



# WELCOME GROUPS FOR REFUGEE CLAIMANTS

Volunteer Training Manual



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this training manual is to prepare volunteers to provide social support to refugee claimants. *Welcome Groups for Refugee Claimants* is an adaptation of Together Project's Welcome Group model, originally developed in partnership with COSTI Immigrant Services, to match volunteers with Government-Assisted Refugees in five cities across Ontario: London, Mississauga, Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Toronto. We wish to thank the Ontario Trillium Foundation for their generous support for this program.



### ABOUT THE MANUAL

The goal of this manual is to empower volunteers with an overview of the knowledge and tools most useful to providing social support to refugee claimants. The manual is divided into five sections.

**Understanding the Refugee Claimant Journey and the Volunteer Role / Section 1** describes the refugee claimant journey to Canada, common integration barriers, and how volunteers can empower refugee claimants to address those challenges.

**Concepts for Voluntary and Humanitarian Work / Section 2** introduces fundamental concepts for voluntary and humanitarian work: *vulnerability, trauma-informed care, empowerment, cultural sensitivity, and confidentiality*. The goal is to ensure that volunteers approach their relationships with refugee claimants in a way that fosters independence and ensures that all people involved experience a healthy, uplifting relationship.

**Managing Expectations / Section 3** touches briefly on how Welcome Group volunteers can manage their own expectations and refugee claimant expectations in order to build positive social connections.

**How the Program Works / Section 4** explains the responsibilities, timelines and expected tasks in the first weeks and months of your new relationship.

---

**THROUGH THE WELCOME GROUP PROGRAM, NEWCOMERS AND VOLUNTEERS BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTIONS BY WORKING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS NEWCOMER DEFINED PRIORITIES FOR THE MATCH OVER A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS. PRIORITIES CAN RANGE FROM LANGUAGE LEARNING TO ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE, EMPLOYMENT OR EDUCATION, TO SOCIALIZING. THESE PRIORITIES CREATE A SENSE OF COMMON PURPOSE AND SHARED EXPECTATIONS FOR THE MATCH.**

---

Illustrations, cover and opposite: Emilie Muszczak

# SECTION 1 UNDERSTANDING THE REFUGEE CLAIMANT JOURNEY



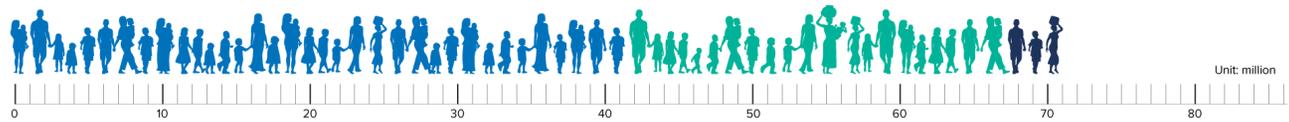
According to UN Refugee Agency, as of June 2019, an unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 25.9 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. Approximately 3.5 million of these refugees are asylum seekers, or “refugee claimants.” There are also millions of stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

## WHO ARE REFUGEE CLAIMANTS AND WHY ARE THEY COMING TO CANADA?

Refugee claimants, also referred to as “asylum seekers,” refer to “a person who claims refugee protection in Canada.”<sup>1</sup> The journey of a refugee claimant is different from resettled refugees in Canada. Whereas resettled refugees—Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) or Blended-Visa Office Referred (BVOR) Refugees-- land in Canada as Permanent Residents, the legal status of refugee claimants is different given that further processing is required to determine if they meet the definition of a Convention Refugee.

***The 1951 Refugee Convention, defines a refugee as any person who: “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted [...] is outside the country of [their] nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [himself or herself] of the protection of that country.”***

**70.8 million** forcibly displaced people worldwide



Internally Displaced People  
**41.3 million**

Refugees  
**25.9 million**

20.4 million under UNHCR's mandate  
5.5 million Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate

Asylum-seekers  
**3.5 million**

Where the world's displaced people are being hosted



About 80 per cent of refugees live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin

**57%** of UNHCR refugees came from three countries

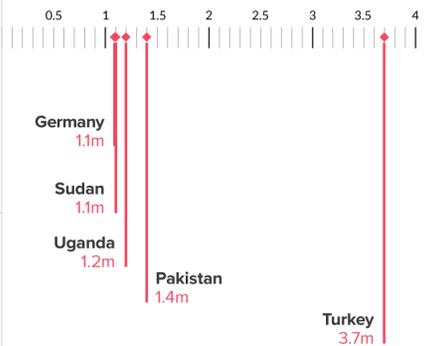


**341,800** new asylum seekers

The greatest number of new asylum applications in 2018 was from Venezuelans



Top refugee-hosting countries



UNHCR has data on  
**3.9 million** stateless people  
but there are thought to be millions more



**92,400** refugees resettled

**16,803** personnel

UNHCR employs 16,803 people worldwide (as of 31 May 2019)

**134** countries

We work in 134 countries (as of 31 May 2019)

**37,000** people

a day forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution

We are funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with 86 per cent from governments and the European Union and 10 per cent from private donors

Source: UNHCR / 19 June 2019



Chart: UNHCR USA



## DEFINITIONS

**Refugee Claimant (or Asylum Seeker)** – A person who has applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and is waiting for a decision on his/her claim from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

**Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs)** are refugees referred to the Canadian government by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) or another designated organization. The Government sponsors their initial resettlement and provides a year of financial assistance and other supports.

**Privately-Sponsored Refugees (PSRs)** are those refugees matched by a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) with a Group of Five or more Canadians or an organization who provide 12 months of financial and volunteer support.

**Blended-Visa Office Referred (BVOR) Refugees** are referred by UNHCR and matched with private sponsors. The Government of Canada provides six months of financial support and the private sponsor also provides six months of financial support and a year of social support.

