against the Australian system, and we are hoping the Canadian Embassy can move quickly enough to allow the family to come here before they are made to leave Australia, or that the Australian government will extend any bridging visas while our refugee application is being processed.

Almobarak - OCRA is assisting with this application by the family of a young woman originally from Syria, now in Lebanon, where conditions are terrible. This young woman has been the victim of domestic abuse and is on her own in a country where there are significant dangers for young refugee women.

Al Refai - OCRA is assisting with this application for a family of 6 from Syria, now in Jordan, where conditions have become worse for refugees. The Dad lost his employment in 2021 because his employer would no longer pay the large fees for refugee work permits. Their rations from UNHCR and other charities have been reduced, and the Dad has been forced into covert work to feed the family.