



# Guidebook For Sponsoring Syrian Refugees Through The BVOR Program

February 2016

## **Disclaimer**

Readers are advised that the content of this guidebook reflects the procedures current at the time of publication.

## ***Prior to Arrival***

Preparations for the arrival of the newcomer(s) should be started well in advance. This is an overview of some important items your sponsoring group should be preparing ahead of time.

- Secure housing, either temporary or a permanent dwelling. If you decide to wait until your newcomer(s) arrive to choose permanent housing, make sure you do research into available options ahead of time.
- Find a doctor or begin researching your options for one prior to your newcomer(s) arrival.
- Gather information for an orientation binder. Provide information in English as well as in the newcomer(s) native language. A page with photos, names and contact information of members of the sponsoring group could be on the first page. Other things to include: emergency contact information; Telehealth (811); area maps; bus schedules; how to use appliances and any other useful information. Information should be put simply and clearly in bullet form. It may also be a good idea to include pockets/folders for important Immigration Documents, etc that will be needed in the first days and weeks after the newcomer(s) arrival.
- Plan for an interpreter to accompany you to the airport.
- Provide the newcomer(s) with an International Calling card and phone upon arrival so they have a mode of communication.
- Make sure your newcomer(s) have some essentials they may need over the coming days, whether you drop them off at a temporary accommodation or in permanent housing. Such as basic toiletries and easy to prepare food.
- Provide the newcomer(s) with a cash allowance.

- Delegate the responsibilities for everything that needs to be accomplished within the first few weeks among the sponsoring group members.
- Consider putting together welcome bags for each family member.

### ***Visits and Privacy***

Given the media attention in recent days it is important to be aware of the privacy of your newcomer(s) both when they arrive and when you are assisting them in resettling. Please do not allow media access to these details and respect the privacy of your newcomer(s). Keep their privacy at the forefront too when sharing on social media regarding their arrival, resettling them and as they experience new things for the first time in their new country. Consider how you would want to be treated in regards to your own privacy if you were in the same situation as the newcomer(s).

- If your church has a policy in place for those who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults make sure you use this same policy for those who will work closely with the newcomer(s). If your church does not have such a policy, now would be the time to put such a policy in place. For more information please visit this link. <http://baptist-atlantic.ca/tools-resources/child-abuse-response-prevention/intro/>
- In the first days after the newcomer(s) arrival, it is important not to separate the parents and their children without first discussing the arrangement with the parents. Remember the situation and be sensitive to their needs to remain together during this time.
- An important note related to privacy is the visits with female newcomers. It is best that no men from the sponsor group be alone with newcomer

women, especially in their home. Make sure to always have a woman from the sponsor group present out of respect for religious or cultural reasons.

- Make it a practice to call or text ahead when you are planning to visit with the newcomer(s).

### ***Arrival***

This is an exciting time for your sponsoring group as you anticipate the moment you will receive your newcomer(s). Below are some important things to keep in mind and be aware of as you plan for this day.

### ***At the Airport***

- Make a welcome sign with their names both in English and their native language. This will identify your group as they enter the arrival area.
- Please keep in mind that the newcomer(s) has travelled long distances and will be tired and overwhelmed. While a larger group can be present to hold the sign and witness their arrival, it is recommended that your core sponsor group meet the newcomer(s) and personally welcomes them at the airport.
- Arrange to have a translator at the airport with you for the arrival. This ensures easier communication of important information; addresses any concerns or questions and eases some discomfort with the initial meeting.
- The newcomer(s) may not know what role you play as a sponsorship group and therefore you should go over some of your responsibilities and expectations as the sponsor for your newcomer(s). Make sure to revisit this in the days ahead after the excitement of the arrival has settled.

- If you plan to take some initial photos of the arrival, make sure to communicate this with the newcomer(s), respecting their wishes to have pictures taken or not.
- Bring water and snacks to the airport, particularly if there are young children. Depending on the arrival time plan to have a meal prepared and waiting for them when they arrive from the airport to their accommodations.
- If your group has not set up permanent housing and has opted for temporary accommodations, make sure the newcomers are together and not separated. Also be sure to communicate to them that this is not their permanent dwelling and that in the days to come you will be finding permanent housing for them.
- The newcomer(s) will arrive with a blue and white IOM bag that contains important documents.

