

# Best Practices Series Volume III

## Sponsoring Visa Office- Referred (VOR) Cases



**The Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP)** provides resources and information services to meet the ongoing information and training needs of private sponsors of refugees in Canada.

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## FOREWORD

Volume 3 of the Best Practices Series focuses on sponsoring Visa Office Referred, or VORs, cases. These are refugee applicants who have already been assessed by Canadian visa officers abroad and have met the eligibility and admissibility requirements for resettlement to Canada. Usually, these refugees are identified and referred for resettlement to a Canadian visa office abroad by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The identification and assessment process is similar to that for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs); however, unlike GARs, visa office-referred refugees have to be sponsored by private groups in Canada before obtaining entry visas. Usually, VOR cases are proposed to private sponsoring groups upon their request to the Canadian government. Sometimes, VOR movements are also organized in response to refugee crises in different parts of the world (e.g. for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and Iraqi refugees in the Middle East).

As with sponsor-referred cases, under normal circumstances VORs have to be supported by private sponsoring groups in Canada for a period of 12 months or until the refugee becomes self-sufficient, whichever comes first. The support includes financial commitment,

Under the PSR Program, there are two options for identifying potential sponsorship cases. The first option, which is a sponsor-referred sponsorship, allows private sponsors to identify a refugee whom they wish to assist.

The second option, **visa office-referred sponsorship**, occurs when either a sponsoring group asks CIC to refer a refugee applicant for their consideration or when a visa office requests that the Matching Centre (at NHQ Ottawa) finds a sponsor for an approved refugee applicant.

“The Matching Centre at CIC national headquarters in Ottawa administers an inventory of “visa office-referred” cases that have already been selected but require a private sponsorship before a permanent resident visa can be issued. Sponsoring groups may request profiles of refugee cases from CIC.” The sponsoring group is given limited time to decide whether to proceed with the sponsorship or consider other profiles. “Visa office-referred cases are normally ready to travel to Canada within one to four months of being matched with a sponsor. However, delays may occur in some ‘travel-ready’ cases because of problems in arranging exit permits, travel documents, etc.” Once the sponsorship is signed, CIC will provide the sponsor with more accurate information regarding departure and arrival dates, as well as any particular settlement needs that might exist in transit and in the first few weeks after the refugees have arrived in Canada.

Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/ref-sponsor/section-2-09.asp>

settlement assistance, as well as emotional and social support.

Despite many similarities with sponsor-referred cases, VORs are different in that they may not have any connection to Canada and, thus, may not get support from relatives or friends after arrival, which is often the case with sponsor-referred refugees. Therefore, VOR cases require a slightly different approach in terms of sponsors' preparations and provision of settlement assistance after refugees' arrival.

This volume offers promising practices that were collected from various sponsoring groups across Canada that have previously sponsored VOR refugees. These stories address different aspects of this type of sponsorship, including some difficulties that may arise throughout the sponsorship process and offer helpful suggestions and tips to handle and overcome some of the challenging situations.

We hope that the users of this document will find answers to some of their questions in these stories as well as an inspiration to get involved in VOR sponsorship in the future.

The RSTP Team

## Part 1 - Raising sponsorship interest

**One of the differences between VOR cases and sponsor-referred cases is that in the latter case refugees usually have links to Canada – most commonly relatives or friends who initiate the sponsorship, whereas visa-office referred refugees are selected for resettlement by the Canadian visa offices abroad and, therefore, groups sponsoring them may not be able to rely on the support of any Canadian relative or friend. Therefore, sponsoring groups have to be self-reliant and fully prepared financially and otherwise for this sponsorship. So how do you raise sponsorship interest in your community? And what are some possibilities for fundraising? Here are some stories of forming sponsoring groups and raising necessary funds.**