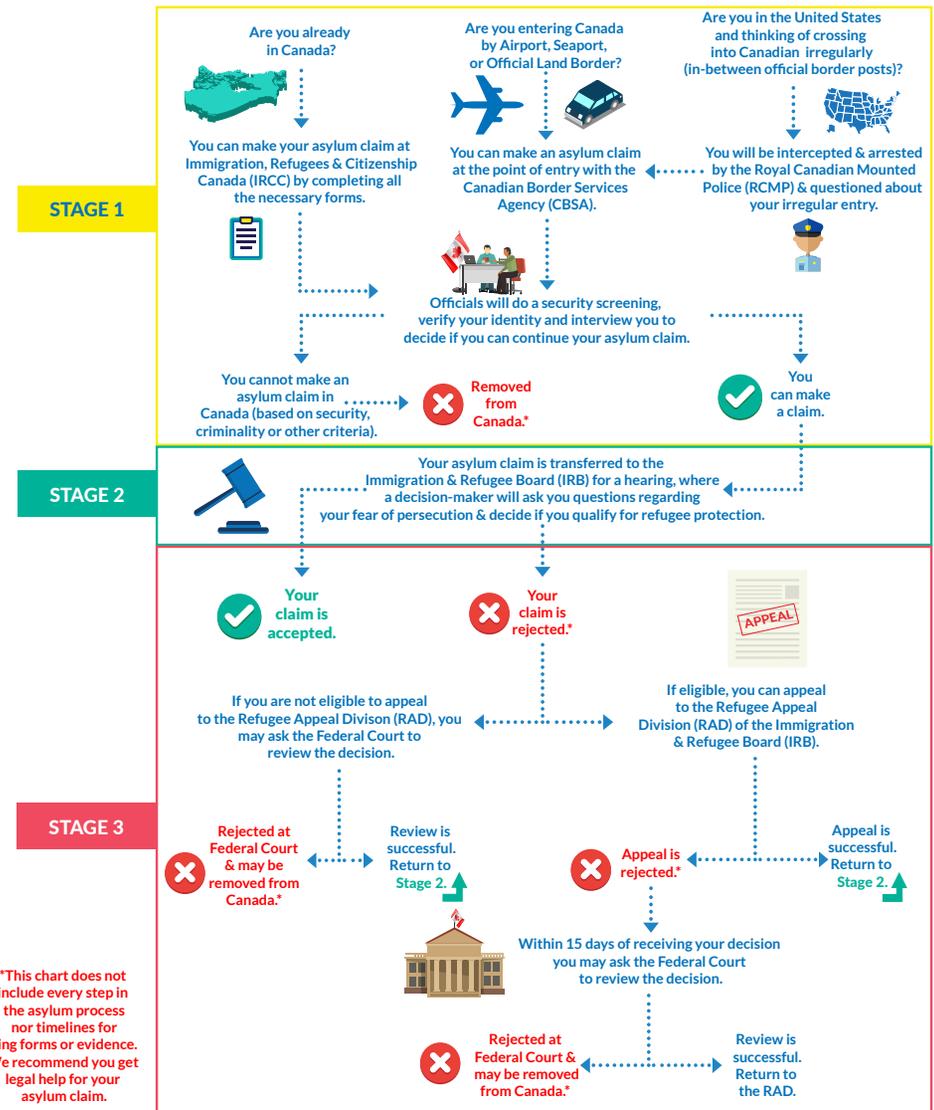
Refugee claimants undertake the arduous journey to Canada, because, in the words of a former refugee claimant, Godfrey S., “They all wish, desire and long to share the dream of a much better life; a worthy, meaningful, safe and productive life in Canada.”<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that due to their precarious legal status, refugee claimants receive less direct services as part of the migration process than other categories of newcomers to Canada and consequently face additional challenges with regards to social isolation and integration.

## REFUGEE CLAIMANT LEGAL PATHWAYS TO PERMANENT RESIDENCE IN CANADA

**While it is important for volunteers to have an understanding of refugee claimant legal pathways to Permanent Residence in Canada, it is equally important for volunteers to recognize that they are legally prohibited from making suggestions or providing any kind of legal advice as to how refugee claimants present their claim.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, volunteers will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement that prohibits sharing any personal details disclosed by a refugee claimant household. Volunteers should not become involved in an unfolding legal situation and instead, should leave this aspect of service delivery to trained lawyers.**



## MAKING AN ASYLUM CLAIM IN CANADA



\*This chart does not include every step in the asylum process nor timeliness for filing forms or evidence. We recommend you get legal help for your asylum claim.

Chart: UNHCR

There are several pathways through which refugee claimants can make a claim once they arrive in Canada. They can start by making a claim with the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) at a port of entry at an airport, sea port or land border. Refugee claimants can also make an inland claim at an Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) office sometime after they have arrived in Canada. Finally, refugee claimants can cross the border from the United States irregularly (not at a port of entry). When refugee claimants cross irregularly, they typically: 1) are intercepted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), 2) submit to a background screening by the Canada Border Services Agency and 3) are screened by a CBSA or IRCC officer to determine if they are eligible to file their Basis of Claim. Both international and Canadian law protects the rights of individuals fleeing to safety, including when it is necessary for people to enter a country illegally.<sup>4</sup> This right is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under Article 14, the right to seek asylum from persecution in other countries.<sup>5</sup> This convention and Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act<sup>6</sup> say that refugees must not be penalized for breaking immigration laws when entering a country to seek asylum.<sup>7</sup>

While inland claimants file their Basis of Claim at an IRCC office, those arriving at ports of entry are given 15 days to complete the paperwork and return it to the designated location.<sup>8</sup> Assuming claimants pass basic security, criminality, and eligibility checks as part of establishing their Basis of Claim, the claimant is put in a queue for a hearing<sup>9</sup> with the Refugee Protection Division (RPD) of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). The Refugee Protection Division (RPD) is a tribunal branch of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) and hears matters from individuals claiming protected person status.<sup>10</sup> The IRB is a quasi-judicial entity that hears cases and determines whether or not refugee claimants meet the United Nations' definition of a Convention Refugee. According to the Immigration and Refugee Board, the criteria against which cases are judged are:

***Convention refugees are people who have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Membership in a particular social group can include sexual orientation, gender identity, being a woman, and HIV status. Persons in need of protection must show that if they return to their country of nationality, they will face a danger of torture, a risk to their life or a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment. Persons are unable or, because of your fear, unwilling to try to get the protection of their home country.***<sup>11</sup>

While in queue for their hearing at the IRB, claimants may access social assistance and education, receive health services, enter into emergency housing and engage legal aid. Additionally, they are eligible to apply for an Open Work Permit, typically valid for 24 months, that can be renewed for 12-month periods after that.<sup>12</sup> A work permit enables claimants to apply for jobs here in Canada, once they have undergone a medical examination. It is worth noting that claimants are not entitled to receive federally funded settlement services until the IRB has rendered a positive decision, although they may qualify for certain provincial ones. Refugee claimants may apply for their Permanent Resident status only after a positive decision has been rendered by the IRB.

As of January 2019, the posted wait times for a hearing at the IRB were projected to be 24 months,<sup>13</sup> an increase over the estimated 20-month timeframe in September 2018.<sup>14</sup> Some cases will fall short of the 24-month threshold, while others will exceed it. If claimants receive a positive decision as a result of their IRB hearing, there is a projected 22-month processing time for Permanent Residence applications, based on the current caseload. Once a positive decision has been rendered by the IRB, a refugee claimant's status changes to that of a "Protected Person" or "Convention Refugee" until Permanent Residence is granted.

Legal aid lawyers can provide a range of services to refugee claimants, including: assisting with the Basis of Claim, preparing the claimant for their IRB hearing, compiling and organizing documents related to the hearing, assisting with hearing appeals, and/or preparing the Permanent Residence application.

## **THE VOLUNTEER ROLE**

- Volunteers should have a basic understanding of the stages of the refugee claim process in order to better understand the claimants' focus on their legal situation.
- However, volunteers should not, make suggestions related to how claimants present themselves at a hearing, which parts of their story to tell, make contact with the claimant's lawyer, or provide any other legal advice or input to the case.
- Volunteers must sign a confidentiality agreement that prohibits sharing personal details disclosed by claimants.

## REFUGEE CLAIMANT HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

The journey of a refugee claimant can be physically and mentally strenuous, from the point of arrival throughout the pre-hearing journey that can take up to two years or longer. Upon arrival at a point of entry, a refugee claimant is met by the Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA) to submit their Basis of Claim, they have 15 days to return their paperwork. For those who make a claim at a port of entry with the CBSA, their eligibility is determined at the time and they receive Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage on the spot.<sup>15</sup> Claimants may be referred to community agencies that prove vital to addressing health and mental health needs. When making an in-land claim, refugee claimants typically receive Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage from one-two weeks after submitting their basis of claim, but it can take longer.

