

A Sponsor's Experience

Good Shepherd Parish, Thornhill



On June 8th, 2011, Luciano Moro introduced Good Shepherd Parish Refugee Committee, to the Office for Refugees (ORAT) and the steps we might take to begin our journey assisting a refugee family in need, identified from ORAT's mission trips. With great support from our pastor, Father John Weber, we welcomed a refugee family of two parents and four girls on February 25th, 2016. We were very well prepared, and the entire parish rejoiced when we celebrated Easter Sunday Mass with the family.

What steps of preparation resulted in our success for resettlement? As a community of faith, we remembered them in prayer at all the weekend Masses. We advertised, from the ambo, the need for a house to rent and we accepted an offer of a large empty home at the end of Mass that day.

What worked perfectly for us in acquiring everything that was needed was the following plan: On tables in the church hall, the signage read: Household articles; Bathroom items; Food necessities; School materials; Clothing for everyone – age etc. Attached to the item name was a card on which the parishioner signed their name, phone number and the item. The donor took the itemized paper, and we kept the information card. Many cards from various tables were often taken by a single individual. The requirement was that the purchased products were to be brought to the church the following weekend. 100% success! The K of C men delivered the boxes all labelled to the newly acquired house that very day. The committee was there to receive them. The utter joy in our parish that day was unbelievable. A few days before the family's arrival, the committee came together for a celebratory dinner in the furnished home.

Arrival day was exciting for everyone as we, the Office of ORAT and committee, met the family at the airport and transported them to their new residence. The following days were very busy for everyone e.g. school registrations, government applications etc. We arranged a schedule whereupon families signed up to prepare and deliver dinner at 5:30 pm every evening for a month. This was a great gift for both families as they met and explained the meal they had prepared.

I will never forget the 26 trips I made to the dentist office with the children in those first few months. We were all so grateful to the Government of Ontario for this service.

The newcomer family were French speaking from Ivory Coast originally and so the parents attended Language school daily. In time the father was employed in a factory, riding his bicycle to save bus fare and he continues to do so to this day, 7 years later. The family welcomed a baby brother in September of 2017. You can imagine how ecstatic they all were! They were living in a two-bedroom apartment, very crowded but very happy.

The finance committee was made up of three marvellous individuals who met every Friday evening in their home to teach and guide the parents and two eldest daughters, both of whom began working part-time within a year, along with attending high school. The team presented a budget and money/cash that they would need for the following few weeks.



At this meeting the father would present the family report of expenditures and receipts for every penny that had been spent – bus transfers, food receipts, etc. This meeting schedule went on for the entire first year.

Once the year of responsibility for sponsorship completed, the committee dispersed but my sister and I continued to be very involved in all matters in which they required assistance. The schools called us regularly and we met with the family weekly. We were family and continue to be. The parents and children very much appreciate and love us as we do them.

Today I am so proud of their many accomplishments. The eldest daughter is completing her teacher's degree at York university; daughter #2 graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce and continues to work on her CA while being employed by Revenue Canada, both girls living together in an apartment; daughters #3 and 4 continue their studies at Seneca College; the baby is doing wonderfully well in grade 1 and his mother is the lunch supervisor in his school. All four girls worked part time in nearby stores all through their high school years.

My sister Carol and I continue to be very grateful for the opportunity given to our parish by the ORAT office to help in the sponsorship and settlement of this refugee family. Every parishioner benefitted greatly by their involvement in this process which brought the spirit of love and community to all of us.



*CG Co-Chairs – Good Shepherd Parish
(Left to Right, Carol & Catherine Von Zuben)*