**Getting Ready for the Refugees’ Arrival: Required Preparations**

The first step in preparing is to learn about all the local resources available. Before you can help the newcomers, you need to educate yourself about your community resources. This may require some sleuthing, for there is no section in the Yellow Pages that compiles such a list. What are the kinds of resources you will want to research? You want to find out about anything that will help you accomplish the tasks in the checklist below. A good place to start is with these BC community resources: <http://www.welcomebc.ca/newcomers_guide/Newcomers-Guide-Local.aspx> and <http://www.welcomebc.ca/welcome_bc/media/newcomersguides/english/index.html>. Here are some detailed suggestions:

**1. PREPARATION CHECKLIST AND RESOURCES**

| **PREPARATIONS:**  **Thing you need to make sure you do…** | **RESOURCES:**  **Getting Started and Important Issues to Consider** | **RESPONSIBLE**  **Who in the team leads on this…** |
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| **FINDING HOUSING and STOCKING THE HOUSE**   * Scout appropriate housing before the newcomers arrive. * Is rent within the guidelines? At a level that’s affordable after sponsorship ends? (take into account the cost of utilities as well.) * Is the location convenient for transit, stores, schools, etc.? * Is the landlord sensitive to cultural issues? * Will the refugee feel safe there? * Prepare **temporary** housing before the newcomers arrive. | You’ll need to find out about affordable housing options in your community, venues for searching for rental units, and the specifics of the rental laws and local bylaws that apply in your community. Most importantly, you’ll need to get out into the community and look at housing so that you get a very good idea of what’s available and what’s affordable. When the newcomers arrive, it may be with very little notice, so it is good to have scouted out the possibilities in advance.  Having an interim housing option is ideal, as this gives the newcomers the chance to participate in the permanent housing decision. When stocking the apartment with food, take into account the kind of food the newcomer is used to. Stocking “food from home” can go a long way to easing the stress around all the new things newcomers face. |  |
| **SHOPPING**   * Help newcomers learn to shop for food in Canada. * Take into account the newcomers’ need to have national foods in his/her diet. * Introduce them to Canadian food and cooking. | Since newcomers will have very limited funds to work with, learning how to shop economically will be a priority. Shopping may be quite different in their country of origin—for example, they may be used to bargaining on prices; or alternatively, they may be used to fixed prices for staple foods, and may not realize they need to comparison shop. Find out what economical shopping venues are available in your community: from bulk food to discount stores, to second hand shops. |  |
| **FINANCES**   * Assist newcomers to open a bank account. Help them learn about handling money in Canada, how to use bank services, rights and obligations, income tax, etc. * Find out about support provided by community groups. Some multicultural groups will provide financial counselling to newcomers in their own language. * Provide guidance in budgeting, including an explanation of the costs of long-distance phone bills, utilities, and other variable costs. | Some multicultural groups offer financial planning and management counselling to members of their community, in their own language. Although you will certainly provide orientation in this area, it can be tremendously helpful to newcomers to have someone from their own culture—who understands the differing cultural perceptions around handling money—to provide the “bridge” into the Canadian way of approaching money matters. As well, you may want to talk to bank managers to find out whether any banks in your community have special cross-cultural sensitivity or expertise. |  |
| **INTERPRETERS**   * You may need an interpreter often, especially at first. * Find out about interpreters in your community. In choosing an interpreter, take into account age, gender, and political sensitivities. * Interpreters may deal with very personal matters, so they must be highly trusted.   **INTERPRETERS con’t…**   * As soon as possible, newcomers should be encouraged to interact without the use of an Interpreter. This will build their confidence and help them build other connections to become independent. | Most newcomers, unless their English is very good, will require the use of interpreters at some point. At the beginning, this may be extensive and indispensable. You’ll want to have interpreters identified before arrival. Settlement agencies or multicultural councils may be able to make recommendations. There are a number of important considerations:   * Given that you will very likely be discussing some quite personal matters, is the interpreter’s gender and age appropriate? * If the interpreter is from the same country as the newcomer—is s/he from a group that has historical hostility with the newcomer’s group? This situation can be both explosive and painful for everyone. * Does the interpreter have an understanding of refugee situations and issues? If not, s/he may benefit from some information and awareness-raising. * Is the interpreter easily available? At the beginning especially, the interpreter may be needed on short notice, and at virtually any hour of the day or night. * Is the interpreter known and recommended within the multicultural community? Unless you can understand the language that will be spoken, you will depend upon the interpreter to accurately convey information, and must place a great deal of confidence in him/her. * Does the interpreter understand the need for strict confidentiality? |  |
| **SETTLEMENT SERVICES**   * Find out what settlement agencies, refugee/ethno-cultural groups and community social support groups exist in your community and the services they offer. * Help the newcomers to connect with those groups that will be able to offer appropriate assistance or ongoing support. | Many agencies provide counselling, support, referrals, and a variety of ongoing services and can provide invaluable advice and contacts. So, visit your local agency to understand exactly what services and resources will be available to the newcomer. Plan to build on this. Note: although you may feel you are capable of providing the counselling yourselves, keep in mind that the newcomers may make friends and important contacts through groups at agencies. |  |
