

# Vitality & Engagement

Developing Communities

Project Newsletter June 2023

## PARTNERS



The VE Project is being implemented by Amnesty International Ireland and The Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR).

*Amnesty International Ireland and The Refuge Council (CPR) Portugal are working in partnership to raise engagement and awareness of the Community Sponsorship (CS) initiative- locally, nationally and transnationally. The newsletter is here to share the voice of refugees, CS industry allies, highlight milestones and look to next steps for the VE programme.*

## Content

- Project Infographic
- Case Study - Ireland
- Case Study – Portugal

## Vitality & Engagement

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19



Civil Society Events Hosted

373



Civil Society Event Attendees

13



Project Case Studies

650



Online Training Users

## Infographic Summary

JUNE 2023

73



Outreach Events Hosted

1185



Outreach Event Attendees

26



Allies Network Partners

17



Resources Available

1061



Community Sponsorship Enquiries

1025



Social Media Followers

11



Online Training Modules Developed



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## NATIONAL PEER SUPPORT NETWORK

“THE SHARING OF IDEAS AND ADVICE, AND THE SUPPORT OFFERED ARE INVALUABLE TO BOTH EXISTING AND START-UP GROUPS”



The Open Community is the National Support Organisation for Community Sponsorship in Ireland. We work collaboratively with key programme partners and wider stakeholders to promote and develop CS as a sustainable refugee resettlement programme. The Open Community is committed to developing supports and resources that enhance and enrich the experience of all those who engage in community sponsorship in Ireland. As part of this commitment, The Open Community established a National Peer Support Network for sponsors to connect and meet from across Ireland. The network seeks to provide a structured avenue to capture the experiences and the expertise of those engaged in the programme, with an emphasis on knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer support.

Network activities include:

- **Steering Group meetings** (regularity: 5-weeks) - Coordination of small Steering Group (7-8 CSG representatives) that helps to coordinate the network and its activities, whilst ensuring the network is CSG led with secretariat oversight provided by The Open Community.
- **Regular full Peer Support Network meetings** (regularity: 5-weeks) - creating connections between sponsors from across the country and at different stages of the journey, to share experiences and knowledge and to learn from one another.
- **Regular Focus group and consultation sessions** - on various aspects of the programme to gather feedback and inform changes.
- **Participation at Events** - facilitate opportunities for sponsors and resettled persons to participate in events or conferences either in Ireland or across Europe.
- **Story Sharing** - facilitate opportunities for sponsors and resettled persons to share their sponsorship stories.
- **Peer Mentoring** - development of a mentoring support programme for newer groups to connect with more established or experienced groups.

Feedback from Sponsors:

### Carolyn

“The meetings are so helpful in broadening our perspective by hearing of the experiences of other groups. I was struck at the last meeting by how much a family’s needs change over the course of two years!”

### Anthony

“Starting a Community Sponsorship Group can be a daunting undertaking, with most members stepping out of their comfort zone and undertaking challenges in new areas. The Network is invaluable in allowing you access to people who have overcome the difficulties you may be facing and can share their experiences.

Struggling with a problem? Who better to assist you than someone who has faced it before and is happy to share experiences through the CS Network.

The open willingness to share experiences through the Network has been invaluable and very encouraging at difficult times.”

“THE OPEN WILLINGNESS TO SHARE EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE NETWORK HAS BEEN INVALUABLE AND VERY ENCOURAGING AT DIFFICULT TIMES”

### Finbarr

“The Open Community gave us a forum to share issues that we were encountering with the aim of both highlighting them as issues for Open Community to raise on at a higher level and of providing learning for newer groups.”

### Trish

“The Community Sponsorship online Peer Network meetings facilitated by the Open Community are a very important way of meeting with other CS group members. The sharing of ideas and advice, and the support offered are invaluable to both existing and start-up groups.”



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## Case Study – Portugal: Sponsor Perspective

### CHAVES ACOLHE

**“THE IDEA OF WELCOMING A REFUGEE FAMILY IN CHAVES STARTED TO GROW THE DESIRE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF OPENING OURSELVES TO A CHALLENGE WE THOUGHT WAS BIGGER THAN US.**



The sponsor group Chaves Acolhe was formally formed in November 2022 in the Northern city of Chaves. The group started the sponsor training course back in May that year and since then suffered a restructuration, given that some members were forced to move from the city due to professional reasons. Others joined the sponsor journey making a group of 12 people from different backgrounds with ages ranging from 23 to 54. The first outreach session developed in Portugal by the ComUnidade initiative was in Porto in March. There, one of the participants was amazed by the idea of community sponsorship and suggested it to the organisation where she volunteers – Soul Frater. The other volunteers embraced the idea and jumped firmly into it.

The training started in May with an in-person session, allowing the group to better understand what community sponsorship and their responsibilities really were. It continued online, providing essential tools when supporting refugees like: intercultural communication techniques; safeguarding notions to protect the most vulnerable; how to deal with trauma; conflict management and many others.

Then more people joined in, while some had to back out due to professional and personal reasons. The then small group started to disseminate the idea among friends and relevant stakeholders. The strategy was to gather the most diverse people as possible, building a heterogenic group that comprised

people from relevant areas that would be useful to the CS program like: education; law; business; pharmaceuticals; psychology or arts. The group, with the help of ComUnidade, started to develop the Welcoming Plan, detailing their strategies and foreseen results in the various areas such as housing, education, labour, health, safety or socializing. They also developed a Communication Plan defining the dissemination strategies among the local community.

**“After that session in Porto, I made the proposal to the association Soul Frater [where I volunteer] and a group of concerned people with a big drive to help gathered and that little seed that was so small started to grow in the hearts of every single one of them and it finally gave fruits!”**

By the beginning of 2023 they received the news they have been waiting all along: a family was going to arrive in April! The excitement kicked in and in a couple of months they managed to secure and furnish a house in the city centre, make the children enrolment in school and prepare everything. A fundraising dinner with a firm participation of the community was held in March to gather funds and donations. Every thing was in place to receive the family of four. They arrived in a sunny day, exhausted but overjoyed with all the smiles and the beautiful house and gifts awaiting them.



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