

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH CANADA CONVERSATIONS

Centering Community in Community-Based Research

Centering Community in Homestay Hosting: Supporting Displaced Ukrainian Women in Toronto

With...

Dr. Areej Al-Hamad, Mr. Jalal Nazari, and Dr. Kateryna Metersky

May 21st, 2026 | 12:00 - 1:00 PM ET



Welcome | Bienvenue | Boozhoo

We respectfully acknowledge that the Community-Based Research Canada (CBRCanada) Secretariat is located on unceded land promised to the Six Nations of the Grand River in the Haldimand Treaty of 1784, and on the traditional territory of the Attawondron (Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. CBRCanada stands with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and is committed to embracing Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous-led research to advance justice and reconciliation.



Community-Based Research Canada

Recherche partenariale du Canada

www.communityresearchcanada.ca



Community Based Research Canada

Guests:

Dr. Areej Al-Hamad

Assistant Professor, Daphne
Cockwell School of Nursing,
Toronto Metropolitan University

Mr. Jalal Nazari

Settlement Worker & Former
Community Host Program
Coordinator, Romero House

Dr. Kateryna Metersky

Interim Associate Director, Collaborative
Nursing Degree Program, and Associate
Professor, Daphne Cockwell School of
Nursing, Toronto Metropolitan University

CENTERING COMMUNITY IN HOMESTAY HOSTING

Toronto
Metropolitan
University

Supporting Displaced Ukrainian Women in Toronto



Presenters

Dr. Areej Al-Hamad, Assistant Professor, TMU, Board of Directors, CBRCanada

Dr. Kateryna Metersky, Associate Professor and Interim Associate Director, TMU

Mr. Jalal Nazari, Settlement Worker / Community Host Program Coordinator, Romero House

Why this conversation matters

Homestay is never only about housing - it is also about power, safety, reciprocity, and the everyday work of making space for one another.

Toronto context

High housing costs made private hosting a critical settlement pathway for many newly arrived Ukrainian women.

Community context

Community organizations already knew that hosting works best when relationships, expectations, and support systems are treated seriously.

Research question

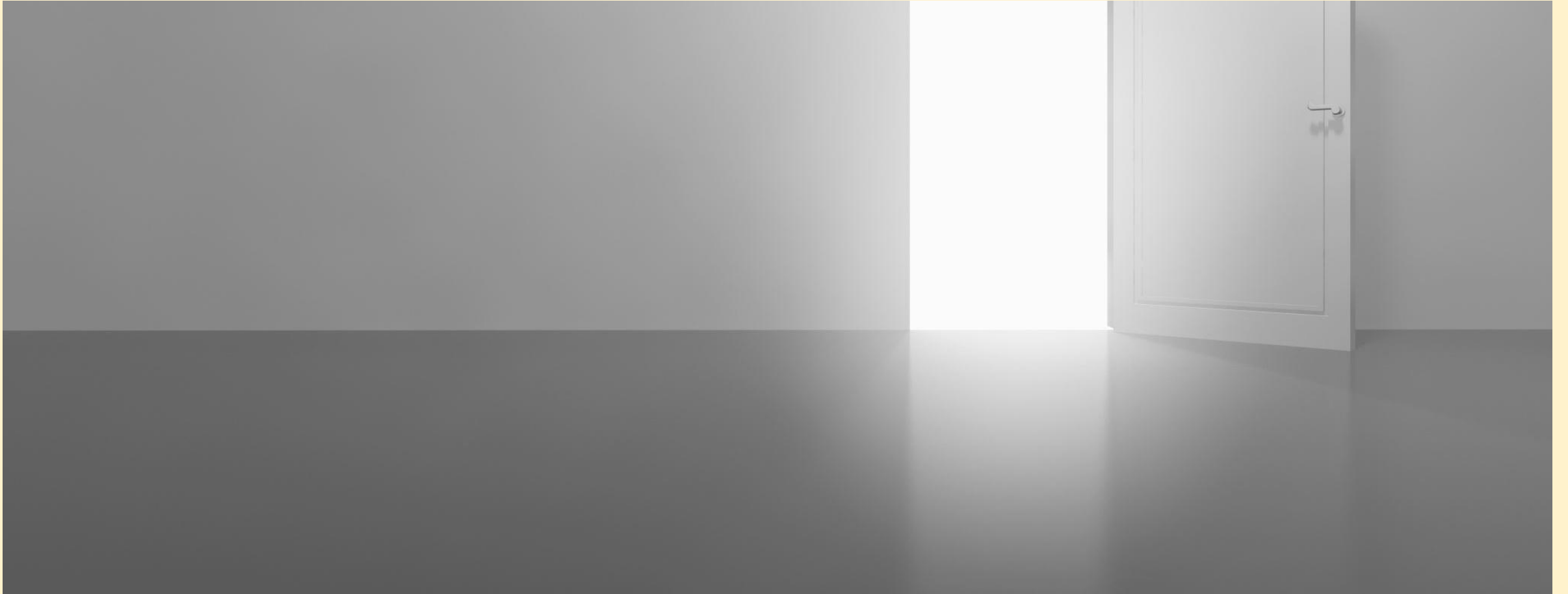
The project asked what becomes visible when we study hosting without centering displaced women's own interpretations.

