Overview

This document is intended to help you and your sponsorship group prepare for the arrival of your newcomer(s) and covers the following topics:

- Airport Arrival
- Emotional Considerations
- First Day
- Confidentiality and Privacy

Airport Arrival

The airport arrival is often a much-anticipated moment for the sponsoring group. Listed below are some key considerations to keep in mind when planning for this event.

- **Welcome Sign:** there are generally a lot of people at the arrival area so it is a good idea to make a welcome sign with the newcomers' names in both English and their native language to hold up when they exit the arrival area. This way they have something to look for in the sea of people at the arrival hall.
- **Small Groups:** meeting too many people at the airport might be overwhelming for the newcomer(s), especially after the long trip they just made. It is therefore recommended to have a smaller group meeting the newcomers at the airport.
- **Customs:** for people arriving at the airport it might take time to go through customs so be patient while waiting. Wait at the passenger pick-up area until the refugees arrive with an IRIS (Immigration Reception and Information Services) representative. Staff at IRIS helps the refugees through the Canadian customs and immigration at the airport. They wear red sweaters and are easily recognizable.
- **Translator:** remember to organize for a translator to attend the airport arrival if language might be a problem for communicating with the newcomers. It may be overwhelming with the long trip to Canada and then to arrive in a country where they do not understand the language. To have someone speaking the newcomer(s)' language at arrival may ease some discomfort that might exist for the newcomer(s). If a translation person cannot be arranged, you might want to try a translation app like iTranslate which can be downloaded for free. Just be aware that they are not 100% accurate.
- **Introductions:** the newcomer(s) may not be aware of your role as a sponsoring group when they arrive. It depends on how much information they have received before departure. Therefore, as a sponsoring group you should include in your introductions at the airport that you will support them through their settlement in Canada and also emphasize that you will be around to help them out when needed. This way they learn which people will be returning to assist them throughout the first year. This should also be repeated at a later occasion such as when talking about expectations of the newcomer(s) as the airport arrival can be overwhelming and it might be difficult to take in all the information given at once.
- **Children:** it is important not to separate parents and children without the parents understanding or agreement , especially in the beginning. It might seem more convenient to only bring the parents when going for appointments etc. but this can become a very uncomfortable experience for both parents and children. Remember what they have, and are, experiencing is probably very traumatic and staying together might be a great comfort for them. If there is ever a need to separate parents and children for any reason, make sure that you do it with the parents' agreement.
- **Photos:** as a sponsoring group you will probably want to take pictures with the newcomers when they arrive at the airport. Remember that they are probably very tired after the long trip and are faced with many new impressions at once. If you decide to take pictures, ask the newcomers if it is ok and only take a few pictures to make the process quick.

Emotional Considerations

Mixed emotions surrounding the actual arrival of sponsored refugees highlight how important the first meeting is and how lasting its impression.

When you first receive the newcomers, it is important that you are aware that newcomers might be experiencing a

bewildering number of things all at once, and so be sure to keep the following in mind:

- When newcomers arrive they may be exhausted and/or scared—they may not even feel particularly happy to be in Canada, as they may not have not left their country by choice. Their feelings may be quite different than yours and very mixed.
- Make sure you always communicate to the newcomers what you are doing and why.
- Be sensitive to the emotional ups and downs newcomers will experience. Give them privacy and enough time to rest.
- Be sensitive to the overload newcomers might experience as they are introduced to many, many new things all at once.
- Be patient and prepared to explain anything as many times as necessary. Do not assume that the newcomers feel comfortable asking for information or help; be aware of signs of confusion.
- Be sensitive to culture shock and the frustrations of adjustment.
- Be aware of the newcomers' needs to make their own decisions right from the very beginning. Never make a decision for the newcomer; make the decision with the newcomer, aiming, whenever possible, to be a mentor providing alternatives and resources.

First Day

After picking the refuges up at the airport there are a few things that need to be covered during the first day.

Remember that the refugees are probably tired and overwhelmed from travelling so try to keep information to a necessary minimum during the day of arrival.

