

Gleams of Hope Art Auction background (Oct 2025)

In response to the war in Gaza, a multi-faith community of Muslims, Jews and Christians came together, initially to start a dialogue and then to sponsor this Palestinian family in dire need. We were moved to action when R.'s story reached us through a family connection. Now named "Gleams of Hope", our committee now includes Muslims, Christians and Jews and the unaffiliated and we welcome participants from any background to join us in this effort.

Many at St. Philip will remember meeting Robert Oppenheimer, Dahlia Beck and May Shihadeh when they came to present to the 9:30 service on several occasions.

This refugee sponsorship group is working with the support of Victoria's downtown synagogue Congregation Emanu-El and Christ Church Cathedral through the ICA (the Inter-Cultural Association, who deals with the federal government and handles most refugee sponsorships in the Greater Victoria region).

A Cry for Help: R.'s Family's Story

R. is a Palestinian woman born in Syria, carrying the legacy of her family's displacement from what was then Palestine in the 1948 War. Her life has been marked by relentless loss and hardship, but she remains a devoted mother to her two teenaged daughters, who dream of becoming doctors.

R.'s world shattered in 2012 when her husband was tragically killed in the chaos of the Syrian war while trying to protect his family. Left to care for her daughters alone, R. faced constant threats and violence, forcing her to flee their home multiple times. With no safe refuge in sight, she sold everything to secure a visitor visa to a "third country" on the far side of the world, the only option available.

Since 2017, R. and her daughters have lived in hiding in the "third country", their visas long expired, leaving them vulnerable to arrest. Her daughters study online, clinging to their dreams, but the constant fear of being caught and imprisoned overshadows their lives. Given their family's history, she doesn't feel it would be safe for them to return to Syria, despite the recent change in regime there. R. has long dreamed of a safe haven where her children can live with dignity, pursue their education, and heal from their trauma.

Our committee's application for the family to come to Canada was submitted to the federal government in March by Victoria's Inter-Cultural Association, after we were able to raise an initial \$40,000 from the community with the organizational support of both Congregation Emanu-El and Christ Church Cathedral.

This past summer of 2025, the family suffered another terrible blow when R. was diagnosed with breast cancer. Under CRA rules, we are not allowed to use any money to help with her medical treatment that was raised through the synagogue, cathedral or ICA designated for supporting the family's resettlement in Canada (for which charitable tax receipts were issued). Thanks to the generosity of people willing to donate without charitable tax breaks, R. is receiving treatment, but the family now is living with the new

fear that her daughters might have to come to Canada alone. We are continuing to raise money separately for R.'s medical treatment.

For the sponsorship to proceed, we still need to raise an additional \$10,000 to meet the minimum amount for the family's support required by the government and the Inter-Cultural Association. The deadline was originally Dec.1 but was extended to Feb. 1 because the committee's fundraising efforts were diverted into helping with R.'s medical costs. We are hoping the sales from the art auction and associated donations will allow us to reach this amount before the end of this year.

To make tax deductible donations to help sponsor R. and her family, please follow the instructions on the donations page. All donations will go towards refugee settlement costs.

Many thanks for helping give R. and her daughters the chance to live here in Victoria and pursue their dreams in safety.

Salaam/Shalom,
Robert Oppenheimer and Dave Conway
For the "Gleams of Hope" Sponsorship Committee