



Photo: Julie DeMelo

The Kinbrace community welcomes refugee claimants with housing, education, and support.

The name "Kinbrace" was coined by co-founder Tama Ward in May 1998, merging kinship + embrace.



We respectfully acknowledge that we live, work, and gather on the traditional and unceded lands of the Coast Salish peoples, including the x^mməθk^wəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish), and səl ilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

With distinct histories, refugee claimants and Indigenous communities in Canada share similar experiences, including forced displacement, family separation, language and cultural oppression, colonization, and marginalization. The Kinbrace community acknowledges the complexities and contradictions creating refuge for newcomers on Indigenous lands. Newcomer refugee and Indigenous voices must be heard in the quest for truth, reconciliation, dignity, belonging, and justice.



Photo: Julie DeMelo

The 2023 Kinbrace camping trip to Anvil Island was a central community-building event where refugee claimants and Canadians came together thanks to the generosity of donors and volunteers.

You bring the dream to life!



The Kinbrace community – those with lived refugee claimant experience, donors, volunteers, neighbours, staff, supporters of all kinds near and far – share this common dream for each refugee claimant arriving in Canada: a world of welcome, a community of belonging, a life of opportunity.

Message from the Board of Directors

Kinbrace is a community that proactively resources human-centred transitional housing, broader community capacity, and integration resources for refugee claimants arriving in Canada. While the news is again marked by unprecedented numbers of forcibly displaced people (144,000 refugee claimants arrived across Canada this year), it's a privilege at Kinbrace to know the names and faces of just a few of those people. Kinbrace continued to develop and make accessible public legal information through the 'My Refugee Claim' program, so that refugee claimants can be promptly informed, connected, and prepared wherever they arrive in Canada.

A significant challenge Kinbrace is facing is the high cost and scarcity of housing. Vacancy is below 1%. The average cost of a one bedroom in Metro Vancouver is \$2500 per month. Rental allowances for those on income assistance have not increased to meet the rising cost of housing, often resulting in 70 – 80% of a family's income being spent on rent.

Another challenge we face is that the majority of refugee claimants coming through Kinbrace are not able to find housing locally. This means that, after arriving in Vancouver, people are displaced yet again in order to find more affordable housing in the suburbs. This is significant especially for families who have settled in the community, enrolled their children in schools and become involved in social programs.

Kinbrace has responded to this housing crisis by strengthening its settlement and housing team using a case management model. This has provided refugee claimants with increased accompaniment in dealing with all aspects of their claim process, including housing.

This year we have also begun a holistic assessment of the organization's governance, policies, and procedures. With such rapid growth in staff, programs, and projects we want to be careful that our programs don't outpace our governance capacity. We hired external consultants to provide a comprehensive governance diagnostic. This resulted in a fulsome set of recommendations, including the development of a Governance Authority Matrix and Manual, oversight of the strategic plan and implementation, and oversight of the operational policy framework. The Board will be implementing these recommendations in the upcoming year with the assistance of an experienced governance consultant. The Board also has begun a review of the co-leadership model and is excited about how to reorganise Kinbrace's senior leadership to support and encourage our staff, volunteers and especially refugee claimants whom we serve.

Donations from donors and via fundraising totaled approximately \$340,000, which we hope to increase to \$375,000 in the upcoming fiscal year. With this increased financial capacity we were able to hire for a new position: 'Donor Engagement and Communications Officer.'

Sadly, we had to close our recently started Beyond Refuge program due to lack of funding. One of the legacy projects of Beyond Refuge was Becoming Neighbours, a series of six community dialogues focused on Kinbrace's organizational values. These were encouraging and generative conversations and built community among those with and without lived refugee experience.

Maria Zerjav
Chairperson



2023-2024 Board of Directors
Left to right: Natasha Wallace (Treasurer), Ray Fung, Rosemary Toye, David Nacho, Maria Zerjav (Chairperson), Randall Cohn, Erin Goheen Glanville (Secretary) (not pictured) Sadiq Mohibi

Aldo and Carmen's Story



Maria José, Aldo, and Carmen.

Seeking refugee protection in 2019, Carmen and Aldo reunited with their daughter Maria José 2.5 years later. They are close to receiving their citizenship, and meanwhile run two burgeoning family businesses.

My name is Carmen Acevedo, and my husband is Aldo Mena. We are from Managua, Nicaragua, located in Central America.

