



BVOR NEWS

Refugee
Sponsorship
Training
Program

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Paris, Ontario BVOR sponsorships a community collaboration



In the summer of 2015, Barbara Fullerton, then minister at St. Paul's United Church in Paris, Ontario, started talking about the Syrian refugee situation in her sermons. While church members could provide housing in the former church manse, they didn't have the necessary human or financial resources for the refugee sponsorship they wanted to offer. So they invited others in the community to collaborate. "The response was amazing," says Barbara.

St. Paul's initial CORE (Coordination of Refugee Engagement) group grew to include six other nearby United Church congregations, a Baptist church, a Catholic church, local Optimists, Kiwanis, Friends of the Library and a number of private citizens.

Working with The United Church of Canada SAH, CORE applied to sponsor two BVOR families. They arrived soon after, in February 2016. Barbara recalls that the group moved quickly because "we were one of the last sponsorships at the time of the Syrian crisis, and we didn't want to lose the opportunity or the momentum."

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.

CORE received an email on a Saturday advising them that the refugees were arriving on Monday. "All day Sunday, folks from the community were working elbow to elbow in the house, painting, sorting, decorating, stocking cupboards," says Barbara. "It was amazing to walk over after worship and see my Baptist pastor colleague already there painting!"

When CORE members met the seven newcomers, they discovered they were actually two unrelated families instead of the one they'd anticipated. CORE settled the larger family in the old Victorian manse and "scrambled" to find an apartment of comparable spaciousness for the smaller family. The manse was later used by another Paris sponsorship group to house another sponsored refugee family.

The community response was warm. "We had a welcome event for the first two families when they arrived," says Michael Shewberg, CORE co-chair and director of Paris' Five Oaks Retreat Centre. "We had to rent out the Paris fairgrounds. Over 200 people came. I felt very proud to be a Canadian." During their first sponsorship year, CORE received invaluable advice and support from members of the Brantford Mosque and its Imam, Tarek.

(continued...)

That collaboration continues today in activities related to the intercultural/interfaith Five Oaks Retreat Centre. Today CORE consists of interested individuals committed to social justice sponsorships, specifically of LGBTQ refugees. Barbara remains active as a community member.

Related Video: Michael Shewberg speaks about CORE's sponsorship experience in RSTP's Under One Roof: Brantford Mosque Unites Sponsors. Members of CORE are some of the participants in the featured interfaith/intercultural community walk.

The needs are great. There are many refugees waiting to be sponsored through the BVOR program. Below is a profile of an Iraqi BVOR refugee family on our list, and some of the reasons BVOR refugees like them need sponsors in Canada.

Current BVOR profile

An Iraqi family of four currently in Turkey, awaiting resettlement. The head of household speaks some English. Life is difficult for them in Turkey. It is recommended that they move to Waterloo or Toronto where they have relatives.

You can help sponsor this family through the BVOR program!

BLENDED VISA OFFICE-REFERRED (BVOR) PROGRAM

For more information, visit www.rstp.ca or email bvor@rstp.ca

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Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada

Refugees in Turkey

In August 2018, UNHCR reported 142,576 registered Iraqi refugees living in Turkey.

They have only limited protection in Turkey. Most now receive “temporary protection” through a document that must be renewed every six months. Temporary protection, unlike full refugee status, does not provide complete legal protection. Reports of forced return for Syrian refugees add to the instability of the situation for all refugees.

Limited access to work

Basic needs, social services and education are provided, but work permits are limited and must be renewed periodically. Refugees are restricted to the area or camp where they were first registered, even though employment may only be available in other regions. Poverty has led to early marriage and child labour.

Restricted freedom of movement

Refugees who wish to travel in Turkey must request permission, as must those who wish to leave their camp for longer than a day.

How can you help BVOR refugees in Turkey?

Contact the Refugee Sponsorship Training program and ask us about the Blended Visa Office-Referral Program (BVOR).

RSTP will match you with a suitable refugee or refugee family and help you through the application process!

For more information, please visit:

- [RSTP's 4 Steps to BVOR Sponsorship VIDEO](#)

- [RSTP's webpage on BVOR sponsorship](#)