



**United Way
Centraide**
Ottawa

United for Refugees

2019 Final Report





**"It was difficult
for me in the beginning.
But when you challenge
yourself, you can do it."**

Alaa



Message from the CEO

In September 2015, Ottawa was struck by the realities of the Syrian refugee crisis.

From the video of a toddler rescued from the rubble of his bombed-out home, to stories of overcrowded boats capsizing—the images were devastating. I'll never forget the heart-wrenching photo of Alan Kurdi, just three-years-old, washed up on a beach in Turkey.

When Alan drowned alongside his brother, mother and 10 other Syrian migrants, the world took note—and so did you. Generous donors, community leaders, non-profits, businesses, faith groups, community agencies, universities and governments pulled together.

United Way Ottawa has a history of supporting newcomers, and it was clear we needed to do something: bring refugees from the Syrian crisis to Ottawa and help them build a better life.

In October 2015, we launched *United for Refugees* in collaboration with the Community Foundation of Ottawa, the City of Ottawa, and Refugee 613. The success of this initiative is due to many organizations and people, including former City Councillor Michael Qaqish. Mayor Jim Watson also deserves special mention for his leadership in coordinating Ottawa's response.

By the end of 2018, with the incredible generosity of donors like you, *United for Refugees* had raised more than \$950,000. With advice from a team of volunteer experts from organizations that specialize in refugee resettlement and sponsorship, we invested resources where they were needed most and would have the greatest impact.

Together, we made a difference.

Thanks to your kindness, *United for Refugees* settlement initiatives served more than 1,000 refugees of the Syrian crisis in Ottawa each year since 2016. You also helped welcome 51 refugees to Ottawa through 14 sponsorship groups, with another four applications still pending with the federal government. This generosity allowed these newcomers to make a home, put food on their tables, learn English, receive mental health and other supports, and connect to job opportunities.

The impact of this work is long-lasting.

Ottawa provided refugees of the Syrian crisis not only with a home, but a new beginning. Our work continues – not only for refugees of the Syrian crisis, but for all newcomers. When you support United Way Ottawa, you provide pre-employment and employment training, mental health counselling, school readiness for children and more—vital services that help newcomers transition to their new city, and flourish in the community.

Thank you for your commitment to making this city great—for everyone.

Sincerely,



Michael Allen
President & CEO, United Way Ottawa



Changing lives in Ottawa

Thanks to your generosity and the hard work of community, *United for Refugees* invested in local organizations who took up the charge to bring refugees of the Syrian crisis to Ottawa, and help them build a better life. *United for Refugees* funds were invested by a committee of community experts who directed investments to where they would have the greatest impact: sponsorship and settlement needs.

Sponsorship

To date, more than 40,000 refugees of the Syrian crisis have arrived in Canada¹, about 2,300 of whom settled in Ottawa.² The costs to bring a refugee to Ottawa are great, often involving government assistance or private support. To complement efforts of private sponsorship groups, *United for Refugees* has invested \$175,959 in sponsorship—providing funding to the 14 local sponsorship groups listed below. Together they have welcomed 51 refugees—with an additional four government applications pending.

These groups include:

- Alia Group
- Abaza Group
- Alhalabi-Harb Group of Five
- Almalah Group
- Bromley Road Baptist Church
- Greenbelt Church
- Knox Presbyterian Church
- OC Refugee
- Ottawa Muslim Association (x2)
- Ottawa Refugee 2016 (x2)
- Our Syrian Family Ottawa
- Rideau Sponsorship Collective

¹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/welcome-syrian-refugees.html>

² Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/welcome-syrian-refugees/destination-communities-map.html>



**“It is like you brought
us back to life, our
coming to Canada.”**

*Rana with her husband, Bashar,
and their three kids.*



Stories of Sponsorship

Reuniting the Alhalabi family



Bashar Alhalabi, a dermatologist and cosmetic skin surgeon in Damascus, Syria, fled his home with this wife and children in September 2013 and came to Ottawa. With *United for Refugees* support, he set out to bring his sister Nawal to Ottawa along with her husband Nasser, 14-year-old daughter Zaina and 10-year-old son Ward.

Here is an excerpt from a moving speech he made in May, 2016.

“Before the Syrian crisis, I lived a happy life there with my wife, three kids, my parents, brothers, sisters, and a lot of friends. I had a good career with an excellent income.

Then the war started. You can’t imagine what it’s like to hear gunshots every day and every night, to see buildings destroyed and blood everywhere. The last year I was in Syria, every night I had nightmares that my kids were kidnapped. I didn’t allow them to play outside...