Listed below are some things that you need to go through during the first day:

- **Welcome Binder:** if possible, it would be a great benefit to provide the newcomers with a welcome binder for their orientation. This binder should be prepared ahead of time. As there will be a lot of information to take in for the newcomers during their first week, having it in written format gives them a chance to look over the information whenever they need it.

  The binder can be given to the newcomers on the first day but do not expect them to look through it right away. After the first week's orientation you can ask them to go back to review the information in the folder.
- **Emergency/911:** one of the most important things to do during the day of arrival is to give the newcomer(s) information about how to call 911 in case of emergency, as well as provide them with a phone to do so. The sponsoring group also needs to explain the difference between calling 911 and the local police office and provide them that phone number as well.
- **Medical:** Be sure to provide information about the nearest walk-in clinic and hospital and explain the differences between the two such as to which one they should go for certain specific services. For sponsoring groups that are located in Alberta, you can also explain what Health Link is, and when and how they can make use of it.
- **Committee Member Photos:** it is suggested that the group provides a picture of each committee member with their name attached as the newcomers can be overwhelmed by all the new people and will want to know who they can trust.
- **Important Contacts:** provide a list of important phone numbers that the newcomers need, such as emergency numbers and a list of phone numbers to committee members who are available 24 hours during the first days after arrival in case of emergency.
- **Home Orientation**: make sure that the newcomers know how to use appliances, such as shower, toilet, telephone, stove, fire alarm etc.
- **Nourishment:** Have easy to make snacks/food/drinks for the first couple of days. You can research and buy food items popular in their country that can make them feel more at home.
- **Incidental Funds:** provide a small amount of cash for the newcomers.
- **Family Calls:** give them the opportunity to call their family inside and outside Canada. Provide them with a phone card or phone with a phone plan and explain how it works and how much they can call. If the newcomers

have to buy the phone themselves, take them to a store where they can buy a cheap phone and make sure they get a plan or phone card that suits their needs.

- **Visits:** before you leave arrange for a time to meet the next day.

Confidentiality and Privacy

There are many reasons to maintain the privacy of the refugee newcomer families. Some are related to common sense, others to the law in Canada.

A basic guideline will be to envision how you would like to have your privacy and the confidentiality of your situation and that of your family ensured. Add to that the needs of refugee families who have been traumatized and are now in a society and a context that they do not know or may not understand.

The trust that you are able to develop with refugee newcomers will depend to a great extent on how well they perceive that you guard their privacy and safety.

Some basic do's:

- Telephone first or make an appointment before going over to the refugees' homes. This is common practice in Canada. It also allows refugee newcomers to know that their home is theirs.
- Wait for an invitation to enter their homes. Take down information on those wishing to contact the family and then relay that information to the refugees and help them make the connection if they wish to do so.
- Discussion within the sponsorship group around practical aspects of settlement is important but those matters that are very personal should be discussed on a *need to know* basis among those who are directly involved in providing support. Avoid *gossip*.
- Provide protection from media attention by acting as a mediator and determining the interest of the refugees in responding to media interest.
- In accessing support from settlement agencies and other community organizations, act as a liaison to connect the refugee newcomers directly with the support service.

Some basic don'ts:

- Do not publish, promote or distribute to anyone or any organization the names, address and telephone number of any member of the refugee families without their specific permission.
- Do not discuss their private and personal affairs with any individual or any member of an organization without their permission. This includes discussion with other members of the sponsorship group and with settlement organizations.
- Do not talk *around* the refugee newcomers with others when they are present unless the refugees are directly involved in the dialogue.
- Do not expect agencies and organizations to keep you completely informed on their work with the refugee newcomers. They are bound by privacy legislation.

Female Refugees:

One of the more important points related to visits and privacy is the visits with female refugees.

Due to the power imbalance between a sponsoring group member and the refugees, **no men from the sponsoring group should be alone with sponsored newcomer women, especially in their home**. The women may have a history of abuse or have experienced other situations that have led to the lack of trust in men and it is therefore important to be extra conscious about this.

The women may also feel uncomfortable being alone with a man for religious or cultural reasons. Make sure to always have a woman from the sponsoring group present when a man visits newcomer women. This is out of respect for the woman.

If there are concerns about this ethical practice please contact your SAH representative.