



ROMERO HOUSE
ANNUAL REPORT
2020 / 2021

Jenn McIntyre, Executive Director



IN

THIS

TOGETHER

wildlife near my home -
more walks helped me
notice WAY more animals
my favourite was a
beaver near
my house ☺

GARDENING

The loss of
the ability of friends/family
to visit me in this
new space

THE CREATIVITY
OF MY HOBBIES

Not being able to
meet my neighbor who
was here in December to
celebrate the holidays
with my family

NOT BEING ABLE TO
HUG MY
MOM

I feel like I read
miss hugging people
and felt free and
secure.

I loved watching
movies with my
family and share
good times

Be Grateful
for
what we have
😊😊

I feel I have lost my
time during this
pandemic

Pandemic taught
me to appreciate my
family, nature,
people around me
and LOVE

خاورسہ
خوب زندگی
آه زیان نرسم
شماره ۱۰۰
خیابان درمیان
برائین

خاورسہ
خوب
خوارا کرد
کرد

I look forward to
sharing food with
family & friends
again

2020

WILL **CERTAINLY** BE A YEAR FOR

THE HISTORY BOOKS

We will remember it at Romero House as a year that kept us on our toes. We were always ready to change course, adapt and respond to the reality and needs in front of us. Our team demonstrated patience, creativity and compassion for one another. Our supporters stepped up 110%, ensuring that every expressed and unexpressed need was met. We emerged from the year as a community that is truly “In This Together.”

As I look back on 2020-2021, I am amazed by all that happened in the midst of a pandemic. We may not have been able to laugh together at Romero House summer camp or to enjoy the Romero House Centre filled with people and energy. But we managed to come together as a community in new and different ways. We served hundreds of vulnerable refugee claimants through our remote walk-in program. And we engaged in important advocacy work for the rights of refugees to seek protection in Canada. We may have stayed at home, but we certainly did not stay apart.

Window to the Neighbourhood

Physical distancing posed a challenge to connecting with our neighbours in traditional ways, so the innovative Romero workers turned to the front window of our Bloor Street Centre. It became a way to communicate with the neighbourhood

Mexican Mestizo artist, commissioned by Windermere United Church; and one that usually makes an appearance at the Romero House Christmas liturgy. These displays won us first place in the local BIA holiday window display contest! We finished out the year with our message “In This Together,” filling the window with notes of gratitude and



Dia de los Muertos display made by one of the Romero House families. The window then hosted two nativity sets during Advent, one made by a



grief one year into the pandemic. These displays have opened our eyes to great opportunity our front window offers us moving forward.

“Gathering” during COVID

We are a community that likes to gather, which was certainly made difficult by COVID. We took advantage of the looser restrictions of summer 2020 to hold small outdoor picnics, soccer games, dance groups and art clubs. Our team discovered the joy and distractions of outdoor meetings during the September worker orientation. As things started to tighten up in the late fall, we transitioned to “doing community” online. Zoom was our gracious host for Morning host for

Morning Prayer and team meetings, weekly women’s yoga, birthday parties, craft nights, a Holly Jolly Zoom event and more. A highlight of the year was the 80th birthday of one of our founding board members, Jack Costello, in December. Nearly one hundred former residents, workers and long-time friends of the community joined for what was a surprisingly intimate celebration for Jack and for 30 years of life together at Romero House.



THE BIGGER PICTURE

23,890 ↓

Total Refugee Claims
made inside Canada

JAN 1, 2020 > DEC 31, 2020



The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences for global freedom of movement – which is a prerequisite for refugees to have ways to flee persecution and seek safety.

The closure of borders and strict travel restrictions led to a massive drop in refugee claims made in Canada. 23,890 refugee claims were made in Canada in 2020, with over half being made in the first quarter. This figure is just over a third of the refugee claims made in the previous year. However, conflicts and persecution around the world have not lessened. We have spent the year in fear for the lives of the numerous people who have not made it to Canada or to other places of safety.