### **“It was an excellent opportunity and we seized it”**

It all started with some local people in Kaslo, BC expressing interest to bring refugees from abroad. However, there was not enough information on the process and financial commitment to execute such undertaking. When a year later the Primate World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) within the Anglican Church proposed an initiative to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by bringing 50 refugee families to Canada, Dirk Pidcock, the Anglican minister in Kaslo, thought it might be an excellent opportunity to bring refugees to the community. The PWRDF offered \$4,000 to support each sponsorship. However, more money was required to sponsor a family and the decision was made to form a steering committee that would take the lead on fundraising. Requests for donations went far and wide but the biggest success was the group’s idea to propose partnerships to all Anglican churches in the area, with a proposed minimum contribution of \$500. The response was great and after just little time the group was ready to start researching whom to



sponsor. The group decided that given the small size of their community and lack of settlement resources for newcomers, it would be best to sponsor a family with whom they could communicate, and thus they limited their search to applicants with skills in the languages spoken by the community members (English, French and Spanish). The first family that they considered was the perfect match and after three months this Colombian family of four was welcomed by Kaslo residents.

### **A note in the paper**

When Joe McMorrow of Camrose, AB read a note in the Catholic Newspaper about refugees who needed help to come to Canada, he knew that this would be something he wanted to get involved in. He then organized a series of meetings in this North Alberta community of 15, 000 residents to find volunteers for his sponsoring group. The parish that Joe belonged to had sponsored refugees before, so it was not a brand new idea. It had been a while, however, and this new sponsoring group had to be formed from scratch. The idea to get involved in the private sponsorship of refugees was included into the church bulletin and was followed by a workshop to inform participants about situation in the home country of these refugees and why there was no other solution to their plight.



The next meeting that took place focused on the sponsorship process and responsibilities of sponsoring groups. To better understand the intricacies of this work, the group invited an experienced SAH representative from Edmonton who talked about settlement and sponsors' responsibilities and was able to answer all important questions that participants had.

The next big step – raising funds for sponsorship – was also successfully reached when the group was able to raise more money than was needed to sponsor one family. So the decision was made to sponsor as many refugees as possible with the funds that the group had raised. Two months later, Camrose welcomed two families from Iraq, consisting altogether of nine persons, and gave them their new home in Canada.

## When fundraising goes national

For almost a year, sponsors in Halifax were trying to secure the necessary funds to sponsor a VOR family from the Al Hol Camp in Syria. The refugee family had close ties to Halifax and it was certainly a strong desire of the SAHs in this city to help them come to safety and reunite with their close ones. However, financially tapped out constituent groups could not secure enough funds to bring this family of two and their adult son.

The unexpected happened after the fundraising campaign spread across Canada.

The cases were included in the special program to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund and the message was spread to the Anglican churches in different provinces. The idea was to encourage the churches to pool their resources to raise the funds to make the sponsorship in Halifax happen. And the response was great. One church in particular raised at least half of the funds required.

A couple of churches involved in this fundraising campaign had previously done sponsorships themselves and had a bitter experience on one occasion; however, it did not stop them from being willing to help the sponsors in Halifax... and they helped in a big way!



With the help from Anglican churches from other provinces, the SAH in Halifax was able to secure the necessary funds and has been able to submit the undertaking to sponsor the VOR family that otherwise would have no other solution to their plight.



## **Fundraising ideas**

### **Fundraising Idea no.1**

#### **Run (or walk!) to support refugee sponsorship**

A group in Toronto has been sponsoring refugees for a long time and fundraising has become a big part of their lives. They would like to share one particular fundraising experience that has proven to be not only fun but also very successful in terms of numbers. Every year they participate in the Toronto Waterfront Marathon organized by Scotiabank, in the 5K walk category. They call it “Running for Refugees” fundraiser and collect donations to support their refugee sponsorship program. This type of fundraiser allows group members to appeal for pledges to wider circles – such as friends, colleagues, family and not just fellow parishioners. And the results have been very impressive – last year this group was able to raise \$8,000 to support the cause.

