



▶ ENABLING SETTLEMENT



▶ PREPARING FOR THE LONG TERM



▶ EVALUATING YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

# CHAPTER 8:

## *The First Year and Beyond*

### *Enabling Settlement*

During the first year, newcomers learn a tremendous amount and generally move from a large degree of dependence to a large degree of independence. Through it all, your role is that of an enabler, supporting newcomers to equip themselves, make their own decisions, and find out as much as possible about their new environment. Above all else, you are providing warm friendship and support.

An important task will be to clarify expectations on all sides. While the Canadian government expects certain *outcomes* (finding employment, learning English, learning life skills to function in Canada), newcomers and sponsoring groups have aspirations that both include and go beyond this. They will want to learn about each others' backgrounds and develop a sense of community. Sponsoring groups may hope to increase their skills through this learning experience; newcomers may hope to motivate their sponsors to become more involved in advocacy. Newcomers may hope to be supported while they study or re-qualify for certain trades or professions, and sponsors may hope that the newcomers find work when possible. If these hopes and aspirations can be expressed and agreed on, the potential for misunderstanding and disappointment can be reduced.



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**During the busy first months when there are so many details to take care of, *the bigger picture* may be forgotten from time to time. Following are some of the important things you will want to consider during periodic times of assessment.**

#### ***Reviewing the Budget***

You may want meet with the newcomer on a quarterly basis to review the budget and assess the expectations on both sides, taking into consideration the kind of employment he or she will seek or has obtained. Also remember immigration loan repayments. Support newcomers through referral to financial literacy and counseling services available at local volunteer groups, settlement agencies, or from someone in your group. Newcomers will also need to know about the Canada's tax system, the law and how tax deductions are handled

by employers. In budget planning, explain that salary earned will not be equal to take-home pay.

### **Cultural Adjustment**

**Culture shock** is a period of disorientation experienced when encountering a new culture and a normal part of cultural adjustment. While it can be painful, it usually results in profound learning. Cultural adjustment is typified by the stages described in the chart. Keep in mind that the pace at which people progress through these stages is highly individual, and family members may therefore progress at quite different rates. This process may last three to five years. You can provide specific supports at each stage:

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Characterized by</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>Honeymoon</i>	An initial reaction of enthusiasm, fascination, admiration, and cordial, friendly, superficial relationships with hosts. Refugees have not come to Canada by choice, and may be less enthusiastic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide orientation and information</li> <li>• Focus on the practical aspects of becoming competent in the new situation (i.e. getting around, looking for a job, language training).</li> </ul>
<i>Challenge and Crisis</i>	<p>Differences in language, concepts, values, and symbols lead to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety, and anger. During this time, studies show that most people find the most difficult situations to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making friends your own age</li> <li>• Dealing with someone who is cross</li> <li>• Approaching others</li> <li>• Appearing in front of an audience</li> <li>• Getting to know people in-depth, intimately</li> <li>• Understanding jokes, humour, sarcasm</li> <li>• Dealing with people staring at you</li> <li>• Being with people that you do not know well</li> <li>• Complaining in public/dealing with unsatisfactory service</li> </ul>	<p>Give empathy, friendship and support; accept that anger and frustration are normal and legitimate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share information about culture shock.</li> <li>• Help newcomers to see their competencies.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for the newcomers to talk about their culture.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities to learn together about cross-cultural communications.</li> <li>• Talk about the most difficult situations. Share how these things are dealt with in both your cultures.</li> <li>• Share jokes from your different cultures; talk about why they translate (or not).</li> <li>• Set up a fun time for role plays or role reversals.</li> </ul> <p>If the newcomers are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or other psychological problems, help them to find appropriate help.</p>

<b>Recovery</b>	<p>The crisis is resolved as the person learns the language and culture of the host country. Life factors known to reduce stress and aid recovery include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Having a sense of purpose</li> <li>• Being socially or politically involved</li> <li>• Having (employment) opportunities</li> <li>• Maturity</li> <li>• Having strong social support</li> <li>• Having structure in life</li> <li>• Equal or greater status than before</li> </ul>	<p>You will notice that in a number of these areas, neither you nor the newcomer has any control. In fact, in some areas such as <i>status</i>, newcomers are likely to be worse off than before. However, there are things you can do to enhance a sense of purpose, belonging, and structure. During this time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the newcomers to find employment and to map out an employment strategy that will lead to a fulfilling job.</li> <li>• Help the newcomers to see the positive contribution they are making to your community.</li> </ul> <p>As the newcomers' English abilities increase, set aside more times for storytelling—this is both an opportunity for the newcomers to teach you about their situation, and a way for them to structure/make sense of events.</p>
<b>Adjustment</b>	<p>Newcomers begin to work in and enjoy the new culture, though there may be some instances of anxiety and strain.</p>	<p>Continue to provide friendship and support. Continue to expect to learn as you walk alongside the newcomer.</p>

### ***Understanding Family Issues***

Whenever there is a big change in a family's life, there is stress on the family system. Some circumstances are especially difficult for newcomers. For example, while some mothers stay home to take care of young children, their partners and other family members engage in activities outside the home which allow them to develop competencies, build friendships and get comfortable within the new environment. Watching this, the mother may soon find herself feeling isolated, friendless and depressed. Depression may make leaving the house very difficult particularly when transportation options are complicated during the winter weather. Gender-based cultural norms may differ in Canada from what the newcomers are used to and also add to the stress experienced within the family unit. Making friends outside of the home and particularly at gatherings with both males and females present may be challenging for some.



