



LOOKING FORWARD



Illustration by Aleja Martinez. See description on page 5

We acknowledge our presence in this place, in Toronto, in the West Bend Neighbourhood. We acknowledge that this place, where people from all over the world meet, is on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat. We are grateful to our host nations. We, as Romero House, commit to learning the stories of this land, doing so in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect.

A Word from the Executive Director

By Francesca Allodi-Ross

I walked home from Romero House on my first day as Executive Director in a warm drizzle with yellow tulips and a wide grin. The whole team had taken time out of their busy days to sit down for an hour and enjoy lunch with me. There were beautiful place settings, a welcome poster, chocolate cake, and a Mexican feast prepared by a family that I knew well. It was a family that I had welcomed to Romero House 15 years ago when I was a Summer Worker. A family that was now welcoming me back and into a new role.

What a gift to feel welcome. That lunch was a poignant reminder of the important work that Romero House does, work that I have seen each day during my first two months. Welcoming refugees, welcoming neighbours, welcoming strangers who walk through our doors. In April, I had the pleasure of welcoming a family to live at Romero House for the first time in my new role. With clean sheets, a fridge full of groceries, and fresh flowers, we received them from a long journey with a safe place to lay their heads for the next year. The six-year-old was thrilled that I remembered her name the second time we met.

That lunch was also a perfect example of the mutual care that Romero House embodies. Our mission is to support refugee claimants who have recently arrived with all of their complex needs, but what makes Romero House unique is the surrounding community that recognizes they are not unique in their vulnerability. We all need care and support at different points in our lives: when we are children, when we are sick, when we are lonely, when we age. Mary Jo Leddy, our Founder, recently recovered from hip surgery, supported by many friends including some of the other founders and first residents of Romero House. When we ask others in our community for help, it is a gift for them, making space for them to be vulnerable and to ask for help themselves one day.

I feel grateful to have the privilege of returning to Romero House in this role of welcome. Welcoming others is often how I come to feel that I too belong. Over the past two months, I have felt myself slowly settling in. I can be shy and there are so many new people to meet! But I feel each week my smile getting wider, my embrace more freely offered, as I greet the people who walk through our doors and I know that it is because I myself am feeling more welcome, more myself, more at home. I look forward to continuing to welcome refugees and be welcomed myself for years to come.



Francesca today



**Francesca as a
Worker in 2006**



**Francesca as a
Worker in
2009/2010**

A Note From our Outgoing Executive Director

By Jenn McIntyre

After eight years as the Executive Director at Romero House, it is time for me to pass the baton. I am so grateful for the opportunity to have served in this capacity and I know that in some special way, Romero House will always be my home. And it will continue to be my teacher, reminding me that the most important “work” that we do is that of welcoming one another.

Over the years that I lived in Romero House I was intimately welcomed into the lives of the families who were my neighbours. I became part of their daily rhythms and routines, their arguments and their inside jokes. I was welcomed generously around dinner tables and I grew accustomed to quiet knocks on my bedroom door in the morning, to find a child offering me breakfast or a cup of coffee. It is a rare privilege to be welcomed like that into the lives of families who are not my own.

I have also been welcomed into many stories at moments of vulnerability for families going through the refugee process. It takes great courage to leave home and to face a system that demands that you tell your story over and over again. To all of you who have sat with me and shared parts of your stories or allowed me to observe your hearings, thank you for trusting me. I do not take it for granted.

And finally, I have had the opportunity to extend a welcome myself to hundreds of families as they arrived at Romero House. I have such a vivid memory of sitting in Toronto Pearson Airport with a mother waiting to be reunited with her six children after three years apart. There were also many joyous airport, bus station and front door welcomes of nervous and excited workers, ready to spend a year in service. And, perhaps most incredible for me, were the welcomes of new life into this world, as I had the honour of holding the hand of more than one mother in a hospital delivery room.

I have learned a lot in my time as the ED of Romero House – about leadership, community and advocacy. But to welcome well, in a spirit of openness and generosity, this is my greatest learning.

Thank you to everyone who has walked alongside me in this role for the past eight years. And the very warmest of welcomes for Francesca as we all now take the step to walk with her.



