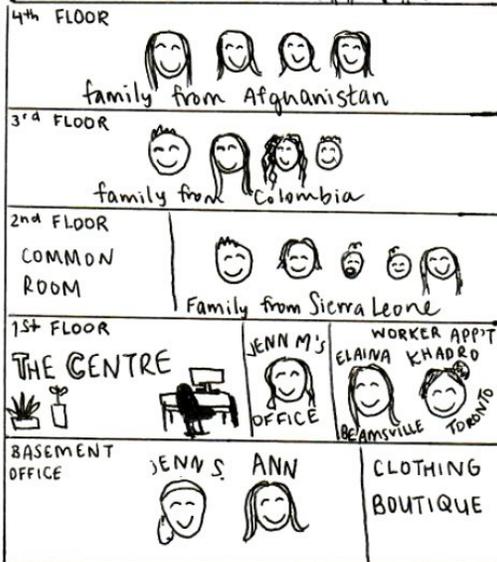


ROMERO HOUSE WINTER NEWSLETTER



RE-OPENING FOR REFUGEES

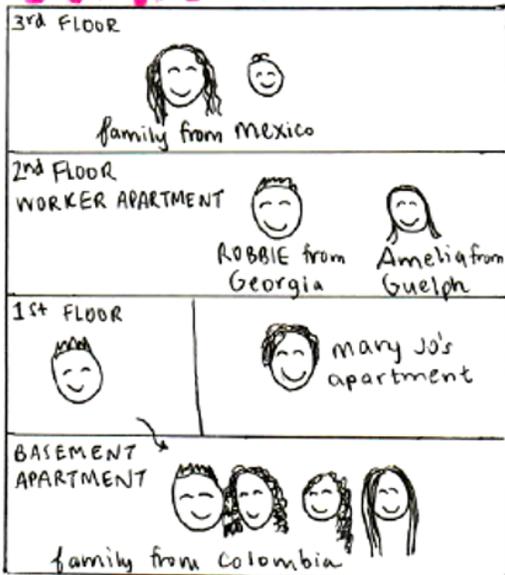
BLOOR *the rooftop!*



DORVAL



WANDA



KEELE *The Dorval garden*



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 Jenn McIntyre**

As the rest of our lives are slowly starting to resemble something we recognize, life is also returning to the Romero House Centre. Our team is mostly working from the Centre and we have started to serve refugee claimants in person again, although many refugees still find remote support more convenient to access. As I write this from my desk, I am delighting in listening to the laughter of workers and volunteers as they set up the Centre for our weekly food hamper distribution. It is so good to be together again.

As Canada has begun lifting travel restrictions for people from abroad, we are starting to see more arrivals of refugee claimants at Romero House, particularly from the airport. Our Centre is alive with people in need of housing, orientation, and legal support. We are certainly struggling with a municipal shelter system that dramatically reduced capacity to make space for physical distancing, so housing is a big issue. Our enthusiastic and creative workers have responded by reinvigorating our community host program, calling on volunteer host families to temporarily host newly arrived refugees in their homes. We are amazed and deeply grateful for the positive response from our supporters and have managed to place several families already.

Although we started seeing more people arriving at the airport in the early fall, the border between Canada and the United States only just opened on November 21 for anyone who attempts to cross irregularly. The border closure, which lasted 19 months, was in direct contravention of our domestic and international obligations to protect refugees. The order was backed up by an Order in Council of the Canadian government, with the justification that we have been in a public health emergency. However, the border opened months early to tourists, athletes and other groups to whom Canada does not have a humanitarian commitment. It is shameful that the pandemic has been used as an excuse to exclude refugees from our country. We are looking to you as supporters of Romero House to reiterate to your elected officials, your neighbours and all people who reside on this land that refugees are welcome here!

Thank you to everyone who has stood by Romero House over the past year and a half. We have made it through a profoundly challenging time held in the hands of our wider community.

MARKING SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS

Farewells

Farewell to Kathy Mansfield and Matt Roorda, who served on our board. Thank you for your wonderful talent and time!

Farewell to Tembeka Keswa, and THANK YOU for your amazing leadership as Assistant Director.



Welcome!

Welcome to our new Assistant Director, Jenn Stephenson!

Welcome to our new Workers: Khadro, Elaina, and Sarah. They joined returning Workers Laura, Amelia, and Sayan.



Hurrah!

Congratulations to the families of Stephanie and Luis & Aram and Mehdi on your Positive Refugee Decisions!

We celebrate with the families of John and Paola & Qasim and Anila as they received Permanent Residence status!