Despite having access to health care shortly after arrival, refugee claimants must also deal with the immediacy of finding housing and employment, culture shock, and learning a new language, among many other challenges. As a result, health care may not be prioritized despite the fact that many refugees may have had limited access to healthcare pre-migration. Some refugees may also have endured war and other forms of violence. Despite these pressing health care needs, a range of factors can impede access to health care, resulting in late intervention and potential health-care risks and complications. These factors may include:

- refugees' difficulties navigating the complex, unfamiliar medical system upon arriving in Canada
- competing challenges of migration including housing, employment and child care
- lack of familiarity with concepts of preventive services that may not have been available pre-migration<sup>16</sup>

As per the Interim Federal Health (IFH) summary of coverage for refugee claimants,<sup>17</sup> coverage typically includes:

**Basic coverage** (similar to health care coverage from provincial or territorial health insurance plans)

- in-patient hospital and out-patient clinic services
- services from medical doctors, registered nurses and other health-care professionals licensed in Canada, including emergency, preventive, chronic, and pre- and post-natal care
- laboratory, diagnostic and ambulance services

**Supplemental coverage** (similar to the coverage provided to social assistance recipients by provincial and territorial governments)

- vision care (annual eye exams and prescription lenses every 2 years)
- urgent dental care
- refugee claimants on social assistance can receive free limited dental care through Toronto Public Health.<sup>18</sup>
- adults 18-64 are eligible to receive emergency dental services. Children 0-17 and older adults 65 years and older are eligible for more comprehensive dental care through Toronto Public Health.
- children whose families are on social assistance or below a defined income threshold can register for Healthy Smiles Ontario for dental care<sup>19</sup>
- home care and long-term care
- services from allied health-care practitioners including clinical psychologists, psychotherapists, counselling therapists, occupational therapists, speech language therapists, physiotherapists
- assistive devices, medical supplies and equipment, including:
- orthopedic and prosthetic equipment
- mobility aids
- hearing aids
- diabetic supplies
- incontinence supplies
- oxygen equipment

**Prescription drug coverage** (similar to the coverage provinces and territories give to social assistance recipients)

- prescription medications and other products listed on provincial/territorial public drug plan formularies (and a short list of additional medications prioritized for this population)

**Coverage for the Immigration Medical Exam (IME)**

- for most categories of beneficiaries, the IFHP also covers the cost of one IME and IME-related diagnostic tests required under the Immigration Refugee Protection Act<sup>20</sup>

In order to receive health coverage, claimants must present their refugee claimant document (often referred to as their “refugee ID” or “brown paper”) at any health care encounter (just as you would show your provincial OHIP card). The benefits covered by the IFH have certain limits, including maximum dollar amounts. It is important to note that once the Immigration Refugee Board renders a positive decision on a refugee, the refugee must apply for a health card under the [Ontario Health Insurance Program](#) (OHIP). If a claim is refused, the claimant’s health coverage under the Interim Federal Health Program continues until the claimant leaves Canada.

Of note, health care providers must proactively register with Medavie Blue Cross, which administers the Interim Federal Health Program, in order to bill for

services; not all health care providers accept IFHP coverage. It is thus important that refugees and claimants connect to health care providers and facilities that accept IFHP. A full listing of IFHP registered providers can be found [here](#).

***Due to challenges in administrative processing of IFH claims for refugees, some community agencies have partnered with clinics, such as the Crossroads Clinic at Women’s College Hospital, to ensure that refugee claimants receive optimal care. The Crossroads Clinic is Toronto’s first hospital-based refugee clinic that specializes in health-care for refugees. Some clinics are able to arrange for interpretation. When language is a barrier to healthcare, interpretation can significantly improve client access to care and enhance the quality of care.***

## THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

- Volunteers should have a basic understanding of the services provided under the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program.
  - Volunteers must keep in mind that they do not have the right to see any refugee claimant medical information unless it is shown to them. If they are privy to information, it must remain confidential.
  - Volunteers should be aware that refugee claimants may face barriers when trying to access health care services. These barriers may range from the need for language interpretation to service navigation assistance.
  - Volunteers may wish to direct refugee claimants to health service providers and clinics that specialize in refugee client care and that accept IFHP.
  - A timeline of health and mental health priorities can be established as part of the match to help direct claimants to appropriate services.
- Volunteers can support claimants as they establish and maintain connections with local clinics, request interpretation, and navigate services.
  - Volunteers should not provide medical advice but can help orient claimants to the medical system and appropriate services.
  - Volunteers should recognize that people respond to traumatic events in different ways. Stress and trauma can manifest at different times for different people; therefore claimants may require a variety of supports. Some of the primary interventions for mental health for refugee claimants include a focus on social concerns (housing, language, education, employment, etc.) But some refugee claimants may also be interested in counselling. Together Project’s online resource listings refer to a variety of cultural-based organizations and community health centres with counselling programs.

## ACCESS TO TORONTO'S SHELTER SYSTEM AND REFUGEE HOUSES

***While some refugee claimants may have personal connections to friends or family in Canada, many claimants arrive with few, if any, social ties. As a result, they may seek access to Toronto's shelter system upon arrival.***

In responding to refugee claimant requests for shelter, the City of Toronto reviews refugee claimants' unique needs and may identify a City shelter or refugee house based on factors such as country of origin, language proficiency, health, or other factors. Once refugee claimants are receiving shelter services, staff work to link them to health care, settlement support, the education system, income supports, as well as initiate the search for housing. Staff also refer them to service providers that can assist with the filing of their refugee claim.<sup>21</sup>

***Access to the shelter system and refugee houses is managed through Central Intake, a phone intake service operated by the City of Toronto. The Central Intake Line (416-338-4766 or 1-877-338-3398) is a 24/7 call service for individuals and families requiring emergency shelter.<sup>22</sup> Youth and adults can also get a walk-in referral from the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre (SHARC) at 129 Peter Street.***

### THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

- Volunteers should ensure that refugee claimants are familiar with Central Intake, a phone intake service operated by the City. The Central Intake Line (416-338-4766 or 1-877-338-3398) is a 24/7 call service for homeless individuals and families requiring emergency shelter.<sup>23</sup>
- Volunteers can explain to refugee claimants that they will be referred to a shelter based on their unique needs, including country of origin, language proficiency, health, and other factors.
- Volunteers are not expected to provide emergency shelter to the claimants they are matched with.

## ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Access to affordable housing has become a major challenge for refugee claimants. While Government-Assisted Refugees receive support from the government for housing, refugee claimants are not provided designated housing

support. Instead, they often rely on social assistance for income and the shelter system for temporary housing.<sup>24</sup> Housing generally becomes a priority for claimants after they get started on their legal paperwork, have a health assessment and register their children in school. Research from The City of Toronto's *Toronto Newcomer Strategy* found that one of the main barriers claimants face in their search for housing is the fact that many newcomers don't have banking history or employment history, making landlords apprehensive about renting to them.<sup>25</sup> Discrimination also exists within the rental market based on landlords taking advantage of newly arrived individuals who may not understand their rights as tenants.

***Due to the lack of shelter space in Toronto, emergency shelter services and refugee houses have been a primary source of accommodation for newly arrived refugee claimants. Claimants typically stay in a shelter for around 3-6 months, but the lack of accessible and affordable housing has extended the average time that individuals remain in the shelter system. As a result, refugee houses have had to extend the shelter services that they provide.***

Refugee claimants may be reluctant to move to other areas of Ontario because they recognize that there are a number of programs and services available in Toronto, or they may wish to be close to established communities and families. However, as housing prices are significantly lower outside of the City of Toronto, it can be useful for claimants to understand that they can access services outside of the city as well.

### THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

- Volunteers can help claimants understand their housing rights to help them avoid being mistreated by landlords. However, volunteers should not provide legal advice to claimants regarding any housing issues. Instead, volunteers can help to connect claimants to their local free community legal clinic if there are legal concerns.
- Volunteers can introduce claimants to areas outside of the downtown core to help claimants avoid the high cost of rent in the city.
- While volunteers should not actively engage in helping claimants search for housing, they can show someone how to conduct an online search for available apartments, accompany someone to view a unit, assist in filling in application forms or communicate with landlords where there is a language barrier, and offer ideas and encouragement.