This talk focuses on what community-centred research added beyond a narrow service model.

Today's Presentation

- Romero House as a community partner
- How community shaped the research design
- What women taught us about everyday hosting
- What this means for community-centred hosting going forward

Poem -The Door That Opened



Romero House was not just a recruitment site

It was the clearest reminder that hosting is a community practice, supported through trust, accompaniment, and volunteer infrastructure.

Romero House

A community homestay hosting program for refugees, rooted in relationship-building rather than simple placement.

An example of volunteer-led settlement support that recognizes hosting as social, emotional, and practical work.

A partner that helped keep the project accountable to community realities and not only academic framing.

Why this mattered

Community partners see what formal systems often miss: everyday tensions, informal care, the labour of matching, and the importance of follow-up when placements become difficult.

Partnership lesson

When community organizations are treated as knowledge partners, research becomes more ethically grounded, more practically useful, and more responsive to lived complexity.



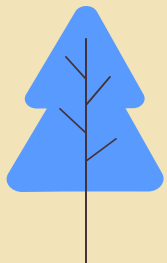
Community hosting works through relationship, routine, and human connection - not housing alone.



Toronto Refugee Community non-Profit Homes and Services

ROMERO HOUSE

**A Community of Welcoming
Refugee Claimants**

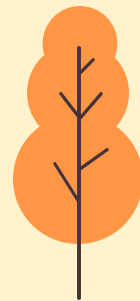
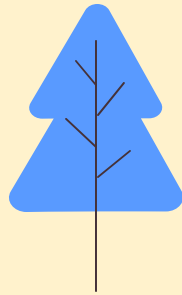


Jalal Nazari, Apr 2026



MISSION

The Romero House community welcomes refugee claimants with housing, immigration and settlement support.