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Inter-generational issues may also arise. In general, teenagers tend to experience more difficulty adjusting, at least initially, when compared to other family members. They often struggle to fit in the different sub-cultures of their peers, relate to adults according to new customs, and come to terms with new expectations and different set of values. Inter-general issues and role reversals also occur within newcomer families where young children learn the new language and generally adapt faster than



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their parents or older siblings. In many situations, parents rely on their children to interpret at important appointments, over the

phone, while filling out forms and while shopping. This is more responsibility than children can handle and, at best, inappropriate. Whenever possible, interpreters should be arranged, for example through settlement agencies, to avoid the additional burden on children.

It is also important to orient and inform newcomers about Canadian child protection laws and the definition and legal implications of domestic violence. What may be considered *discipline* in one context might be considered *abuse* in Canada. It is equally important to be aware of where to turn to for help. Find out whether there is a trauma counseling centre, a community centre, a social service agency, or a women's shelter in your community to which you can turn to for help in a crisis. As well provide emergency numbers.

### **What can you do?**

- ❖ Recognize that you cannot *fix* the situation. The newcomers will be in a state of flux for a long time, and will face cultural and social challenges. Accept that the struggle is normal, with the aim of being supportive throughout the year.
- ❖ Talk about how family life differs in Canada from the newcomers' country.
- ❖ Highlight the family's strengths and areas of competency. Help them to see how much they are achieving in all their adjustments to their new situation.
- ❖ Be especially supportive of women experiencing isolation. Try to help them develop relationships outside the home and learn English. If necessary, provide extra English tutoring in the home.
- ❖ If a family situation is severe, find out about professional counseling which provide specialized cross-cultural counseling.

### ***Non-Accompanying Family Members***

If the newcomer family has family members abroad, their first focus is likely on contacting these family members. The family separation may delay the newcomers' ability to focus on their own settlement and may require counseling and support. The Red Cross offers a tracing and reunion service that can be of assistance.

### ***Post Traumatic Stress, Torture, and Healing***

Refugees may have experienced traumatic situations of deprivation, violence, and torture. **Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is an anxiety disorder that affects people who were exposed to rape, domestic violence, child abuse, war, accidents, natural disasters, political torture and other violent events. Symptoms of PTSD include depression, flashbacks, nightmares, experiences of overwhelming emotions of grief and fear, numbness, avoidance of intimacy, irritability, trouble concentrating and remembering, dizziness, nausea, panic attacks, and more.

As a trigger of PTSD, torture affects every part of the person and inflicts deep psychological, emotional, and spiritual wounds, in addition to the physical injuries. The [Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture](#) (CCVT) notes that even though "torture may be used to obtain information or signed confessions, this is not its primary purpose. **Torture is directed towards instilling and reinforcing a sense of powerlessness and terror in victims and the societies in which they live. It is a process which generates a situation designed to destroy the physical and psychological capabilities of survivors to function as viable individuals.**" As a supporter of someone who has survived torture, this

is important for you to know. Gaining a sense of control over one's own life is critical to a survivor. Therefore, your support should never *take over* the newcomer's life; it must always result in empowerment.

While all sufferers of PTSD may experience the aforementioned symptoms, victims of torture face additional repercussions. They may be unwilling to disclose information about their experiences, and may feel suspicious, frightened, or anxious to forget what has happened. These feelings may discourage them from seeking the help they need. In addition, everyday situations may throw them into a state of terror. Newcomers may be adversely affected by officials in uniform, signing forms, visiting doctors' offices, being admitted to hospitals or even encountering staff of government agencies. Many treatment methods are used to aid recovery from PTSD and torture; whatever treatment is recommended, they all have in common an emphasis on restoring a sense of control and safety.

**For your group, there are several important things to be aware of and act on:**

- ❖ PTSD must be dealt with by trained professionals.
- ❖ Love and support are critical for healing to take place. Your group can have a very important role here.
- ❖ Each person's healing proceeds at its own pace. You have no way of knowing how long it may take for an individual to heal, nor can you judge whether the individual has made *enough* progress. Your role is to support and encourage, not to judge.
- ❖ Maintain appropriate boundaries. Empathy is appropriate; taking on the emotions as if they were your own, is not. Only the individual can heal—it is not something you can do for someone. There is a delicate balance here, which you will need to examine often. If you are providing support for someone in therapy, it may be appropriate at some point to speak with the therapist to find out how to be most supportive and how to maintain appropriate boundaries.
- ❖ Healing is hard work. Do not be surprised if the individual seems exhausted, distant, or overwhelmed.
- ❖ If you are providing support, it is appropriate to find ways to celebrate together the individual's progress, and acknowledge his or her strengths and successes.

***Support Newcomers to Get the Education They Need***

Once some progress has been made in learning English, the newcomers may want to begin planning for other aspects of their education and skills development. Your previous research on skills assessment and training courses will allow you to show them some of the many options available.

***Assist Newcomers with finding Employment***

Finding employment can very stressful. Many refugees are highly skilled and trained and may even have gained a high status in their own country. In Canada, they may find themselves suddenly back at the bottom of the ladder, facing years of re-training, additional education, or having to choose a completely different career because their qualifications are not recognized. At first, they may

*Remember that newcomers are NOT necessarily expected to become fully self-supporting during their first year in Canada and most resettled refugees require longer social support. It may take some longer to learn English or upgrade their skills, and others may simply require a longer period to adapt and adjust. Recognize the contribution your group has made to their adjustment—whether or not they become independent within their first year.*

need to settle for a menial and low-paying job. Because of their struggles to learn a new culture and language, they are aware they may sometimes come across (and be treated!) as childlike, even though they are confident and competent in their own environment. These things are very hard on self-esteem. Newcomers will need all the support, sensitivity, and encouragement you can provide during their job search.

### ***What if the Newcomers Want to Move?***

Your responsibilities under the sponsorship Undertaking are to help the newcomers settle in your community. Every permanent resident has the right to relocate however, and newcomers do sometimes choose to move to another part of Canada. Depending on the circumstances, you may be responsible for continued financial support if the sponsorship period is not completed and the newcomers are not self-supporting.



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## ***Preparing for the Long Term***

From the beginning you and the newcomers need to prepare for the long-term. What will things look like when this sponsorship period is over? The following are some issues you may want to consider.

### ***Help Newcomers Work Towards Self-Sufficiency***

The core of self-sufficiency is that people are able to make their own plans and decisions in order to attain their own dreams. When a group sponsors refugees, this can be a delicate balance to maintain. Out of a desire to help, groups may **do for** rather than **do with** newcomers, reducing the newcomers' learning opportunities—and eventually, their chances to survive independently in Canada. Independence does not imply that the refugee will sever ties with your group (though this possibility must also be allowed for). You may remain life-long friends, but your help should always be given with the goal of self-sufficiency.

### ***Help Newcomers Link into a Social Network***

An important way for newcomers to increase their chances for self-sufficiency is to link into a secure and supportive social network. This network may or may not include your group. While building a diverse network can take longer than a year, it can be achieved if approached intentionally. In preparing for the newcomers' arrival, you have already greatly expanded your network of contacts through talking to people about employment options, language courses, settlement services, cultural awareness, and so on. As you pass on this knowledge by *learning through doing* to the newcomer, you also pass on much of this network. The newcomer will be busy developing his or her own set of relationships and contacts at the same time. *Remember that newcomers cannot be required to join your organization, or participate in future sponsorships.*

### ***Consider an Advocacy Role***

Advocacy is a voice for change. Most advocacy groups see themselves in the role as *a voice* for a cause, and view advocacy activities as going hand-in-hand with educating the public and being partners with the groups on whose behalf they advocate. This can be done in many ways: showing films, talking with school children, raising funds for a cause or bringing speakers to community events. As you work through the sponsorship process, you will become more aware of the need for advocacy on refugee issues. This may prompt you to join a formal refugee advocacy group, such as the [Canadian Council for Refugees](#) (CCR) or [Amnesty International](#), or you may concentrate on education and awareness-raising within your community. Both are legitimate responses, and indeed, go hand in hand.

# Evaluating Your Achievements

Monitoring and evaluating your group's work will allow you to find out what worked best and what can be build on for the future, particularly if your group thinks it may sponsor other refugees at some point. Most evaluations ask questions from two angles: what were the results? And, how were these results achieved (process)? Examples of the questions you might ask in these two areas are:

## **Results:**

- What did we set out to achieve?
- Did we achieve it?
- Did we achieve other things also?
- How did these results affect everyone involved?

## **Process:**

- What methods did we use to achieve our goals?
- Of these methods, which were most effective?
- What would we do differently next time to achieve better results?
- What would we do differently next time to achieve the same results more effectively or more efficiently?

It is important to ensure each participant has a chance to give their opinion. Situations look different to different people, so only by including the views of as many as possible can you get the full picture.

## **What to do With the Results**

Now that you have a *picture*, you can ask the *big picture* questions: What does this all mean? What are the life lessons we learned?

You may want to write up your results, and, if appropriate, some stories to illustrate them, so they can be shared amongst your group, with other sponsoring groups and, if applicable, with your SAH. This kind of record can be very useful if, at some time in the future, you decide to sponsor again. You will not only have reminders about some of the significant things you learned, but reading about your experience will take you right back to those earlier memories. Documenting and evaluating your experience will help you see how rich it has been and will equip you better for the future.

*To wind up your evaluation and bring closure to the entire year, plan a celebration to honour your achievements. A dance, a special meal together, a street party, a multicultural potluck, or a games night can be fun and can easily include other partners and community members who supported the newcomers and your group. Mark the anniversary of the newcomers' arrival. It is time to celebrate the past year! It is time to look forward to future possibilities.*

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