I sincerely thank you for your donations and for helping me bring my sister and her family here, and giving to them the chance to make a better life here in Ottawa...

Thank you to all the people of Ottawa for welcoming so many refugees to this beautiful city.”

[Read the full speech.](#)

Finding meaningful work together

Settling into a new home is no easy feat. Refugees of the Syrian crisis needed help to find stable housing, learn English and French, and over the long term, they need ways to support themselves and their families.

Wedjan and her son Mohamad attended a local seminar aimed at not only helping newcomers better understand Canadian workplaces, but also educating them about available pre-employment support. This includes things like language training, peer support, and mentorship, as well as connecting to local job opportunities.

[Read their full story.](#)

Settlement

Escaping the Syrian conflict was just the first step in a long journey. Thanks to your generosity, to date *United for Refugees* has invested in the 10 local projects outlined below. These partners worked towards the healthy, supportive, and successful settlement of Ottawa's newest residents. Your donation not only helped create new services and programs tailored to the unique needs of refugees, you also helped expand existing ones to meet the need, demand, and opportunities in our community.

Local settlement projects

Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre - \$50,000

Projects

- Syrian Refugee Outreach Worker

Settlement orientation and education, connecting refugees to social, health and financial networks in Ottawa.

Anglican Diocese of Ottawa - \$73,129

Projects

- Programmer Analyst for Syrian Refugees
- Refugee Sponsorship Program Assistant

Administrative support to the Diocese and community groups sponsoring and settling hundreds of refugees under the Diocese's agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Developing a computerized management information system to keep track of the influx of refugees, donations and volunteers.

Helping with Furniture - \$9,400

Projects

- Gently Used Furniture and Household Items for Families in Need, helping refugees affected by the Syrian crisis make a home in Ottawa. This includes things like beds to sleep on, tables to eat around and pots and pans to cook with.

Jewish Family Services - \$114,863

Projects

- Mental Health Services and Supports for Children/Youth Refugees and their Families
- Mental Health Services and Supports for Adult Refugees

Providing support to children, youth, adults and families—including a mental health counselor, assessments and referrals—to help refugees cope with trauma in their past, adapt to their new environment, and build a future.

Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization - \$201,173

Projects

- Syrian Refugee Complex Case Management and Peer Supports
- Refugee Sponsorship Facilitation
- Refugee 613

Specialized case management services, peer support, and facilitating private sponsorships so qualified applications can be submitted quickly. Also providing a one-stop web-presence that gives sponsorship and settlement information for refugees, private sponsors and volunteers.

Ottawa Food Bank - \$42,723

Project

- Hunger at Home — Helping Our New Neighbours

Making more food available because of the increased demand on local food banks. This includes perishable products like eggs, cheese and milk, and nonperishable items such as canned food, pasta and rice.

Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre - \$35,000

Project

- Espoir d'avenir à Rideau-Rockcliffe

Helping families integrate and build a sense of belonging in their community, offering counselling; providing a culturally sensitive, safe space to gather, helping children adjust to the school system, and providing food, clothing and shelter.

Somali Centre for Family Services - \$45,000

Project

- Engaging Syrian Refugees for Better Settlement and Integration
Providing multi-lingual services in counselling, crisis intervention, advocacy, and outreach services to help refugees settle into their new homes and country.

University of Ottawa's Refugee Sponsorship Support Program - \$55,000

Project

- SSP Syrian Family Support Program

Adapting University of Ottawa's pro bono lawyer training, custom resources, and expert support program to best serve specific needs of Ottawa's Syrian-linked community, in many cases helping reunite families separated by the crisis.

World Skills Employment Centre - \$109,860

Project

- Employment Roadmap for Syrian Refugees

Collaborating with other stakeholders to develop long-term settlement strategies and help refugees get ready for the job market. This includes assessing their language skills, evaluating how ready they are for the job market and helping fill any gaps to get them on their way.





What's your favourite
part of Ottawa?
"I like school!"
says Mahmoud.



Stories of Settlement

Starting from zero

There were only so many things the Internet could have prepared Alaa for before his arrival in Ottawa in January, 2016—the shock of blistering cold temperatures and knee-deep piles of snow didn't make the list. But as a refugee of the Syrian crisis, the shock could not be matched by the relief he felt being in a country where he says he could “finally feel safe.”

When Alaa arrived in Ottawa, it was as if a reset button was pressed on his life.