SETTLEMENT FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES

By Jenn McIntyre and Sarah Buisman

In August 2021, many of our eyes were glued to our screens as we watched and read about the evacuations out of Kabul, Afghanistan. At the Romero Centre, we received emails, phone calls and visits from desperate Afghans already in Canada, asking how they could help their family members back home. Generally, the most we were able to do was to give good information about what the Canadian government was doing and to connect people to organizations advocating for family members abroad, such as the Forgotten Families initiative.

In the weeks and months since, Romero House has seen several families come through our doors who were part of the evacuation efforts. Most people arrived with Temporary Resident Permits and are still required to go through the refugee determination system, even people who were evacuated because they worked with the Canadian forces in Afghanistan. Our workers have worked hard to orient these families to our system and to find them legal and settlement support. We expect more people to continue arriving if the Government of Canada succeeds in ongoing evacuation and resettlement efforts.

OBSTACLES FACING AFGHANS

- Due to challenges around documentation, it has been difficult for Afghan refugees to access services such as school and health care. In these situations, Romero House workers are advocating for the Temporary Resident Permits to be recognized by Canadian institutions to allow newly arrived Afghans to access services.
- Some Afghans in quarantine hotels do not have access to basic items such as warm clothes, laundry and toys for kids. This is particularly challenging as many families are staying in these hotels for more than the required two weeks, as they wait to be settled in different areas of the country.
- Many Afghans eligible for resettlement in Canada due to their “enduring relationship with Canada” are still in Afghanistan, waiting to be evacuated.

SETTLEMENT FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES (CONTINUED)

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Contact your Member of Parliament, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister asking them to act definitively to support the evaluation of Afghans and the settlement of newly arrived Afghans in Canada.

Specifically, you can ask them to :

- Provide additional funds and clear directives to Canadian government officials and offices dealing with the high volume of cases
- Remove the need for every refugee to individually demonstrate that they should qualify as a refugee, given the clear danger for at-risk groups in Afghanistan right now
- Work with ally countries to find ways to evacuate at-risk individuals who are still in Afghanistan
- Provide warm clothing and basic supplies to Afghans while in quarantine hotels

If you would like help in sending advocacy messages to these people, visit our advocacy page at <https://romerohouse.org/get-involved/advocates/> or send an email to info@romerohouse.org.

Contact info

Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship: sean.fraser@parl.gc.ca

Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs: melanie.joly@parl.gc.ca

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister: justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca

Find your MP by going to <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Members/en>.

Reference Articles

- Maan Alhmidi, "[Afghan Refugees Housed at Quarantine Hotels Say They Lack Basics](#)," CBC, November 2, 2021
- Tom Blackwell, "[A dysfunctional process': Thousands of Canada's allies and their families still stranded in Afghanistan](#)," The National Post, October 25, 2021
- Janice Dickson and Mark MacKinnon, "[Afghan refugees, fearing Canada has abandoned them, dig in for a hard winter in overseas purgatory](#)," The Globe and Mail, November 15, 2021
- Allan Rock and Warda Shazadi Meighen, "[Memo to the new cabinet: Canada must meet the moment in Afghanistan](#)," *The Star*, November 4, 2021

Spotlight on (un)Affordable Housing

By Elaina and Laura, current Workers

Finding permanent housing can pose difficulties for residents moving out of Romero House. Here we have units that follow a model of 'Rent-Geared-to-Income', meaning that apartment rent is calculated according to the income or social assistance that each family receives per month. The same is not true for most housing in Toronto.

The average 'affordable' market rent in Toronto is \$1661/month for a 2 bedroom apartment. However, even this 'affordable' cost is much more expensive than the maximum shelter allowance families can receive from Ontario Works social assistance, which is only \$756/month for a family of 4. This discrepancy makes housing searches a long and difficult process for many refugee claimants. In addition to this, some people wait months before receiving a work permit, which means they cannot work and must rely solely on the income from Ontario Works to find housing.

We are working with another organization, Techfugees, to establish relationships with landlords who are committed to more affordable housing and want to house refugees. If you are a property owner and interested in partnering with Techfugees and Romero House in this endeavor, please contact us!

Join us in our call for deeply affordable housing in Toronto!

Family Size	Maximum Shelter Allowance / Month
1	\$390
2	\$642
3	\$697
4	\$756
5	\$815
6 or more	\$844

**Monthly Shelter Allowance
on Ontario Works social assistance**

“It’s really hard being a refugee and finding housing. Nobody would be willing to risk their place or location to give to a refugee especially because of not having credit cards, credit scores or a status basically. We wanted to be on our own feet and have our own place and pay our own rent. It was very hard to find a place and live it - it took us a very long time” ”

- Osama, former resident

Spotlight on (un)Affordable Housing (Continued)

WHEN LIFE BECOMES UNAFFORDABLE

By Mary Jo Leddy

It means going to the food bank and to the Romero Second Harvest program at least two times a week.