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### **Fundraising Idea no.2**

#### **Turning old treasures into new opportunities**

We have all heard about selling old gold and silver jewelry and household items that we do not use anymore. But what about turning this into a fundraiser? One sponsoring group turned this idea into a great fundraising event to support the sponsorship of refugees. They invited a specialist who was able to do an evaluation on the spot and was able to offer good prices for the gold and silver items. A deal was made with this person that a percentage of the total amount would go towards sponsorship fundraising. And it turned out to be a real “Gold Party” with sponsoring group members inviting their friends and family to bring the items they wanted to sell. Everyone had a great time and the sponsorship fund increased by almost \$1,000.

## Part 2 – Settlement preparations

**Something that sponsors should always keep in mind is that VOR refugees arrive within a short period of time after the sponsorship undertaking has been submitted. This has to do with the fact that by the time sponsors receive information about these refugees they have already been assessed by the visa offices abroad and accepted for resettlement. In other words, the biggest part of the application process has already been completed. Normally sponsors should be ready for the applicants' arrival within 1 to 4 months after submitting the undertaking to sponsor. It is exciting to be able to welcome sponsored refugees so soon but it is also a big task to have everything prepared for them within this short time period. Here are some tips from sponsors on how to get everything ready when there is not much time.**

### Housing

- One option to ensure that the sponsored refugees have a place to stay after their arrival is arranging for a temporary housing.

Ralph Paragg (Regina, SK): "Because the notice of arrival from CIC was so short, I sent out a bulletin to our parishes through the Synod Office and the Committee requesting a family to host our newcomers over the Christmas holidays while we look for accommodation. Within a couple of days one parish family responded and we accepted their offer. Another family contacted us as well a few days later, but we had already accepted the first offer."

- Another great tip from sponsors is to try to make connections with landlords and superintendants in the buildings with affordable housing to get alerts on vacant apartments.
- Reach out for help to friends and family - they may have the right solution!

Ralph Paragg (Regina, SK): "we were able to find rental accommodation through a friend who had contact with an independent apartment owner, who had a two bedroom apartment available in early January, which we snapped up."

## Furniture and Household Items

- Make a list of all the necessary furniture items and household goods that the sponsored individual/family will need during the first couple of months after their arrival
- Start collecting these items early!
- Some sponsors have found it helpful to include a call for furniture and household goods in their church/organization bulletins and newsletters.
- Send an e-mail to your friends and family – they may have exactly what your group is looking for
- Contact business organizations in your area – they may wish to donate or give you some funds to buy some of the items on your list
- After the refugees' arrival, if they still need some household items, it helps to put up a flyer on the church (or community center) bulletin board or include a note in the newsletter with a call for donation of that particular item
- If you collected more items than you needed, do not discard them; keep them for your next sponsorship. If storage space is an issue, ask your friends, family, neighbors, or your parish if they can help out by storing some of the items.



## Other settlement arrangements

- a. When you have time constraints and a great deal of work to get done to make sure that everything is ready for the sponsored refugee's arrival one of the best ways to complete all the tasks is by working efficiently as a team. **Assigning different roles** to members of the sponsoring groups and **creating deadlines for each task** can be very helpful when you need to accomplish a lot within short time periods. Roles can be assigned to group members based on their personal interests, creativity, skills, physical abilities and resourcefulness. This way everyone gets to participate in the settlement preparation activities without being too overwhelmed with the amount of work.

- b. A SAH in Toronto uses a document that they put together for the sponsoring group in order to keep their settlement preparation organized and on schedule. Among other things, this document includes **a list of tasks that have to be completed** before the group receives the Notification of Arrival Transmission (NAT), upon receipt of the NAT and after the refugee's arrival (on the day of the arrival, the next day, within 24 hours, and within 48 hours). This document helps the sponsorship group members see and understand all the tasks that have to be completed. It also helps them create a timeline for each individual assignment.
- c. Another helpful idea – to contact the applicants prior to their arrival (if possible). This will help greatly in finding out about any preferences or restrictions accommodation-wise (for example accessibility) and other information such as their shoe and clothing sizes in order to prepare some of the things for them ahead of time.
- d. Settlement preparations should also include research and making preliminary contact with settlement agencies, educational institutions, health care providers, and other organizations that will play an important role in helping your group in settlement and integration. It will be helpful to make a list of various organizations in your community that offer programs and services for newcomers, and find out if they could provide services in the native language of the sponsored applicant. You will then be able to make an appointment for the sponsored newcomers with a settlement councilor shortly after their arrival. The same practice would be helpful with finding a family physician for the sponsored refugees – making a list of family doctors in the area and getting in touch with them to find out if they are accepting new patients ahead of time.

