

## **Some Frequently Asked Question from Public Meetings**

### **What is the sponsorship process with Lifeline Syria?**

Lifeline Syria will recruit, train and assist sponsor groups to welcome and support 1,000 Syrian refugees coming to Canada as permanent immigrants to resettle in the GTA over the next two years. We will work with the Syrian community in the GTA to link refugee families with potential sponsorship groups and we will work with governments at all levels to ensure that these sponsorships are approved quickly. Most often, we will work with organizations who now hold contracts with the federal government (Sponsorship Agreement Holders - SAHs) and link them to local groups interested in sponsoring refugees.

### **What Is a SAH?**

Organizations that have signed sponsorship agreements with the Government of Canada to help support and resettle refugees from abroad are known as **Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH)**. They can sponsor refugees themselves or work with others in the community to sponsor refugees. Most SAHs are religious, ethnic, community, or service organizations. They work with individual sponsorship groups, also known as constituent groups, to sponsor refugees.

### **What are the main categories of sponsorship?**

There are several options for private sponsorship.

**Group of Five (G5):** at least five Canadian citizens or permanent residents can initiate refugee sponsorship if they fulfill the criteria. This designation works directly with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The five individuals are assuming all the liability and dealing directly with the federal government.

**Constituent Groups** are groups of 5-10 or more individuals who are working with cases authorized by a SAH to sponsor refugees under its agreement.

**Community Sponsors** are organizations, associations or corporations which do not have a sponsorship agreement with the federal government but can still sponsor by binding the entity to assume liability for the refugee family.

## **Does religion play a role in refugee sponsorship?**

No. While many SAHs are affiliated with religious organizations in Canada. They offer protection to refugees solely on the basis of humanitarian need and have a long track record of offering help to people of all faiths. Lifeline Syria works with anyone who is a Syrian refugee under the Canadian requirements; religion does not affect whether or not a case is submitted.

## **How are cases selected?**

The first category of cases are those with a family member or other connection living in Canada who qualify as refugees. The second category are those people identified and referred by the UNHCR based on their seven resettlement criteria: survivors of violence and/or torture; medical needs; women and girls at risk; family reunification; children and adolescents at risk; lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions; legal and/or physical protection needs.

## **Is there an emphasis on persecuted minorities? How does that affect Lifeline Syria?**

Lifeline Syria does not look at religion in its selection of refugee cases and groups are encouraged not to request a specific religious group to sponsor. People of all faiths are welcome.

## **Are processing fees part of the program?**

There are no application or processing fees under the private sponsorship program. However, there is a requirement to provide funds for the refugees to support them during the sponsorship. Refugees are expected to contribute to their own settlement costs from funds they bring to Canada or earn during their sponsorship period. But it is illegal for a SAH to charge refugees or to force them to pay to submit a refugee resettlement application.

## **What are the different types of sponsorship?**

**Named/Family Referred/Family-linked** - the sponsoring group has direct knowledge of particular refugees or refugee families overseas who have been brought to its attention and applies to bring them to Canada, agreeing to support them financially and emotionally for a year.

**Visa Office Referrals (VOR)** – the refugee has already been identified as in need of protection by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (or another referral organization overseas) and the Canadian visa office abroad, but requires a sponsor in Canada.

**The Blended Visa-Office Referred (BVOR)** -- a program designed to resettle refugees identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and submitted to Canadian visa offices abroad. It is referred to as a "blended" program because it is a cost-sharing arrangement whereby Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and a SAH or private sponsorship group working through a SAH both contribute to financially supporting the refugees.

### **How Does the "Blended" Model Work?**

Refugees resettled under the Blended VOR Initiative will receive income support for 6 months - usually months 2-7 - after their arrival through the federal government's Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). They are also fully covered under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) for a full 12 months in addition to provincial health coverage. Sponsors will be responsible for the remaining 6 months of financial support.

### **What are the responsibilities of a sponsorship group?**

Sponsorship groups must make provision for reception, care, lodging and settlement assistance and support for the sponsored refugees for the duration of the sponsorship period which is 12 months from the date of arrival of the refugee or until the refugee becomes self-supporting and no longer requires settlement assistance, whichever is less.

The group will complete a settlement plan outlining the settlement arrangements put in place for the sponsored refugees, such as the monthly support being provided, finding suitable housing for them, and helping them to learn an official language, get a job or go to school, and connect to services in the community.

### **What is the financial obligation?**

A sponsorship group takes full responsibility for a refugee family for one year from the date of arrival. Responsibilities include providing housing, clothing, food, and all aspects of assisting with integration, e.g., enrolling adults in language

classes and the children in schools, teaching them how to do the shopping, helping them to find a family doctor, and so on.