### ***First Day(s)***

There are several important things that need to be done on the first day(s) after the arrival of the newcomer(s). Please check the newcomer(s) documents that are contained in the blue and white IOM bag they arrived with. Be sure you ask the newcomer(s) if you have their permission to go over the documents with the translator to check for accuracy with birth dates and names on these documents. You should also communicate that you need to make copies of the documents to use in the coming days. Look for the newcomer(s) Interim Federal Health (IFH) certificate and Social Insurance Numbers (SIN). If these documents are not present or if there are errors you will need to contact IRCC (CIC). You should also

note these important documents will be needed in the years to come for Permanent Residence Renewal, Travel Documents, and Canadian Citizenship applications. **\*Special note:** When the newcomer(s) are issued their Social Insurance Number they are cautioned by the translator in their Point of Entry that this number is highly confidential and they should not tell anyone about their SIN. In some cases, sponsor groups have believed the SINs were not issued because the newcomer(s) have hidden them from the sponsor group. It is important to have your translator clarify to the newcomer(s) this number is needed for documents pertaining to settlement and should be disclosed to the sponsor group.

Within a few days after the arrival, the representative of your sponsoring group will receive an email from IRCC which will include a Direct Deposit Form, Change of Status Form, the Income Support Calculation spreadsheet and a copy of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). You will be instructed what forms need to be filled in, where they need to be mailed and what copies of documents will need to be sent as well. Make sure an email is sent to Jacqueline Derrah [jacqueline.derrah@baptist-atlantic.ca](mailto:jacqueline.derrah@baptist-atlantic.ca) in the first 3-5 days to confirm your newcomer(s) arrival for the SAH and to give an update on how the resettlement is going to that point. Information that should be covered the first day:

- Go over the information you have provided in the orientation binder. Note this should act as a supplemental resource for the newcomer(s). You might want to suggest they use this binder as a central place to store their important Immigration Documents, etc.

- An important item to discuss at this time is how to call 911 in case of emergency. Your group also should explain the difference between calling 911 and the local police office and provide that phone number as well.
- Be sure the newcomer(s) know how to use the appliances/tools in the dwelling such as telephone, stove, microwave, can opener, thermostat, shower, toilet, laundry, etc.
- Explain what to do in case they hear the fire alarm go off in their building.
- Explain how garbage and recycling in the particular location you have settled them.
- Discuss the rules of the apartment building, such as quiet hours, visitors, parking. Go over the lease or Tenant Agreement.
- Show them the basic food staples you have provided and explain that tap water is safe to drink.
- Provide the newcomer(s) with a small amount of cash.
- Provide your newcomer(s) the opportunity to call family members. Look into buying International Phone Cards or other methods of calling internationally at a fair price.
- Explain to the newcomer(s) how the Canadian phone plans work. Go over with them the details of the plan you have provided them with, both local and international.
- Create information cards for each family member they can carry with them. Include their name, address and emergency contact number on it.
- Make sure when you leave the family at the end of the day that you explain to them when you will return. Arrange for a time to meet with them the next day.

### *Medical Needs*

Newcomer(s) may have medical needs that need to be addressed quickly after they arrive.

- Finding a family doctor prior to the newcomer(s) arrival is preferred. If this is possible, schedule an appointment(s) soon after the arrival.
- If no family doctor has been located, the newcomer(s) may need to be seen at a walk-in clinic or health centre. Be sure to schedule an interpreter for the visit.
- Inform the newcomer(s) they need to bring their IFH (Interim Federal Health program) document with them whenever they go to a medical appointment.

### *Health Coverage*

- **Medical Services Insurance (MSI/Nova Scotia)** - Registration should be done as soon as possible after arrival. The newcomers have to call (or someone can speak on their behalf) 902-496-7008. They have to give their home address and then **MSI** will mail them an application form (this serves as proof that they have a valid NS address). Once they receive the application form, they will have to fill it in and mail it back to MSI together with a photocopy of their Confirmation of Permanent Residence document (received at the airport at time of entry into Canada). MSI will email the newcomers their cards as soon as they are processed. The newcomers are covered by MSI from their date of arrival. More information can be found [here](#).
- **Medicare (NB)** – Applications can be found online [here](#). Completed forms *must* be mailed to Medicare directly (refer to Contacts) or delivered

in person to a Service New Brunswick office. Please note: proof of Canadian citizenship or a copy of all Canadian Immigration identification records and entry stamp on passports *must* accompany your request as well as proof of identity and proof of residency.