The Refugee Border Ban

One Canadian policy that has contributed to the drop in number of refugees arriving in Canada was the Refugee Border Ban that took effect shortly after the pandemic was declared. This Order in Council impacts people who come to Canada via the US-Canada border and make a refugee claim after crossing irregularly. Although our own laws and international obligations require us to process these refugee claims, border officials have been systematically pushing people back to the United States, at times to face detention and even removal to their countries of persecution. Romero House has taken a leadership role in a national effort to advocate for the end of the Refugee Border Ban.

Snapshot of ROMERO HOUSE FAMILIES

APR 2020 ~ MAR 2021

Country of Origin No. of Families

AFGHANISTAN	7
COLOMBIA	4
DOMINICAN R	1
ERITREA	1
IRAN	1
IRAQ	2
LEBANON	1
LIBERIA	1
MALAYSIA	1
MEXICO	3
PAKISTAN	1
<i>Total No. of Families</i>	17

Immigration Decisions 2020-21 No. of Families

POSITIVE DECISIONS *	6
NEGATIVE DECISIONS	2
PERMANENT RESIDENCE GRANTED	2
 FAMILIES STILL WAITING	 3
FOR HEARINGS OR DECISIONS	
AS OF MARCH 2021	

Immigration Decisions 2020-21 includes current and former residents of Romero House

* Includes refugee claims, Humanitarian and Compassionate applications, Pre-Removal Risk Assessment applications

Navigating Pandemic Life

Although the numbers of refugee claimants entering the country dropped in March/April 2020, the needs of those people who were already here increased dramatically due to the pandemic. Our workers did an incredible job of shifting to **offering remote support**, which we have been doing for over a year now. They have supported Romero House residents and walk-ins in navigating pandemic related delays and confusion in the refugee system, accessing online schooling, finding housing, dealing with threats of eviction, figuring out COVID income benefits, applying for the new health care worker pathway to permanent residence and so much more.

Access To Technology

One of the greatest barriers, for refugees & newcomers wanting to access services during the pandemic has been access to devices and digital literacy. Thanks to the generosity of donors, Romero House has distributed **more than 50 digital devices**, aiding adults and children in accessing online schooling, and enabling some adults to engage in remote work and have facilitated communication with case- workers, lawyers and others. The

workers have also become live-in tech supporting Romero House residents in utilizing digital tools.

Virtual Refugee Hearings

The Immigration and Refugee Board cancelled all scheduled refugee hearings in April 2020, including the hearings of four Romero House families. This created a large backlog in the system, with most families at Romero House still waiting for hearings at this point.

After a long wait, the virtual hearing program was launched in Fall 2020, to respond to so few hearings taking place in person, and we quickly took the initiative to set up a private space in our office to host hearings for those unable to in their homes. We hosted 3 virtual hearings at Romero near the end of the 2020-2021 year, with more scheduled in the future.

We are monitoring the impact of these hearings, as it seems that they will be here to stay in some capacity when the pandemic ends.



Staying Safe + Healthy

Moving In New Residents

The Romero House workers facilitated 16 moves (7 out and 9 in) over the course of the year, which was a real feat given the strict pandemic protocols in place. New families moving in to Romero House were required to quarantine for two weeks, which we could generally

accommodate in-house, but involved the use of a hotel in a small number of cases. We are grateful to the assistance from a number of current and former board members who are health professionals and supported Romero House in the development of our COVID-19 health protocols.



Mobile Vaccine Clinic

The amazing mobile vaccine team from Women's College Hospital ran an initial vaccine clinic for Romero House residents and staff at the end of March. As a congregate living setting, we were prioritized for vaccinations according to Toronto Public Health.