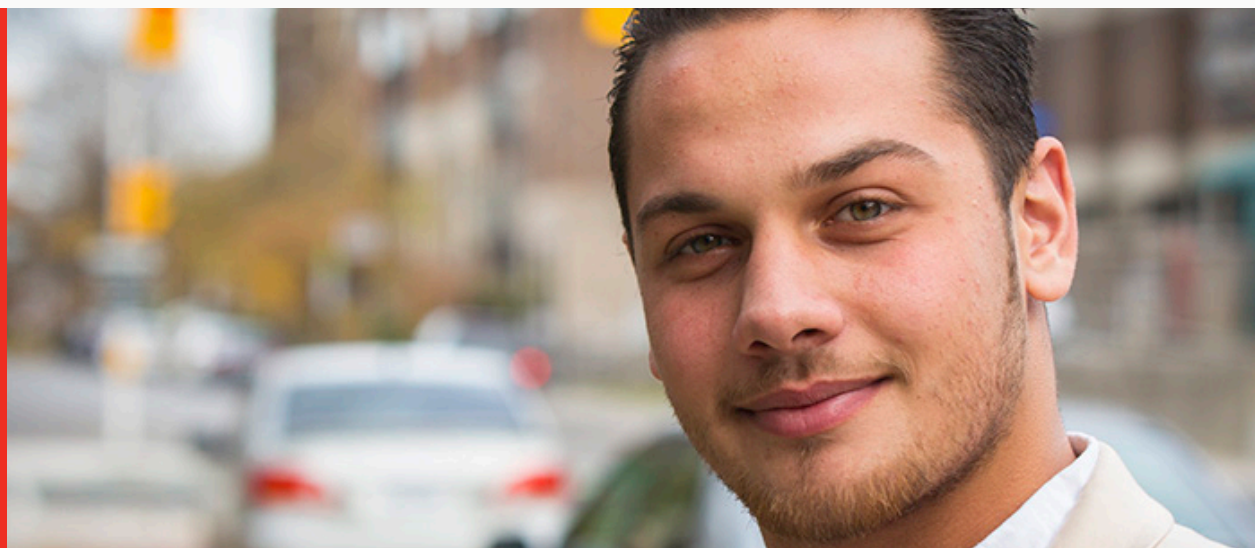
“You have to find everything—friends, job, home. You have to start from zero, to go up,” he says.

Escaping a harsh reality is just the first step in a long journey. Alaa stayed in a downtown Ottawa hotel for nearly two months after his arrival. There, agencies often offered their support to help him and others with the resources they needed—things like language training, counselling, and mental health services. After participating in a skating program, a counsellor referred Alaa to a *United for Refugees* funded program at World Skills Employment Centre. Never did he expect that the people he met that day would help lead him to his first job in Canada.

“It was difficult for me in the beginning,” says Alaa. “But when you challenge yourself, you can do it.”

Not only was Alaa able to learn English in just six months, thanks to *United for Refugees* donors, he has a job and has also turned a hobby into a business—gathering a group of new-found friends and forming a cultural dance group to bring the beauty of Syria to his new home.

[**Watch his story.**](#)



How job support is helping refugees feel more at home in Ottawa



For refugees of the Syrian crisis, finding a job is much more than finding a means to make money to support their families—it's about finding a sense of purpose, a renewal of confidence, a place to belong and an outlet to escape the horrors they faced in their journeys to build a better life.

The World Skills Roadmap to Employment (RTE) program, which aims to facilitate the integration of Syrian refugees into the Ottawa labour market, was created thanks to a \$109,860 grant from *United for Refugees*—the initiative's largest investment. From July 2016 to June 2017, 252 clients were actively engaged with employment counselling, workshops, application assistance, targeted recruitment events and networking opportunities. When the participants gathered to celebrate their successes one year on, Abdel-Raouf recounted his slip into a depression when he first arrived in Canada.

"I would ask people here what can I do to introduce myself to other people, how can I find a job, how can I make anything for this society," he recalls. After finding the program through a local job fair, Abdel-Raouf has gone up two levels in his English language skills and has found a stable job and he and his wife have even started their own small catering business.

[Hear from more refugees who benefited from this program.](#)

To read more stories

of how our new neighbours are moving forward with their lives and what your kindness and generosity has done for them, please visit uwco.ca/newcomers



Inspiring Generosity

United for Refugees was made possible by the generous support of many people and organizations in our city. We are grateful to all the individuals and organizations that helped ensure our success.



CBC Ottawa deserves special recognition for raising this issue to public prominence and for dedicating its December fundraising effort, *Project Give*, to support this initiative. *Project Give* fundraised more than \$204,000, collected through cash gifts made in person, via unitedfor-refugees.ca, and through a telephone hotline managed by CBC and promoted through all day, wall-to-wall local news coverage.