## Part 3 – Post-Arrival

**The arrival of the sponsored person or a family to Canada is an exciting event. After months of fundraising and preparations you finally get to meet these people and introduce them to their new homeland. It's a start to a great experience that everyone involved in the sponsorship will cherish for many years to come. However, like most things in life, settlement and integration experiences may have its ups and downs. Things may not go according to plan and you may need to make last minute changes and adjustments. It is important to remember to not be discouraged and to actively look for ways of managing unexpected fallouts. The following chapter offers some tips and advice on how to overcome or manage challenges that may arise after the arrival of refugees.**

### **Dispelling myths and handling expectations**

Those of us who like visiting foreign countries know that before each travel we have a certain image of that country, its people, cuisine, culture and traditions; and many of us have probably been in a situation when the images we had before the arrival were actually wrong. The same sometimes happens with resettled refugees who are arriving to Canada. The images and expectations that they have about this county and North America in general may be influenced by Hollywood movies, pictures in magazine ads, rumors or false information spread by those who were resettled earlier. In addition, unrealistic expectations may take hold as a result of years spent in dispiriting situations and rising hope that finally something great is going to happen.

The following section offers some tips and advice on how to effectively dispel myths and handle unrealistic expectations.



## **Communication, Communication, and more Communication**

### **Before arrival**

Many sponsors start their communication with the sponsored applicants early – before they arrive to Canada. They write letters to the individuals and families that they are sponsoring to introduce the sponsoring group and the city/community where the sponsored refugees will be living and also to talk about the settlement support that will be offered to these applicants during the period of sponsorship. In the case of visa office-referred refugees, establishing early communication may be particularly helpful, since these applicants do not know the people who are sponsoring them and very often do not fully understand what it means to be privately sponsored to Canada.

To help you start drafting your letter, some examples from the groups who have been previously engaged in VOR sponsorships may be helpful.

*“To the Sponsored Family,*

*St. Francis Xavier Parish members and Catholic Social Services are happy to hear that your family has been accepted to start a new and joyful life here in Camrose, Alberta, Canada. Our committee is busy planning for your arrival and are very excited to have you as part of our community. We hope that the new life experience brings great joy and prosperity for your family.*

*Camrose is a great city to be a part of. It has a population of about 18,000 people with lots of great things to do. There are plenty of parks for kids to play at, coffee shops, shopping centers, recreational activities and local festivals and entertainment for everyone to enjoy. This city has a lot of things to offer as well as a lot of great people to live and share the community with.*

*The temperature here can vary from very hot to very cold, so it is very important to dress accordingly. From our estimation, you will arrive here in Canada somewhere around the beginning of December, which means it could be cold outside and possibly have snow on the ground. We will be able to accommodate you with the proper clothing once you arrive. We would appreciate some information regarding the family’s clothing sizes. It would be*

***important for us to also know the height and weight of children under the age of 12 to provide proper and safe transportation. That way we could accommodate the entire family with proper clothing for the weather conditions.***

***We are all praying for your safe journey to Canada and hope that you take care during this time. Please let us know if there are any questions you may have, we will be happy to answer them for you.***

***Sincerely,  
St. Francis Xavier Refugee Committee”***

- You may want to provide more details about the community where the sponsored refugees will be living:**

