

STUDY VISIT: KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

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In September, The Open Community and CPR supported a study visit for Chaves Acolhe, who are the first community sponsorship group in Portugal, to meet sponsorship groups in Ireland. The visit is part of continuous knowledge exchange and feedback for sponsors under the VE project.

The Portuguese sponsorship group and CPR team met with members of the Cloughjordan Community Sponsorship Group in County Tipperary, and with the Baltinglass Community Sponsorship Group in County Wicklow, as well as with families and individuals who have resettled in each community.

The trip was carried out in partnership with Irish Regional Support Organisations, the Irish Red Cross and Doras, who are working with the sponsorship groups in their local areas.

The groups from each country shared experiences on recruiting group members, and on promotion, fundraising and outreach approaches within each of their communities.

The Portuguese visitors also had the opportunity to hear from members of Syrian families welcomed by the Irish groups, who spoke about their journey to Ireland and their experiences of resettling.

Matilde Neves, the Chaves Acolhe group coordinator, said that the visit was important in their point of view, to understand if their work

was in any way similar to what was being carried out in Ireland.

“Hearing the testimonies of the families being hosted through community sponsorship in the first person, was very important as we only had the reference of the family we are hosting. This made us realize that there are aspects common to all families, dispelling some of our doubts and fears,” she added.

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Barbara Oliveira, Program Manager with CPR said: “Having the opportunity to learn from others who may have different (albeit similar) experiences, and who may have thought about different solutions or maybe view an issue from a different perspective, is one of the most effective ways of bringing about change.”

“It can also be a way to bring a breath of fresh air into a team, encouraging the pursuit of new solutions that have been tried and tested in other contexts,” she added.

SALMAN FAMILY

“WE WERE VERY SCARED AT FIRST AND HAD NO EMOTIONAL STABILITY BUT THE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT GIVEN BY THE GROUP AND COMUNIDADE ALLOWED US TO FEEL VERY GOOD.”



The Salmans left Iraq more than 10 years ago, having stayed 9 years in Turkey, witing in limbo. The family of four, including a teenage boy and a little girl, have longed for the moment where they could finally have their home and rebuild their lives.

By the end of March 2023, they received the news that they would be the first sponsored family in Portugal. First, they were scared and wondering why were they the chosen ones to pioneer the program but after meeting the group and seeing all what they had done they were relieved and very happy.

When they arrived to their new home in the Northern city of Chaves, they were amazed with all the things that the sponsor group Chaves Acolhe had prepared: gifts for each; a full pantry; clothes and all the basics and a piece of art made by everyone involved in this journey.

The first weeks posed a challenge but this was eased by the support from the group and from all the local community. Their kindness and effort to make them feel welcome has made the Salmans feel they need to commit to their adaptation and to give back to the community.

Young boy Salman's birthday was just two weeks after their arrival and his class

mates prepared him a little surprise party with personalized gifts: a football and a shirt from the local football team. Football wasn't his favourite sport but after that he can't stop following the football stars and the whole family went to watch the local team play.

The children feel happy in school and the mother has already started working at a local hotel. Step by step they are feeling more and more confident and understanding Portuguese better.

“WE WAITED 9 YEARS FOR THIS... IT IS A LIFE TIME AND MANY DREAMS WERE LOST ON THE WAY BUT NOW WE FEEL SAFE AND HAPPY. WE KNOW THE PROGRAM WILL END BUT WE WANT TO CONTINUE BEING FRIENDS WITH THE GROUP AND BE PART OF THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP.”

They now feel they are integrated at 70% but know they can do better so all can speak Portuguese and both parents can work, preferably in their own areas. They would like to go back to university and complete their degrees. The future is still very uncertain but with the help of the CS group everything will be easier.