

## An Incredible Journey from a War-Torn Country to Graduation Success and Beyond

**M**y name is Marzia, I arrived in Canada with my husband and son in December, 2021. As a newcomer to Canada, I needed to enroll into ESL. However, due to the huge number of immigrants, I was on a long waiting list. Eventually, in September 2022, I enrolled in the ESL course and I finished it successfully.

At the beginning of 2023, I decided to study at the Adult High School. Since I hadn't studied in a long time and being in a new environment, it was very difficult for me to do high school courses especially in English even though I had finished university in my home country. Nevertheless, I persevered and my perseverance, and hard work paid off and blissfully, I graduated from high school in June 2024.

In fact, it was not an ordinary graduation, it meant a lot for me because it was my first achievement in Canada. Furthermore, it was a step forward to improve myself. I still remember when my parents came and gave me the flowers in my graduation ceremony. I was very emotional and even cried because I had never been that happy before.

This joy, achievement and the incentive of making myself at the level of Canada made me take an even bigger decision. I started the Teaching English as A Second Language course (TESL) at Algonquin college



in September of 2024. Hopefully, I will finish it successfully, and enhance my knowledge and skills which can ultimately lead me to get a good position in this field.



## At the FOREfront of generosity

**T**he Wall and Ceilings Contractors Association of Ottawa made OMRA their charity for their 2024 Golf Tournament. These generous and spirited people raised \$80,000 for OMRA in a day-long competition with games and prizes at every hole. We are so grateful to the Association for their thoughtfulness. The funds will provide rent subsidies to many newcomer families. Special thanks to organizers James Jensen and Matthew Desormeaux.

# Finding The Way Forward

By Mona Ahmed

In July 2020, I arrived in Canada, stepping into a new chapter of my life and career. Coming to a new country was both exciting and challenging, but I was determined to build a future here. I started my career in a casual position as an Administrative Assistant in the Director's Office at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). This initial role lasted for four months, giving me a valuable introduction to the Canadian work environment. During this time, I worked hard and focused on improving my performance, and I was offered an extension on my contract for two more years. This extension allowed me to gain more experience and understand the agricultural sector from an administrative perspective.



A key milestone in my journey was receiving my credentials for my Master's Degree in Agricultural Science.

This achievement was not just a personal triumph but also opened doors to greater opportunities in my field. With my educational background and growing experience, I was eager to transition into a more scientific role.

Last month, I was appointed to an indeterminate position as a Biologist with the Pest Management Centre at AAFC. This new role marks the culmination of years of hard work, learning, and perseverance. As a biologist, I am now part of the Minor Use Program team which Supports Cana-

dian growers of minor crops (horticultural, fruits, berries, seeds, forages, and other specialty crops) with their pest management needs by generating data for registration of new minor uses of pesticides.

Throughout this journey, I have been fortunate to have the support of wonderful people who believed in me. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Nicolle Huggins, Marcos Alvarez, Patricia Lepage, and Christine Gagnon they all played an instrumental role in my success. Their guidance, encouragement, and unwavering belief in my potential helped me reach this stage in my career.

Additionally, I am immensely grateful for OMRA's assistance from the very beginning of my resettlement in Canada.

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OMRA provided me with a subsidized house for two years and supported my transition, allowing me to focus on building my career and adjusting to my new life. The journey has been both rewarding and challenging, and I am excited as a Canadian Citizen to continue contributing to the agricultural sciences in Canada. From administrative support to scientific research, each step has shaped my career, and I look forward to what the future holds.



## The G Family – putting down roots

Two sisters from Syria arrived in Canada in 2023 to make Canada their home along with their mother. The sisters were teachers in Syria. RG has excellent English and French and has found work as a lunch monitor already but hopes to get a teaching job soon. FG is working hard at ESL and will look for training for employment as soon as her English is a bit better. MD, the mother, is looking after the home front and looking forward to sewing with a machine kindly donated by a friend to OMRA.

