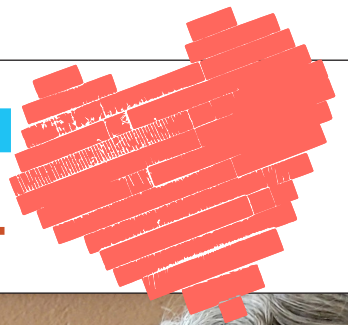




NEW  
CANADIANS  
CENTRE  
PETERBOROUGH

# Our Love Letter to You Gratitude Report 2024



**Through your generosity, compassion and acts of kindness,  
you make our community a welcoming place for all to thrive.**

With gratitude and appreciation, Team NCC

## My NCC Story: Ghada Hussein, Chair, NCC Board of Directors

Twelve years ago, I arrived in Peterborough/ Nogojiwanong, directly from Pearson Airport after a 24-hour trip from Cairo, Egypt. All I knew about Peterborough is that it had Trent University, where my daughter had been accepted. I also sort of knew it was going to be just a little colder than Cairo. As I looked around, everything felt different. The air, the streets, the faces - I was a stranger in this picturesque Canadian town. You see, I arrived in August. The weather was warm. The trees were green. The flowers were blooming. The river was glistening. My heart was filled with hope, excitement and fear.

I called the New Canadians Centre one day after I arrived. I got an appointment with Maria the Settlement Officer. She helped me with all the paperwork that needed to be done. She made what seemed like a huge hurdle seem more manageable. My daughter had gone to the annual international camp at Trent, and I was literally alone. I went from having a huge network of family and friends to knowing no one. And you know what? Maria called and invited me to her home for dinner. We sat in her kitchen where she shared her story with me. It was a tale of love, resilience and hope. That night I was grateful for Maria and the NCC.

A week later, I met with Michael VanDerHerberg who was the employment support officer at the NCC. I wanted to find a job. I remember on the first meeting with Michael. I told him that I feel too old to be looking for a job. I remember what

went on a few informational interviews set by Michael and guess what? I got the job I wanted 3 months after I arrived in Canada.

But the help I got from the NCC did not stop there. I joined the Women's Group to stop feeling lonely. This was a great experience. We cooked together, went to the movies, laughed and cried together. And slowly, I started growing my network and learning about my community.

I felt so privileged and lucky. I started volunteering with the NCC in any way I could. Then one day someone sent me the ad for board members, and I applied. And I became a member of



Ghada celebrating her birthday with her family

the board! I became a part of a group of people who are amazingly knowledgeable, empathetic and professional. I am proud to walk with you as your Board Chair. I am in awe of each and every one of them and proud to walk with them as Board Chair. Over the three years that I have served on the board, I got to see the diverse work the NCC does everyday.

The NCC has been weaving stories like mine for decades. It started in 1979 with a group of volunteers to sponsor refugees fleeing the communist regime in Vietnam. Today the NCC is an established charitable organization funded by municipal, provincial, federal, and private contributions.

Thank you for believing in this important work of welcoming people who are new to Canada.



Ghada and her family at her son's wedding

he told me. He told me, "You have at least 20 more years of career to go".

That was an eye opener and a paradigm shift. I looked at my situation as an opportunity and

# Everybody wins when we volunteer

According to Marcia Jones—who uses her experience, knowledge and passion to support Canadian newcomers—the rewards of volunteering go well beyond what the eye can see.

A former teacher, Marcia has been volunteering with the New Canadians Centre since 2022, shortly after returning from teaching abroad in Qatar for seven years. Retired and needing “a purpose” and “connection” to the community, Marcia took on the responsibility of using her experiences and background to lead the English classes. Today, she continues to lead the weekly conversational classes, helping refugees and newcomers engage in anything from small talk to conversations around necessary topics like driving terminology.

**“Learning a language is like anything else: if you don’t take a risk, you’re not going to improve, and if you don’t feel comfortable, you’re not going to take the risk,” she says. “So, we create a space where it’s okay to make mistakes, and where we can help one another.”**

Marcia’s giving doesn’t end there. She has also volunteered to work on Resettlement Support Groups, assisting refugees in navigating their new community. Not only has she found a community in the team members who have given a piece of their hearts alongside her, but she still maintains a relationship with the first family she ever supported.

**“We had a really strong resettlement team that worked well together,” she says. “I still have a big connection to that family.”**



Marcia sharing a meal with the Al Khalil family

Having lived overseas for many years, Marcia knows firsthand how many obstacles are in place for newcomers, and yet, the work she does is just as “fulfilling” for herself.

**“Having this support group in the community is huge,” she says. “I get warm and fuzzy and feel a lot of joy from volunteering.”**

In her belief that volunteering has just as much to offer to those putting in the work as it is to the newcomers she welcomes to the community, Marcia is a reminder of how everybody wins when we give back.

## Some photos from our past as we celebrate our 45th anniversary this year



## Making dreams come true

23-year-old Maher Ghir has never stopped dreaming and has never stopped working hard to achieve those dreams.

After his father died in a bombing in Syria, Maher fled to Lebanon with his mother, two younger brothers, and a baby sister who was less than a year old. As the eldest of the family, he worked hard from a young age, spending 14-hour days in a butcher shop with very low pay to support his whole family.

