

MVRRRT /

A GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS SUPPORTING REFUGEE SETTLEMENT



PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Welcoming refugees has become a national initiative. People from all walks of life have come forward offering their time, energy and experience to become part of this national movement by volunteering to support refugee settlement and integration.

Volunteers play an important role in familiarizing refugees with their new community, helping them understand and access our systems, supporting job preparation and job search and helping with English language acquisition. Some volunteers have considerable volunteer experience and may have a good understanding of refugee settlement, health, employment and language needs. Others are keen but have a more limited understanding, or in some cases no experience working with refugees.

The intention of this guide is to provide some information and guidance for those wishing to volunteer to support refugees.

WHO ARE BC'S REFUGEES?

BC welcomes about 3,000 refugees each year. It is the third largest recipient of refugees among Canada's provinces.

These individuals and families arrive from countries from around the world. Recent source countries of refugees to BC include: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Columbia among others.

It is important to consider that all refugees have varying and unique needs and different obstacles to overcome as they settle

and integrate. They arrive with a range of experiences, skills, education and English language ability and varying needs for health and mental health care. Some are professionals and some have never worked, some hold advanced degrees and others only a few years of elementary school, some speak several languages and are fluent in English and others have only a few words of English and still others may not be literate in their own language.

As a volunteer it is important to recognize and be sensitive to these varying needs and provide the best support you can to meet these needs.

WHERE CAN I VOLUNTEER TO SUPPORT REFUGEES?



Many different opportunities exist to help refugees. Depending on your skills and interests, you can offer your time to assist individuals to:

- Navigate the healthcare system and get to appointments;
- Help them learn English;
- Familiarize themselves with their community;
- Provide companionship and help understand daily life;
- Assist in identifying housing or helping manage food security; or
- Offer job search assistance or be a mentor.

To find agencies that need volunteers in all different areas, go to the Volunteer page on the Metro Vancouver RRT website:

<http://metrovanrrt.ca/volunteer/>

THINGS TO CONSIDER AS A VOLUNTEER SUPPORTING REFUGEES

Cultural Awareness

It is essential that prospective volunteers have sensitivity awareness and understanding of the cultural backgrounds of refugee communities, and the challenges that they face. Various organizations offer cultural sensitivity workshops and training that could be very useful for volunteers with limited experience in working with refugees.

Refer or Connect to Services

Through interactions with refugees, volunteers are often the first to identify signs of trauma and observe emotional and mental issues. Referring refugees to counseling or other supports may be necessary. The MVRRT Inventory of Refugee Programs and Services can help you find agencies that provide a range of programs and services – www.metrovanrrt.ca

Self-Care

Working with persons from refugee backgrounds may expose volunteers, workers, teachers and other profes-

sionals to some difficult circumstances and heart-wrenching first-hand stories. This can be challenging and may affect volunteers' sense of safety and well-being. It is important to be prepared to deal with hearing stories of loss, grief and trauma. If this becomes overwhelming, volunteers should connect with the agency they are volunteering for or a refugee serving agency; these organizations can offer guidance and support to both the volunteer and the refugee.

Helping vs. Empowering

The desire to help is a very important and valuable

human characteristic. Volunteers often find it natural or easier to "take on or take over" tasks rather than support or teach refugees to do things on their own. Volunteers can become concerned or fearful that without their help, refugees will struggle too much or feel isolated and vulnerable; it is important to know that refugees have managed to overcome many obstacles and barriers to get where they are right now. They are survivors. By being taught how to do things, they will feel empowered and a sense of satisfaction that they are not a burden on others.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All organizations, groups and individuals have rules around privacy and confidentiality. As a volunteer, you should be sure that consent has been given before you access any personal information of the refugees you are assisting. It is also important that you protect any information you have been given.

Decision Making

Refugees new to Canada have many decisions to

make; they will have to consider and decide on issues such as education, employment, housing, healthcare, childcare, money matters, etc. As a volunteer, it is important that you are careful to only provide options and ideas; the refugees you work with must make their own decisions. If you do not have access to the information required by the refugee to make these decisions, connect with an immigrant and refugee serving agency to get assistance.

CHALLENGES FACED BY REFUGEES ADAPTING TO THEIR NEW COUNTRY

Culture shock

Many refugees will have limited to no English, and be presented a very different way of life. This can create feelings of frustration and anxiety for many who might be experiencing a change in status, a loss of their support system, separation from friends and family, and difficulty in accomplishing tasks they once found simple.

Societal Prejudice

Immigrants and refugees may face discrimination, misunderstanding and prejudice. This could include some myths about refugees

receiving more attention and financial support than locals or refugees being a burden on social services. These myths are out of touch. In fact, refugees are contributing members of the society and based on Government of Canada stats, refugees who have come to Canada over the past 30 years have paid more income tax in Canada than immigrant investors.

Trauma

A common belief is that all refugees have chosen to come to Canada. While for many newcomers this is true, there are some people who have been forced to leave their former homes and countries out of necessity. During their flight, refugees might have experienced traumatic events and incidents. This trauma might

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was developed by the Metro Vancouver Refugee Response Team.

The MVRRT was established in early 2016, under the leadership of MOSAIC. The MVRRT membership represents organizations spread throughout the region and across a diverse sphere of activities, from ethnic and faith-based organizations, through immigrant and mainstream service providers, through health and education authorities, government and the business community.

have long term effects such as unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, depression, anxiety, headaches, or nausea.

A change in economic situation

Some refugees have left senior positions and well-paid jobs and may be forced to work in jobs for which they are overqualified. This change in status can affect a refugee's self-confidence as well as their economic well-being.

Role reversal

It is often easier for children to learn a new language than it is for their parents and this can create a reversal in roles. Children may take on more of an adult role in the family, as they translate for their parents and speak on their parent's behalf. Refugees in this

position may find this role reversal difficult.

Geography or climate

Many refugees will have come from a warmer climate and so it may be difficult for them to become accustomed to BC's heavy rainfall, grey days, cold and snow. This may make some "homesick", for others this may exacerbate already existing "blue" feelings or depression, for others it is simply hard to get used to.

A change from a rural to urban setting or vice versa

Many refugees come from rural centres or smaller more intimate communities and may find the impersonal nature of the city difficult to adjust to. This may result in feeling daunted or feelings of isolation or insecurity.

EXISTING RESOURCES

Refugees will likely have many questions about day to day life in BC. The following are a few excellent resources to assist you to help them.

Newcomers' Guide

This guide is 125 pages and has been translated into 14 languages. These guides can be downloaded here:

<https://www.welcomebc.ca/Start-Your-Life-in-B-C/Newcomers-Guides/Newcomers-Guide-Provincial>

Print copies are available for order free of charge in eleven languages.

Immigrant Questions and Answers

A library settlement project called NewToBC has an online database of hundreds of questions that new immigrants and refugees to BC might ask. Answers to these questions with direct links to source information are provided at a click of a mouse:

http://newtobc.ca/faq_category/immigration-citizenship-questions-answers/

English Language Learning Materials

NewToBC also maintains an inventory of language learning and teaching materials. You can search this inventory online to find resources to support the acquisition of English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills at all levels:

<http://newtobc.ca/newcomer-resources/eal-resources/>

My Training BC

WelcomeBC designed MyTrainingBC to provide training modules for settlement and frontline workers supporting immigrants, refugees and newcomers in BC. The training modules are designed to complement the in-house staff training provided by settlement organizations. This training is very useful for volunteers and others working with refugees:

<http://www.mytrainingbc.ca/SST/index.html>

THE METRO VANCOUVER REFUGEE RESPONSE TEAM

These Member Organizations provide guidance, leadership and oversight to the MV RRT. Collectively they developed the Action Plan has guided the activities of the MV RRT for 2016-17.

MOSAIC – MV RRT Contract Manager
PEERs Inc. – Project Consultants
Back in Motion Rehab, Inc.
BC Alliance for Manufacturing
BC Centre for Ability
BC Construction Association (BCCA)
BC Muslim Association
Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC
Burnaby Board of Trade (BBOT)
Burnaby Community Services
Burnaby Family Life
Burnaby Public Library
Burnaby School District 41
Canadian Lutheran World Relief
City of Burnaby
City of New Westminster
City of Vancouver
Coast Mental Health
Coquitlam Public Library (CPL)
Douglas College
Fraser Health
Immigrant Employment Council of BC
Islamic Society of British Columbia
ISSofBC
Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver
Lower Mainland Purpose Society for Youth and Families
New Westminster School District 40
North Shore Multicultural Services (NSMS)
Pacific Immigrant Resources Society
Richmond Multicultural Community Services (RMCS)
Richmond School District 38
Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
South Asian Community Coalition
Against Youth Violence
Syrian Canadian Council of BC
Syrian Community Network
United Church
Vancity
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Society
Vancouver Coastal Health
Vancouver School Board (VSB)
YWCA Metro Vancouver

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Was this information helpful?

Email us at:

sspindari@mosaicbc.com
to let us know if this fact sheet was useful to you, or if you have suggestions for further content.

MORE INFO

For more info on the MVRRT, check out our website at <http://metrovanrrt.ca> or contact **Saleem Spindari, MVRRT Project Manager**
T: 604.254.9626 ext. 226
E: sspindari@mosaicbc.com

To find out more about refugee resettlement in B.C., visit the BC Refugee Readiness Hub at <http://refugeehub.issbc.org>