Although the cost of living varies from one region to another, the following table notes the basic minimum cost required by the government to sponsor a refugee family for 12 months. The required financial resources indicated are roughly equivalent to social assistance rates. Sponsorship groups may need to budget for larger sums depending on the cost of living in their area but are not liable for providing more than listed in the chart. Income support levels may also be reduced through in-kind donations of essential items such as housing.

Family Size	12 Months of Income Support	Start-up Costs	Estimated Total Annual Settlement Cost (\$)
1	9,800	2,800	12,600
2	16,800	4,400	21,200
3	17,700	5,300	23,000
4	20,000	7,000	27,000
5	22,500	7,200	29,700
6	24,500	8,000	32,500
<b>Additional member</b>	1,550	1,000	2,500

## What are Start Up Costs?

Start-up costs are a one-time payment and might include:

- household items
- furniture
- linens
- food staples
- (winter) clothing
- deposit for utilities
- phone installation
- first month's rent
- school supplies for children

## | **Do we need the funds in advance?**

Some SAHs may require a sponsoring group to have sufficient funds set aside in a trust account to support a family for a year. Others may simply seek proof of your ability to meet this commitment.

Some groups establish trust accounts for the funds collected, raised or donated for the settlement of sponsored refugees.

## **What are the responsibilities of the sponsor group after arrival of a family?**

- Providing the cost of food, rent, public transportation and household utilities and other day-to-day living expenses
- Providing clothing, furniture and other household goods
- Locating interpreters
- Selecting a family physician and dentist
- Assisting with applying for provincial health-care coverage and the Interim Federal Health Program
- Enrolling children in school and adults in language training
- Introducing newcomers to people with similar personal interests
- Providing orientation with regard to banking services, transportation, etc.
- Helping in the search for employment.
- Physically reside in the expected community of settlement

## **If a refugee becomes self-supporting during the first year, does the sponsor still need to support them financially?**

No, though the sponsorship group remains obligated to help in all social aspects or the resettlement. Should a refugee subsequently lose his/her job during the one year resettlement period, the sponsorship group must resume financial support.

## **If all the money raised by the sponsorship group is not required, what happens to those funds?**

If the funds have not been given to a charity who issued a tax receipt then it is up to the group to decide how to use the money. For example, they can be given to the refugee to help pay off the transportation loan they needed to come to Canada; they can be used to start sponsoring another refugee or they can be returned to sponsorship group members.

If the funds were given to a charity and you received a tax receipt, the money remains under the control of the charity.

### **How can we donate to Lifeline Syria?**

You can donate to Lifeline Syria in different ways. Lifeline Syria is not a charity but has set up donation facilities at the following organizations which will provide you with a charitable receipt. All funds raised through the following organizations will be further disbursed to charities that are directly engaged in the sponsorship and resettlement of Lifeline Syria refugee cases.

**CanadaHelps and the Aqueduct Foundation.**

**Toronto Community Foundation**

**COSTI medical emergency fund**

You can also donate directly to a variety of charities, religious institutions or settlement service providers. These organizations often have established procedures for setting aside funds for refugees.

### **Can donors get tax receipts?**

Donations given to the Emergency Fund through Lifeline Syria are eligible for tax receipts. According to the Canadian Revenue Agency funds donated directly to individuals or families do not qualify for tax receipts. Any funds donated by co-sponsors, friends and relatives, or community donors for the benefit of a specific individual or family are considered to be acts of private benevolence which, according to Canada Revenue Agency guidelines, do not meet the criteria for a donation tax receipt.

### **What happens if our sponsored family gets sick? Are we responsible for covering healthcare?**

The refugee arrives as a Permanent Resident and is covered under OHIP immediately upon arrival. They also receive various levels of support from the Interim Federal Health Program and many doctors are offering pro bono support for Syrian refugees.

## **How many members should be in a group?**

Groups should have a minimum of five and preferably up to 10. There can be more than 10 members but it is easier to have a smaller core group to make decisions and find meeting times. Other people can be more involved in the settlement tasks. Ideally, a group should have participants of different ages, backgrounds and availability in order to cover the wide variety of sponsorship responsibilities.

## **Do all group members contribute financial support? How much should we each contribute?**

For Groups of Five specifically, at a minimum, three of the members should be committing to contribute towards the financial support of the sponsored refugee(s). That is, more than three members can, but do not have to contribute financially. Otherwise, how much each of you contributes is up to you. However, you do have to make sure that the overall group total equals to the figures provided in the sponsorship cost table. The amounts that each group member pledges to contribute need to be reasonable, taking into account the number of dependents the group member has, any previous sponsorships the group member has committed to, and the group member's annual income after tax deductions.