| **TRANSPORTATION**   * Find out about bus or metro passes * Show the newcomers how to use the transport system; show them around your town | When checking out transportation options, keep in mind the limited resources of the newcomers, and make sure you find the most economical options. As well, consider the convenience of bus routes, keeping in mind that the newcomers will be juggling many things: housing and employment search, child care, and ESL classes. |  |
| **CLOTHING**   * Assist newcomers to buy required clothing, and show them how to make use of second-hand and bargain stores. * Advise them on dress appropriate for our Canadian climate | Be sensitive to issues of cultural appropriateness, especially concerning use of second-hand clothing. Budget for at least some new clothing.  Adequate winter clothing is essential. |  |
| **LANGUAGE TRAINING**   * Research available ESL (English as a Second Language) courses in your community. Settlement agencies can explain testing/referral process in your area. * Assist newcomer to find and register for the most appropriate course (e.g., some ESL courses focus on language in the workplace, related to a specific job; others are more general). | You will need to research what ESL and language training courses are available in your community. The newcomer may be eligible for government funded language instruction courses specifically organized for newcomers. Language classes are offered through various types of organizations (educational institutions, non-profit organizations, government organizations), and in various formats (community-based, workplace-focussed). Adult immigrants who have not acquired Canadian citizenship are eligible for these classes. To find out more, visit the CIC web site at [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca) or contact your local CIC. Other courses may also be available, through the local adult education program, college, or high school. Newcomers may even want to consider distance education courses in English, or private volunteer tutoring. When researching courses, find out about their focus, the “target” student group, and how, where, and when assessment and placement is conducted.  Your sponsorship budget should allow newcomers to take language classes when they first arrive rather than requiring them to begin working immediately. Newcomers that learn an official language settle better in the long term. |  |
| **EMPLOYMENT**   * Find out about employment counselling services in your community. Ethno-cultural groups or settlement agencies may provide counselling or even some training (e.g., using a computer) that is tailored to the needs of newcomers.   **EMPLOYMENT con’t…**   * Find out about the services of the Employment Resource Centres such as access to the internet, fax, computers and printers for job search, workshops on job search, counselling services, etc. * Find out about the employment preparation workshops such as resume writing, interview skills, networking strategies, etc. * Assist the newcomer to learn the “how to” of searching for jobs in Canada—searching ads, using the Canada Employment Centre, getting together a resume, “knocking on doors,” etc. * Provide lots of practical help and emotional support. * If applicable research re-qualification procedures for newcomers who may have professional skills and education (see Education section below). | Looking for employment is one of the most important tasks facing the newcomer during the first year of settlement. Maybe you have experienced how scary it is to walk into an office where everyone speaks a different language, and the “rules” of seeking employment are foreign. To assist the newcomer, advance research can be very helpful. If you know anything about the newcomer’s skill set and background, you can start researching employers for those skills in your area. Visit your local Canada Employment Centre to find out what resources are offered, and whether job counselling is available.  Begin to check out the many web sites for job hunting, such as +Jobs Canada, ([www.canada.plusjobs.com/)](http://www.canada.plusjobs.com/)), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada Job Bank, (www.[jb-ge.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/](http://jb-ge.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/)), Canada Jobs ([www.canadajobs.com/)](http://www.canadajobs.com/)), the Job Bus Canada ([www.JobBus.com/](http://www.JobBus.com/)) and Southam’s Careerclick, which covers job listings from major newspapers across Canada ([www.careerclick.com/)](http://www.careerclick.com/)).  These are only a few of the many, many job sites available. In addition to listing jobs, many such sites also provide information and resources on writing good resumes and successful job hunting. As well, you should be able to find printed resources in your local library that give valuable job-hunting advice, such as the classic *What Color is Your Parachute?* by Richard Nelson Bolles. Do all this keeping in mind that the newcomer will need to learn how to find and use all this information him or herself—in other words, with an eye to mentoring the newcomer into the effective use of the employment and job hunting resources that are out there. |  |
| **CHILD CARE**   * Find out about childcare options in your community. * Keep in mind access to public transport, proximity to ESL classes, cost, and cultural sensitivity. * Remember that for mothers to attend ESL classes, childcare may be one of their first needs. | When researching childcare resources in your community, keep in mind the likely income level of the newcomer after support ends. In addition to the normal care and safety concerns, consider cost, access to transport and sensitivity to cultural issues. Consider too that parents may be uncomfortable leaving their children with strangers, and will only participate in programs where childcare is on site. |  |