When did you arrive in Canada?

We came to Canada on Monday, July 29, 2019.

What was your biggest challenge in your first days and weeks?

Our lives changed drastically from the moment we landed at the Vancouver airport. My husband and I were alone, we did not speak the language, we only had \$20 dollars in our wallet. The first day we slept at the Vancouver airport because we did not have any family or acquaintances, everything was new to us. An Immigration officer guided us a little about the immigration process and gave us a brochure where we could find help to survive the first week. When we arrived at ISSofBC, they told us that they did not have a place for us to stay together as a couple, so my husband was placed in a shelter of the Union Gospel Mission located in Hastings and I was placed in a safe shelter for women called Cynthia's Place in Surrey.

How did you get connected to the Kinbrace community, to get the housing support you needed?

I traveled to meet my husband and we spent the day together at Trout Lake Park located on Victoria Drive. We said goodbye at 6 pm because we had to be at our shelters.

Every day we went to ISSofBC, and we asked if there was another place where we could stay together and they told us about a nice and cozy place that was Kinbrace, but we had to wait a couple of weeks. On August 22, after one month of living separated in shelters three transit zones apart, we received a call from a social worker at ISSofBC who informed us that Kinbrace had a space for us.

What were two or three significant ways the Kinbrace community helped you?

One of the important aspects was that it was a place where we could be together, finally, after being separated in different shelters.

The welcome we received from the Kinbrace Staff was truly incredible, welcoming and hospitable. From the first moment, we felt at home, surrounded by kindness and warmth. We felt very comfortable and it was a very pleasant experience that left us with a feeling of gratitude and comfort impossible to forget.

As refugee claimants, you were separated from your daughters for a long time. Tell us the timeline of reuniting with your family.

Thank God, and very grateful for the advice and support from the Kinbrace Staff, we managed to reunite with our daughters. On October 3, 2021, María José, the youngest of our daughters, came, then María Fernanda arrived on January 28, 2022.

Your family is entrepreneurial and hardworking! Tell us what you started...

My husband and I are very grateful to God because we both have our own business companies. Aldo runs his own construction company, **Aldo's Concrete LTD**, while I manage my cleaning company **MC Cleaning LTD**. Together we have built these businesses with effort and dedication and we are happy with what we have achieved.

What are you most proud of for yourselves since you arrived in Canada to now?

We are very proud because we have managed to get ahead and establish ourselves with our families and our own



Photo: Genevieve Althea Photography

Carmen and her husband Aldo received transitional housing in the Kinbrace community at the start of their refugee claim process. Now, they are an ongoing and integral part of the welcoming community, holding the cleaning contract for the houses. Here, Carmen cleans the Kinbrace hallway, the same hallway that led to their first home in Canada.



Photo: Carmen Acevedo

Daughter Maria José helps with the family cleaning business, MC Cleaning Services. Here, she cleans one of the Kinbrace transitional housing units, preparing to welcome the next refugee claimant in need of housing.

businesses. Despite not mastering the language 100%, we face each challenge with determination and perseverance. Thanks to our efforts and sacrifices, a great satisfaction for us is that each small success is a reminder of our ability to overcome obstacles and build a prosperous life in a new country.

What are your dreams for the future?

Our biggest dream is to buy our own home, a space that is truly ours. It is a goal that we have had since we started our business and every step we take is closer to reality. For us, owning our own home means stability and security. It is a symbol of effort and dedication.

Impact

Housing and Settlement

The Kinbrace community meets the immediate and unique needs of refugee claimants, particularly transitional housing for the most vulnerable who have just arrived in the country. Once housed, families receive wrap-around support and accompaniment. This year we transitioned from a siloed program model to the case management settlement model.



79 new arrivals and former residents received wrap-around support. Of these:

42 received transitional housing

30 moved from transitional housing into permanent housing

The Settlement Team prepares the Welcome Basket for each new resident when they arrive in the Kinbrace community. Gift cards to local food stores, hygiene products and other essential items fill the basket. Staple food supplies such as rice, flour, sugar, salt, and fruit are on the kitchen counter with the basket, all topped with a hand-written card of welcome.