***“The people in this area are generally kind and friendly, and will be ready to help you in many ways. There is a good school for children ages 5 to 13 in the village of Port Hood (which is where my wife and I work each day), a senior school 10 km away which our daughter attends, and a hospital about 30 km away. In the town of Port Hawkesbury (about 40 km from Port Hood) there is a Community College which has many courses for adults, from electrical to mechanic, carpentry to ocean related work such as navigating ships. Port Hood has a grocery store and 2 churches (one Roman Catholic and one United Church). Many people work in fisheries (this is a lobster fishing area), and at a large paper mill in Port Hawkesbury. There are teachers, nurses, and people employed in heavy construction and dairy farming. Our population is small in comparison to big cities like Damascus, but we all live here because we prefer ‘small town’ to ‘big city’.”***

***• • •***

***“I would like to share a little about our city Kenora. Our city sits on a beautiful lake called Lake of the Woods. The lake is 240 kilometers long and 70 Kilometers wide with 1,500 islands. The lake freezes over in the winter. We are in the northwestern part of a large province in Canada called Ontario. We have forests, rocks and lots of lakes. Our city has a population of 16,500 people in the winter time and because we are a tourist destination we have about 40,000 people in the summer. Our main industry here is tourism, summer and winter. We have a big hospital, government services and many stores, hotels/motels and sport fishing camps on the lake. We also have schools for children (public***



*not Christian and Catholic, Christian), two high schools one Catholic Christian and one not Christian (Public School) and a college for adults.”*

- **It would also help the refugees to know who will be greeting them at the airport after their arrival:**

*“After leaving Syria and upon arrival at the closest international airport to Kenora, Winnipeg International Airport in Winnipeg, Manitoba you will be greeted by the following people at the airport. Pastor Frank and Lynn, Pastor Steve Beiler and Ellen, Pastor Bill and Pastor Pauline Cowen, and Dr. Jack Spielman and his wife Ellen. (Jack has been a part of the planning committee. He is a member of The Way Christian Fellowship. Jack is also a surgeon in our community. (we will have winter coats for the whole family upon you arrival so you will be warm). After your arrival (we are so excited that you are coming) we will be taking a two hour drive from the airport to our city of Kenora.”*

- **Before their arrival to Canada, sponsored refugees may be worried about their language skills and the fact that they may not be able to communicate with their sponsors. It is important to tell them about the languages spoken in the community:**

*“We have a medical doctor in Kenora who speaks Arabic. We also have a teacher in Kenora who speaks Arabic but we are still trying to get in contact with her. We are trying to set up a program where you can learn English as a second language. I have started learning Arabic through the Rosetta Stone computer program.”*

•••

*“English is the predominant language and there are a few who speak Arabic. Both daytime and evening classes for learning English are available.”*

- **If you would like to include more information about the kind of support that will be offered to the refugees and at the same time mention some of their responsibilities, you may find the following example useful:**



***“As your sponsors, we will:***

- ***Meet you upon your arrival and take you to your accommodations.***
- ***Arrange translation and interpretation as necessary***
- ***Rent an apartment and provide basic furnishing, kitchen equipment, etc. (some items may be new while others may be used.)***
- ***Provide adequate clothing for all our seasons (this may include used clothing.)***
- ***Provide you money to cover living expenses, work out a budget with you for using that money***
- ***Orient you to our community, services, local transportation, banking, etc.***
- ***Register you for health care, which is free in Canada for most items***
- ***Help you find a family doctor and other required medical care.***
- ***Help you access English Language classes.***
- ***Help you find employment***
- ***Provide you with 24 hour emergency support.***

***We have not yet rented an apartment for you, so you may have to stay in temporary accommodation until we can find you your own place. This may take some time as there is a shortage of apartments and houses for rent.***

***Our commitment to support you is made on the understanding that you will live in our community. You do have the right to move anywhere in Canada, but we are only required to provide you financial support for your first year if you live in our community.***

***You are responsible for finding work, and we will assist you with this, but there is no guarantee of a job. Employers decide whether to hire based on skills and willingness to do the job, and they prefer Canadian work experience if possible. So it will be important to begin working, even if your first job is not in your trade, skill or profession. It is very common in Canada to work in one job to gain the experience to go on to a better job.”***