The Romero House Team

Supporting the work of Romero House from behind the scenes is the deeply committed volunteer Board of Directors. **Lori Neale** has put in an unbelievable amount of work as board president, with the backing of **Anil Varughese** in the role of Vice-President. We offer our gratitude to **Claudia Girado, Andrew Brouwer** and **Sonya Wu-Winter**, three board members who departed this year. We welcomed Amensisa Ketema and Shahid Akhtar as new members of the board, and we look forward to the experience they bring in charitable financial management, human resources and conflict resolution. We could not carry out the daily work of Romero House without the generous commitment of the **live-in workers**, who give all of themselves in



accompanying the residents and walk-ins in the community. We do not take for granted that the team this year chose to make Romero House their home during a pandemic, where they had few opportunities to find space outside of our houses. They met the year with creativity, optimism and so much enthusiasm. Thank you to **Amelia Marfisi, Anika Reynar, Hayley Schultz, Laura Friesen, Robbie Arzumanov** and **Sayan Das**.

The Romero House staff has gracefully handled the past year, managing their work from home, overseeing public health and safety measures and continually adapting our procedures to make functioning in a pandemic work. The Assistant Director, **Tembeka Ndlovu**, managed our housing program and provided steady leadership to the Operations Team. **Ann Khatter** fulfilled her duties as bookkeeper with great care, and she has supported our ongoing transition to digital financial procedures, hastened by the challenges of remote work. The Maintenance and Buildings Manager, **John Nino**, continues to look after our houses and office, ensuring that they will give many more years of welcome to refugee families.



Mary Jo Leddy, the Romero House Founder, took on the important role of spiritual care for the live-in worker community during the pandemic, facilitating the regular continuing education reflection sessions. She also continues as a ceaseless advocate in solidarity with refugee families facing long-haul immigration issues, never letting viruses or restrictions get in the way of her perseverance.

Volunteers!

Romero House is sustained by the generosity of hundreds of volunteers. We were unable to welcome most of our volunteers into our physical spaces this year and we missed them dearly. Yet, a smaller group of volunteers found valuable ways to support our work:

12 ESL conversation partners met with residents virtually to practice and reinforce what they are learning in their English Second Language classes.

7 enthusiastic volunteer drivers delivered food hampers to 24 families representing 93 people during the summer of 2020

15 volunteer interpreters have assisted our intake workers remotely.

2 tech professionals have lent their expertise to the development of our almost launched website and our new Salesforce software.

A special thank you to two particularly committed volunteers: **Harold Wright**, our Worker Program Applications Coordinator, and **Barbara Reid**, our Grant Writer. Their faithfulness to Romero House over many years has been a true gift.



Donors!

555 DONORS

supported our work in small and big ways this past year – through significant one-time donations and an increase in our monthly donor base. We were moved by the tremendous financial support received during the pandemic.

We also received

29 GRANTS

from religious orders and foundations that have made our work possible.

Many foundations and communities have been pillars of support for us for several years, providing reliable funding. We want to acknowledge the one time grant that we received from the United Way as part of the Emergency Community Support Fund for non-profits and



charities responding to the needs of vulnerable populations during the pandemic. We are also grateful for a donation from the Sprott Foundation of \$10,000 worth of grocery cards that were distributed to walk-in refugee families throughout the summer and fall.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

