

President's Report

When the fiscal year of 2019-2020 began for the Catholic Centre for Immigrants, the phrase physical distancing was unheard of. The concept of social bubbles didn't exist and our doors were literally open to every person in the world who found themselves with the good fortune of landing in Ottawa.

If the beginning of the fiscal year was business as usual, the end proved anything but as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and became a part of our everyday lives.

Thanks to the dedicated work of the CCI staff and the exceptional leadership of our Executive Director, Carl Nicholson, we quickly transitioned to an online environment when the pandemic lockdown was implemented. Through online platforms, CCI Ottawa continued to support newcomers in our community.

Although we closed our main office at 219 Argyle, staff at our two transitional homes went to work every day to help government-assisted refugees, refugee claimants and homeless immigrants. Some had arrived just days before the lockdown was implemented.

The front-line staff at Reception House helped refugees find homes in Ottawa and prepared their children for online schooling. It was the same story at Welcome House where a number of homeless immigrants and refugee claimants learned to live under the lockdown while we helped them search for their first Ottawa home. And we did it under strict health and safety protocols to ensure everyone stayed healthy.

With our emergency food pantry closed, we delivered food baskets and grocery gift cards to the most vulnerable families. Those who lost their jobs were given help in applying for emergency benefits. We helped others find jobs, working with many to improve their resumes and sharpen their interview skills.

We started an online kids corner to help young children cope with isolation and we ran more self-care workshops to ensure the parents had the tools to cope with the uncertainty brought on by COVID-19.

Language classes went online. Volunteers were matched with newcomers who needed to practise their English. We ramped up our mentorship program so that newcomers with higher education and career goals received the support they needed.

Looking ahead, I am confident CCI Ottawa is well positioned to expand its digital reach to ensure newcomers receive the supports they need to settle and integrate into their new community.

As Board President, I want to thank my Board colleagues for their insight and dedication during the past year. I want to applaud the CCI staff who continue to work from home with passion and commitment. The pandemic has changed the way we deliver services but it has not changed our mission; to help newcomers realize their full potential and to build a more welcoming community together.

Luise Czernenko Reid
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