It means taking your daughter to emergency where you learned she had food poisoning from the peanut butter you were given at the food bank.

It means thinking twice about visiting your daughter who is a subway ride away

It means selling the ring that your mother gave you to make a down payment on an apartment.

It means working nights removing gum from under the seats of the Royal Alex Theatre.

It means wrapping your feet in plastic bags to keep the water out of your winter boots.

It means moving to a neighbourhood where you know your children will not be safe.

IT BECOMES UNBEARABLE

The Romero Community has witnessed this reality.



This reality ignites action like our one week demonstration for affordable housing during the federal election. We fight for affordable housing and hope for days where life is affordable for all of us.

A day in the life of Romero House



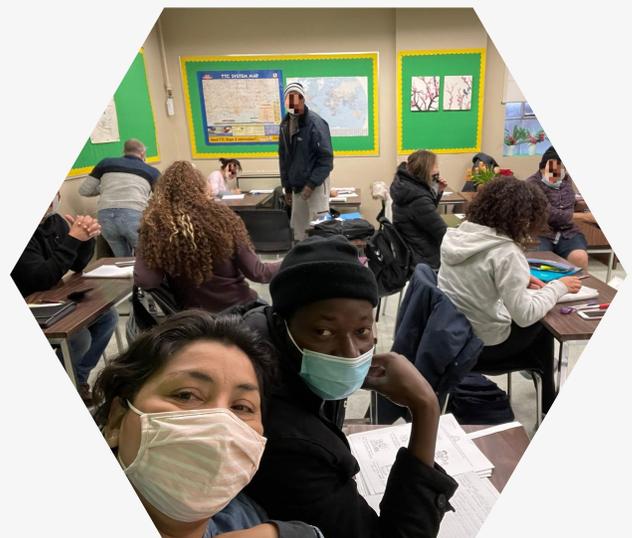
**Dionicio's Zoom
English class**



**Elaina, Laura, and
Sarah pumping air
into the van tires**



**Robbie and John
fixing furniture**



**Dailybet's in-person
English class**

a day in the life (Continued)



Anthony goes to school!



Kodi, our resident bike-fixer



Mary Jo cleaning the drive way

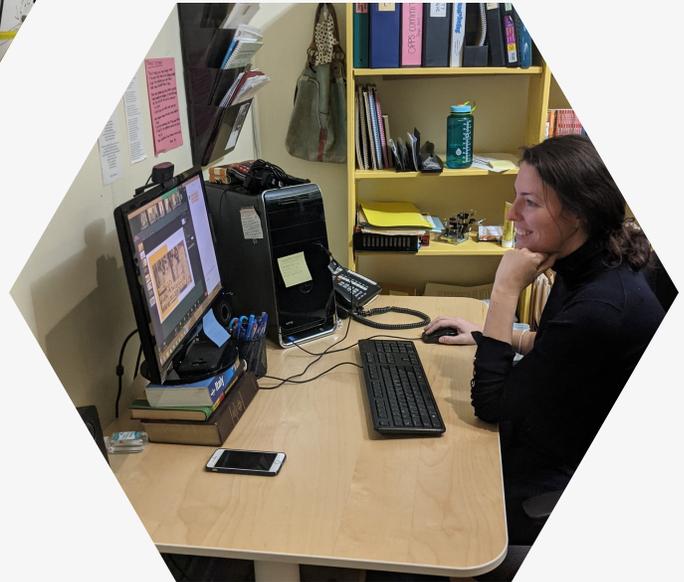


Elaina and Robbie boxing at the gym

a day in the life (Continued)



Workers and teens go bowling!



Jenn attends a session at the Canadian Council for Refugees Consultation



Amelia doing our bi-weekly Covid-19 spit test



Celebrating Sarah's birthday

THANK YOU

We are incredibly grateful for the support of our community. Thank you for all the ways you contribute, whether through the gift of volunteering, friendship, advocacy efforts, encouragement, or monetary and in-kind donations. Together, our work is possible!



Thank you to Erika for all your help with Second Harvest, and the Period Purse for the menstrual products!



We are so grateful for Paula, one of our Spanish-speaking volunteers!



Thank you to Anna, and all our receptionist volunteers!

Ways you can give financially

By Cheque: Make your cheque payable to Romero House and sent it to the address below.

Stocks and Securities: We accept Donations of stocks and securities. Go to: <https://www.romerohouse.org/get-involved/donors-supporters/security-donations/>

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



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