## EMPLOYMENT

Early employment for refugee newcomers has been correlated with long-term economic success. Meaningful employment can also support integration, self-esteem and sense of purpose. However, refugee claimants face multiple barriers to employment that range from uncertain legal immigration status to common barriers, such as language fluency, gaining recognized accreditation of former education and training, and understanding the cultural norms in the workplace.

***Refugee claimants can apply for a work permit from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). If approved for a work permit, refugee claimants can also apply for a Social Insurance Number (SIN). There is no fee associated with applications for either a claimant's initial work permit or Social Insurance Number.***

Not all refugee claimants who apply for a work permit receive one. Refugee claimants must prove that they need to work to support themselves or that they would require social assistance without a work permit. According to IRCC, if a refugee claimant is already receiving social assistance, they must include proof of this when submitting the work permit application. Also, refugee claimants may need to submit the results of a medical examination prior to receiving a work permit.<sup>26</sup>

A work permit is both mandatory to work and a requirement in order to get a Social Insurance Number (SIN). The initial work permit is valid for 24 months and must be renewed every twelve months thereafter until they obtain Permanent Residence status. Many settlement agencies can offer assistance to help refugee claimants apply for and renew a work permit. Refugee claimants receive a SIN beginning with "9", which indicates a temporary work status. Some employers may be less willing to hire and train a refugee claimant due to this temporary work status.

A lack of legal status and/or fear of deportation means that refugee claimants are particularly vulnerable to precarious working conditions. Refugee claimants may not feel safe in reporting employers who: pay less than the minimum wage, refuse to pay owed wages, or offer unsafe working conditions. Lack of a legal work permit, and for many, limited English, as well as other barriers to employment, may drive some claimants to find jobs that pay 'under the table.' Welcome Group volunteers can encourage claimants to connect with employment agencies with experience in serving refugee claimants, such as [Acces Employment](#). Volunteers can also encourage them to connect with an Ontario Works (OW) caseworker about their employment goals; OW offers many training and employment opportunities that are only for OW recipients. Where there are concerns about

workers' rights, claimants can access legal support through their local [legal aid clinic](#) and/or through other organizations like the [Workers Action Centre](#).

### THE VOLUNTEER ROLE:

- Volunteers can assist by helping refugee claimants identify transferable skills which would aid them in their search for work in an unfamiliar Canadian job market.
- Volunteers can also act as an initial information and referral source, supporting newcomers with a wide range of needs: from creating an email account, assisting with resumes and cover letters, creating a LinkedIn profile, and/or conducting mock interviews.
- Volunteers can also help refugee claimants connect with appropriate employment agencies, skills building and accreditation programs and employers.
- Volunteers can encourage refugee claimants to consult with community agencies and employment agencies to ensure that they are aware of their workplace rights.
- Volunteers can tap their own social networks to help refugee claimants chart a path towards meaningful employment.

## LANGUAGE LEARNING

***Refugee claimants arriving in Canada possess varying levels of English language ability. Official language skills are important for navigating the previously mentioned services but are equally useful in social integration and building social networks. Volunteers can play an important role in providing opportunities for informal language learning.***

While refugee claimants are eligible to attend English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, they are ineligible for federally funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs. Refugee claimants in ESL programs must pay material fees of up to \$30/month for 30 hours a week of language training. ESL programs are offered at locations throughout the city and are designed to assist with reading, writing and grammar, speaking and listening, pronunciation, workplace skills, and computer literacy. Newcomers report

varying degrees of satisfaction with ESL training and can benefit greatly from informal language learning with volunteers.

### THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

- Volunteers can assist with finding an available ESL program and teacher.
- Volunteers can work with Together Project and their matched refugee claimant household to create specific language learning priorities and to develop a language learning home practice program.
- With refugee claimant parental consent, volunteers can help tutor their children in English and other subjects. Volunteers should recognize that children may be coming from different educational systems and could have gaps in their schooling.
- Volunteers and refugee claimants can use assistive technology (such as Google translate) to support social interaction and help overcome language barriers.
- If necessary, volunteers and refugee claimants can communicate via a volunteer “Cultural Ambassador” who is assigned to the match by Together Project to assist with language and cultural interpretation.

### GENERAL SETTLEMENT SUPPORT

Navigating a new city can be particularly challenging for individuals arriving from potentially very different contexts, with limited English, and who may have recently been affected by trauma. While claimants often receive support services in the shelter system, shelter employees recognize that integration is a long term process that extends past the average three-month mark where individuals remain in the shelter. Many shelters across the city offer outreach programs for refugee claimants after they leave to ensure that they continue adapting to their new life in Canada.

Canadian winters can be a challenging experience for many newcomers. Refugee claimants may need assistance in identifying clothing banks where they can find winter necessities.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, some newcomers may initially be overwhelmed by Toronto’s transit system and require initial assistance in transit navigation.

Access to childcare and education are also key priorities for many newcomer households. While school registration may initially occur with assistance from

professionals in a community shelter, it is very common for refugee claimants to move multiple times during their early years in Canada. Multiple relocations will require building new relationships with local public schools and/or childcare providers. Volunteers can provide assistance in navigating education and recreation supports for refugee claimant children and youth. Welcome groups and refugee claimants can use the 211 service<sup>28</sup> via phone, text, live chat or the website for additional support in locating or accessing community and social services. Interpreter services in 100 languages are available during daytime hours. More resources are available in our Refugee Claimants Resource List.

Ontario Works (OW) can offer both financial and employment assistance for refugee claimants. Financial assistance may include:

- income support to help with the costs of basic needs, like food, clothing and shelter
- health benefits for clients and their families

Employment assistance to help clients find, prepare and keep a job may include:

- workshops on resume writing and interviewing
- job counselling
- job-specific training
- access to basic education, so clients can finish high school or improve their language skills

In most cases, an OW client must agree to participate in employment assistance activities in order to receive financial assistance.<sup>29</sup>

Refugee claimants can start the application process either online, by phone or in person.

- Online, use the [Online Application for Social Assistance](#)
- By phone or in person, call or visit your local [Ontario Works office](#)

***Refugee claimants who have filed a Basis of Claim have the right to apply to Ontario Works (OW) for social assistance for things like rent, food, clothing and prescription drugs. Claimants can apply for social assistance at their local Ontario Works office. Claimants can contact 211 or ServiceOntario to locate their local Ontario Works office (Toll-free 1-800-267-8097). An OW worker should phone the applicant within three business days to set up an appointment to complete the application in person. OW will ask a refugee claimant for documents to prove that they have made a claim.***<sup>30</sup>

If a refugee claimant has a disability and needs help with living expenses, then they may be eligible for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) offers:

- financial assistance to help with essential living expenses
- benefits, for the refugee claimant with the disability and their family, including prescription drugs and vision care
- help finding and keeping a job, and career advancement.