Bridgehead Coffee was also a key partner for CBC Ottawa, and for *United for Refugees*. Bridgehead hosted *United for Refugees* fundraising events across the city in its stores, and collected donations at cash registers. Collectively, more than \$17,000 was donated directly through Bridgehead locations to aid refugees.

Scotiabank also fueled fundraising by offering \$50,000 in matching funds—a public commitment to match *United for Refugees* gifts dollar-for-dollar—a generous challenge that inspired the community to act.

In addition to these organizations, United Way received generous support from:

- The Borealis Foundation
- The Minto Group
- Sisters of Charity of Ottawa
- Union of Solicitor General Employees
- PSAC
- Embassy of the State of Qatar
- Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
- Borden Ladner Gervais LLP/s.r.l.
- Ottawa Carleton District School Board
- IBISKA Telecom Inc.
- The Hill Strategy Group Inc.
- Felicis Holdings Inc.
- Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain
- Embassy of the State of Kuwait

Your Impact

United for Refugees was a response to our community's urgent desire to help those affected by the Syrian refugee crisis. Together with our partners and donors, we provided refugees with the support they needed to start their new lives. We also came together to achieve long-lasting impact for those depending on us.

Here is just a snapshot of some of the results reported to date from programs *United for Refugees* invested in:

- *United for Refugees* helped 14 sponsorship groups bring 51 refugees to Ottawa.
- A further five refugee applications are still pending with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which might result in a higher number.
- Investments reached more 1,000 refugees each year since 2016, providing vital services such as counselling in their native language, help to navigate their new life, mental health support, English and French language training, pre-employment and employment supports, and more.
- In just one program, 142 individuals received mental health supports over two years, with the agency reporting that 100% of clients served showed a decrease in depression and an increase in response to treatment.
- In one program providing employment support, 125 refugees found employment over two years.
- One program provided 800 refugees with food supports over two years.
- In a program aimed at supporting refugee children, the agency reported that 92% developed essential skills for academic success.



- At a program that offered counselling, a safe space to gather, school support for kids, food, clothing and shelter, the agency reported that 100% of refugees served developed a sense of community belonging.
- At a program offering settlement orientation and education, connecting refugees to social, health and financial networks, the agency reported that 100% of the refugees they served felt their basic needs were met.
- One local organization was able to use *United for Refugees* seed funding to build its foundation, secure further grants, and then increase its capacity to help refugees in Ottawa.

These are just a sample of the results shared with us by the programs *United for Refugees* funded. This highlights that our community is delivering on what it set out to do—but also that the work must continue.



After the Crisis, a Focus on Community

Providing immediate support during the Syrian refugee crisis was a multi-year, community effort. But supporting refugees—and all newcomers—is a long-term part of building a healthy, vibrant Ottawa.

Through *United for Refugees*, United Way demonstrated that we are here for our community, no matter what happens—and we will be ready to take on this challenge again if our city needs us.

We know that many who supported *United for Refugees* are longtime supporters of United Way—loyal donors who stepped up and took on the challenge that we put to you. We also know that many who gave in support of *United for Refugees* had perhaps never given to us before. What we all have in common is simple: a love of our city and its people, and a commitment to help tackle its most pressing challenges.

United Way donors support newcomers along many stages of their journey. Separately from *United for Refugees*, here is a snapshot of the amazing impact United Way Ottawa has in this area.

- Since 2011, United Way Ottawa has helped 9,760 newcomers get the help they need to find a job and start a new life in our city.
- We support 5,100 newcomers each year through other investments in the community, like mental health supports and programs for isolated seniors. We also know this number is likely much larger, as some of partners (like crisis lines) are unable to collect this type of information.
- Our community-wide initiative, Hire Immigrants Ottawa, has helped employers hire over 2,400 newcomers, delivered workshops to more than 877 employers, and provided integration support to more than 1,500 employers in its 12-year history.
- Our support of after-school programming (homework clubs, recreation programs, etc.) draws large numbers of children of newcomers as they are located in communities with significant numbers of immigrants and new Canadians.
- United Way Ottawa's investment in place-based programs and projects that support community engagement and resident capacity-building are focused in neighbourhoods with large immigrant populations.

**AT UNITED WAY OTTAWA
WE STAND WITH, AND FOR
OUR COMMUNITY.**

To all of the incredible people and organizations who stepped forward in response to the Syrian crisis: thank you. As we all know, the important work of supporting newcomers must continue. Our success will be made possible by a continued commitment from you, and the vibrant community of Ottawa to join us as we take up this challenge.



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