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Occupational Therapists as Allies in Refugee Settlement: An Examination of the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

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Rationale: The need for refugee re-settlement has never been greater as unprecedented numbers of displaced persons flee their homelands. Upon arrival in host countries, refugees experience occupational challenges related to systemic barriers including poverty, inadequate social supports, and discrimination. Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (CPSRP) engages small groups of community members to provide refugee re-settlement support, though how this supportive relationship is framed is unclear. An anti-oppressive response to this lack of clarity is the notion of allyship. While there is growing international interest in the CPSRP there is a dearth of research examining how the private sponsorship relationship shapes the re-settlement journey, nor how occupational therapists working from an anti-oppressive framework can be allies in this process.

Objectives: This presentation aims to describe the CPSRP and to share insights from the narratives of sponsors and refugees about their private sponsorship relationship as they pertain to key principles of allyship and occupational engagement.

Method: With an anti-oppression focus on allyship, the narratives of both former sponsors and refugees are examined as they relate to how the private sponsorship relationship shapes their journey towards re-settlement into Canadian society.

Results: Preliminary inquiry raise questions about trust, paternalism, sponsor motivations vis-a-vis refugee expectations, power inequities, and dilemmas about *doing for* versus *doing with*.

Conclusion: The private sponsorship model provides a venue for occupational therapists to serve as allies in the refugee re-settlement journey. By framing the occupational therapy role in terms of allyship, power inequities and structural barriers are highlighted.