The refugee claimant household can contact their local Ontario Works office to learn more about ODSP.<sup>31</sup>

### THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

- Volunteers can assist refugee claimants in preparing for winter by directing them to affordable stores or clothing banks where they can find winter necessities.
- Volunteers can orient refugee claimants to new neighbourhoods and familiarize them with local transit.
- Volunteers can support refugee claimants as they enroll their children in schools, seek childcare or research recreation activities.
- Volunteers can assist refugee claimants with Ontario Works service navigation, ensuring that they connect with their local Ontario Works office if the household requires social assistance.
- If a refugee claimant household includes a person with a disability, then volunteers can encourage the household to connect with Ontario Works to learn more about their eligibility for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

### SOCIALIZING

Refugee newcomers frequently specify that “socializing” is a key match priority. Relaxed social encounters can be an important step in building trust, providing informal language practice opportunities and increasing cultural understanding. Informal conversations can help build confidence and a sense of community and promote cultural exchange. Socializing is also an opportunity to recognize



and celebrate refugee claimant talent and abilities. Research suggests that mitigating newcomer social isolation can have positive consequences for refugee physical and mental health.<sup>32</sup>

### THE VOLUNTEER ROLE:

- Volunteers can recognize that socializing is an important activity that can help build trust between newcomers and volunteers.
- Informal socializing can lead to opportunities for language practice, exploring local neighbourhoods, using transit, and expanding social networks.
- Informal socializing can help volunteers become more familiar with refugee claimant talents and abilities.
- Informal socializing can also help refugee claimants feel more comfortable in reaching out to volunteers in times of stress.

Illustration: Emilie Muszczak

## SECTION 2 CONCEPTS FOR VOLUNTARY AND HUMANITARIAN WORK



### INTEGRATION DYNAMICS

Integration is a two-way street: newcomers adjust to their new surroundings and environment, and Canadians adjust and make space for their new neighbours by welcoming them into their communities. Integration is the foundation of multiculturalism, makes our cities some of the world's most vibrant, and helps ensure the intergenerational well-being of all Canadians. However, our relatively open immigration policies do not guarantee successful integration and settlement. In many ways, the hard work begins when newcomers arrive.

***Integration is a two-way street. Receiving societies and newcomers adapt to one another, fostering healthy, vibrant communities.***

There are many metrics for integration, the most common of which are data around economics and labour market performance. However, there are also “softer” metrics like civic participation, language fluency, and education. A good deal of research suggests that access to social networks within receiving societies can foster more rapid and durable integration.

Volunteer support and community building are thus vital for successful integration. Receiving society attitudes and actions have a significant impact on newcomer life opportunities.<sup>33</sup> The volunteer Welcome Group model offers a venue for those established in Canada to play an active, personal role in building stronger, more integrated communities.

### UNDERSTANDING VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability describes the degree to which an individual or community is susceptible to harm or mistreatment. It informs many parts of development, humanitarian, and volunteer work, and it is a crucial concept for all Welcome Group volunteers to understand.

Working with vulnerable populations entails understanding that such individuals' freedom and capacity to protect and care for themselves may be hindered by social and political circumstances, lack of familiarity with and access to resources, and potential constrained ability to make fully informed decisions.<sup>34</sup>

***Refugee claimants may face unique challenges in navigating their legal status, unfamiliar bureaucracies, public transit, or social systems. Limited financial resources are often a significant source of stress, presenting restricted options in day-to-day life and higher-stakes decisions. For example, someone may tolerate unsafe or more precarious working conditions. Some individuals may have suffered injuries or have complex medical conditions that pose additional obstacles to autonomy.***

At the same time, individuals demonstrate remarkable resilience: determination in learning a new language, flexibility in adapting to an unfamiliar context, and strength in moving forward despite the incredible hardships they may have endured. Reducing an individual's vulnerability involves building and supporting their capacity to mitigate, respond to, and cope with future hazards.

### TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Exercising *trauma-informed care* can help mitigate vulnerability. Trauma-informed care does not mean acting as a social worker and volunteers should be aware of the limits of what support they can offer. Much like understanding vulnerability, it is a general approach towards your relationship based on understanding the physical, psychological, and emotional effects of traumatic stress. The prevalence of trauma among refugee claimants is significant.

***Core principles of trauma-informed care include safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. For example, one can help to promote a sense of physical and emotional safety by following an individual's lead in physical contact preferences, such as handshakes, and by framing questions in respectful, non-judgmental ways. A trust-worthy connection can be cultivated through careful listening and respecting confidentiality. Setting clear expectations and following through on a commitment to take a family on a scheduled outing, for example, are important ways to establish trust. Seeking to identify and support the needs and preferences of an individual/family, providing information to support their own decision-making, and respecting their choices (even when they differ from one's own) help to promote choice, collaboration, and empowerment.***



Social support systems are invaluable to the recovery process.<sup>35</sup> Almost by definition, refugee claimants are torn from their social support networks and face a number of obstacles when trying to build new ones - particularly around language, culture, and discrimination. Understanding trauma-informed care can go a long way towards fostering healthy communities and guarding against future trauma or vulnerability.

### FOSTERING AUTONOMY & PRACTICING EMPOWERMENT

It is important for volunteer Welcome Groups to distinguish between charity versus empowerment, and dependency versus autonomy. Those supporting refugee newcomers can run the risk of fostering relationships of dependency. Dependency is made more likely given the vulnerability of refugee claimants.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs describes facilitating a sense of autonomy and empowerment as “enabling people to increase control over their lives, to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives, to increase their resources and qualities, and to build capacities to gain access, partners, networks, [and] a voice, in order to gain control.”<sup>36</sup>

***Initially, for example, Welcome Group members may accompany refugee claimants on public transit to attend an appointment with a medical or social service provider, orienting them to the route, address, and schedule. The goal, however, should be to foster autonomy. On the other hand, consistently driving people to appointments might foster dependency. With practice, refugee claimants will be able to make this journey independently, scheduling appointments for the priorities they have identified and on a timeline that suits their needs.***

Autonomy and empowerment are critical to integration for refugee populations.<sup>37</sup> It is important that newcomers develop a sense of self-sufficiency. Self-determination and self-sufficiency are often associated with employment and financial independence, but they also refer to the freedom to direct and practice one’s own values, beliefs, and culture.

### CULTURAL SENSITIVITY & CULTURAL HUMILITY

Cultural sensitivity describes the awareness of another’s particular norms, beliefs, and traditions without the imposition of value judgements. Cultural humility entails continuous critical reflection on our *own* beliefs, biases, values, and norms of behaviour, as well as seeking to understand another’s values and

---

**SUPPORT SYSTEMS ARE INVALUABLE TO THE RECOVERY PROCESS. ALMOST BY DEFINITION, REFUGEE CLAIMANTS ARE TORN FROM THEIR SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS AND FACE A NUMBER OF OBSTACLES WHEN TRYING TO BUILD NEW ONES – PARTICULARLY AROUND LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND DISCRIMINATION. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS FOSTERING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AND GUARDING AGAINST FUTURE TRAUMA OR VULNERABILITY.**

---

priorities and to validate their strengths and resilience. Again, much like trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity and humility are not ultimate goals, but a general approach that tries to prioritize others’ beliefs and experiences.

The Welcome Group model engages refugee claimants from around the world, so there is no single orientation toward cultural sensitivity.