• • •

***“As a sponsored refugee under the private sponsorship program of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Grouard/McLennan, a newcomer may receive logistical, moral, spiritual and financial assistance from his/her Canadian sponsor. The newcomer will receive financial support only until he/she gains a sufficient level of financial independence as deemed by the sponsor. The maximum time for receiving support is for one year from date of arrival in Canada; but this support***

*will end sooner once financial independence is attained. No government support is available during this time.”*

- **You may want to conclude by reassuring the sponsored refugees that your group will be there for them during the period of sponsorship:**

*“We want you to know that Kenora is a safe place for you and your family. We care deeply about you even though we have not yet met you. We will be there for you in any way we can. We will support you, encourage you, help you and minister to you in whatever way you wish us to participate in your life. Our three churches are very close. We love one another and care for each other’s members as if they were our own. We are a community in love with Jesus and each other. We pray that we will be a blessing to you as brothers and sisters in Christ.”*

• • •

*“The people on the committee are from many different faith groups: Catholic, United Church, and Buddhist. Our committee members are raising money to help you buy food and to rent an apartment for your first year. You will have to pay the Government of Canada back for the loan they will give you for your airplane tickets, but what we give to you is given as friends. We look forward to helping you make this Country your new home. It is a good land with good people.”*

- **It is also recommended to provide:**

- A map of Canada with marking of the area where the sponsoring group is located and where the sponsored refugee(s) will be living



- Contact details of the sponsoring group in case sponsored refugees would like to and are able to contact their sponsors for further communication.

*It is important to understand that sending letters to sponsored applicants before their arrival may not guarantee that the issue of high expectations is completely resolved, but it could help to set realistic expectations. Additionally, it will be a good start to creating a bond between the sponsors and the applicants and will make it easier for the sponsored refugees to board the plane and start their journey to their new life.*

### Orientation after arrival

Another important stage in communication is post-arrival orientation for sponsored refugees. It is crucial to have this meeting with sponsored newcomers soon after their arrival to introduce them to the members of the sponsoring group, ask them how their first days in Canada have been and go over the most important details of the sponsorship period. The first orientation session provides a good opportunity for sponsors to talk about expectations from both sides and provide any clarification if needed.



You may want to provide orientation in an informal and flexible way that will allow you and the sponsored newcomers to have two-directional conversations and allow for any questions that the newcomers might have to be asked and answered in a safe and comfortable atmosphere.

Here is what one sponsoring group in Toronto includes in their orientation session with the sponsored newcomers:

### ORIENTATION

- **Within 48 hours of arrival, along with Chair, Treasurer, and possible translator meet with family to explain sponsorship, mail delivery, postage, 911, financial arrangements, etc.**
- **Provide orientation of transportation system**
- **Assess religious needs and arrange as required**

**Additional items for the initial orientation session could include:**

- ✓ Responsibilities of sponsors (limitations, availability, expectations, etc.)
- ✓ Responsibilities of newcomers
- ✓ Their rights as permanent residents
- ✓ Emergency contact numbers and procedures
- ✓ Information about any matters requiring immediate attention – this will differ case by case. Prioritize according to their situation and needs. For example:
  - If arriving from warm climate during the winter months, you may want to discuss the Canadian winter (where to obtain appropriate winter attire, concept of wind chill, outdoor safety, school/school bus cancellations, etc.)
  - For families with young children, set up a time to accompany to school for school registration and provide support for school preparations (school attire, stationary, plan school route, vaccinations, etc.)
  - If arriving with medical need, identify a local health care provider together, set up a time to accompany for IFH and provincial health care registration, explain health care support and system in broad terms

**Communication throughout the sponsorship period**

Keeping the lines of communication open throughout the sponsorship period will help sponsors resolve any misunderstanding and overcome challenges related to unrealistic expectations. Sometimes it takes more than one or two meetings and numerous explanations to reach a common understanding, and sponsors have to be ready to invest significant time and effort to maintain ongoing communication with the sponsored newcomers.

Sometimes an issue may arise at a later stage in the sponsorship when sponsored newcomers feel more confident and may not require as much guidance and attention from their sponsors; however, even then sponsors should be ready to dedicate their time to provide explanations and make sure that there are no unresolved issues.