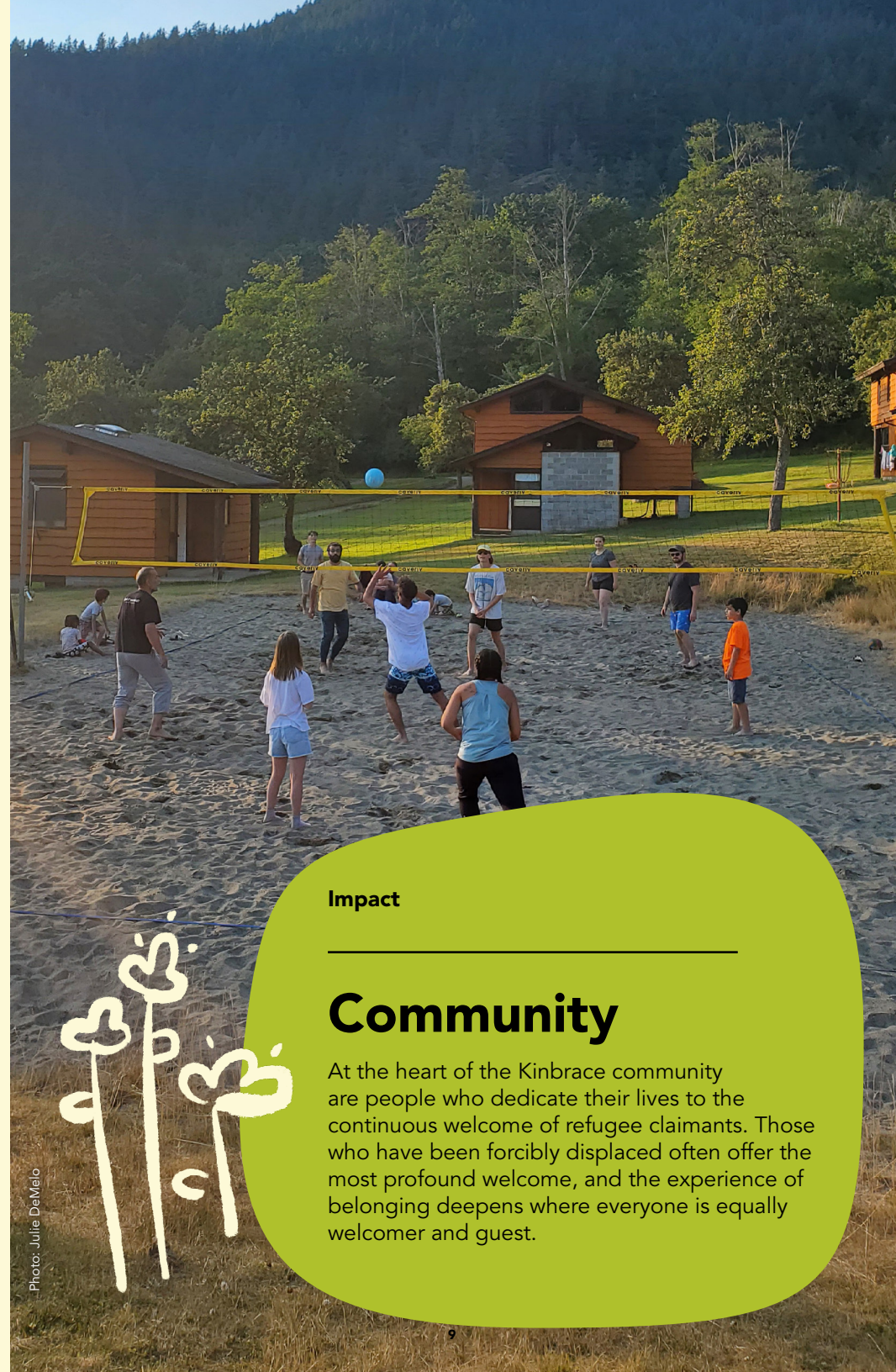


Photo: Genevieve Althea Photography



Photo: Amanda Morrison

Volunteers and staff help a family move from the transitional Kinbrace community into permanent housing. Moving day includes loading the truck with personal items, picking up furniture from HomeStart Foundation, a shared lunch on the way, and unpacking into the new home wherever it might be in BC's lower mainland.



Impact

Community

At the heart of the Kinbrace community are people who dedicate their lives to the continuous welcome of refugee claimants. Those who have been forcibly displaced often offer the most profound welcome, and the experience of belonging deepens where everyone is equally welcomer and guest.

Photo: Julie DeMelo



Photo: Krista Ewert

Exploring the pumpkin patch was a highlight of the autumn season, bringing the community together for a day of fun, laughter and community connection.