Jenn & Mary Jo in Arizona at the No More Deaths camp during the international sanctuary delegation trip to the US - Mexico border



A protest against Legal Aid cuts in Queen's Park in 2019

In this issue

In this newsletter we wanted to imagine what the future holds for refugees in Canada. At the Board level, Romero House is in a process of Discovery and Discernment to reflect on where we are and where we want to go as an organization and as a community. In these articles, we ask broader questions: how can our systems not only welcome refugees, but make Canada a place where refugees thrive? What kind of world do we want to live in when we think about migration, peace, and equity? Join us as we ponder these questions.

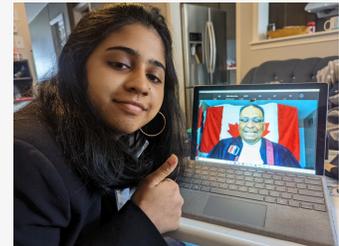
Marking Significant Moments

Hurrah!

We celebrate the positive refugee hearing decisions of many former resident families: Sana'a and Bob, Domitillah and Noorman, Marja, and Keria!

Congratulations to 5 Walk-In families we have assisted who received positive refugee hearing decisions!

We are so excited for Maran and Dishaly who had their Citizenship Oath Ceremonies!



Dishaly and Maran

Farewell

Thank you to John Niño for your work as our Maintenance Manager! John brought amazing positivity, kindness, and skill to our team.

We wish Jenn McIntyre all the best as she finished her time as the Executive Director of Romero House. Jenn's many years of leadership and service are a beautiful gift to our community.



Robelin and John

Welcome

Welcome to Robelin Severino, our new Maintenance Manager. It has been a blast having you join us!

Welcome to Francesca Allodi-Ross, our new Executive Director. We are so grateful to have Francesca's wonderful leadership!

Welcome to our three new Workers, Rafael, Paula, and Marisol.



Francesca and Sayan

About the Cover *By Former Resident Aleja Martinez*

Reflexión sobre la utopía del futuro.

Utopía. El regocijo de la vida se basa a mi parecer, en todo aquello que nuestra alma a recorrido, es el hilarante sueño de estar vivo lo que permea todo aquello que nos comprende, y es allí en la inmensidad de nuestros pasos sobre esta tierra que el futuro coquetea con nosotros, tan irónico y hermoso que solo puede verse al tenerlo de frente, con sus vacilaciones, incógnitas y desafíos, es la magnificencia de lo absoluto empujándonos a los brazos de lo desconocido, lo que nos recuerda que "se hace camino al andar", y que se anda por que es lo único que nos conduce a la utopía de días mejores, donde todos, con total certeza algún día queremos estar. Canadá 2022

Reflection on the utopia of the future.

The joy of life is based, in my opinion, on everything that our soul has gone through. It is the hilarious dream of being alive that permeates everything that understands us. It is the hilarious dream of being alive that permeates everything that comprises us, and it is there in the immensity of our steps on this earth that the future flirts with us, so ironic and beautiful that can only be seen when it is in front of us, with its hesitations, unknowns and challenges. It is the magnificence of the absolute pushing us into the arms of the unknown, which reminds us that "the path is made by walking", and that one walks and that it is walking because it is the only thing that leads us to the utopia of better days, where we all, with total certainty, want to be someday. Canada 2022

Let us Imagine *By Mary Jo Leddy*

Let us think BIG about what Romero House could look like in another 30 years:

We would have more houses

(better houses)

We would have more money

(effortless fundraising)

We would have smarter technology

(faster, better)

We would be like the rich

(while serving the poor)

We would have more staff

(perfect people)

We would serve more refugees

(and they would be perfect)

We can imagine a future that is bigger, better, faster, smarter, always growing.

Then again, we can also imagine a future that THINKS SMALL, treasures the humble tasks, values the less than perfect.

How astonishing to witness the wonder of the ordinary welcome.

How wonderful to imagine the possibility of a truly new way of being.



Time with babies at the Centre!

Refugee Hearing Reflections

By Sana'a (former resident) and Amelia (worker)

This article features a conversation Amelia had with Sana'a, whose family recently received a positive decision for their refugee hearing. We talked about what it was like to receive a positive decision and her hopes for other refugees in Canada.

