

Ideas for Hosting and Welcoming Refugees

Build relationships...through visiting

- **Invite newcomers to your homes for meals:** Eating together is a wonderful way to build a friendship. Many new immigrants have never been in a Canadian home even after many years in Canada. Take the initiative and invite people to your home to share a meal together.
- **Celebrate holidays together:** Since most newcomers do not have extended family in their new country, holidays can be difficult, lonely times. Invite newcomer singles and families to join you for special occasions such as Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, etc. for a mutually beneficial experience.
- **Visit homes of newcomers:** Most newcomers love to have visitors in their home. Hospitality is a much higher priority in many cultures than in mainstream North American culture. Relationships are deepened through visiting the homes of newcomers. In order to develop mutual relationships, it is important that we are able to receive hospitality as well as extend it.
- **Community meals (soup lunches, etc.):** Invite everyone from church to stay for a simple meal of homemade soup and bread together. Encourage newcomers to stay and for everyone to eat with someone they don't know very well yet. Keeping the meal simple is the key to allowing it to happen frequently.
- **Celebrate life's milestones (birth of babies, weddings, graduations, baby dedications/baptisms, and funerals):** Participation in these events helps strengthen community and creates shared memories. Newcomers appreciate the emotional and practical support of a church community during these significant life events.
- **Provide help for crisis situations in home countries:** Churches may be able to help with specific crises in the home countries of newcomers in their church. For example, one family experienced the sudden death of a parent back in Haiti. They could not afford the funeral and burial expenses and were looking to their family member in Canada to help. The church was able to make a significant financial contribution that was wired through a reliable money transfer agency (such as Western Union) directly to the family in Haiti. Other churches have travelled to visit refugee camps where new members of their congregation used to live. They were able to take some medical supplies to give to people still living in the camp.

Build relationships...through the necessities of life

- **Furniture/clothing/food distribution:** This may take various forms such as:
a) gathering donations of good quality clothing and household items and inviting people to a one-time event where everything is set up (in a church hall or gym etc) and people are free to choose whatever they need or **b)** churches gathering clothing and household items you anticipate newcomers will need and distributing on an 'as needed basis' or **c)** considering a marketplace where clothing and living necessities are sold (mindful of limited incomes with the required posture of dignity for all).
- **Access to health care and social services:** Newcomers may benefit from having someone help them navigate the complex health care and social service systems. Especially if one is not confident in English, it is helpful to have an English-speaking companion to advocate for them and guide them through the system.
- **Health days:** If you have health care professionals in your congregation, offer a health day, perhaps in partnership with a local community centre. Health education seminars can be held, and written information in several different languages can be offered. Activities like blood pressure checks could also be helpful.
- **Help with filing income tax:** Filling out Canadian income tax forms can be a daunting task for newcomers. The assistance and experience of an established Canadian is appreciated in this task.
- **Tutoring and homework help:** Running an afterschool homework club where students can come to get help with their homework. University and college age students are a great resource for running this kind of program. There may also be older adults who enjoy reading with young kids.

Build relationships...through learning English

- **ESL classes (both church-based and in partnership with community agencies):** English classes have taken different formats at different times. Churches have experimented with offering more formal English classes in the evenings. A reasonable number of volunteers is needed in order to accommodate different language levels. Another format is a less structured conversational English group. This kind of group is primarily meant to provide a context for people to practice conversation skills in a safe setting.
- **Easy English Bible studies:** These studies are designed to create a safe environment for people who are interested in growing in their English skills in

the context of exploring their faith. This kind of group may be a good way for newcomers to initially get interested in a church community.

- **ESL Sunday School for adults and for children:** An adult ESL Sunday School class is one of the options for a Sunday morning. Participants break into small groups based on language level for discussion. Consider an accompanying children's Sunday school class for those children who are learning English.

Build relationships...through education and recreation

- **Women's cooking classes:** Church volunteers work alongside newcomer women learning to cook new dishes and/or use the food products in a new country. A children's program may be offered at the same time.
- **Women's craft classes:** Enjoy classes focused on doing crafts together. Craft sales may be held regularly where women could sell some of their handiwork.
- **Pick-up soccer (for men and children):** Take the time to gather weekly for informal games of soccer. In the winter months this can happen indoors and in the summer in a local park.
- **Picnics:** Church picnics are a great way for people to have fun together and get to know one another in an informal setting. Playing games in the outdoors with adults and children interacting are excellent ways to establish meaningful relationships and create shared memories.
- **Sightseeing trips to local tourist attractions:** Many newcomers do not have access to a vehicle and have not had the opportunity to enjoy nature and life outside the city. Trips to places like Niagara Falls and local conservation areas are enjoyable for people and give an opportunity to get out of the city.
- **Camping/Retreats:** Planning a camping trip or retreat for newcomers and others in the church provides an extended time for relationship building and a great opportunity to create shared memories. Include newcomers in the planning of these events. Campfires, games, singing, learning, and sharing are great ways to grow relationships.

Explore your community and its services. Find an organization/service that supports refugees. Discover ways that you may come alongside refugees through the opportunities and venues provided through this community service.