- **Medical Care Plan/MCP (NFLD)**- To apply for coverage, complete an Application Form and mail, fax, or bring it to one of the Medical Care Plan (MCP) offices, along with the appropriate identification and citizenship/immigration documents (photocopies are acceptable). Application forms are available at hospitals and doctors' offices throughout the province, and of course, from Medical Care Plan (MCP). Information can be found [here](#).
- **PEI Health** - In order to get your PEI Health Card you must fill in a Personal Health Card Application form. You only need to fill in one form for yourself and any family members living with you. Information can be found [here](#).

### *Housing*

- When deciding on permanent or temporary housing, be aware that your sponsoring group (or one member) may initially need to have the lease put in their name or that of the sponsoring group.
- If possible, transfer the lease to the newcomer(s) name. It is important that they are able to build their credit rating and this would be a good step in doing that.
- You should explain the circumstances under which you are signing the lease, making the landlord aware of your responsibility to the newcomer(s).
- Choose housing that the newcomer(s) will be able to afford themselves once the sponsorship is over. This will enable the newcomer(s) the security

of staying in this housing at the end of the sponsorship without the worry of finding a new place to live.

- Consider tenants insurance. Explain the need of this with the newcomer(s) and how it works.

## ***Orientation***

### *The Neighbourhood*

Explore the neighbourhood. Show them where schools, hospitals, shops, libraries, dentists, and parks are located.

- Have a public transportation orientation. Bus schedules and maps should be included in the binder you provided them with initially.
- Secure bus passes. Inquire to see if your city is offering free passes to newcomer(s).
- Take the newcomer(s) on bus routes that will become familiar to them. Explain how much they cost, how transfers work, hours of operation, and how the schedules work.

### *Grocery Shopping*

Show the newcomer(s) where they can go grocery shopping. Keep in mind budgeting. Find a store in their area that would be a cheaper place to shop.

- For the initial trip to the grocery store, focus on just a few items to purchase.
- Ask them about their preferences when it comes to food such as halal or certain ethnic food items. Providing them the opportunity to stock food that is familiar to them will help in easing some of the stress of the settlement process.

- Slowly introduce them to Canadian food items. This can be done by grocery shopping with them or preparing a meal with and for them.
- Shopping may be very different in their country of origin and they might be used to bargaining on prices at the stores. Explain the customs around non-bargaining in Canada.
- With their agreement, accompanying them on shopping trips for the first little while is a good idea. Be open to answering any questions they have or help to clarify things as you shop.

### *Clothing*

If the newcomer(s) arrive in winter, you will need to provide some weather appropriate clothing for them. Depending on the timing of their arrival, they may be provided with some outerwear at the point of entry to Canada. Regardless, you will need to go shopping with them to pick out weather appropriate clothing that also suits their cultural needs and budget.

- You should advise the newcomer(s) on how to dress appropriately for the climate, winter will probably be colder than they have expected. If they arrive during spring or summer, make sure that you assist them with acquiring warm clothes for the winter either through donations or by helping the newcomer(s) to buy them.
- You may receive donations of second-hand clothing for the arriving newcomer(s). Some cultures have differing views on second-hand goods/clothing. While in some cultures it is completely acceptable, for others it can be viewed as an insult to give people used goods. No matter which culture the newcomer(s) belong to, it is a good idea to explain why

you are giving them used clothing and how it is seen in Canadian culture.  
Explain the benefits of second-hand clothing in terms of money savings.

### *Banking*

- Make an appointment with a bank that is most convenient for your newcomer(s).
- Make sure you have an interpreter who is able to attend the appointment.
- Go over the basic currency, banking services and charges before the appointment.
- Ahead of time research which account is most suitable and affordable for the newcomer(s).
- Show how to use a bank machine.
- Discuss financial support and make sure the newcomer(s) understands.

### *Language Assessment*

- Book an appointment at your local Settlement Agency: [New Brunswick](#), [Newfoundland and Labrador](#), [Prince Edward Island](#), [Nova Scotia](#)

### *Applying for Child Tax Benefit*

- Apply for the Child Tax Benefit as soon as possible after arrival. Delays in applying will result in delays to receive benefits. Find the information you need [here](#).

### *Worship*

Ask the newcomer(s) if they might be interested in a specific religious place of worship and offer to help them locate one. Do not assume the newcomer(s) are

of a specific religion or are looking for a place of worship. It is always best to ask. This would be a great way to help the newcomer(s) adjust to their new life in Canada.

### *Creating Community*

A vital part of the resettlement process includes community involvement. This helps the newcomer(s) meet new people and adjust to life in Canada.

Connecting them to the settlement agency in your community also gives them the chance to meet people with shared backgrounds, traditions and languages. This is a great way for the newcomer(s) to practice their English and make connections. Look for ways to build community that goes beyond just the practical elements of resettlement.