Portions of this conversation have been edited for length and clarity

Amelia: What was it like receiving a positive decision?

Sana'a: It was very liberating and it was a very heavy moment at the same time. You've been waiting to hear these words for so long, and you put so much weight into it, and when it happens, you realize there is more uncertainty in the future than you expected. But it was definitely one of the top moments of our lives. It was such a relief.

And to be validated too, because when you go on your refugee journey, we were even scared to share our story with other people, because it reads like a movie. And you think "what if people don't believe you, what if they think you're making it up?". The validation of our stories was really something.

Amelia: A lot of your excitement was thinking about how this decision would positively affect your daughter Petra. As a parent, how was it for you to hear the positive decision?

Sana'a: That was the best. This is the moment I've been waiting for. Just to know that she has a future, she's going to be Canadian, and that she will be able to go wherever she wants, do whatever she wants, because she has this piece of identity.



Petra, Age 4

When we came here as refugees, we held back from doing certain things that might be too risky. My husband had a really negative work experience and was mistreated by an employer but we didn't want to speak out because we were scared. And you think all of this worry will go away once you get the Permanent Residence. But once the PR gets here, you have to tread carefully until you get the nationality, and you worry, even when you have it they can take it away from you. There's always this concern there.

Amelia: How did getting a "yes" change your view on dreaming for the future?

Sana'a: I think we feel more like actual human beings, not just because we have the new status as Protected Persons, but what else comes with it. For example, our SIN changes, because even employers can look at your number and can tell who you are. We feel more like we have tangible rights and a tangible start to a life.

There's a foundation now for our lives... And we got a cat! That's one of the biggest signs: it's thinking that we can stay.

Refugee Hearing Reflections (Continued)

Amelia: What do you dream of for other refugees?

Sana'a: I never felt disrespected as a refugee in Canada ever since we crossed the border. We felt more like human beings here than we did in our own countries. But I wish for more user-friendly paperwork, and maybe more clinics to have people fill out their papers. And less waiting times.

And of course more shelters. It's so hard to find space. So you're already traumatized from the whole thing, you know, coming in, and then you can't find a place to live sometimes.

And the whole issue of employment, having qualified people who can't work due to various restrictions. For example, Canada needs more doctors while there are doctors who came here but work blue collar jobs. So more integration I guess.

Amelia: What do you dream of for Canada, and how Canada could welcome refugees better?

Sana'a: I think one of the main things Canada can do is affordable housing. Because if you are worried about putting a roof over your kids' heads, you are not gonna be worried about being the best version of yourself.

"Because if you are worried about putting a roof over your kids' heads, you are not gonna be worried about being the best version of yourself."

You're not worried about what you can offer to Canada. Maybe you don't have time to even integrate into the community. We met so many older people who still don't speak English because they don't have time to learn. And it's not just affecting refugees, right? We need better housing for all Canadians.

And then the paperwork, the waiting times, the requirement to have Canadian experience on your resume thing is really challenging and needs to be changed.

Amelia: Do you have any closing thoughts?

Sana'a: I keep saying [Romero House] saved our lives.

We wouldn't be here without Romero House. Learning about all the steps that we needed to take. And the feeling of being home, with the community having support. I think that's one of the most important things, because you feel so lonely as a refugee. You know how they say, teach a man how to fish - you give the tools for people to sort of have a plan, a security for their futures in Canada.

Worker Spotlight: One Day

In these reflections, a few of the Workers share experiences they had while assisting refugees. We hope these give a window into the work we do, while we dream of how things can be better.

By Elaina Mohr

One day, I was providing over-the-phone support for a Roma family from Hungary to find shelter. This family had come to Canada 10 years ago, but due to discrimination they experienced in their legal process, were forced to return to Hungary. A couple days later, I had the delight of meeting them in person, as they had received a ride to our Centre from another Roma family that had come from Hungary at the same time as them 10 years ago. Once these two families became re-connected, I was able to communicate with the new family much more easily. It was due to the generosity of the family who had stayed in Canada that the new family's process began to move much smoother, as they were driven to doctors appointments, legal clinics and grocery stores. Furthermore, the now-settled family was able to offer advice and insight from their personal experiences navigating the refugee system. **In the future, I hope to see more hospitality and solidarity between people who have had similar experiences, who can provide guidance to those navigating the refugee system for the first time.**

By Sarah Buisman

One day I was helping a Haitian family find shelter in Toronto during the housing crisis. I was able to talk to the shift leader at Central Intake, the access point for City of Toronto shelters. I advocated for this family, highlighting the winter weather and their three young children. They shared that they might have a room for this family, but that the shelter required infants under the age of one to have a crib, and the shelter did not have a crib for them. I told the shelter worker that Romero House could get the family a crib if the shelter could provide the room! I promptly ran from the Centre to our storage and sent a crib in a taxi to the shelter in Scarborough. The family was able to make it there that evening!