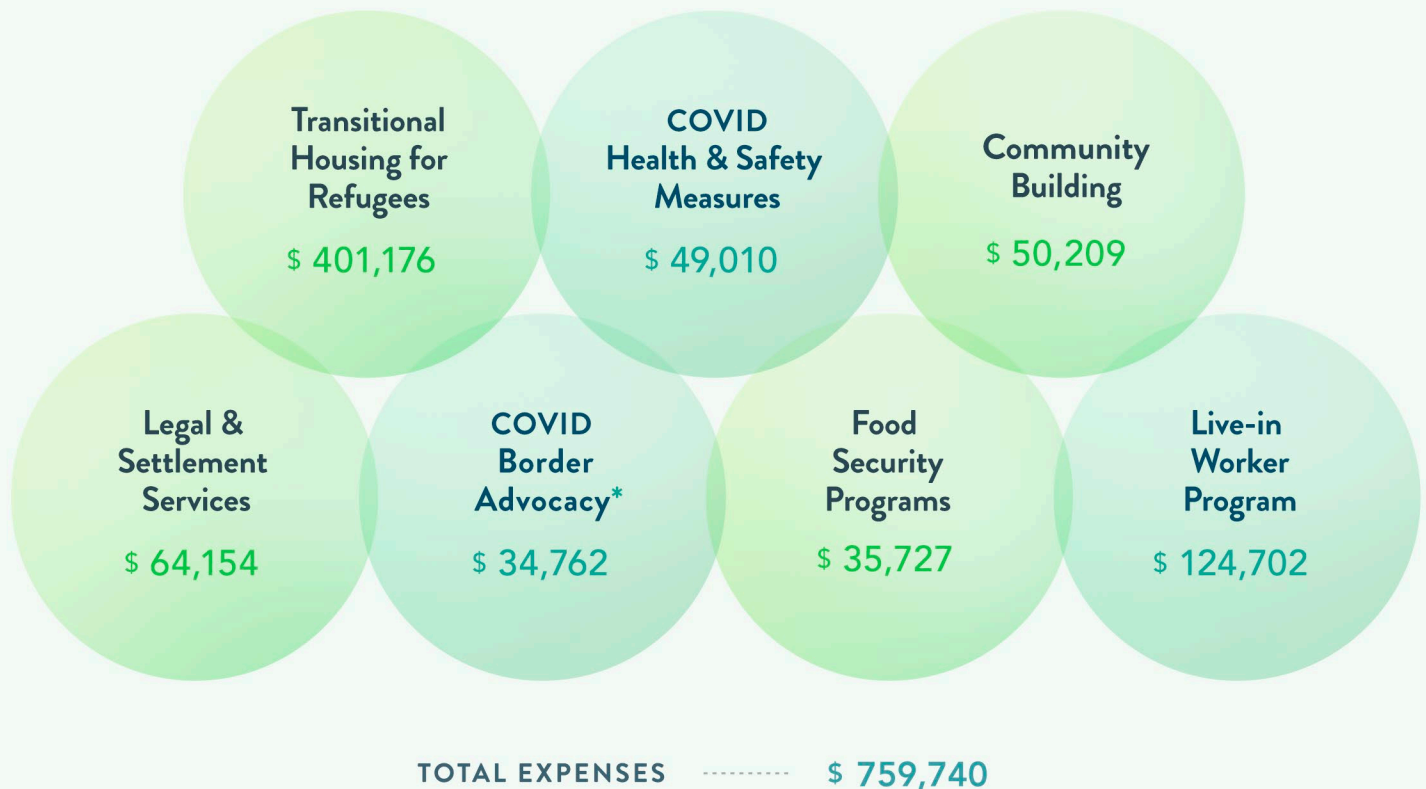
Revenue

April 1, 2020 ~ March 31, 2021

\$ 251,085	-----	Donations
\$ 120,148	-----	Grants
\$ 62,128	-----	Fundraising + Other Gifts
\$ 63,351	-----	Rental Income
\$ 308,070	-----	Housing Subsidies
\$ 14,322	-----	Other Income
\$ 819,104	-----	TOTAL

Expenses

April 1, 2020 ~ March 31, 2021



* COVID border advocacy work done in partnership with the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers



Border Re-opening + Increase In Claimants

As COVID cases decline and vaccinations climb, we look forward to the day that the border reopens to refugees and numbers of claimants start to return to normal. At the same time, many bureaucratic systems have adapted to lower numbers of refugees.

Romero House
important role
spaces and

and other refugee organizations will play an
in ensuring refugee claimants have shelter
do not wait years for refugee hearings.



Virtual Systems

We know that many of the virtual shifts that we have seen in the past year are here to stay. From virtual refugee hearings to online training programs, refugee claimants will require consistent access to technology and digital literacy. We are anticipating that supporting access to justice for refugee claimants who are often excluded from digital systems will become a more prominent part of our work moving forward.





We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an opportunity
for the Lord's grace to enter
and do the rest.



~ *Saint Óscar Arnulfo Romero*