## Hope in dark times

It's been a tough year, but not one without hope. In May, 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, reported that the number of people displaced by war, violence and persecution around the world had grown in the previous year to 114 million. His expectation was that the numbers would keep rising. Violent conflicts — many with civilians as a primary target — continue to rage around the globe. People caught in the crossfire in places like Sudan, Syria, Gaza and Myanmar are being forced to flee in increasing numbers.

Once they leave home, refugees and asylum-seekers continue to face huge challenges. In receiving countries, opportunistic politicians have sometimes demonized migrants, creating a poisoned atmosphere for newcomers in many places. Meanwhile, the current affordability crisis — with rents and food prices rising constantly — has made it much more difficult to put down roots in a new country, to look beyond basic survival and towards getting a better education, a good job, and finding a meaningful place in a new society.

It's sometimes hard to look at this web of daunting obstacles with a sense of optimism.

Yet in our own community, the achievements of many of our refugee friends shows how a little bit of help (sorry, Ringo) can go a long way. Modest rent subsidies from OMRA, along with services such as language tutoring, have assisted many newcomers to

our city as they've established new lives and built more promising futures.

It's undeniably a dark time throughout much of the world. But modest steps at the community level can make it a bit brighter.

## Asylum Seekers

This fall, OMRA has taken a new step, by extending our subsidy program to include a small number of asylum seekers. OMRA generally aims to have an even balance between Government-sponsored refugees and privately-sponsored refugees, although during COVID there were very few privately-sponsored arrivals. Lately, OMRA has accepted a number of asylum seekers who do not arrive as permanent residents as the other newcomers do. They are usually escaping extremely dire circumstances and live very precarious lives once they arrive in Canada as they receive less support, have very limited funds and face the worry of homelessness each day. They really need the OMRA subsidies as they await the decision of the immigration board regarding their ability to stay in Canada. OMRA has decided to take on a small number of asylum seekers who have demonstrated that they are willing to work hard learning English and get part-time jobs. We are honoured to be part of their lives.

### *A big thank you!*



Our grocery card coordinators from St. Thomas The Apostle, Sandra Wright and her husband, Glenn, are retiring this year after

approximately 15 years of promoting, selling, and delivering grocery cards. Many thanks to them both for not only the work done, but the positive attitude they always showed in promoting it.

*OMRA greatly appreciates your support through our grocery card program or by your donations!*

## A Note of Gratitude from the OMRA President

As 2024 draws to a close and some world and Canadian realities seem to be increasing the hardships felt by many vulnerable people, I am heartened and grateful for the many gifts of friendship and encouragement OMRA has experienced this year.

To name but a few:

- 1) The affirming results of the University of Ottawa's evaluation showing with concrete data how OMRA has had a positive impact helping newcomers settle well into jobs and Canadian life.
- 2) The fun and community building around the Tamarack Race, (my 6-year-old grandchild was so delighted to be the fastest runner from our OMRA team!), the OMRA picnic highlighted by the canoe rides, and the incredible WACCA golf tournament and the financial support that gave OMRA.
- 3) At the end of November, we were overjoyed to get a grant for \$98,000 from The Catherine Donnelly Foundation to be used to expand OMRA's idea of time-limited, monthly rental subsidies to other populations at risk of homelessness in Ottawa. This will be done through OMRA's partner, Rent Assist Allies.
- 4) The kindness of individuals and their generous donations to OMRA.
- 5) And, as always, our grocery card fundraiser which has so many faithful participants. Even though we only get 5% of total sales of cards, this amounts to about \$50,000 yearly to assist with the rent subsidies.
- 6) Board changes – Linda Redekop, Caroline Pestieau and Julia Bruno left the Board after many years of incredible service and we wondered how we could cope without them, but we are excited that four new board members wanted to join and have become an integral part of shaping and caring for OMRA.

As we each try to bring peace, joy and justice to our world, we thank you sincerely for your love and care of newcomers to Canada through your support of OMRA.

Sincerely,

*Maria Rigby*

### **Grocery Card Program Achievement!**

In December, 2024, OMRA set a new record for monthly sales. We sold over \$85,000 worth of cards! Many thanks to all of you who participate in this fundraiser.

To sign up for our grocery card program just go to our website: [omraottawa.org/get-involved/](https://omraottawa.org/get-involved/)