**“It was very labor-intensive and we loved it!”**

In 2011 a group in Kenora, ON sponsored a VOR family that consisted of 7 family members. They knew that it would not be easy to settle this big family and they were ready to do some hard work and overcome any challenges that could arise. So when they were confronted with some misunderstanding and false expectations on the part of sponsored family they knew exactly what to do – invest more time and show more patience.

At first the family thought that the sponsors would leave them on their own, and it took the group about two months to convince them that the group was there for them. Almost every day sponsoring group members would visit the family, would take them shopping, show them around; introduce them to other people in their neighborhood. The group bought a portable translating device that they would use to communicate with the family in the beginning and eventually sponsored newcomers were convinced that their sponsors were not going to leave them on their own.

Another case of misinformation arose with regard to the sources of funds for the family: sponsored newcomers thought that the money was given to the church by the government. It took a lot of communication with the family to explain to them how the money was raised to sponsor them.

This sponsoring group never stopped communicating throughout the sponsorship period – in addition to meetings to discuss serious matters; sponsors were taking the family out for dinners and coffees, for walks and other activities. And having that constant communication helped both, sponsors and sponsored refugees learn more about each other and become good friends.

## **Dealing with secondary migration**

When individuals and groups get involved in private refugee sponsorship they hope to see sponsored persons and families grow roots in their communities to be able to help and support them during the period of sponsorship and to become good friends with them after the sponsorship ends. In most cases sponsored persons will stay in the same community after the sponsorship period has ended. However, there are situations when sponsored refugees want to

move to a different city or province in search of employment/educational opportunities or to reunite with their families and/or friends. This type of movement is referred to as secondary migration - it is not something to be afraid of. Most sponsors that have come across secondary migration were able to successfully deal with such situations and have remained encouraged to do more sponsorships.

### Sponsoring to build a community

When sponsors in Camrose, AB decided to sponsor two different families from Iraq, they were only thinking about helping as many refugees as possible with the funds that they were able to raise. However, when the two families arrived



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to Camrose, their sponsors realized that this sponsored both families was also a good idea because of the support that the families would be able to get from one another. The two families were not related and only met after their arrival to Camrose but coming from the same cultural background and speaking the same language they quickly found common ground. The two families supported one another, especially during the first months after their arrival. Settling in a small community of North Alberta it was helpful to them to have a small piece of their previous life – to celebrate some of the holidays, to speak their language, share common memories of the past and hopes for a great future in their new homeland.

Fifteen months after their arrival, the two families are still living in Camrose. They have become more confident and no longer depend on each other for comfort; however, having this connection in the very beginning was a great help and may have even been part of the reason why these two families were not looking for comfort and support from the community outside of Camrose.



## When cooperation among sponsors makes a life-changing difference

By Klaus Gruber (Synod of the Diocese of Saskatoon)

Amina and her three children desperately wanted to be reunited with her parents in Canada. She was left behind in Kakuma camp because she had her own family but her husband had left her soon after her parents came to Canada. Amina's parents were frantic to find a sponsorship for her. Several months after her arrival, reports were that things were going well and Amina and her children were doing well. A month later we were amazed to receive a frantic phone call from Amina's parents telling us that she had announced that she was moving to Edmonton in a week. She had apparently been in contact with some people that she had befriended in the camp who were pressuring her to come to Edmonton. At that point, we also discovered that there was serious tension between her and her parents.



While we reassured her that she could go wherever she wanted in Canada, we explained that we could not support her in Edmonton, however, that we would try to find a group that could take over the sponsorship. After a few days, Amina said that she would stay in Saskatoon. We were relieved. Three weeks later, she informed her parents that she was moving to Winnipeg the next day, which she did.

I contacted the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council to see if they could check on Amina and her children to see if they were ok while I worked to try to find a sponsoring group that could complete our responsibilities for Amina and her family. Eventually, MIIC agreed to complete the sponsorship and we sent our money to them to complete our obligation.