### ***Syrian Cultural Considerations***

#### *Syria: Urban and Rural*

- Syrians take great pride in their cities.
- Damascus, the capital, has been called the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world
- Rural areas contrast with wealth of its cities
- Rural people and immigrants have lower level of education but have more experience in community organizing (because they have to rely on themselves)

### *Socializing*

- Conservative Muslim women do not socialize with men outside their families
- Greeting: members of the opposite sex shake hands, Muslim women may instead, nod and put their hands on their hearts
- Syrian men and women are affectionate with members of the same gender.
- It is normal for two men or women to hold hands, lean on and touch each other, and greet each other with kisses on the cheeks.
- Stigma against gays and openly gay behavior. LGBTI individuals are likely to keep their sexuality very private.
- Could stand close to you, use loud voices and more gestures for normal conversation.

### *Parenting and Children*

- Help children with schoolwork and monitor activities as best they can
- Boys often monitor the behavior of their sisters
- Syrians are affectionate with children –even the children of strangers – and will hold them on their laps, touse their heads, and kiss the cheeks of babies and children.
- Children are expected to shake hands when they meet new people and show respect for elders
- Corporal punishment is common and accepted. Be aware of this and consider the need to explain our laws in Canada regarding disciplining children.

### *Health Care*

- Place great faith and trust in doctors
- Prefer to be seen by same-sex health care providers
- Could be embarrassed by personal questions, particularly those having to do with sex and sexual problems

### *Eating and Drinking (and Smoking)*

- Eating is an important activity
- Value eating meals with family and friends
- Inviting others to share one's food is an essential courtesy
- Person invited is expected to decline the invitation the first time out of politeness
- Breakfast: tea/coffee with pita bread and either cheese, eggs, hummus, or yogurt, jam, olives
- Lunch: main meal around 2 to 3 pm is often a cooked stew, with meat or chicken and vegetables, served with rice and salads.
- Dinner: late and similar to breakfast
- Muslims do not eat pork and devout Muslims do not drink wine
- Men especially are more likely to smoke, and may find it normal to smoke indoors.

### *Food Suggestions from a Syrian*

- Burghul(cracked wheat): medium and fine
- Mediterranean diet generally: Vegetable oil, short-grain rice, Potatoes, Garlic, Pickles, pasta, pita/naan bread, tahini, feta cheese

- Lentils, chick peas or fava beans, tomato paste/crushed tomatoes
- Butter, Yogurt, Milk, Flour, Sugar, Yeast, All spice, Cumin
- La Vache Qui Rit cheese (popular amongst Syrian kids)
- Halal meat, if possible

Also:

- Za'atar (mix of dried thyme with cumin and sesame seeds – Middle Eastern Store or could make it!) + large cooking pot
- Do share your own cooking traditions with them, or you never know, they may want to learn to make pizza!

Want to read more?

Cultural Orientation Resource Center “Refugees from Syria” – November 2014

<http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders>

Check <http://www.zabihah.com> - Halal meat and restaurants as well as mosques (Search Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI, NFLD).

## Required Tasks – Prior to and Day of Arrival

TASK	ASSIGNED TO	COMPLETED	COMMENTS
<b>PRIOR TO ARRIVAL</b>			
Housing permanent or temporary & utilities			
Find a doctor/research options			
Create Orientation Binder			
Plan for an interpreter			
Provide toiletries and basic food staples			
<b>DAY OF ARRIVAL</b>			
Review <i>Visits and Privacy</i> with your group			
Bring an Interpreter			
Explain who the group is and that you are there to help			
Provide phone (home or cell)			
Go over basic safety orientation of new home			
Go over contents of Orientation Binder			
Give details on 911, doctor, dentist, etc.			
Provide a premade meal			
Orientation of appliances in new home			
Provide a small amount of cash			
Information Card(s)			
Arrange for a time to meet the following day			
Review Documents contained in the <b>IOM</b> blue/white bag.			

## First Days and Weeks Checklist

TASK	ASSIGNED TO	COMPLETED	COMMENTS
Make copies/scan Newcomer Papers			
Email Jacqueline at CABC			
Make medical appointments			
Discuss IFH/Provincial Health Coverage			
Apply for Provincial Health Coverage			
Explore the neighbourhood			
Grocery shopping			
Clothing Shopping, explain our climate			
Make a bank appointment			
Apply for Child Tax Benefits			
Bus routes			
Worship			
Creating Community			
Language Assessment			