

Refugees: Worldwide Darkness Descends. OMRA Housing is a Bright Light & a Safe Haven for Newcomers



2025 – As Trump ends foreign aid and countries tighten up their refugee quotas, life for the world's refugees forced to flee war, torture, trauma has gotten worse. Country after country have turned them away baring entry.

Even in Canada, the lives of refugees and asylum seekers have become much more precarious. The time for newcomers to have a stress-free year to learn English and adapt to Canada is over. Homelessness looms as federal and provincial government rates are insufficient to cover rising rental rates and people are forced to use food allowances to pay rent. Almost every OMRA client uses the Food Bank, often driven there by volunteer tutors. Adult ESL classes have been cut by governments, so many newcomers are not in school for the first year, but are at home, lonely, traumatized and unable to adjust.

How is OMRA striving to provide a generous welcome and a safe haven for newcomers?

- 1) OMRA provided \$160,000 in rent subsidies in 2024, and has budgeted to increase that

to \$220,000 in 2025, while helping the same number of families.

- 2) OMRA provides a “house warming” of a start-up kit and furniture delivery and repair as the newcomer moves from a shelter into their home. In the words of a newcomer, “OMRA’s volunteers made me feel like I had real friends, not paid workers in my new home.
- 3) OMRA has a tutoring, mentoring program where volunteers go 1-2 times a week to help with learning English or to just share stories over a cup of tea.

Our volunteers aged 25 – 85 years of age meet in coffee shops, client’s homes and libraries. One OMRA client was so moved by the kindness of her tutor. “Martha invited me to share dinner, stories and laughter with her family in her home. I forgot my loneliness for a few hours.”

On the other hand, many of our tutors are treated to the hospitality of our clients. I remember a particularly delicious 4 course Syrian lunch when I had expected a cookie and tea! Friendship and caring goes both ways.

OMRA AGM

Please mark your calendars and join us at our AGM on Monday, June 23, 2025, from 6:30 to 9:00 pm at the Ottawa Mennonite Church, 1830 Kilborn Ave. There will be time half an hour ahead of the meeting to visit with one another to have some refreshments and treats. Your participation and interest in OMRA is very important. More information will be provided closer to the date.

Monday, June 23, 2025, 6:30-9:00
Ottawa Mennonite Church
1830 Kilborn Avenue, Ottawa

Tamarack Race Weekend!

SAVE THE DATE -The Third Annual Tamarack Race Weekend is Fast Approaching – May 24-25th



Come and Join Us for FUN, Friendship and Fundraising for TEAM OMRA

Last year we had 28 runners sponsored by friends and family that raised \$ 27,842.34. **Our goal was \$25,000** and you put us over the top! Thank you!

Many us run (or walk and talk) in the 2 km race which is Saturday, May 24th at 3pm. However, many of you may like the challenge of the 5k, 10k, the half- marathon or the full marathon. The good news is everyone can be part of Team OMRA and support OMRA's rent subsidies.

For now, register for the race of your choice at:

https://www.letsdothis.com/ca/checkout/ticket?eventId=234971&preferred=true&utm_organiser_id=176436

Let Donna (dbrietschlin@hotmail.com) or Maria (rigby.maria@gmail.com) know when you are registered. As soon as we get onto the new fundraising platform being used in 2025, we'll contact you so you can link to OMRA and begin raising funds that OMRA will use for rent subsidies.



Congratulations to Isis and Her Daughter!

Newest Canadian Citizens

By Donna Rietschlin

On March 25 2025, Isis and her 5-year-old daughter became Canadian citizens! She was joined at this joyful event by her family and two friends she met through



OMRA when she and her daughter arrived in Canada. Isis has been so successful that she is independent of OMRA's financial support and brought family members to Canada recently. Canada is better because you are here, Isis! Congratulations!!

Looking for Volunteers

*Plight of Young Men as Newcomers –
Need for a OMRA Friend, Mentor or Tutor*

By Maria Rigby

My heart usually goes out to young woman alone in Canada, but recently I have met three young men who seem so alone without family and worried about the situation in their countries.