### Fallout:

While we provided a debriefing to the varying sponsors, there were a number of people who were extremely disappointed and felt "burned". Others were more accepting of Amina's decision. Amina's parents were also upset but continued to support Amina.

Learning:

We assumed that because Amina was rejoining her parents and had no other relatives in Canada, secondary migration was a non-issue in this case. While we mentioned secondary migration in the training, our discussions about refugees' desire and their right to move was given perfunctory coverage at best. That was a mistake.

Because the main sponsors were friends of Amina's parents and the sponsorship involved several organizations, I did not have any direct contact with the family. The sponsors seemed knowledgeable and were on top of things when I checked. I do not know whether the sponsors ever had a conversation with Amina about how she might go about moving, should she wish to do that. In any case, given Amina's apparent impulsivity, she may still have decided without consultation.

Finally, when faced the crisis, I relied on the SAH community, who I knew would be able to help. That was a good decision.

### **Expecting the unexpected**

By Klaus Gruber (Synod of the Diocese of Saskatoon)

We were thrilled that our new VOR family was arriving. We had put together a diocesan wide sponsorship with many new but well-trained volunteers. According to the matching centre, the family from Iraq was a young couple with three very young children and no other family in Canada. It was late Thurs. evening and we were excitedly awaiting their arrival at the airport with our translator and our flags.

They arrived; we greeted each other. Their next words were "we want to go to Vancouver". We tried to explain that it was impossible for us to get him to Vancouver immediately and that we would be happy to discuss in the morning how to get them to Vancouver. They were insistent.

Several things became clear:

1. They knew they were in Saskatoon but had no idea where that was in relation to anything else in Canada.
2. They had family in Vancouver and wanted to be joined with them.



3. They thought that Vancouver was just down the road.
4. They had no idea who we were and what role we had.
5. They assumed that we were government officials with authority to move them.
6. The husband was very suspicious. He believed that he had been recognized in Toronto and had been followed from there. He was becoming more agitated and aggressive (though certainly not violent).

After repeated reassurances that getting them to Vancouver would be high on our agenda, we convinced them to go to the motel where we had some food for

“During our debriefing with the sponsors, people were generally understanding of the family’s need to be with relatives.”

them. Their apartment wouldn’t be available until Saturday. During the night, the mother became ill so the next day was spent in a medi-clinic with mother and with caring for the young children and continuing to discuss the situation. In the meantime, the father had contacted his brother in Vancouver who was

flying in with a friend to pick them up. I continued to try to dissuade them from acting so quickly and asked him to give me a chance to get support organized in Vancouver. By Friday afternoon, the brother had arrived with his friend and they had made arrangements to purchase tickets for the family to Vancouver. On Saturday, while driving them to the airport, they asked whether we were on the road to Vancouver. I explained that if we drove on the road for 20 hours, we could get to Vancouver. I don’t think they understood. By Monday, they were settled in Vancouver with their family. We had contacted their family’s settlement worker who had made contact with the family. The matching centre had been contacted and CIC had agreed to turn the family into a GAR and we were recovering from the wild weekend. During our debriefing with the sponsors, people were generally understanding of the family’s need to be with relatives.

Among the things we learned, some of the most important ones were:

- It is important that volunteers be well prepared for secondary migration, even immediately.
- Always expect the unexpected.

## EPILOGUE

Sponsoring refugees is truly a great endeavour and a unique experience for everyone involved. And even though, it is not always an easy undertaking, it is absolutely worth the time and all the effort invested in it. For many visa office-referred cases, being sponsored to Canada is the only solution to alleviate their plight and help them re-build their lives. Many groups in Canada have sponsored visa office-referred refugees and we hope that the present document will inspire even more sponsors to get involved in this type of sponsorship in the future. We also hope that the stories that were generously shared by private sponsors in this volume served as guidance and motivation to sponsoring groups that are in process of sponsoring VOR cases and may have encountered challenges similar to those addressed in this document.



We would like to thank all sponsors who shared their sponsorship stories and experiences with us for the purpose of creating the present volume.