Photo: Angela Lam



Photo: Angela Lam

All smiles while selecting a Christmas Tree and embracing Canadian winter in the midst of flurries!

52 Tuesday community meals

25 community events

40+ volunteers

1 amazing summer camp on Anvil Island

Countless
conversations, tears, and laughter



Photo: Jason Lam

Community dinners turn meals into connections, bringing people together one dish at a time.



Photo: Angela Lam

Refugee Protection

Canada's world-class refugee protection system is astonishingly complex, making it hard for refugee claimants to comprehend and navigate. Refugee claimants daily risk losing their way, and not getting the safety they desperately need. Working with diverse collaborators, the Kinbrace community continued to create discoverable, accessible resources so refugee claimants can understand and control their refugee claim journey.

82,502 new users visited
www.MyRefugeeClaim.ca

18,000 users returned to
www.MyRefugeeClaim.ca

9,962 downloads of the
[Orientation Booklet](#)

1,494 refugee claimants
registered for the [Ready Tour](#)
(560 previous year)

260 service provider
registered for the [Ready Tour](#)



Illustration: Andrea Armstrong

She's the recipient of the new Kinbrace Educational Award!



While her details are confidential, this deserving young woman selected for the first-ever \$5,000 Kinbrace Educational Award completed her first year of university!



My career aspiration is to become an immigration lawyer and focus on assisting individuals, especially those with refugee backgrounds, to navigate legal challenges and achieve their goals. This year, one of my Politics courses inspired me the most, especially as it explored immigration law and crises.



*–Recipient of the
Kinbrace Educational Award*

The new Kinbrace Educational Award supports the post-secondary educational aspirations of one foreign-born young person who made a refugee claim in Canada (or whose parents made a refugee claim) and is now a protected person, permanent resident, or Canadian citizen.

Learn more at www.kinbrace.ca/educational-award.

Beyond Refuge

The Beyond Refuge program sparks transformative connections between refugee claimants and Canadians. This year, the program concluded the five public Becoming Neighbours Workshops, exploring time-tested values that lead to belonging and safety in a world increasingly marked by forced displacement. With regret, the Beyond Refuge program closed due to lack of funding in April 2024.



Attending the Becoming Neighbours Workshops was so uplifting and encouraging. I felt I grew as a person because of them. The carefully curated workshops – combining many elements such as a warm welcome, delicious food, discussion, thought-provoking panelists (including people with lived refugee experience) – made it an expansive experience to be involved in.



–*Becoming Neighbours Workshop participant*



254 unique participants engaged the five 2023 Becoming Neighbours Workshops, facilitated by Erin Goheen Glanville and Karanja Thariki. Nineteen panelists brought diverse lived experience expertise to inspire the conversations.

Transforming Employment Narratives



The 5-day in-person Transforming Employment Narratives Program brought together seven employers / HR managers, four settlement workers, six refugee claimants, and one funder to start changing mental models on surface level issues related to employment of refugee claimants.

60 participants attended the Transforming Employment Narratives Public Event on 25 October 2023, in partnership with RADIUS SFU and SFU Public Square. Here, a panel explores the importance of hiring refugee claimants in businesses and nonprofits.



The Achieving Financial Mobility initiative focused on the new Transforming Employment Narratives (TEN) program. This pilot professional development program and ideas incubator targets and seeks to change the employment system. TEN builds awareness and centres refugee claimants – crucial steps as we collectively envision and build solutions with and for the flourishing of refugee claimants and employers. Learn more at www.transformingemploymentnarratives.ca.

Challenges faced by Kinbrace during the year

- Extremely high rental and low vacancy rates made finding permanent housing an even more desperate challenge. Refugee claimants moving from Kinbrace spent at least 80% of their income on rent.
- Growth opportunities have been identified by the board, including strengthening governance capacity, as the organization emerges into a larger organization
- As residents move further away because of Metro Vancouver's housing crisis, they are becoming more disconnected from the Kinbrace community.



Lessons learned & corrections made

Project growth outpaced capacity



Over the past four years, Kinbrace launched four significant new programs / projects in response to the 10-year strategic vision and to funding opportunities aligning with the mandate:

- the "K3" project (increasing transitional housing stock)
- the Beyond Refuge program
- the Transforming Employment Narratives project, and
- the My Refugee Claim project.

