



Immigrant and Refugee  
Community Organization of Manitoba

Fall/Winter 2021 Community Newsletter

## A Community of Belonging

### Greetings from IRCOM!

A lot has been happening at IRCOM and it's about time that we sent you an update! Each and every one of us at IRCOM has a passion for our work and it shows. If you were to drop by IRCOM, you would see adult students in English classes, children with noses in books in Children's Literacy Program, our youth heading off to get homework help, followed by soccer practice ... all with physical distancing, PPE and screening questions, of course, but wonderfully in-person!



**A Recent Donation for our  
Children!**

Thanks to a wonderful organization



called Sleep in Heavenly Peace – Winnipeg, and Dufresne Furniture and Appliances Dream Big Event, 30 IRCOM children are now sleeping in their lovingly hand-crafted beds, with brand new mattresses and bedding donated by our generous friends! These beautiful beds will last a lifetime, and the memories of this warm welcome to Canada will last just as long!

## Afghanistan

When Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) put a call out for help, IRCOM responded. Seeba Wahabi, our homework program Teacher and former IRCOM tenant, did not hesitate. She flew to Toronto and for two weeks she helped welcome Afghan arrivals. Seeba said, reflecting on her experiences as a former refugee, "We just needed that familiar voice to just say, 'Hey, I'm an Afghan,' and 'Welcome' in our language. So just being able to provide that for them last night was so powerful. "You could see it in their eyes. They were relieved, just knowing that we were there." Seeba is now back in Winnipeg and is leading the Homework & Education for Youth (HEY) Program, while still being a community support for newly arrived Afghan families. We also have suites coming available for Afghan arrivals (photo credit CBC.ca).





## How have families at IRCOM coped with the pandemic?

When everything shut down in March 2020, we could see our families were no strangers to empty streets and runs on the grocery store. They did their best with what they had in those early days of the pandemic and showed incredible resiliency throughout. IRCOM also realized, quickly, that many would fall through the cracks if we didn't step up. Within the first 30 days of the pandemic in 2020, IRCOM had created a host of new services: a Community Cupboard, a Tech-Lending Library, an innovative First Language Call Centre so newcomers with language barriers could learn about COVID-19, about prevention, transmission and all the new rules - in their own language! In those early days, our team showed amazing creativity and flexibility. We had to learn all sorts of new technology overnight and then bring our participants into this new digital age. English classes, tax preparation, homework help, children's programming and more – all went on-line!



## #FindingHomeAgain

Jenan came from Syria as a refugee. Upon arriving, she quickly joined English classes at IRCOM which provided on-site childcare for her daughter. While attending class, Jenan met our Access to Benefits Navigator and asked for help to get a birth certificate for her newborn baby. The Navigator asked if she had opened a RESP account for her kids. Jenan replied no and, due to her religious beliefs related to bank fees and interest, she preferred to not open one, but she really wanted to save for her children's education. IRCOM's Navigator talked about Jenan's needs with her financial institution, and together, they came up with a solution that worked. That IRCOM combination of expertise, cultural awareness and advocacy, plus a responsive institution, enabled Jenan to open a Term RESP account with no interest for her five children. Listening to Jenan and seeking creative solutions was the beginning of a long and trusting relationship between Jenan and IRCOM. Jenan learned how to



claim tax credits to help care for her blind mother-in-law, access free tax filing services, and participated in IRCOM's Saving Circle program

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Recently, IRCOM was asked to speak to the United Way of Winnipeg's Board of Trustees about our COVID-19 response and were happy to share our successes and learnings with leaders from across the city. One key message shared by all agencies presenting was the importance of our work in food security, income support, and *social housing*. Our collective work in these areas helped vulnerable families make it through the worst of the pandemic.

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## #MeetOurStaffMondays



Okay, so not all of us are social media hounds! However, we want to use our social media, website and other platforms to share a bit more about the amazing team at IRCOM. They are the bedrock of our organization and they are what make our model such a success.



