

To Ottawa residents – and all those working to create safe and welcoming communities,

We, as organizations with extensive experience supporting newcomers, are writing to share our perspective on the City of Ottawa's Newcomer Reception Centre model, which offers a new approach to receiving people seeking safety and a fresh start in our community.

Ongoing global migration trends have significantly increased the number of individuals arriving in Ottawa. As a result, a large proportion of people in the emergency shelter system are newcomers, most of them refugee claimants. With Ottawa's shelter system under considerable pressure, providing adequate services and support has become increasingly complex.

We are encouraged by the City's plan to establish Newcomer Reception Centres because it presents a much-needed opportunity to effectively address critical challenges related to housing, settlement and social services, and it is based on genuine collaboration with subject experts and service providers.

It's important to note that being an immigrant, or specifically, a refugee claimant, simply signifies a person's migration journey. It is not a reflection of a newcomer's many skills, their evident drive or their tremendous capacity and motivation to contribute to Ottawa. Many of the people currently sleeping on cots in Ottawa community centres or bunk beds crowded into hockey arenas are ready to work, or even have a job already. What they need is a roof over their heads and the services that we and our allies in the community provide, to help them navigate life in Canada and support them on the path to permanent housing.

If the City's proposed plan is implemented, refugee claimants and other unhoused newcomers will have a central landing spot in our city for the first time, a welcoming and supportive place staffed by experts who will help them get their immigration papers in order, apply for a work permit or refer them to other services they need, many of them on-site, while having food to eat and a safe place to sleep.

These facilities will provide extensive wraparound services, designed collaboratively with experienced community service providers to make the most of their temporary stay. Clients will be well-supported and busy with the day-to-day activities of building a new life in Ottawa. This evidence-based approach will significantly reduce reliance on emergency shelters and the use of community centres and arenas as overflow shelters.

Much more needs to be done by all levels of government to help people exit the shelter system to permanent housing, but we believe the provision of better, more dignified housing on arrival is an urgent priority that this plan can address.

Many of us have dedicated years to assisting individuals and families transitioning to life in Ottawa. Some of us have navigated this journey ourselves. Data shows that the majority of refugee claimants, close to 75%, will have their claims accepted and become long-term residents of our city. As colleagues, friends and neighbours, they will contribute meaningfully to our community's social and economic fabric for years to come. It is in our best interest to support them in building a strong foundation here.

The reception centre plan is an important step in addressing an urgent need while upholding Ottawa's proud tradition of compassion and inclusivity. We are committed to working diligently with the City to ensure it follows through on the commitments articulated in this plan, so that together we can build a stronger and more welcoming community for all.

Sincerely,

Members of the Collective Impact Initiative for Refugee Claimants (CIIRC)

- Alliance To End Homelessness Ottawa
- Burundi We Want
- Capital Rainbow Refuge
- Carty House
- Catholic Centre for Immigrants
- Centretown Community Health Centre
- Centre d'établissement, de soutien et d'orientation communautaire
- Community Legal Services Ottawa
- Cornerstone Housing For Women
- Dalhousie Food Cupboard
- Dorcas House
- Immigrant Women Services Ottawa
- Matthew House Ottawa
- Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization
- Refugee 613
- Samaritan House
- Somerset West Community Health Centre
- Stepstone House
- WorldSkills
- YMCA of the National Capital Region