One young man seemed to be adapting well and volunteered at a city shelter. He was incredibly kind and friendly until he became overwhelmed and depressed with the situation in his home country and couldn't bring himself to volunteer anymore. OMRA tries hard to find resources for him, but it isn't easy. A friend to have coffee with once a week would be fantastic.

Another young man knows no one here and lives in a room in a house on the outskirts of Ottawa because it's all he can afford. He is amazing as he takes 3 buses to school in downtown Ottawa each day. It would be wonderful if he had a volunteer to befriend him and provide some English language tutoring.

A third man is a student at the Adult High School. He works hard at school, but is desperately looking for a part-time job. He lives in a situation where he is not able to bring friends home. An OMRA tutor and

someone who could help him find a part-time job would be wonderful.

If you would be interested in volunteering, please get in touch with OMRA at omrainquiries@gmail.com.

Simple Pleasures

Newcomers Surprise Sponsors with Their Request for Help

By Maria Rigby

A husband-and-wife newcomer family in their mid-fifties were recommended to OMRA because their Ontario government shelter allowance was \$642/month and the bachelor apartment cost \$1,395. On visiting them and conversing for a few hours, we found that they faced many challenges including health situations, but were very grateful for the smallest of gifts. In fact, when I asked what they needed, I was told, "Nothing. But what I would really like is some soil." "Soil???" I asked incredulously.

Then the woman showed me her onion tops which were sprouting and she needed the soil to get more onions! I wanted to get her access to a public garden plot where she could grow the food, she would need in the winter. If anyone has a garden plot in the west end where this couple could grow a few things, please let me know.



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

**To sign up for our grocery card program just go to our website:
omraottawa.org/get-involved/**

A New Direction for OMRA

OMRA's Board hires a Client Service Manager on a one-year contract

Since we began in 2001, OMRA has always been run entirely by volunteers. However, the Board decided that our rent subsidy program, though very helpful in preventing homelessness, wasn't enough to provide the OMRA clients with the tools to become self-sufficient and independent.

As governments cut back on the settlement services they offer, OMRA's clients are asking for help, particularly



with respect to health, education, and employment. **We are excited to announce that OMRA will hire Amena Kha-vari under contract for a period of one year**, to provide advice to the OMRA board, volunteers and clients, and to manage our volunteers. Amena had recently served two years as a Board member (stepping down after indicating interest in the position) and has worked more than three

years at Catholic Centre for Immigrants, the primary settlement agency for Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs). We look forward to working with Amena in taking us in a new direction in helping our clients.

Rent Assist Allies – Open for Business

Based on OMRA's model for rent subsidies, RAA is now accepting applications for rent subsidies and connections to social and practical supports for families who are housed and at imminent risk of homelessness. RAA rent subsidies can help stabilize a family by helping to prevent eviction or imminent loss of housing. A typical subsidy will last from one to five years based on an annual review. There is a requirement that the family work toward self-reliance as a condition of receiving a subsidy.

Subsidies are negotiated on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's financial needs. RAA only accepts applications from a referral agency.

RAA is working in partnership with Action Logement and the Housing Program Community Partnership and has received funding from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation and the Ottawa Community Foundation.



RAA can be reached at:
rentassistallies@gmail.com

The OMRA Board Members invite you and your family to our

Annual OMRA Potluck Picnic!

**Brantwood Park, 39 Onslow Cres
August 23, 12:00 to 3:30**

*Come and join us for an afternoon of friendship,
delicious food, great conversation, fun and games
and a paddle on the Rideau River.*

What to bring:

Yourselves and your family, food to share, drinks for your family, a blanket or a lawn chair. OMRA will provide plates, cutlery, napkins etc.

No rain date – let's hope for blue skies!

How to get there:

Bus routes 5 and 55 go down Main Street – exit at stop 7641 or 7642 (Main and Bower/Beckwith) and walk east, through the stone gates, and downhill on Beckwith Street, 2 short blocks to the park.

RSVP:

Rigby.OMRA@gmail.com