Since that point, the family has been supported by a shelter worker and by a refugee lawyer that Romero House referred them to. I often hear about the challenges of Central Intake not having enough shelter spaces and I rarely have the chance to speak directly with the people who work there, so it was really great to work directly and collaboratively with them to make this happen!

In the future, I dream of a world in which service providers collaborate to serve refugees, creatively matching what everyone can bring to the table with the needs of those we serve.

Worker Spotlight: One Day (Continued)

By Laura Friesen

One day a newly arrived family called us requesting help to find shelter. There was no city shelter space for this family, so we reached out to a Community Host in Hamilton who was available to welcome them. It was the end of the day, and we needed to figure out the time sensitive logistics of how to get this family and their luggage to Hamilton, along with the need for a car seat.

At this moment, we checked our voicemails and heard from a volunteer whose kids had a PA day the next day and wanted to offer support. We were delighted by this offer and the perfect timing. The volunteers tracked down a car seat and were able to bring the family to Hamilton. We were blown away by the generosity - during an incredibly stressful week of finding other families shelter, this assistance came at the perfect time and was a big relief.

This is a story of neighbours contributing creatively to support refugee welcome, and we hope to see this continue vibrantly in the future. However, this is also a story that highlights the immense measures needed to ensure refugees have sufficient shelter when they arrive. There should not be such limited options.

I dream that refugees could have access to truly affordable housing immediately upon their arrival. Given the difficulties of the housing situation right now, this may sound like a radical hope. But why not be radical?



**Celebrating
Nowruz**



**Easter
Sunrise
Service**



**Celebrating
Ibrahim's
Birthday**

The Community Host Program

At the beginning of 2022, **the Toronto shelter system collapsed** due to Omicron taking a huge toll on shelter capacity. With many newcomers arriving, many would call Central Intake to ask for a shelter space. Oftentimes there were no spots available, **leaving families and children with nowhere to go**. We reignited our Community Host program, asking if anyone in the community with spare space could host refugees until they found somewhere else to go, and our calls were answered!

From October 2021 to April 2022, with the help of 21 different hosts, we have organized 45 separate host stays

A reflection from one of our Community Hosts

“ Turns out there is a way to offer hospitality to strangers, even these days. Yes, our comfortable daily routine is upended. Yes, it’s hard to hear what people are fleeing (when they’re willing to share it). Yes, the grocery bill goes up (although families typically have some money and contribute). But a whole world opens up around the table. Smiles and tears are shared while everyone is in the kitchen getting the next meal ready. Friendships develop, and extend beyond the stay itself. What is supposed to happen if angels come to stay at one’s house? The author of Hebrews in the Christian Bible doesn’t say. What will the householder who welcomes strangers experience? Hebrews 13 starts off, “Let mutual love continue.” Several examples follow, including radical hospitality. And that has been our experience: mutual love starts, and continues. ”

CALL TO ACTION

Community Hosting is a reminder of how unaffordable housing is in Toronto, and that the City of Toronto, provincial and federal governments are not doing enough to help unhoused people. **Please call on your Member of Parliament** to demand funding from the federal government to build safe shelters for refugees around the city. We also demand long term solutions; the City of Toronto must prioritize the construction of at least 10,000 more Rent Geared to Income housing units.

GET INVOLVED!

As the shelter crisis continues, **we are still looking for hosts!** If you are interested in being a community host, please contact Laura at laura@romerohouse.org. If you are unable to host, but still would like to help, consider making a donation to Romero House specifically to help fund hotel stays for refugees who have nowhere else to stay.

Thank you for your immense generosity!

