



Terms of Reference:

Oak Bay Refugee House Room Sponsorship

Background:

Oak Bay Municipality and VIRCS have partnered to create a unique supportive interim housing service for refugee. This is Vancouver Island's first such specialized housing site and we are very excited for a chance to make it an amazing and valuable location for selected refugees and Oak Bay residents who participate. This TOR document shows one wonderful way that a whole group can participate in the fun and challenge of helping someone vulnerable start afresh in Canada, in one of our most beautiful and hospitable communities.

What is Monterrey House?

Monterrey House is to be a facilitated house that has five rooms where an individual or a couple can find a safe, welcoming place to initially live when they arrive. The house will be staffed with a coordinator who will live on site and provide a reception, an orientation, do a needs assessment and then help that person connect with VIRCS' resettlement team who can help the resident build a new life here and sort out the myriad things; administratively, legally, socially, economically and emotionally in a sequence that is not overwhelming. The House Coordinator will also work with VIRCS' volunteers who are interested in providing volunteer services such as language buddies, mentors, ESL teachers, orientation workshops, cooking classes, facilitated grocery shopping trips. Our volunteers will meet at the House and help the residents with activities that our staff plan designed to help the residents build strength and confidence.

The whole purpose is to assist people solve problems by learning how to do things on their own, with helping volunteer friends. We are not here to do things for people but to help build agency and capacity in individuals.

The rooms are not intended to be the end of the line for people, they are a safe and welcoming place for people to use as a launchpad once they are stabilized, strong and ready.

What is a Room Sponsorship?

Preparing the Room: Each of the five rooms needs to be unique, comfortable and completed with items that make the residents feel like they are in a home. A sponsor group takes time and

care to prepare the room between each resident's stay. Initially they may need some paint and tidying up, we have access to furniture but we may be missing a few items, hospitality items like alarm clock, bedside lamps, art, mirrors, towels, bedding, comforters, bookshelf/books etc. This room should have the same items that would be in your guest room, if you have one in your house or a fairly well-appointed B+B. When the resident moves on, the group will meet, re-assess the room with the Coordinator and then in a few days, brush everything up, replace worn items and make the room lovely again.

As an added bonus, Western Interior Design Ltd has offered to create room plans for the group to follow.

Friendship: The Room Sponsors will have a personal relationship with the refugee(s) who is staying in their room. This will be different for each person and for each sponsor group because everyone has different needs, interests and abilities. For example, if a local small business sponsors the room, they may want to have one person take the resident out to lunch every two weeks for a conversation. They may want to invite that person to staff functions or staff retreats. If one staff member enjoys hiking they may invite the resident out for a hike. They will remember the resident's birthday. If the resident drops in to the workplace staff will know them and welcome them. It may be an opportunity to do a work internship if that fits everyone's needs. If the Sponsor Group is a Service club they may host them at Service club functions and dinners. They may help the resident build a personal network or ask if they want to be involved in public activities. VIRCS supports and respects all faith groups and those with spiritual beliefs; we require those who are respectful and supportive of others beliefs. An individual Oak Bay family could sponsor a room if they have that capacity but two or three families may find it easier and more fun to engage as a Room Sponsor group.

If your group had considered sponsoring someone from Syria in 2016 but was not able to locate the tens of thousands of dollars or felt unable to make such a commitment, this may be a way to participate in a great Canadian tradition of hospitality and building Canada one person at a time. Sponsoring a room bears very minimal cost. It will take thoughtfulness, resourcefulness, a sense of humour, patience and some basic home-making skills.

At VIRCS we sincerely believe that helping refugees participate fully and contribute to Canadian life is one of the highest levels of patriotism. We are deeply excited that Room Sponsor Groups will have this chance to join us in creating welcome spaces and connections that are deep and lasting.

How long?: We anticipate that residents will stay 6 months to one year. We will expect a Room Sponsor organization to commit to one year at minimum. We prefer a two-year commitment so there is some continuity at the house. The Welcome House project is supported by Municipality of Oak Bay so there is preference given to Room Sponsors based in Oak Bay.