

Welcoming Newcomers

Resources & Stories for
Refugee Sponsoring Groups



A Cross-Cultural Primer

The Middle East is a beautiful region, coloured by a range of unique cultural practices where hospitality is an essential value. This e-newsletter and subsequent editions will feature specialized information on cross-cultural issues as you get to know your new neighbours.

Few things are better than taking the time to engage your newly arrived Syrian family in conversations about family, culture, weather, friendships, work experience, memories and so on. These mutual conversations can grow into relationships that will enrich you and your community for years to come.

Celebrating Diversity and Acknowledging Difference

Refugees have been uprooted from their homes and are now in a foreign land. They may take comfort or find strength in a faith tradition during this transition. Pressure to abandon their own religious beliefs or cultural values may cause increased anxiety for newcomers. Your attitude of 'welcoming the stranger' can be lived out by being respectful and gentle during conversations about faith – and always being a listener first.

You can help refugees feel at home by connecting them with a place of worship of their own religious background or introducing them to community members and groups from their places of origin. You can also indicate to them that, while there is no obligation, they are welcome to share in the life of your community.

Understanding Hospitality

As previously stated, hospitality is a core value in Middle Eastern culture. Often times, by wanting to always provide for newcomer, it is easy for sponsoring groups to overlook the value of hospitality. Instead, it is incredibly important to allow newcomers to host you in their home. Mutuality is at the center of positive, long term community building, and the same goes for your newly arrived neighbours. Allow mutuality to guide your relationship building – even if it feels different at first.

Sharing a meal together has other cultural considerations. For newcomers, the Canadian cultural norms of eating quickly, getting take out, or getting going right after eating are particularly foreign. Quality time together over a meal is vital to growing effective long term relationships with newcomers, so keep that in mind when scheduling get-togethers.

Help Newcomers Work Toward Self-Sufficiency

The core of self-sufficiency is the idea that people are able to make their own plans and decisions to attain their own dreams. When a group sponsors refugees, this can be a difficult balance to maintain. Out of a desire to help, groups may **do for** rather than **do with** newcomers. While it comes from a good place, this practice reduces newcomers' learning opportunities, which they'll need in order to live independently in Canada. Remember, independence doesn't mean that newcomers will sever ties with your group (though this is possible) – rather, it is about self-sufficiency and the knowledge on how to direct their own future in Canada.