Helping people stay connected to what is meaningful and relevant to them, within their culture framework, may act as a protective factor from future mental and physical stress-related illness.<sup>38</sup>

The practice of cultural sensitivity is integral to the processes of integration. Cultural exchange happens at the intersection of mutual openness to and acceptance of one another’s culture. Community building happens through cultural exchange when newcomers are welcomed to participate in Canadian society without feeling pressured to shed their own identities.<sup>39</sup>

### PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

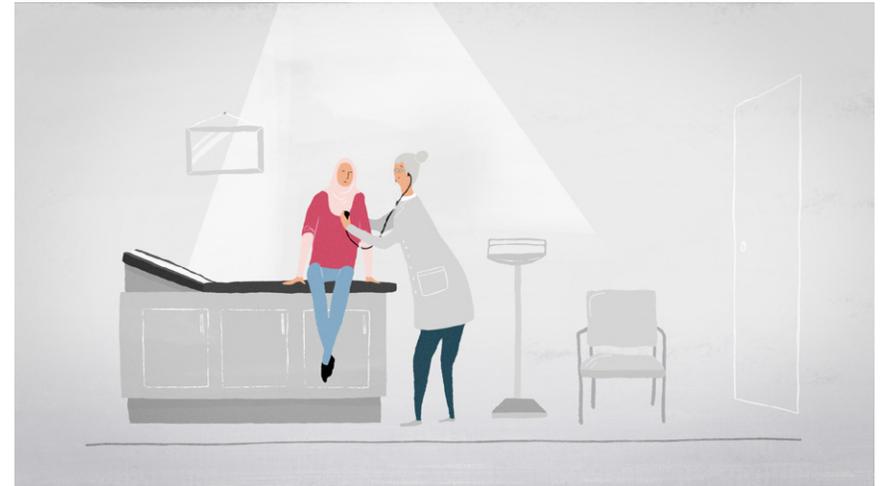
Finally, Welcome Groups should understand and foster the right to privacy. Refugee claimants are entitled to freedom with regard to their body, personal information, thoughts and opinions, and communications with others. The right to privacy is an important component of autonomy and empowerment. Interference in any of these areas is only acceptable if expressed consent is given.

***Welcome Groups may play a role in accompanying refugee claimants to initial medical appointments, for example. Assistance in reaching the medical office, registering at reception, and remembering appointment dates and times are helpful supports. However, individuals/families should be seen privately by their medical practitioner, unless they specifically request otherwise. Details about health conditions, test results, and the reasons for additional investigations are an individual's private health information and won't be shared by medical providers without explicit patient consent. It is important to respect individuals' privacy and preferences.***

***Privacy also includes discretion related to posting photos or personal information on social media. While it may seem perfectly normal to share your relationship with your social circles, newcomers should take the lead in expressing explicit and enthusiastic consent for each social media post. Welcome Groups should ask themselves whether social media posts conform to what they've learned about vulnerability and trauma-informed care.***

The related concept of confidentiality refers to the duty to protect another's right to privacy. This commitment is an important part of building trusting relationships.

It is common for survivors of trauma to have great difficulty talking to others about traumatic experiences, and someone who is not ready to share their experiences may be at risk of re-traumatization if asked to recall past trauma. However, claimants are often forced to do this as part of the refugee claims process (preparing their Basis of Claim, for example), and can benefit greatly from emotional support if they are experiencing distress. Volunteers should take the lead from the claimant about what they want to talk about; how much they want to talk about it; when they want to talk about it, and maintain respect for a claimant's choices about what they share. Volunteers should also be mindful about how hearing about a claimant's trauma may be affecting them, and seek adequate support for themselves. There are professional mental health supports available to anyone having difficulty. To find mental health supports in your community, please contact the Mental Health Helpline at: 1-866-531-2600 or the City of Toronto Information Line at 211.



### **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS FOR VOLUNTARY AND HUMANITARIAN WORK:**

- Integration is a two-way street. Receiving societies and newcomers adapt to one another, fostering healthy, vibrant communities.
- Vulnerability describes the degree to which an individual or community is susceptible to harm or mistreatment.
- Exercising trauma-informed care can help mitigate vulnerability and promote autonomy.
- Autonomy and empowerment are critical to refugee claimant integration.
- The right to privacy is an important component of autonomy and empowerment.
- The practices of cultural sensitivity and cultural humility are integral to the processes of integration.
- It is common for survivors of trauma to have great difficulty talking to others about traumatic experiences. In order to avoid retraumatization, volunteers must allow refugee claimants to take the lead on if, what, and when they choose to share.

## SECTION 3 MANAGING EXPECTATIONS



### WELCOME GROUP EXPECTATIONS

As a volunteer in a Welcome Group, it is important to remember that the safety, needs, and comfort of the refugee claimants are of utmost importance.

Volunteers might become frustrated if newcomers don't learn English as quickly as expected, or if they do not adopt seemingly "obvious" social customs. It is important to understand that integration is a long-term process with different metrics for success.

***Anyone who has immigrated to a new country or even spent a significant time abroad realizes that adapting to new surroundings can be challenging. Even after the end of several years, one can still make mistakes, get lost, or experience frustration at cultural differences. Welcome Group volunteers should maintain a realistic set of expectations for their ability to affect the pace of refugee claimants' integration.***

Illustration: Emilie Muszczak

### VOLUNTEER BURNOUT

While understanding trauma-informed care, available services, and empowerment offers a basic framework for interacting with refugee claimants, it is important to realize that volunteers are not expected to take on the role of a social worker, psychologist, or employment counsellor.

Feedback from both Welcome Groups and private sponsorship groups illustrate a strong potential for burnout among first-time volunteers working with vulnerable populations. Volunteer burnout becomes apparent when you no longer believe you can make a difference or attain stated goals.<sup>40</sup> Volunteers need to manage their own expectations. It is not possible for volunteers to solve all of the challenges refugee claimants face.

### REFUGEE CLAIMANT EXPECTATIONS

It is equally vital that Welcome Groups try to help manage the expectations of refugee claimants. One of the key components of managing expectations is to foster autonomy and avoid relationships of dependency. Together Project emphasizes supporting the empowerment of refugee claimants to live within their means by helping them access available services rather than by providing material goods. On a broader level, it is important to understand that it can take many years for refugee claimants to reach the language, employment, and other integration metrics of other immigrant categories.

***While Welcome Groups help a great deal in fostering social connections to support integration priorities, volunteers should guard against the understandable desire to make promises which do not comport with general trends. Managing refugee claimant expectations can help foster more equitable relationships.***

### THE REFUGEE CLAIMANT HEARING

***Across Canada, the average acceptance rate of refugee claims in 2018 was 62.8%, down from 67.3% in 2017.<sup>41</sup>***

Most refugee claimants are very focused on acceptance of their Basis of Claim by the Refugee Protection Division (RPD) of the Immigration and Refugee Board





(IRB) at their hearing. However, refugee claimants must wait an average of 21 months for their hearing, with some waiting periods being much longer. This period of waiting is an opportunity for refugee claimants to build social connections, increase their language fluency, and/or access healthcare, education and employment. Volunteers can play an important role in fostering social connections to support newcomer integration during this time.

Volunteers may also wish to direct refugee claimants to the FCJ Ready Tour which provides refugee claimants with a FREE opportunity to be better prepared for their hearing, see a hearing room, learn what happens at the hearing, and ask questions about the process.<sup>42</sup> For more information about the refugee claimant hearing process, please refer to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada's website and/or Community Legal Education Ontario's (CLEO) website: <http://refugeehearing.cleo.on.ca/> and <https://refugee.cleo.on.ca/en/refugee-rights-ontario>.<sup>43</sup>

### MANAGING EXPECTATIONS INCLUDES:

- Remembering that integration is a long-term process with many different metrics for success.
- An awareness of the potential for volunteer burnout.
- Fostering refugee claimant autonomy and guarding against relationships of dependence.
- Understanding that the 2018 acceptance rate of refugee claims was just over 62%.

***Based on a refugee claimant referral system from participating community agencies, Together Project matches "Welcome Groups" of five or more volunteers with refugee claimants for six months of social support. The intended outcomes of the Welcome Groups for Refugee Claimants program are: 1) to foster refugee claimant social connections 2) to mitigate refugee claimant social isolation and 3) to make progress towards newcomer-defined integration priorities.***

The Welcome Group Program aims to counteract refugee newcomer social isolation and overcome integration barriers by connecting them with volunteer Welcome Groups. Once matched, volunteers can provide social support as guides, advocates, allies, and even friends. This support can include specific tasks - e.g. helping a newcomer fill out paperwork, finding an affordable sports program for newcomer youth, etc. - as well as general and longer-term support, like conversational language practice and simple social interaction.