All of these were informed by Kinbrace's core work of providing housing and wrap-around support to newcomer refugee claimants.

The funding available to start these new initiatives in 2020–2022 decreased significantly in 2023.

Sadly, the fledgling Beyond Refuge program could not be sustained without grant funding.

While Kinbrace takes bold risks to support refugee claimants, well-intended project growth in too many directions created a sustainability gap. Leadership took a step back to assess how to move forward.

Kinbrace Staff and Host Community



Photo: a kind stranger

Left to right
 Top row: Angela Lam, Kerry Forsythe, Alexandra Dawley, Jason Lam, Sophia Underhill, Laura Wallis-Wood, Thariki Karanja
 Bottom row: Derek Chu, Amanda Morrison, Julie Morey, Chantel Spade, Adriana Zepeda, Loren Balisky
 Not pictured: Masi Allahverdi, Ewert family (Ben, Krista, Jakob, Ella, Audrey), Mohammed Zaqout



Ride for Refuge



Photo: Loren Balisky

This was Kinbrace's 15th Ride for Refuge, our annual signature fundraising event.

Ride for Refuge is the family-friendly fundraising bike + walk in support of local charities serving people seeking hope, safety, and freedom. On 23 September 2023, 30 Kinbrace teams, supported by 223 participants, 1,183 donors, and 41 volunteers, came together to make a meaningful impact in the lives of refugee claimants, raising \$125,707 for Kinbrace.



Photo: Alexandra Dawley

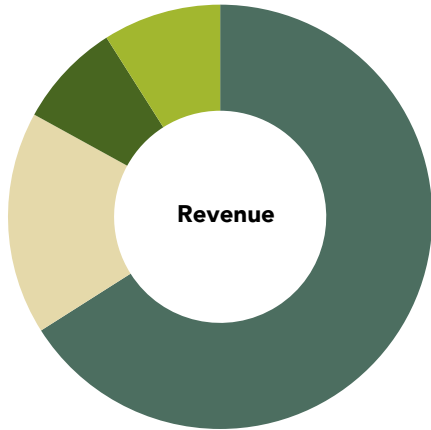


Photo: Alexandra Dawley

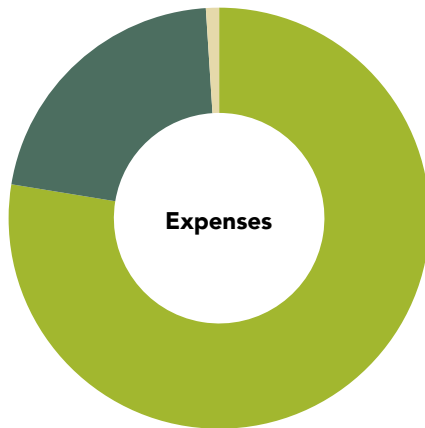
Dedicated volunteers, donors and community members make Ride for Refuge possible, turning their desire for positive change into impact for refugee claimants.

Financials

THANK-YOU
TO EACH DONOR
AND FUNDER!



Kinbrace's fiscal year is May–April.



- 66%** Not for Profit \$888,389
- 17%** Individuals and Major Donors \$230,056
- 8%** Fundraising (Ride for Refuge) \$106,980
- 9%** Rental Income (Other) \$128,002

- 78%** Programs \$1,070,021
- 21%** Administration \$295,356
- 1%** Fundraising \$13,970

Total	\$1,353,427
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Total	\$1,379,347
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Refugee claimants
need your continued,
immediate support!



Yes! I want to **donate now** to provide safety to a person seeking refugee protection



Yes! I want to **join the Ride for Refuge** 05 Oct 2024 to fundraise in solidarity



Yes! I want to **join the Companion Circle** to welcome everyday with my recurring gift



Yes! I want to **volunteer** to give, learn, and grow

Kinbrace's five core values

WELCOME

We are in solidarity: bearing witness to exile, we live with refugee claimants.

TRUST

We are a community: affirming dignity, we commit to the best in one another.

MUTUAL TRANSFORMATION

We are diverse: striving to listen well, we learn and grow.

CELEBRATION

We are grateful: amidst joy and sorrow, we discover hope.

PRAYER

We are sojourners: held by grace, we journey into the mystery and love of God.



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Kinbrace Community Society is incorporated in British Columbia (S0058365) and charitably registered by Canada Revenue Agency (80276 4209 RR0001).

kinbrace.ca