

London Interfaith Refugee Sponsorship Alliance (LIRSA)

LIRSA is a group of churches who sponsor and support individuals and families who have been identified as refugees according to the United Nations Geneva Convention and have been approved as refugee claimants through Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

LIRSA was formed in 1996 and had six members: Siloam, Metropolitan and First-St. Andrew's United Churches; St. Jude's and St. Luke's Anglican Churches; and St. Andrew the Apostle Catholic Church. In 2021, the church members are: Siloam, Riverside and Colborne St. United Churches; St. George's and St. Jude's Anglican Churches.

The work of LIRSA is humanitarian, non-sectarian, and apolitical. The alliance welcomes support from all groups and individuals who share the goal of helping to relieve some of the suffering of people forced to flee their countries, and helping new Canadians make a successful transition to a stable, productive life in Canada.

Sponsorship applications that LIRSA considers may be: Joint Assistance Sponsorships (JAS) with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; private sponsorships; or family-linked sponsorships. Once LIRSA has agreed to help, it is LIRSA's responsibility to provide social and emotional support, advocacy and community liaison in areas such as health, education and employment. In the case of a private sponsorship, LIRSA is also responsible for the financial support of the refugee(s) for one year.

Siloam United Church administers the bank account for funds received and dispenses funds as directed by the chair/members. Monies received are deposited in a dedicated bank account. While some churches contribute a specified amount each year, other church members give an amount when LIRSA welcomes a new family into the city. Participation in the group is not contingent on being able to contribute financially.

LIRSA is also associated with the Westminster College Foundation. This Foundation has very generously granted LIRSA monies to help with medical, dental and vital services that are not covered by government assistance for London and area refugee families. We are indebted to this organization for their help.

The last family sponsored by LIRSA came to London in January of 2020 from Egypt but were originally from Syria. At present, LIRSA is looking into another sponsorship.

The Chair of LIRSA is Margaret (Marel) Fielding representing St. George's Anglican Church; the Treasurer is Peggy Rivard, representing Siloam United Church.