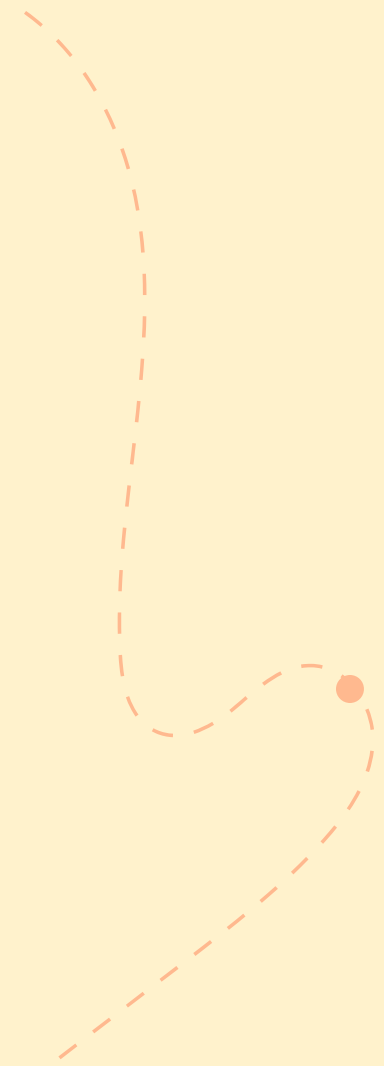
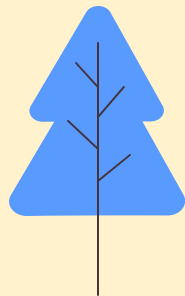
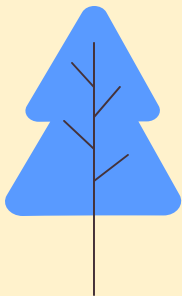
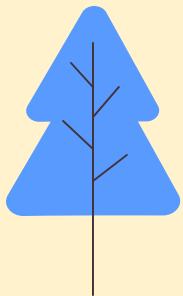
VISION

Refugee claimants in our neighbourhoods are safe, thriving, and know that they belong.



Programs

- TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
- GUEST SUPPORT
- **COMMUNITY HOST**
- ALUMNI SUPPORT
- COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING
- MATERIAL SUPPORT
- ADVOCACY

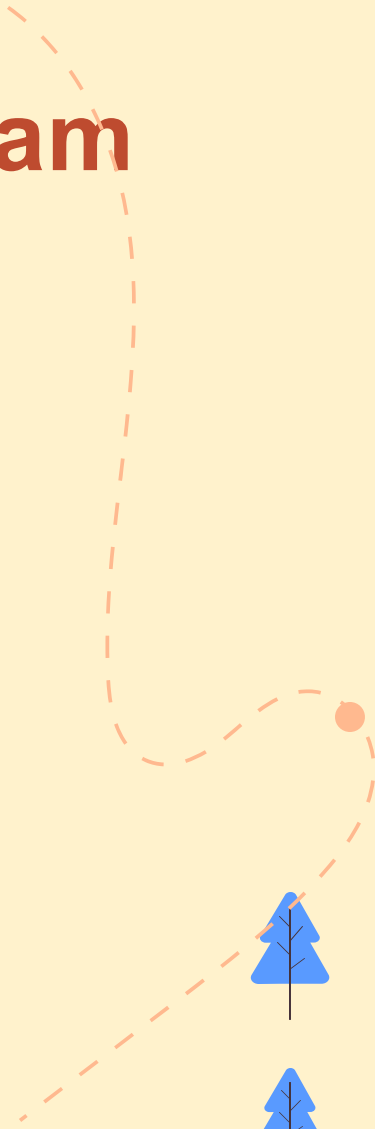
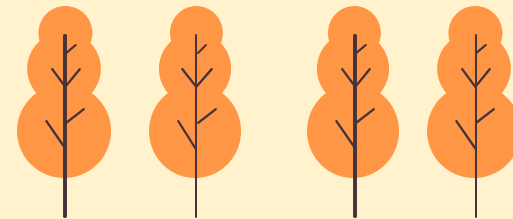


Community Host Program

Overview

Founded in 2016 in response to chronic capacity issues in Toronto's shelter system, the program connects generous volunteers who have extra space in their homes with refugee claimants seeking interim housing as they acclimatize to life in Canada.

For many individuals and families, Romero House's Community Host Program is their only path to avoiding homelessness.