| **HEALTH**   * Get forms to register for provincial health insurance * Ask local CIC about the process for registering for Interim Federal Health Program (IFH) * Assist in finding a family doctor, explaining Canadian medical system, etc. * Investigate which vaccinations are required for school registration. * If sponsoring a refugee family with special medical needs, research the sources of special equipment, care and support. | To receive provincial health coverage, newcomers must meet the provincial rules for eligibility. Privately sponsored refugees are also eligible for Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage. Until they become eligible for provincial health coverage they will be covered for full IFH; from then on they will still have partial coverage for visual, dental and pharmaceutical costs during the sponsorship period.  It is worthwhile registering even for partial IFH, but this program is intended to be emergency care, and covers specific, basic healthcare needs within very strict guidelines. You’ll need to be aware of these guidelines, be prepared to help the newcomers understand them, as well as budget for costs not covered. (see the Appendix for a more detailed description of the IFH program) |  |
| **EDUCATION/JOB TRAINING**   * Find out about schools in the area and assist the newcomers to get their children into school. * Provide information about the Canadian school system and Canadian views towards education. * Support newcomers as they learn about school trips, homework expectations, etc. * Find out about job training and credential assessment and upgrading possibilities. | In addition to ESL courses, there are now a wide variety of workplace training, adult education, and targeted skills development courses available both in-class and through distance learning. Organizations such as the Centre for Education and Training (CET) have services that are developed specifically to help newcomers assess and build their skills and language competency for the Canadian job market (for more information on CET, check [www.tcet.com/](http://www.tcet.com/)).  Many local colleges also offer courses which are intended to develop specific skills for the Canadian market. The Association of Canadian Community Colleges’ Work Keys program provides detailed and specific job profiling, skill assessment, and instructional support that is geared towards the Canadian job market. For more information, check ACCC’s web site at [www.accc.ca](http://www.accc.ca) or contact ACCC at 200 1223 rue Michael Street Nord/North, Ottawa, ON, K1J 7T2; Phone (613) 746-2222. This sort of assessment may be a very good way for newcomers to effectively address their employment skills. |  |
| **RELIGION**   * If appropriate, and the refugee family has informed you of their religious observance, locate places of worship in your community. * Discuss with your group how to ensure that meetings with the newcomers are planned in locations where they feel comfortable if they are not of your faith. | Religion is a very sensitive area. You must be very careful not to impose your religious beliefs on newcomers. Newcomers have the right to religious freedom, and cannot be required to join your group’s church, mosque, temple or other worship group. Invitations to religious activities and worship must be approached cautiously and sensitively even if the newcomers are of the same faith as your group.  Newcomers of different faiths than your own may not feel comfortable coming to a meeting or social event at your place of worship. If issuing an invitation to an event, explain the context carefully. Some newcomers may welcome an invitation to your group’s religious service, whereas others might prefer to meet and express their appreciation to their sponsors outside of a place of worship. |  |
| **CULTURE**   * Find out about the newcomer’s culture. (See [www.settlement.org/cp/](http://www.settlement.org/cp/) for cultural profiles available) * Raise your own awareness about culture. * Learn about how your cultural assumptions (e.g., regarding gender roles) may affect and even cause stress to the newcomers. * Plan how you’ll support the newcomers’ cultural adjustment. | Your work on raising your cultural awareness has already helped you find out about many of these. But you will also want to find out specifically about ethno-cultural groups that provide employment counselling, crisis counselling, and so on. If your town has a multicultural society or council, this is a good place to start.  If appropriate, you may want to find out about community groups, centres, etc., that the newcomer may be interested in affiliating with on their arrival. Keep in mind however the pluralism of a community and the refugee experience and that the newcomer may not necessarily feel affinity with a certain group. See section 4.1.2, below, for specific suggestions on supporting newcomers in their cultural adjustment. |  |
| **CRISIS AND TRAUMA**   * Contact your local settlement agency for information on appropriate trauma treatment or counselling in your area. | Refugees have been through traumatic situations. Once they’ve taken care of their immediate settlement needs, crisis and trauma counselling may become a real necessity for some. Find out in advance the appropriate resources that are available in your community. Visit the web site of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) to find out about torture and its treatment. (See Section 4.1.5 for details.) |  |
| **RECREATION**   * Find out about recreation facilities. * Help the newcomers learn how to use them, if necessary. * Be sensitive to cultural issues (e.g., dress and mixed-gender activities) | Check out facilities in your area, particularly those that can be used at a low cost or for free. |  |

**2. SAMPLE DETAILED SETTLEMENT PLAN**

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| **What Do We Need to Achieve?** | **Activities** | **Who?** | **By When?** | **Resources Required?** | **Who Needs to Know?** |
| Monthly Budget Developed | 1. Research local cost of living 2. Find out about community resources for budget planning support for the newcomers. 3. Design budget, etc…. | 1. Mrs. B. 2. Mr. C. 3. Ms. M. | Aug 31  Sept 15  Sept 15 | For each item list all resources required: money, materials, etc. | Finance committee |
| Apartment rented | 1. Search local vacancies in $500 - $700 range. 2. Talk to prospective landlords, etc…. | 1. Mrs. P, Ms. M. 2. Etc… | Oct 15 | Will need $1000-$1400 for first and last month’s rent. | Finance committee  Housing committee |
| Furnishings and household items in place | Etc…. | Etc… |  |  |  |