Our volunteers and staff at Romero House could not care for our walk-in refugee clients, or our resident refugee families in the way we do, without the dedicated support of our donors, community members, neighbours, family, and friends!

Special Shout-Outs

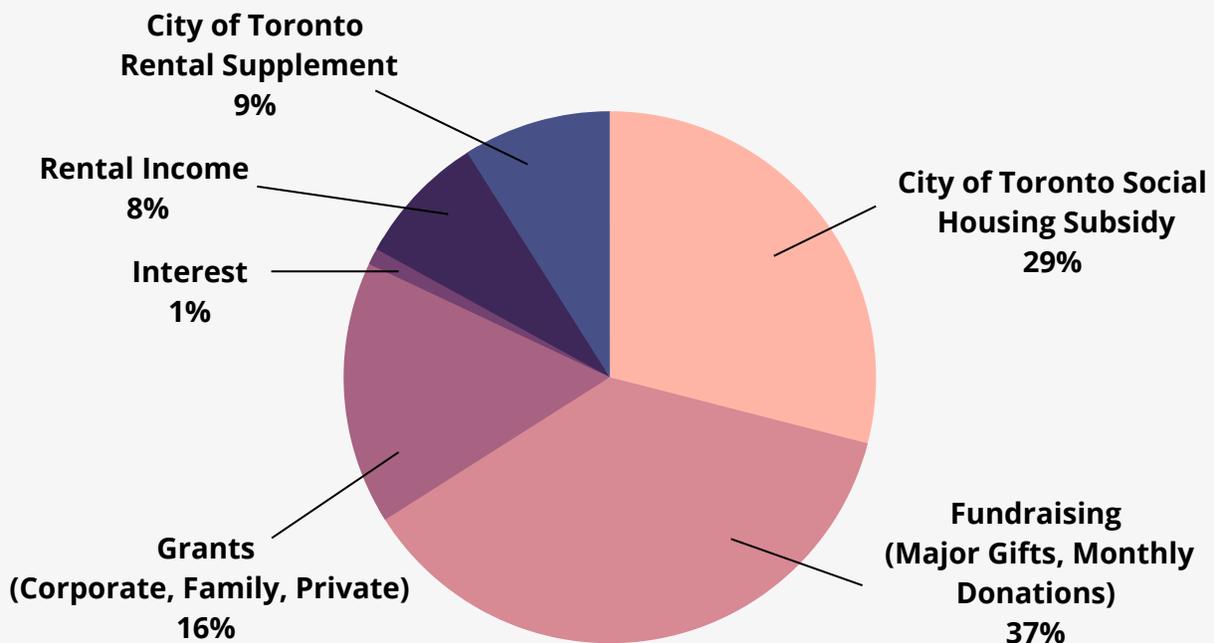
Thank you to the United Way for your generous support of our Food Security program.

Thank you to all those who supported our call to send kids to camp! With your help, and the help of Abbey's Goal, we are sending 7 children from our community to camp at the Pine Project

Thank you to our Major, Corporate and Monthly Donors! Without your support, we would not be able to offer the programs and services that we offer on a consistent basis.

Thank you to the many individuals, corporations, foundations, schools and communities; you are pillars of support to Romero House.

Please find below the many ways in which Romero House continues to receive generous support.



Ways You Can Continue to Support Our Work

Donate online by credit card

You can donate through our website by going to <https://romerohouse.org/get-involved/donors-supporters/donations/>

Monthly Donor Program

You can become a monthly donor by visiting our website and clicking the DONATE button and choose "Monthly"

Stocks and Securities

We accept donations of stocks and securities. Please go to our website at www.RomeroHouse.org/get-involved/donors-supporters/security-donations

By Cheque

Make your cheque payable to Romero House and send it to the address below.

Legacy Program

If you would like to leave a gift in your will, please email us at fundraising@romerohouse.org and a member of our team will contact you to discuss the details.



Thank you sincerely,
from our heart to
yours, for all the ways
you show love to
Romero House!



Romero House
1558 Bloor St. W
Toronto, ON
M6P 1A4

info@romerohouse.org
www.romerohouse.org
facebook.com/romerohousetoronto
instagram.com/torontoromerohouse

t. (416) 763-1303
f. (416) 763-2939