Lily has worked at IRCOM in both Childcare and Housing. She says, "To me, the best part is the close contact I have with the families and the relationship I have developed with them."

We asked her what her favourite part about working at IRCOM is: "IRCOM feels like something familiar in a city that is not familiar to me. Our values and the commitment to the community members we serve bring me close to what I value and to what I did back home. It is a unique feeling to work in a place like IRCOM."

Lily is a spectacular employee

For example, meet Emmanuel, our Youth and Family Support Worker. He says that his role “really brings together a diverse set of skills that I am passionate about. In my role I get to do a little bit of psychosocial education, conflict resolution and awareness facilitation, community resource connections and advocacy.”

He loves working at IRCOM because “IRCOM is like the headquarters of diversity and inclusion in Winnipeg. Every single work day I encounter so many different cultures, languages, greetings, worldviews and (my favorite) foods. There are so many people from different backgrounds living together.”

with a lot of passions. One cause that’s close to her heart and something she has been consistently fighting for is women’s rights and women’s safety. “From my personal life and personal experiences, to what I have studied in school, to what I have learned at different work places, everything has fueled this passion and it is definitely how I live my life and make my decisions daily.”



*Did you know that 23% of IRCOM staff are former tenants?*



If you or someone in your family is on social media, please follow IRCOM on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter! This is a wonderful way to learn about the



exciting things we are doing in programs, meet our staff, and stay connected!

Speaking of staff, we'd like to introduce the newest member of the IRCOM family: Ronin Philip Cyrus, the son of our Child Care Program staff Randall and his wife Rachel. At his birth, Randall spoke eloquently of the tenets that have shaped their lives and the pillars they plan to live by: love, improvement, balance and communication. We are so glad to meet Ronin!

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## Odds 'n Ends

- For Giving Tuesday on November 30<sup>th</sup> we have something fun and non-monetary planned! Using the hashtag **#EhCommunityofBelonging** 😊 we will invite Canadians to share their favourite Canadian word and also "Welcome to Canada" messages that we in turn will share with our newly arrived families at IRCOM. Join the fun and help us create an **#EhCommunityofBelonging**
- We will be fundraising this December – look out for our Holiday Appeal letter and please spread the word!
- For donations of goods. For most items, we don't have a good way of sorting, storing and distributing goods. You can support newcomer families of all faiths by donating goods to the Canadian Muslim Women's Institute's Donation Centre [CMWI Donation Centre](#). For donations of furniture, [Centre Flavie](#) is a great place to support!



## Support Young Entrepreneurs!

On Tuesday November 30<sup>th</sup>, 5:00 - 7:30 PM, a group of aspiring IRCOM youth entrepreneurs will be hosting an art sale. If you want to attend, please RSVP with [ltioviea@ircom.ca](mailto:ltioviea@ircom.ca). Mandatory vaccine + ID will be required and we will manage the size of the gathering through RSVPs.

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IRCOM has a new Executive Director. We were sad to see Dorota leave, but we know she will remain connected with us from her new vantage point as the CEO of the Manitoba Museum. My name is Shereen Denetto and I have been at IRCOM for 7 years in senior leadership positions and

stepped away to work at another organization for the past year. After a national search, I was extremely thrilled to be offered the position of ED at this exceptional organization. I've always said that IRCOM is a place of the heart. It feels good to be back (photo credit: Jessica Lee, Winnipeg Free Press).



In the coming months, the team and I welcome you to connect with IRCOM in ways that feel comfortable.

Mention our good work at a family dinner. Suggest that your newly retired friend volunteer in English classes. Talk about the importance of supporting refugees to Canada - check out our website for our blog about important refugee issues and perspectives. Ask us to give a talk to your high school class about welcoming refugees. Stay connected and be a part of the IRCOM community. You can reach us at [info@ircom.ca](mailto:info@ircom.ca).

Wishing you a wonderful winter season full of family, friends, stories and laughter.

*Shereen*



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