Matches are formed based on shared preferences and criteria of compatibility that are assessed at volunteer and newcomer onboarding sessions. Criteria and preferences include proximity, family size and composition, interests, professional background, refugee claimant vulnerability, volunteer capacity, etc. The goal is to achieve a balance between social connection and pragmatic, task-based integration assistance.

### VOLUNTEER ONBOARDING

Welcome Group volunteers register online and are interviewed by Together Project matching staff to assess suitability and capacity for participation in the matching process prior to completing a preference matching survey. As refugee newcomers are considered a vulnerable population, all Together Project volunteers must submit to vulnerable sector screening through their local police department and attend an orientation session. These sessions also encourage volunteers to meet and share lessons learned.

Matches are based on the refugee claimant household's integration priorities. Welcome Group volunteers and refugee claimants are encouraged to work towards these priorities as a strategy to build social connections. Welcome Group volunteers remain connected to Together Project matching staff for guidance regarding resources that would be helpful to their match.



## REFUGEE CLAIMANT ONBOARDING

Refugee claimants are registered for the Welcome Group Program either by referral from a shelter, health worker, employment agency, or other settlement case worker. Together Project receives the name, family size, contact, and any relevant caseworker information – at which point the program manager can then match them with a suitable Welcome Group, assign a Cultural Ambassador (if needed), and arrange for the initial in-person meeting.

## CULTURAL AMBASSADORS

Matches may be assigned a volunteer “Cultural Ambassador” to assist in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. Cultural Ambassadors provide translation on WhatsApp – the main means of remote communication of the match – and also in-person interpretation, when available.

It's important to note that in matches where language learning is a key priority, an early milestone can be developing a comfortable rapport between volunteers and newcomers that doesn't require an interpreter. Language learning is best done through immersion, and overreliance on interpretation and translation can actually slow down the process over the long term.

## TIME COMMITMENT

Welcome Groups typically sign up to support a refugee claimant household for six months, though the aim is to build social connections that may result in a long term friendship. If a volunteer experiences burnout, or if a match is unsuccessful, there is an opportunity to disengage after three months.

The most significant time commitment occurs during the first few weeks of the match, when the refugee claimant household may have immediate needs or priorities. These specific challenges may be some of the first tasks that a Welcome Group can focus on, and a potential basis for the start of a social connection. During the first month, weekly visits are recommended to make sure the matched refugee claimant household is able to address immediate priorities. For instance, they may have service navigation questions in regards to healthcare or education or they may want assistance in comfortably navigating their new neighborhood. Some matches occur right after a newcomer household moves out of a refugee house or temporary shelter into permanent housing.

Together Project suggests spreading out the visits among different volunteer teams within the Welcome Group as it can be overwhelming to have all five

---

**THE PRIMARY ROLE OF A WELCOME GROUP VOLUNTEER IS TO PROVIDE SOCIAL SUPPORT TO MITIGATE REFUGEE CLAIMANT SOCIAL ISOLATION. TO FOSTER SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, TOGETHER PROJECT WORKS WITH REFUGEE CLAIMANTS TO ESTABLISH NEWCOMER-DEFINED PRIORITIES FOR THE MATCH THAT WILL HELP CREATE A COMMON PURPOSE AND SHARED GOALS AS AN UNDERPINNING FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION.**

---

members of the Welcome Group present at the same time. After the first month, volunteers and newcomer families/individuals can determine if weekly or bi-weekly visits are optimal to make progress towards newcomer-defined integration goals and/or to build social connections through outings, park dates, shopping, finding job fairs, or just spending time together over tea and coffee.

## ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary role of a Welcome Group volunteer is to provide social support to mitigate refugee claimant social isolation. To foster social connections, Together Project works with refugee claimants to establish newcomer-defined priorities for the match that will help create a common purpose and shared goals as an underpinning for social connection. The success of the match will be measured based on a newcomer-defined perception of an increase in social connection and a decrease in social isolation using the Social Provisions Scale.<sup>44</sup> In addition, baseline and exit surveys will measure volunteer and refugee claimant satisfaction with progress towards newcomer-defined integration priorities.

## MATCH PRIORITIES

Together Project works with refugee claimant households to identify their unique priorities, which serve as a general road map for their match. Because Together Project works with a diverse range of refugee newcomers, these priorities can vary from match to match. Most match priorities fall into one of these categories:

- improving English language skills



- navigating and accessing services (like health and dental care)
- supporting children and youth (tutoring, access extracurricular activities, socializing)
- community connections and orientation (accessing affordable goods, using public transit)
- employment/education readiness
- forming social connections and networks

Some high-need households may have many separate priorities, or a single, especially complicated one – like a healthcare issue – whereas some households might only have one or two.

The important thing to bear in mind is that these priorities may not necessarily have a specific conclusion, at least not one that Welcome Groups are directly responsible for. As mentioned earlier in this manual, volunteer burnout can occur when expectations of what is desirable by a Welcome Group exceed what is reasonably achievable. The goal of the program is for volunteers to empower newcomers, so that they might make progress towards these priorities themselves.

Illustration: Emilie Muszczak

## ADDRESSING MATCH PRIORITIES

Depending on a Welcome Group's availability and organization, match priorities can be addressed in a variety of different ways.

Some groups may prefer to immediately divide roles and responsibilities among their members according to, for example, relevant experience or interest. Group members who have a background in education might want to focus on supporting the youth with their schoolwork, whereas members with ESL experience might be best suited for regular language practice.

Other groups may prefer to all work on specific priorities together, rotating to take turns as their availability allows. This usually makes more sense for matches with only a few priorities, like language learning and socialization.

There are no hard and fast rules as to who is assigned to which priority, as long as positive lines of communication are maintained within the group so that activities do not overlap and support is organized. Welcome Group-only WhatsApp chats and a shared worksheet can be useful tools to keep track of progress and make sure that there isn't any miscommunication between group members. Similarly, Welcome Groups should feel comfortable in periodically checking in with their matched household to see how things are going – sometimes, priorities may have changed, or new ones may emerge. Keeping an open and honest line of communication between volunteers and newcomers is an important way to strengthen both the effectiveness of Welcome Group support, as well as the social relationship within the match.

It is also important to bear in mind that basic socializing is the typical platform for Welcome Group's activities to address specific match priorities. In-person interactions may revolve around tea, a meal, or a trip to an event or park. It's a good idea to combine practical support and problem-solving with social interaction to ensure that a match allows for social connections to form naturally over time.

# WELCOME GROUP CHECKLIST

## FIRST WEEK

Two visits recommended, especially for households that are leaving the shelter system and moving into more permanent housing.

