



Bridging the Gap: A Tale of Gratitude Amidst Newcomers' Challenges

At this time of the year, when many Canadians gather with their families, friends, and relatives to revel in the holiday spirit, it is essential to acknowledge the contrasting reality faced by a significant number of newcomers. For those who have fled their home countries due to war, conflicts, and the risk of persecution, the joy of festive gatherings remains elusive.

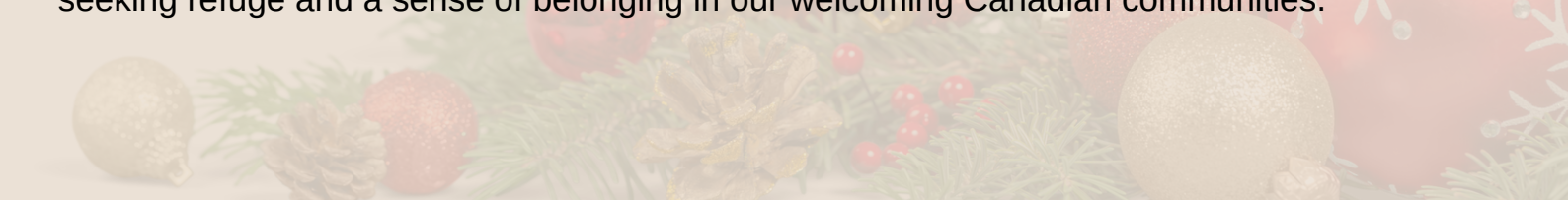
Amena, a newly elected board member, provides a poignant illustration of the challenges faced by newcomers during the holiday season. Having been separated from her family for numerous years due to her refugee status, Amena recently seized the opportunity to reunite with her mother and some family members in Iran. The emotional reunion marked the end of a prolonged separation that had prevented Amena from participating in significant family celebrations, including her younger sister's wedding, the birthdays of her nephews and nieces, and even the funeral of her older sister.



From right, Amena, her mom and sister

Amena's journey to Iran exposed her to the harsh realities experienced by her Afghan compatriots—challenges ranging from physical abuse and detention to forced payments, accommodation in camps, slave labor, and the heart-wrenching separation from their families. While Amena expresses gratitude for the safety and security she now enjoys in Canada, like many other newcomers, her concerns and worries linger for the family and loved ones left behind.

As we celebrate the joys of the holiday season, let us not forget those who are navigating the challenges of displacement. Amena's story serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of empathy, support, and the positive impact each one of us can make in the lives of newcomers seeking refuge and a sense of belonging in our welcoming Canadian communities.





Rent Subsidies of \$140,000 to 30 Newcomer Families & Individuals

2023 was a great year for OMRA. With your financial support, we were able to provide rent subsidies of over \$150,000.00 to thirty newcomers. And all this is done solely by volunteers!

OMRA celebrated together, expanded our efforts to provide tutoring and mentoring for each of our families and had a record-breaking year for grocery card sales. We continued to provide start up kits and to support affordable housing in Ottawa through our membership in the Alliance to End Homelessness.

A heartfelt thanks to our dedicated members, volunteers, funders and everyone involved. Your support is the driving force behind our mission, thank you for making a difference and we are grateful for all you do and give.

Thank You



The OMRA Grocery Card Fundraiser shattered records in December, selling over \$80,000.00 worth of cards.

OMRA's Grocery Card Fundraiser has over 220 individual participants and is still growing! Thank you to all who make this program work. It provides OMRA with **\$50,000/year**, all of which fund our rent subsidies for newcomers.

A special shoutout to St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church which had record-breaking card sales this month, coming in at over \$20,000!

Note: Please consider joining this initiative. Contact Maria Rigby at Rigby.OMRA@gmail.com and she will put you in contact with one of the grocery card coordinators.





OMRA's Annual Holiday Party



About 60 people – OMRA families and friends, tutors, grocery card coordinators, and board members gathered at the Ottawa Mennonite Church for our Holiday Party. The food was delicious, the conversations lively, the gingerbread houses the kids made were uniquely decorated, and the Getting To Know You Game was hilarious.

In the Getting To Know You Game, Grace Amule taught us how to make rooster sounds like they do in Sudan - quite a noise filled the hall! "We had a 4-year-old newcomer sing the ABC song, and we learned that there were only two newcomer babies and an older man that were born in Ottawa!" Particularly moving was when we all spontaneously stood and sang Oh Canada.

The greatest compliment was paid to OMRA when one woman told us, "Other agencies help us from Monday to Friday, 9-5, but only OMRA makes us part of their family." A wonderful evening and thanks to all who came.



All our delicious food



Some of our party guests



A lucky raffle prize winner!

A Creative Way to Pay Back a Loan ; A Donation to OMRA!

An Ottawa couple borrowed money from their good friends, Wei-erh and Kassidy Chen, who live in Des Moines, Iowa. When the couple was ready to repay the loan, their friends requested that they donate the funds to the charity of their choice. **OMRA was their chosen charity!**



Wei-erh & Kassidy Chen Photo-Ottawa



How did Kindred Credit Union help OMRA to Welcome Refugee Families?

In 2023, Kindred Credit Union awarded a \$5,000 grant for a pilot project to help OMRA set up the first apartment for newcomer families. We used these funds to pay furniture-moving expenses, buy mattress covers and six Chromebooks to help with schooling, plus we bought fans during the hot summer.

For every newly arrived family, OMRA provides a set-up kit consisting of small donated items that every family needs, usually consisting of lamps, all the essential items for a kitchen, and bedding. This project has allowed OMRA volunteers to interact personally with each family on the very important day when they move from their temporary accommodations in a shelter to their first home in Canada. This program complements and puts a human face to the financial monthly subsidy that is the essence of our charity.



