

Inter-church Refugee Committee Settlement Plan

There are seven (7) key areas that require our attention. Thanks to Bev Knutson, a settlement officer with the Thunder Bay Multi-Cultural Association, for her expertise and help laying this out for our committee.

**1) ARRIVAL; 2) HOUSING; 3) HEALTH; 4) DAILY FAMILY LIFE;
5) EDUCATION; 6) FINANCES; 7) EMPLOYMENT.**

1) ARRIVAL

Our committee will not be responsible for managing the travel of the refugees to Thunder Bay. A settlement group in Toronto has taken on the task of greeting refugees on international flights into Toronto and making certain the refugees find their way to their connecting flight to Thunder Bay.

We will be responsible for greeting the refugees as they arrive at the Thunder Bay airport. We will probably require a translator and will have to provide group transport for the refugees to at least temporary accommodations. We will have to provide foodstuffs for the refugees for their meals for at least a few days.

We will know beforehand if we are dealing with anyone with a disability or a known medical condition. We must be prepared to help the refugees deal with a medical emergency by providing transport to a clinic or the emergency department at the hospital.

As a committee, we should determine the size of the group greeting the refugees. We should discuss the provision of a language-appropriate "settlement package" for the refugees to read. The package may explain who we are and how we intend to help them.

2) HOUSING

Our committee is responsible for providing accommodation for the refugees for one calendar year from the date of their arrival. We will know the accommodation needs better once we've actually selected our group of refugees from the list provided by the federal government and have confirmed the refugee's agreement to come here. We must be prepared to provide temporary accommodation at a motel with kitchen facilities if we are not able to secure an appropriate and acceptable accommodation for our year-long obligation. We must also secure appropriate furniture and cooking utensils.

The volunteers who take on responsibility for the provision of housing must be able to provide help and education to the refugees to deal with the following:

- paying first and last month's rent;
- the securing of utilities and deposit requirements;
- the need for conservation efforts to lower utility costs;
- the securing of cable television and the payment fees and the costs of pay-per-view channels;
- the securing of renter's insurance;

obtaining telephone services and the costs of data fees and roaming charges for cell phones;
tenants' rights and responsibilities;
door-to-door salespeople and over-the-phone salespeople.

3) HEALTH

Our committee is responsible for helping the refugees connect to the provincial medical care system. One of our first tasks will be to determine whether the refugees are provided with temporary, federal health coverage until coverage is obtained from the Ontario Health Insurance Plan. We will be responsible for helping the refugees apply to OHIP and to generally navigate our health care system including:

given the cultural sensitivities of the refugees, finding an appropriate health care provider (doctor or nurse-practitioner);
obtaining up-to-date vaccinations;
educating the refugees on the use of medical clinics versus the hospital emergency department;
the use of the emergency 911 services and the costs of ambulance service;
the availability and costs of non-OHIP covered medical tests.

We have also been cautioned to be aware of the possibility of mental illness among the refugees and to secure the help of a mental health professional to guide us on how we might best help deal with any such illness. We must also be cognizant of the need for privacy in such matters. This obliges the committee to seek the best advice possible for dealing with unforeseen mental health and medical issues.

4) DAILY FAMILY LIFE

The committee will have to discuss what kind of a budget we'll provide the refugees once they've settled in and used up the original stock of foodstuffs and perishable goods we've provided. The goal will be to make the refugees self-sustaining over the course of the year of our formal support. The following are some of the elements of making their daily lives independent of the committee over time:

shopping for culturally-appropriate foods at various grocery stores;
developing a weekly/monthly budget for food; introduction to Canadian cuts of meat;
nutrition education and proper cooking techniques with help from the Thunder Bay District Health Unit;
how to dress for winter;
educating refugees on public transportation and orientation to the city's retail areas;
introducing the refugees to publicly-available recreation facilities and services, including PRO Kids financial support for sporting activities, Harbour Youth Services Thunder Bay and the Boys and Girls Club;
the availability of private tutoring and music instruction;

encouraging any teenagers among the refugee group to join in activities at the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association.

5) EDUCATION

This is a broad category that includes formal education of primary and secondary-school aged students and learning how to be a Canadian. The committee should be prepared to work with the public and Catholic school boards to develop a program for integrating the refugees into Ontario's formal education system. The parents of children will have to be educated about Ontario's various school boards, including the differences between the Catholic and public boards. Adults pose a different set of issues, including English as a second language training, to educating the refugees on the rights of spouses and children in a liberal, democratic state.

First, working with children, the committee will have to help the refugees navigate the formal school system:

- registering students with a school board;
- explaining the school grade system used by Ontario;
- how testing works;
- report cards;
- English as a second language options;
- bussing;
- explaining special needs options.

Adults may need help enrolling in English as a second language programs at the Multi-cultural Association or more formal education opportunities through the college or university. Apprenticeship opportunities may have to be explored with the appropriate government training agencies. The costs of post-secondary education may have to be explored along with the possibility of applying for student loans.

Additionally, our committee should be aware of the possible need for liaison services with social services agencies for spouses and children. Refugees should be made aware that such services exist. The refugees should also be made aware of consumer rights in Ontario and Canada as well as the city's various faith communities. More generally, the committee should consider ways of introducing the refugees to Canadian cultural norms. The latter may require specific expertise.

6) BANKING

The committee will have to have someone explore the sophistication of the refugees in banking matters. The refugees may need help:

- setting up bank accounts and having someone explain the differences between chequing and savings accounts;
- obtaining credit cards and bank credit;
- being made aware of banking fees and the effects of compound interest.

with issues as simple as the importance of Personal Identification Number (PIN) secrecy.

The refugees may also need help understanding the Canadian and Ontario tax systems, including at-source deductions by employers. They may also need instruction on the importance of filing income tax returns with the Canada Revenue Agency, including the related child tax benefits and other rebates that may be available.

7) EMPLOYMENT

One of the key objectives of the committee should be to help the refugees find employment. We have had at least one offer that could make this job much easier than otherwise might be the case. In any case, the refugees will need help obtaining a social insurance number and instructions on how it is to be used in employment matters.

In the absence of job offers to the refugees as a result of the committee's efforts, it's recommended we help the refugees obtain employment through an agency known as Northwest Employment Works. (Contact may be made by appointment through the Multi-cultural Association every second Wednesday.) Job boards at the federal employment agency offices in Thunder Bay are also a possibility.

The refugees may also need help understanding a variety of employee rights in the province as well the rights of unions, the requirement to pay union dues in certain instances as well as the right to vacation pay. Refugees may need help understanding workplace cultural norms in Canada and the availability of help with any entrepreneurial efforts they may wish to undertake.

Refugees should also be encouraged to volunteer as part of the process of cultural integration into Canada. The committee should also be available for moral support in the face of barriers to progress in the process of becoming citizens, including voter registration.