

## 2025 Newcomer Landlord Award



This year marked the tenth anniversary of the Newcomer Landlord Award, and we were proud to once again celebrate it as part of National Housing Day, hosted by the Region of Waterloo. Since 2016, the award has recognized landlords whose leadership, compassion, and commitment help newcomers find a safe and welcoming place to call home in Waterloo Region.

Each year, more than 10,000 newcomers make Waterloo Region their home - arriving to study, work, reunite with family, or seek safety. In recent years, our community has also welcomed refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine and, most recently, displaced

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Rohingya families. As Waterloo Region grows toward a population of one million, immigrants will make up a significant share of that growth. Across all newcomer groups, access to safe, suitable and affordable housing remains one of the most urgent and consistent needs.

Over the past decade, the Newcomer Landlord Award has celebrated individuals and organizations who remove barriers, offer flexible and responsive support, and help newcomers build a sense of belonging. Their work strengthens our community.

The Newcomer Landlord Award recognizes outstanding contributions across three categories. The 2025 recipients are:

### Small Landlord Category

- **Avisekh Ghosh & Satarupa Ghosh**

Nominated by Kokui Appiah, Avisekh Ghosh & Satarupa Ghosh were recognized for the care and thoughtfulness they extended to Kokui's family during a challenging housing search. As an international student with young children, Kokui faced significant barriers in securing a rental home. Instead of focusing solely on documents or financial details, the Ghosh family took the time to get to know her family creating a foundation of trust and respect. The Ghosh family introduced them to neighbours, offered toys for the children, recommended local schools, and shared practical tips to help them settle into the community. They also paused rent increases after the first year, prioritizing stability over profit. Through their warmth and generosity, the Ghosh family transformed a rental property into a true home and built a lasting bond with their tenants.

- **Onder Özsever**

Nominated by tenants Sevgi Celebi and Hasan Ahmet Gokce, Onder Özsever was recognized for his exceptional professionalism, compassion and commitment to

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creating a respectful, inclusive living environment. As a property manager, he consistently demonstrated flexibility and understanding - particularly when families experienced temporary financial hardship. Mr. Özsever willingness to adjust payment schedules, revisit lease terms and approach each situation with empathy reflects his deep concern for the well-being of the people who live in his units. His thoughtful, tenant-centered approach sets an example of what compassionate property management can look like and contributes to a more welcoming community for newcomers.

### Large Landlord Category

- **Cory de Villiers**

Nominated by Stephanie Goertz from the WR Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis, Cory de Villiers received recognition for his leadership as part of Releven, an organization that purchases properties and rents them to nonprofits at reduced rates. One of these facilities supports Ukrainian newcomers in Cambridge.

A recent rent reduction initiated by Cory allowed the organization to continue operating the site without financial loss. Through this partnership, WR Grassroots has housed more than 43 families, offering on-site food distribution and a donated furniture storage hub that supports families across the region. Cory's actions reflect a commitment to practical, sustained support for newcomer housing.

- **Karen Martin**

Also nominated by WR Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis, Karen Martin was recognized for being the first landlord to partner with the organization during the early stages of the Ukrainian response. She transformed a former retirement residence in the rural townships into a Ukrainian guest house with 12 rooms, providing housing for up to 22 people at a time. Beyond offering the property, Karen took on the role of house coordinator: overseeing volunteers, screening and welcoming new families, helping

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tenants navigate challenges, purchasing essential supplies when needed and fostering a supportive living environment. Under her leadership, the guest house has become one of WR Grassroots' most stable, low-turnover sites, having housed more than 35 families.

### Nonprofit Category

- **Sean Campbell – Union Cooperative**

Nominated by Zakim Tokhy from Reception House Waterloo Region, Sean Campbell was honoured for his ongoing commitment to providing affordable, dignified housing for refugees and low-income families. As Executive Director of Union Cooperative, Sean leads efforts to expand community-owned, accessible housing that prioritizes people often excluded from the private rental market.

Union Cooperative consistently demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness by arranging viewings on short notice and streamlining application processes to remove barriers such as credit checks. Many refugee clients are pre-approved for housing, significantly reducing their wait times and easing the stress of securing a home. The cooperative's long-term plans to develop additional units specifically for low-income families highlight a sustained commitment to meeting urgent housing needs in Waterloo Region.

We are grateful for the vital role the Newcomer Landlord Award recipients play in helping newcomers build safe, stable, and meaningful lives in our community. THIS IS HOME.

Find out more about the Newcomer Landlord Award and explore past recipients who have contributed to welcoming newcomers and refugees at:

<https://www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/thisishome/>