



BVOR NEWS

Refugee
Sponsorship
Training
Program

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Community Welcomes BVOR Refugees During COVID-19

The hamlet of Neerlandia, Alberta is a two-hour drive north-west of Edmonton. For a small community, it has been doing outsize work in resettling refugees for more than 40 years, thanks to members of the Neerlandia Christian Reformed Church. Originally working with the World Renew SAH, the Neerlandia group has sponsored 20 families since 2000, including four BVOR cases (16 people) since 2015.

Family of five welcomed in August

This past August, they welcomed a BVOR family of five - a single mother and her four young children. The mother is a political refugee from Saudi Arabia who had found temporary asylum in Malaysia. "She tells us women have no rights in Saudi Arabia," says the sponsor. The mother has good English language skills, they add, and "the children are adjusting in school; they are always happy to see visitors and are open to talking."

Quarantine worked well

The family lives in a mobile home, which worked well for their mandatory two-week quarantine following arrival. "We stocked the home before they came," the sponsor says. The family were picked up at the airport in two cars. Drivers and family members wore masks during the ride home. During the quarantine period the sponsors kept in touch by phone. "Some people visited outside, and it went quite well with masks," says the sponsor. "We are slowly getting to know them."

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.

Refugees resettled

Over the years, the Neerlandia group has settled refugees from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Other recent BVOR families have come from Myanmar and Somalia. The newcomers have included professionals, fishers, farmers and tradespeople, says the sponsor. While most newcomers found work in Neerlandia during their first year, many eventually moved on to larger cities to further their children's education or be closer to relatives.

Lasting impact on community

The impact of refugee sponsorship on the community has been profound and lasting. Many newcomers "still call Neerlandia home," says the sponsor. Deep bonds and lasting friendships have been formed, with newcomer children calling sponsors Papa and Mama or Grandma and Grandpa. "Our congregation has grown in compassion," says the sponsor, "and Neerlandia children have developed a real appreciation for different cultures."

Planning and communication help overcome challenges of welcoming refugees during pandemic.

- Let newcomers know they must wear masks while in transit in Canada.
- Know your local, provincial and federal public health guidelines on quarantine and safety during Covid, and let newcomers know what to expect.
- Check out RSTP's website for the latest **Covid-19 resources**, including the **Travel Resumption Resource Kit** for Refugee Sponsors.

IRCC BVOR Program Evaluation: Data Collection Activities

A message from IRCC

"Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)'s Research and Evaluation Division is conducting an evaluation to assess the relevance and performance of the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program, including the need for and design of the program. The evaluation is being conducted to provide strategic and timely evidence to the department and in fulfillment of evaluation requirements under Treasury Board's 2016 Policy on Results.

In support of this work, we would like to inform you of two surveys being launched in support of the evaluation; (1) a survey of Resettled Refugees and (2) a survey of Sponsors.

Resettled Refugee Survey

This survey will solicit perspectives of resettled refugees who arrived in Canada between 2016 and May 2020.

The survey focuses on the experiences of refugees resettling in Canada, including the resettlement supports they received, as well as the extent to which their needs are met effectively and in a timely manner. As the results from this survey will also be used to inform a broader resettlement evaluation by the department (scheduled to start in Q4 2020-21), the survey will be sent to GARs, PSRs, JAS, as well as BVORs. The survey will be available in French, English, Arabic, Tigrinya, Dari and Kurdish, and results will be anonymous. The survey is expected to be accessible for respondents to complete between October 23rd and November 13th. This survey should not be confused with IRCC's Newcomer Outcomes Survey (an annual survey sent to newcomers based largely on settlement and resettlement experiences) who will reach out to refugees in the coming weeks or the Department's Resettlement Services Assurance Team's monitoring activities.

Sponsor Survey

The evaluation of the BVOR program will also include a survey of sponsors. This survey will focus on awareness of and participation in BVOR sponsorship, as well as supports provided to BVORs and sponsors' experiences with the program. The survey is scheduled to be launched in November, and results will be anonymous. This survey should not be confused with the survey that will be carried out by Refugee613 with sponsor facilitators in the context of the 'Reviewing and Renewing Refugee Sponsorship' project, which should be launched in the coming weeks."



da BLENDED VISA OFFICE-REFERRED (BVOR) PROGRAM

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or email bvor@rstp.ca

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