

PROVOCATIVE PRACTICE

MOVEMENT



An Interview with Ariel Troster.

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Ariel Troster is a senior communications specialist who focuses on progressive public policy, campaign management and government relations. She has worked with [Rainbow Haven](#), a local settlement and support group, to sponsor LGBTQ refugees to Ottawa by raising money, finding donations, providing one-on-one mentorship, and advocating politically for the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers.

CUASA: Why is Rainbow Haven important to the Ottawa community?

AT: We are a group of volunteers that help sponsor and settle LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers in Ottawa. So far, we have directly sponsored 10 people, and indirectly supported many others. We work with one family or individual at a time, helping them escape countries with harsh laws against or dangerous situations for LGBTQ people. So far, we have helped people from Iraq, Gambia, Guatemala, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Syria.

CUASA: How do you see your work with Rainbow Haven as an extension of your work with progressive public policy?

AT: Well, I have worked for my whole career in altruistic or equity-seeking organizations: NGOs and unions. But I work in communications, so I am pretty much always behind a computer screen. Volunteering with newcomers is a great way to meet people in the community and to do something that feels more concrete. It also gives me a window into how government policies are impacting people on the ground. For example, the housing crisis in Ottawa is really laid bare when you are trying to find affordable rental housing for newcomers. And our fractured mental health system is almost impossible to access. It is not easy.

The logo for Rainbow Haven features the words "rainbow haven" in a bold, black, lowercase sans-serif font. The text is centered horizontally and overlaid on a background of horizontal rainbow stripes. The stripes are in the order of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple from top to bottom. The text is slightly blurred, giving it a soft, ethereal appearance.

rainbow haven

CUASA: What are some ways that we, as CUASA members, can think about building spaces on campus that allow for more types of movement particularly as it impacts LGBTQ refugees and asylum seekers?

AT: I think you should consider sponsoring a refugee or several. Canada's private sponsorship program allows any group of five people to do this fairly easily. There are so many people desperate to make it to safety in Canada. It is a concrete way to show solidarity and make a difference in people's lives.

CUASA: What are some ways that the pandemic has made movement even more difficult for LGBTQ refugees and asylum-seekers?

AT: Well, having the borders closed has obviously been a huge barrier. We were able to bring in one family whose sponsorship we had been working on for years. But other than that, it is still really tough to get people to Canada right now. We need people to advocate to the federal government to accept refugees and open the border to people seeking human rights protection. It's time.





CUASA: Is there anything else about Rainbow Haven you would like us to know? (Or anything you'd like to be asked that I didn't?)

AT: Just that LGBTQ+ people often face the double oppression of being displaced by war, and also being rejected by their families and communities for being queer or trans. So many desperately need to get to safety and also need culturally competent support when they arrive here. I would encourage your members to consider becoming refugee sponsors. It is a really rewarding experience and so needed.

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