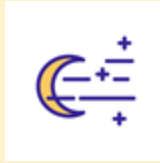


Impacts

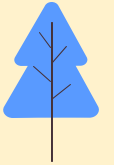
Sep 2024 - Dec 2025



Total Matches **11**



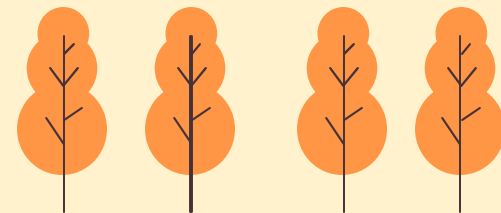
Total Nights (Stay) **+900**



Total #Guests **14 (7 adults, 7 kids)**

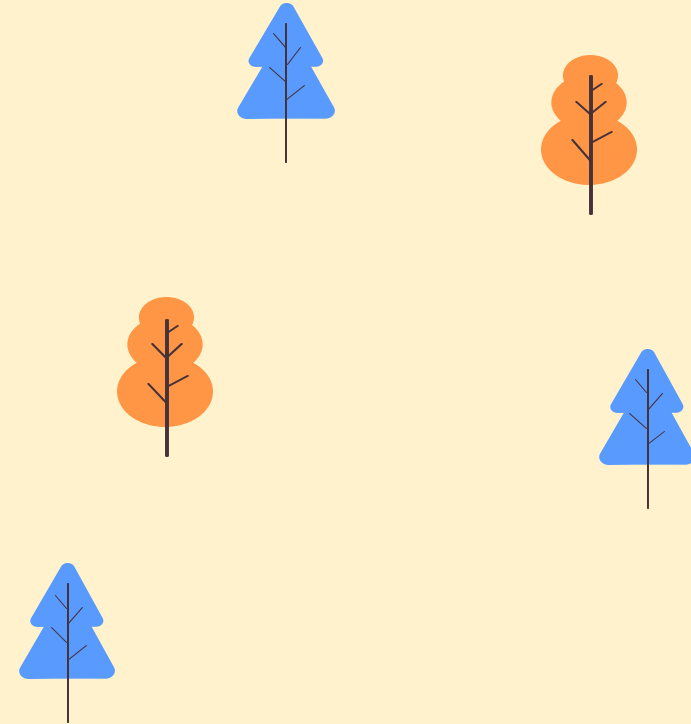
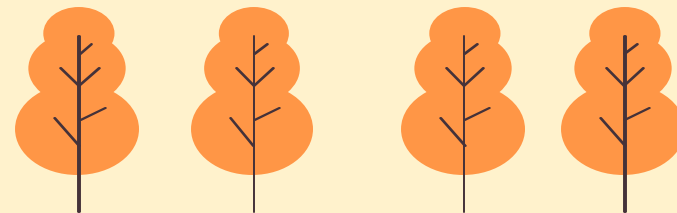
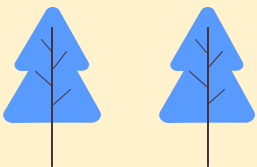


Total #Guests moving to permanent housing **12 (6 adults, 6 kids)**



Host Recruitment Process

- Application Form
- Reference Check
- Interview
- Onboarding Host
- Pairing Guests and Hosts
- Signing the Agreement



How community shaped the research

The study was built with community relationships, participant-created materials, and feedback loops that returned meaning to participants.

● **Community entry**
Research began from settlement realities and community concern, not from detached observation.

● **Photovoice**
Participants used photography to portray what homestay felt like in everyday moments.

● **Co-created metaphors**
Women built metaphors from their own images to express complexity, safety, gratitude, and loss.

● **Focus group meaning-making**
Interpretation was strengthened collectively rather than imposed by the researcher alone.

● **Knowledge mobilization**
Creative outputs were intended to travel beyond academia into community conversation.

What made this community-centred?

Participants did not simply answer questions; they shaped the materials through photos and metaphors.

Meaning was returned to participants during group discussion and interpretation.

Creative methods made it easier to hold contradictory feelings like safety and dependence at the same time.



What “centering community” looked like in practice

Centering community was not a slogan. It showed up in how the project listened, interpreted, and mobilized knowledge.

In practice, this meant...

Participants chose the images, symbols, and stories that carried meaning for them.