When they arrived in Cobourg in 2018 with the help of a private sponsor, Maher was determined to continue supporting his family and used that hard-earned experience to quickly land himself a job in the kitchen at Popeye's.

He was also relieved to learn he wasn't too old to go to school, and somewhere between classes and working 60-hour weeks, Maher was focused and determined to learn English—a language he didn't know at all when he first arrived. With the help of Duolingo, watching movies, and his own perseverance, Maher learned the language very quickly and earlier this year, he received his high school diploma with support from the New Canadians Cen-

tre's Settlement Workers in Schools program.

**"I wanted to go back to school to learn English because I never went to school back home during the war," he says. "It was hard and took a while but I had to do it to build my future up in Canada."**

As he works on his citizenship application with help from the New Canadians Centre, Maher and his siblings attend family and youth events, and his mother regularly attends the women's group in Northumberland.

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**With your support, we can help more resilient, hard-working young people like Maher achieve their dreams and keep their families together.**

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"It's especially good for my mom because she doesn't work, and she doesn't see anyone or have any sisters here," says Maher. "So, we are happy she's in this community."

This fall, Maher has started in the Mechanical Techniques Plumbing one-year program at Fleming College, balancing his studies with working part-time in the

kitchen at Swiss Chalet so he can one day buy a house for his family and send his sister to university. He hopes that through his studies and hard work, he will one day live his ultimate dream: opening a shawarma restaurant in Cobourg to run with his whole family beside him.



**"I'm excited to go and learn at college, and then hopefully in the future, it will help me open my own business," he says.**

## Activities in Northumberland

Left to right: Making winter wreaths, Family Day at the Cobourg & Area Museum





## A “safe and fun” place for kids

No matter the obstacles immigrants and refugees face when first arriving in Canada, the number one priority for many of them is to provide a safe space for their families and children.

That’s why the New Canadians Centre provides the Caring for Newcomer Children program, making it easy for newcomers to get to their appointments and classes without the added time, worry, and cost of leaving their children at a daycare.

The free program can be used by parents of school-aged and preschool-aged children who are participating in scheduled classes and groups at the Peterborough location, such as the English classes, women’s groups, and one-time workshops. The service can also be used when clients are meeting with staff for appointments throughout the day, whether it’s for orientations during Resettlement Assistance Program, citizenship applications, or other services provided at the Centre. As long as the guardian remains on site during the time, the Care for Newcomer Children program is available.

**“They’re so grateful that their children are in a safe and welcoming environment while they’re accessing the support they need to become happy, contributing members of our community,”** says Janine Appleby, the supervisor of the Care for Newcomer Children Program. “That’s all they want, and they want their children to have that as well.”

Appleby notes that being in the “safe and fun” program is oftentimes the only chance some of the children will get to interact with peers going through similar experiences which can lead to deeper connections.

**“We’ve had families who’ve met each other through these programs and then their children have met each other and then they continue that conversation afterward, outside, and we see the impact it can have,”** says Appleby. “Everyone gets what they need when they come to us.”

With your help, newcomers have a safe, fun, and trusted place to leave their children worry-free so they can focus on making their new home in the community.

Pictured here: NCC staff Janine Appleby (left) and Mariam Akhter. They are joined by little Jawad on the cover.

## From newcomer to volunteer

In thanks for the support they received from the community when settling in Canada, the Padrino family is now dedicated and eager to return the favour and give back to others in need.

In Venezuela, Carlos Alberto worked in agriculture while his wife Sahimar worked in education. For their safety, in 2018, the family fled to Peru where they lived in a refugee camp for five years before eventually relocating to Peterborough through government sponsorship.

The family did not speak any English when they arrived in 2023, but the family took language classes at the New Canadians Centre, in addition to joining other events like Women's Group and workshops in sewing and using tools. This led to forming connections in their new community as Sahimar now participates in crafting classes and the Padrinos teach Spanish to a local family.

"We have been able to achieve many things, and a lot of doors have been opened for us [since we arrived]," says Sahimar.

The rest of the family have similarly crafted their own relationships in the community by joining community sport leagues. Both sons have found fulfilling employment, as Carlos Jesus works as a technician at



From left: Carlos Jesus and Luis Alejandro with interpreter Ivete Maturano, Manager of Refugee Resettlement Liana Honsinger, RAP Worker Mohamad Al Halta, Sahimar and Carlos Alberto



The Padrino family at Cobourg Beach with NCC staff Tu Nguyen (front)

Trans Canada Nissan, and Luis Alejandro works at Dynacast Peterborough. Luis Alejandro plans to soon apply to college programs to achieve his professional goals.

**"Everybody has been very willing to help me and support me, and the city of Peterborough is really beautiful," says Luis Alejandro.**

Today, the Padrino family helps other refugees adjust to their new homes. Upon arriving in Canada, they were given donations from community members to assist in their transition, and now the family passes these donations on to others. They

further help those speaking their native language by communicating with them about life in Peterborough.

"We had practice helping people while living in the refugee camp, so we knew how to help people, and the New Canadians Centre completed it for us," Sahimar says. "It's really a blessing, and we feel happy when we help other people."

**Because of You,** the New Canadians Centre has been inspiring, encouraging and helping newcomers feel like they belong for more than 45 years.



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Review our 2023-2024 AGM report to see how your support meant the world to us in a time of great need