Helping a newcomer family furnish their new home

This pilot project has inspired us and made us realize that volunteer Canadians can have an enormous impact on newcomer families, in a way that a paid over-worked case worker never can. One client told us that the day she received a start-up kit from an OMRA volunteer she finally felt welcome in Canada. It demonstrated in a tangible way there there are Canadians who care about them, in a time when most feel so alone.



A Sweet Tale



Mohammed, who owned his own pastry shop in Syria, has found a part-time job doing what he loves most, creating delicious desserts for happy customers






P.C. Photo of Mohammed in one of the bakeries in Ottawa.

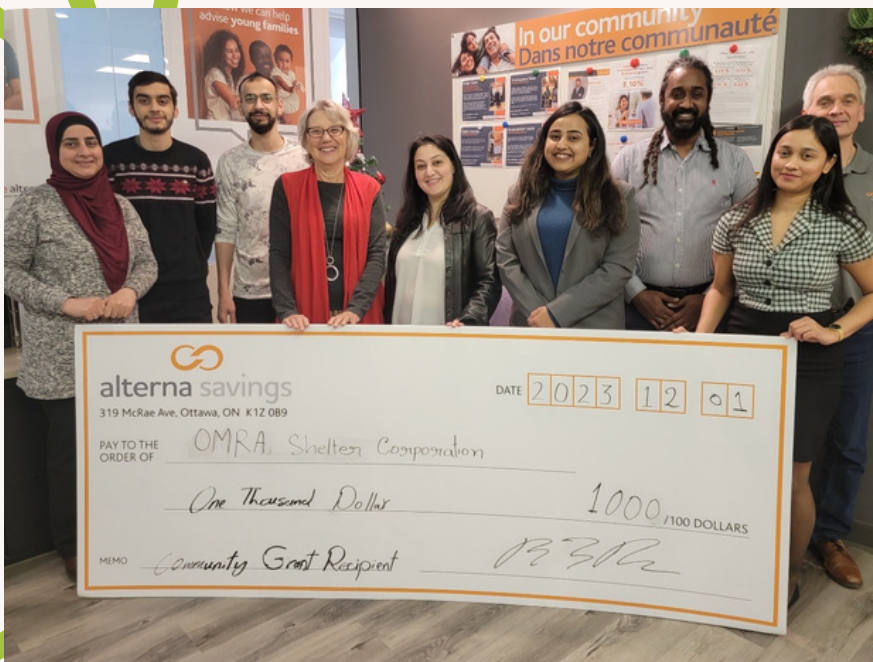


An Expression of Gratitude

OMRA Secures Grants in 2023!

We are proud to announce that OMRA was awarded a number of grants in 2023. We'd like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the following generous organizations:

Organizations	Amount	Purpose
 alterna savings	\$1,000	Purchase educational materials to provide OMRA volunteer tutors with the required resources
 CATHERINE DONNELLY FOUNDATION	\$50,000	Evaluation study of the effectiveness of OMRA's portable rent subsidy program. Study is being conducted by Professors Aubry and Roebuck at the University of Ottawa.
 KINDRED Credit Union	\$5,000	Funds have been used for the OMRA start-up kits, moving expenses for families, and to purchase such items as fans and Chromebooks
 Kiwanis Ottawa	\$750	Donation of 3 Chromebooks for families with children who require them at school
 OTTAWA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION	\$10,000	Increase OMRA's program capacity by providing rent subsidies to refugee woman



OMRA Alterna Savings Bank staff, a lovely OMRA family, and Maria Rigby were photographed receiving a **\$1000** grant in the form of a large cheque. This grant will be used to buy ESL books for the OMRA tutors to use. The tutoring program is highly successful in helping newcomers succeed in Canada. **Many thanks to all tutors and mentors.**



D❤️**ONATION**

OMRA Tax-Deductible Donations create More Room at the Inn

Please consider donating generously this year, as we have had to increase some of our monthly subsidies to over \$800.00/month to cover the shortfall between government allowances and rents. OMRA is 100% volunteer-based and has no government or corporate sponsors; we depend on your generosity to provide these increased rental subsidies.

WAYS TO

DONATE



E-TRANSFER

Use the email **OMRASHelter1@gmail.com** as the address in your bank's e-transfer recipient list. Be sure to provide your contact information (address and email) in the comments section to receive a tax receipt at year-end.

Cheque Donations

Address your cheque to OMRA Shelter Corporation and send it to **OMRA Shelter Corporation, c/o OMRA Treasurer, 20 Bujold Crt., Kanata, ON K2L 3N6.**

Credit Card Donations through Canada Helps

Use this link to access the OMRA Canada Helps donation page:

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/72150>

Thank you for your ongoing support as OMRA continues trying to ensure there is a Room at the Inn for vulnerable newcomers

in **2024**





Grocery Card Fundraising

We invite you to participate in the **Grocery Card Fundraiser**. For further information, kindly contact Maria Rigby at rigby.omra@gmail.com or reach out to **your local church coordinators** mentioned below:

- **St. Joe's** | Donna at dbrietschlin@hotmail.com
- **Glebe St. James** | Donna-Fay at donna-fay@rogers.com
- **Emmanuel United** | Janice at jlperon@rogers.com
- **St. Thomas the Apostle** | Glenn and Sandra at glenn.wright@sympatico.ca
- **Quakers** | Carol Anne at peaseca@gmail.com
- **Carleton University English** | Jan at janice.schroeder@carleton.ca
- **Temple Israel Merle** | savtamerle@gmail.com
- **Neighborhood** | Doreen at doreen.dyck@gmail.com.

A big thanks to the congregations of Emmanuel United and Glebe St. James for not only participating in the grocery cards programme, but for giving OMRA a yearly cash donation.



THANK
YOU
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