Community realities informed what counted as relevant knowledge.

Contradictions were kept visible instead of forced into tidy success stories.

Outputs were designed for public and community conversation, not only journal audiences.

Why this matters for CBRCanada

Community-based research is strongest when lived experience is treated as theory-building knowledge, not only as testimony. That is what makes findings more grounded, more ethical, and more usable.

It also helps resist overly individual explanations of settlement by showing the role of programs, relationships, and structural conditions.

“The resulting scholarship kept community meaning visible instead of smoothing out contradiction.”

What women taught us #1

Shared homes could feel deeply supportive - and still require ongoing negotiation around privacy, routine, and belonging.

“When I come back to the house, they always have their support, love and I feel like home.”

At the same time, women described hosting as shaped by trust, rules, dependency, and the need to negotiate privacy and expectations.

This tells us that hosting is not only shelter. It is a social relationship that requires care on both sides.



Cardboard House metaphor:
safety, fragility, gratitude

What this revealed

- Warmth and belonging could coexist with unequal power.
- Communication mattered when household norms and expectations differed.
- Safety was emotional as well as physical.
- Belonging often depended on being included in ordinary routines.

What women taught us #2

Women were not passive recipients of help. They adapted, interpreted, contributed, and actively remade what “home” could mean in a shared household.



Adaptation here was relational. Women were learning a new context while also contributing to the remaking of “home” through everyday exchange, routines, and emotional labour.

What coexistence looked like

Learning household routines and boundaries while maintaining dignity.

Helping in the home when possible and participating in shared life.

Building gratitude without erasing difficulty or homesickness.

Creating moments of ordinary belonging inside displacement.

What women and Romero House point toward

Community-centred hosting needs infrastructure - not only goodwill.

Prepare hosts

Offer orientation on trauma, privacy, boundaries, cultural humility, and realistic expectations.

Clarify expectations

Use host agreements or shared conversations about routines, guests, communication, finances, and length of stay.

Create support pathways

Make mediation, check-ins, and rapid problem-solving available when tensions arise.

Support navigation

Newcomers need help connecting to transportation, services, work, childcare, language, and longer-term housing.



“It would be nice if there were a host program that is coordinated well by organizations... then it is more stabilized and safe.”

Why creative methods mattered

The metaphors were not decoration. They made difficult, layered experiences visible in ways ordinary language could not hold on its own.



The Cardboard House

Stability, fragility, gratitude



Wall Hanging / Collage

Hope, change, happiness



Ferris Wheel of Photos

**Ups and downs of
adaptation**



Warm Safe House

**Rootedness across two
homes**

These participant-created metaphors helped move the project beyond description into public dialogue, reflection, and community learning.

What this means for community organizations and CBRCanada

Community-centred hosting is strongest when it treats housing, relationship, and settlement support as inseparable.

For community organizations

See hosting as an ongoing relationship to support, not a one-time placement.

Build check-ins, mediation, and transition planning into hosting programs.

Value newcomers' own interpretations as central evidence for program design.

For researchers

Treat community partners as knowledge collaborators, not only gatekeepers.

Use methods that allow contradiction, emotion, and symbolism to remain visible.

Design outputs that can return to community spaces and public dialogue.

For CBRCanada

This project offers a concrete example of how community-based research can centre lived experience, strengthen partner knowledge, and produce outputs that matter beyond academia.

A strong community research ecosystem does not separate evidence from relationship.

From research to public dialogue

The project also moved toward a documentary form so community knowledge could travel beyond academia and into public conversation.

Disclaimer Statement:

Thank you

Centering community means centering the people, relationships, and organizations that make hosting possible.

Questions and discussion

To Know more about the project, contact :
Dr. Areej Al-Hamad, RN, MScN, PhD(HP), PhD(N)
Assistant Professor, Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing
Faculty of Community Services, Toronto Metropolitan University
Email: areej.hamad@torontomu.ca