Welcome Groups and refugee claimants should confirm they have a common understanding of:

- How to use WhatsApp
- How to work with the Cultural Ambassador, if interpretation is required.
- How to contact Together Project and/or the staff person from a clinic, shelter, refugee house or agency who has referred the refugee claimant to the program.
- The newcomer-defined match priorities.
- The local neighbourhood including the location of: the library, schools, transit, pharmacy, community centre, grocery stores, food banks, post office, settlement agency and where basic household necessities can be obtained.
- Fire exits, how to dial 911, and how to access resources regarding living in Ontario, e.g. [http://www.inmylanguage.org/index\\_en.html](http://www.inmylanguage.org/index_en.html)
- How to enroll children in school, if applicable

## FIRST MONTH

### Weekly visits are recommended

It is important to organize responsibilities within your match but it is also important to remain flexible and responsive. For example, some matches may have one or two volunteers who want to focus on informal language learning; others may focus on healthcare service navigation or employment accreditation; while others may prefer to spend time socializing with newcomers in their home. Remember that the intended outcome over six months is to build social connections to mitigate social isolation. Building these relationships can take time but a shared understanding of integration priorities for the match can serve as the underpinning for new social ties. Example integration priorities include support with:

- Informal language practice

- Healthcare navigation
- Employment readiness (finding an employment agency, learning about refugee talents and abilities, support with resume, job search, Linked In profile, or social network support with employment pathways)
- Engaging children's teachers, identifying recreation opportunities or camps
- Financial literacy (i.e. setting up a bank account, processing money orders or checks or attending social assistance appointments)
- Landlord negotiations / home lease
- Technology (phone plan, computers, internet access)

## AFTER THE FIRST MONTH

### Weekly or bi-weekly visits recommended

- Join or invite the household for social outings, park dates, shopping, travel by transit, job fairs, other events, or just spend time together over tea or coffee.
- Focus on making progress towards the household's integration priorities as they may relate to language learning, employment pathways, education, accessing housing, healthcare, childcare or recreation opportunities

## END OF THE MATCH

### After 3-6 months

- Most matches will last for six months, however, some matches can end early if the refugee claimant household leaves Toronto, no longer need assistance, or if the match is not a good fit.
- At the end of the match, Together Project will administer an exit survey to both the refugee claimant household and the volunteers in order to better understand the successes and challenges of the match. Together Project will use the information collected to continually improve and refine the program for the benefit of new program participants.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/static-files/glossary.PDF>
- 2 Interview with Godfrey S., January 29, 2019.
- 3 <https://stepstojustice.ca/questions/refugee-law/where-can-i-get-legal-advice-and-help-my-refugee-claim>
- 4 <https://ccrweb.ca/en/refugees-entering-us-and-safe-third-country-faq>
- 5 <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
- 6 <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-2.5/>
- 7 <https://ccrweb.ca/en/refugees-entering-us-and-safe-third-country-faq>
- 8 <https://refugee.cleo.on.ca/en/refugee-claim-flowchart>
- 9 <http://refugeehearing.cleo.on.ca>
- 10 <https://www.bellissimolawgroup.com/refugee-protection-division/>
- 11 <https://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/statistics/protection/Pages/index.aspx>
- 12 <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/eligibility/eligibility-admissibility-conditions-including-validity-period.html>
- 13 <https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/information-sheets/Pages/refugee-protection.aspx>
- 14 <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-liberals-say-refugee-queue-will-shrink-but-wait-times-predicted-to/>
- 15 Interview with Dr. Vanessa Redditt, January 10, 2019
- 16 <https://www.womenscollegehospital.ca/care-programs/crossroads-clinic/>
- 17 <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-within-canada/health-care/interim-federal-health-program/coverage-summary.html>
- 18 <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/dental-and-oral-health-services/dental-clinics/>
- 19 <https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-dental-care>
- 20 <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-within-canada/health-care/interim-federal-health-program/coverage-summary.html>
- 21 <https://www.toronto.ca/home/media-room/backgrounders-other-resources/backgrounder-refugees-asylum-claimants-experiencing-homelessness-in-the-city-of-toronto/>
- 22 <https://www.torontocentralhealthline.ca/display/service.aspx?id=133949>
- 23 <https://www.torontocentralhealthline.ca/display/service.aspx?id=133949>
- 24 <https://www.toronto.ca/home/media-room/backgrounders-other-resources/backgrounder-refugee-asylum-claimant-arrivals-to-toronto-update/>
- 25 <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/9919-Toronto-Newcomer-Strategy.pdf>
- 26 <https://settlement.org/ontario/immigration-citizenship/refugees/after-you-arrive/i-am-a-refugee-claimant-can-i-work/>
- 27 <https://www.streethealth.ca/street-resources/clothing-banks#.XffdiCOZNo5>
- 28 <https://www.211toronto.ca>
- 29 <https://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/social/ow/>
- 30 <https://refugee.cleo.on.ca/en/social-assistance-refugees>
- 31 <https://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/social/odsp/>
- 32 [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/cmoh\\_19/cmoh\\_19.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/cmoh_19/cmoh_19.pdf)
- 33 Huddleston, Thomas. "Integration Indicators: The Difference between Monitoring Integration and Evaluating Policies." In *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, Anna Triandafyllidou (ed). New York: Routledge, 2016. P193.
- 34 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/53d0b8634.pdf>
- 35 <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Trauma-informed-care-for-displaced-populations.pdf>
- 36 <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ngo/outreachmaterials/empowerment-booklet.pdf>
- 37 [http://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECRE-The-Way-Forward-Towards-the-Integration-of-Refugees-in-Europe\\_July-2005.pdf](http://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECRE-The-Way-Forward-Towards-the-Integration-of-Refugees-in-Europe_July-2005.pdf)
- 38 <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Trauma-informed-care-for-displaced-populations.pdf>
- 39 <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/may-2016/from-newcomer-to-canadian-making-refugee-integration-work/>
- 40 <https://money.howstuffworks.com/economics/volunteer/information/volunteer-burn-out1.htm>
- 41 <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2019/06/19/canadas-refugee-acceptance-rate-falls-amid-record-backlog-of-asylum-claims.html>
- 42 <https://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/ready-tour-registration/>
- 43 <https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/applying-refugee-protection/Pages/index4.aspx>
- 44 [http://otf.ca/sites/default/files/survey\\_connectedpeople3.pdf](http://otf.ca/sites/default/files/survey_connectedpeople3.pdf)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you for taking the time to read *Welcome Groups for Refugee Claimants*, a new pilot program to increase refugee claimant social connections and decrease refugee claimant social isolation. To research the feasibility of adapting the Welcome Group program to serve refugee claimants, Together Project, a project of Tides Canada, partnered with the Public Good Initiative (PGI), a university student-led, policy consulting initiative. PGI's mission is to make a positive contribution to the policy and research capacity of not-for-profit organizations. In particular, we would like to thank, Jennifer Bocti, Sandra Kojovic, Daniella Marciano, and Laurent-Philippe Veilleux and the PGI Director of Operations, Megan Skinner. The information provided in this volunteer training manual is based on recommendations from the Public Good Initiative study as well as lessons learned from previous iterations of the Welcome Group program.

Together Project also wishes to recognize and thank the many stakeholders who have shared their knowledge and expertise to make this program possible including, COSTI Immigrant Services, the City of Toronto Newcomer Office, Toronto Employment and Social Services, Legal Aid Ontario, Sojourn House, FCJ Refugee Center, Christie Refugee Welcome Center, the Crossroads Clinic at Women's College Hospital, Arab Community Centre of Toronto, Romero House, Together Project's Steering Committee, Tides Canada Initiatives and the individual refugee claimants who shared their insights. We also wish to thank the Ontario Trillium Foundation for their generous support.



Illustration: Emilie Muszczak



# TOGETHER PROJECT

A PROJECT OF TIDES CANADA

[www.togetherproject.ca](http://www.togetherproject.ca) | [hello@togetherproject.ca](mailto:hello@togetherproject.ca)

[!\[\]\(c6747d08ffcbb3c0701a343df825d2f1\_img.jpg\) @together.hello](#) [!\[\]\(fb82ab59dfa4a4b29f52070e1009fd14\_img.jpg\) @together\\_hello](#) [!\[\]\(ab5b6130abe1fdf566360da2edf1045e\_img.jpg\) @together\\_hello](#)

FUNDED BY:



An agency of the Government of Ontario  
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario