



# BVOR NEWS

Refugee  
Sponsorship  
Training  
Program

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## Community Sponsorship thrives in Summerland, B.C.



B.C.'s Okanagan Valley is noted for its warm, dry summers and an abundance of wineries. So it's no surprise that the Okanagan-based Summerland Refugee Sponsorship Group's first fundraiser featured generous donations from local wineries. "Whenever the need arises, this community steps up big time," says Doug Holmes, the Group's founding president. Holmes, a Summerland town councillor, hosted an information session for residents wanting to know how to help Syrian refugees after the death of Alan Kurdi. Eighty people showed up that December 2015 evening. A week later, 26 people came to a second meeting. The Summerland Refugee Sponsorship Group was born.

Today, nearly four years later, the Group is an incorporated non-profit with 140 members; has sponsored two BVOR families (one from Eritrea and one from Syria); is waiting for a third family from South Sudan to arrive; and, in 2016, helped settle three government-assisted Syrian refugee families in the Okanagan region. Not bad for a sponsorship group in a town of 11,500 people. Now a Community Sponsor, the Group plans to become a SAH and help other Okanagan communities sponsor refugees. They will continue to sponsor refugees from all over the world, year after year.

## The Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program

The BVOR Program helps resettle refugees identified by United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as the most vulnerable in need of resettlement. It is called blended because it is a cost sharing arrangement. Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) provides up to six months of income support for the newcomers, while private sponsors provide another six months of financial support, start-up costs and up to one year of social and emotional support.

Sponsorship has been "a real participatory, community-building experience," says Holmes. It "has fostered neighborhood relationships, enabled cross-cultural understanding and built local support for refugee issues." He adds that the size of the Group avoids the limited capacity and financial pressure that a smaller sponsorship group might experience.

The Group organizes potlucks, movie nights and talks to attract new volunteers and donations. All volunteers attend an orientation session. Each sponsored family has a designated "family support team" of 8 to 10 volunteers who report to the Group's Board of Directors.

The project has been a success on many levels, not least the successful settlement of the newcomers. "We focus on bringing the whole community together to sponsor," says Holmes. "We've shown that small towns can resettle refugees just as well as large cities."

## Summerland stands #WithRefugees

Recently, Summerland signed the UN Refugee Agency's [Statement of Solidarity](#) with refugees, joining nine other Canadian municipalities and nearly 200 worldwide. The pledge recognizes that solutions to refugee crises start at the local level, so that everyone can live in safety, become self-reliant and contribute to and participate in the local community.

## Featured BVOR profiles

### Somali family needs sponsors

This 50 year old Somali father, accompanied by his spouse and six children, is currently in Ethiopia. He has completed two years of education and has experience as a livestock keeper. He and his family are unable to return to their country of origin due to persecution on account of their faith. As the family have no contacts in Canada they will benefit from the support and assistance of a sponsor while they resettle in their new community.

### Single man from Yemen needs sponsors in Toronto.

This 35 year-old man from Yemen currently lives in Kenya. He is fluent in English, is highly educated with a Bachelor's degree in Economics, and has worked as a banker. He cannot return to his home country as a result of being persecuted for his sexual orientation. He has a friend in Toronto, ON, and resettlement there is recommended.

**Form a group and contact the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program. Ask us about the BVOR program! We will support you in the sponsorship process.**



**Right now, there are over 300 BVOR profiles available on RSTP's matching database.**

Refugee populations in the BVOR program include:

- Syria, Iraq, Iran, Vietnam
- Democratic Rep. of Congo, Somalia
- Burundi, Ethiopia, Colombia, Rwanda
- Tanzania and Uganda, Yemen

Particular vulnerabilities or reasons for resettlement include:

- Women and girls at risk
- Survivors of violence and/or torture
- Lack of foreseeable alternative solutions
- Persecution based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

To learn more about the countries BVOR refugees come from, visit: <http://www.rstp.ca/en/refugees/country-condition-information/>

To view [BVOR profiles](#), please visit [RSTP's website](#). If you are interested in sponsoring any of them, enter your user name and password to log in. If you do not have a username or password, please contact us at [bvor@rstp.ca](mailto:bvor@rstp.ca).

## BLENDING VISA OFFICE-REFERRED (BVOR) PROGRAM

For more information, visit [www.rstp.ca](http://www.rstp.ca) or email [bvor@rstp.ca](mailto:bvor@rstp.ca)

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