## **Can I participate in more than one sponsorship?**

Yes, eligible refugee sponsors can participate in more than one sponsorship. Your ability to participate in multiple refugee sponsorships depends on your financial capacity and settlement capacity. You may be assessed on your annual income, the size of your family (i.e.: number of dependents for whom you are financially responsible for including yourself) and the amount of your financial commitment for each sponsorship.

## **Some of our group members don't live in the same city. Is that ok?**

Sponsorship group members should reside in the community in which the sponsored refugee(s) are expected to live. Group members are responsible for supporting them during the sponsorship period with settlement needs. If group members live too far apart, the refugee application package will be returned to the group for not meeting the residency requirement.

## **What is the best way to manage funds collected for sponsorship?**

Open a trust or bank account.

Pledges are sufficient during the preparation phase. Once the application is ready for submission to a SAH, some or all of the funds must be available.

## **Who gives the refugees the money – the SAH or the group? Does the refugee family get all the money up front or on a monthly basis? Who decides?**

When the money is held by the SAHs they generally distribute the funds on a monthly basis to the family. If the group retains control of the money they decide how it is given out as long as the refugees are receiving, at minimum, a twelfth of the 12 months of income support required in the liability chart. It is suggested that the money is distributed monthly, not all at once.

## **Are there any circumstances in which sponsors would be responsible for a refugee beyond one year?**

No. There are some cases that have a longer sponsorship period but the group would be told this before they committed.

## **How long will it take for refugees to arrive in Canada?**

The overseas processing time of a refugee sponsorship application varies in different Canadian visa offices abroad. Syrian refugees are being given priority clearances; still their initial application may take a few days or a month to be reviewed in Canada before the file is sent to a visa office overseas for processing where refugees will be interviewed and screened for medical, security and criminal checks. This process has previously taken from four to 18 months or more depending on cases and locations. However, there have been a few changes made to the program as well as more resources provided which we expect will lead to quicker timelines.

## **How do we know if the refugee application has been accepted?**

If a refugee applicant is informed and/or given information by the Canadian visa officer on how to obtain a medical exam, it means that the interview was successful. If the interview was not successful, the interviewing Canadian visa officer will inform the refugee applicant.

## **Who arranges the travel details and exit permits?**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) handles all travel-related matters for sponsored refugees. IOM staff will book the flight and arrange for exit permits. The Canadian government will supply the refugees with a loan to cover their medical and travel costs.

## **What social benefits are sponsored refugees entitled to?**

As soon as a sponsored refugee lands in Canada he or she is a permanent resident of Canada and is entitled to apply for Ontario Health Insurance and, depending on the family situation, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the National Child Benefit Supplement, the Ontario Child Benefit, the Universal Child Care Benefit, the Child Disability Benefit and the HST credit.

As a permanent resident the refugee is entitled to a Social Insurance Number and has the right to work. A sponsored refugee is not eligible for Ontario Works benefits or subsidized housing during the period of sponsorship. After three years as a permanent resident, the refugee can apply for Canadian citizenship.

## **CASES**

### **What should we do to sponsor a family still in Syria? Can people who are still in Syria be sponsored?**

No. People who still reside in their home country are not considered refugees, even if they have been driven out of their home or town.

### **Are Palestinians who were living in Syria eligible for resettlement?**

Yes, Palestinians whose habitual residence has been in Syria are eligible for sponsorship.

#### **| Can a refugee lose refugee status?**

A refugee is no longer considered qualified if

- they re-gain protection from their home country;
- they settle in a new country and find protection there;

- they return to their home country;
- they are no longer in danger of persecution.

### **If I don't have many financial resources, can I still sponsor family members?**

Yes, you can join an existing group, contribute to emotional support, settlement plans etc. Lifeline Syria can link you to a group that has raised adequate funds.

### **If I sponsor my family, can they live with me?**

Yes, but it is not advisable. Any accommodation must comply with tenancy and child welfare requirement. It has the potential to create conflict and jeopardize the settlement process.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **We are ready with group members and the funds. What is the quickest route?**

Blended Visa-Office Referred sponsorships are usually the fastest processed cases. Refugees are already identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and their names are submitted to Canadian visa offices abroad. They are then placed on a data base that is available to SAHs for selection. While quick and travel-ready, BVOR sponsorships, because of the refugees vulnerabilities, may be inherently more complicated or demand more attention and support than other private sponsorships.

### **Will SAH's handle our funds?**

Some will. Most will not. Those that will may have specific requirements that the sponsor group must agree to.

### **While fundraising, can our group say we are working with Lifeline Syria?**

Yes. But it must be made clear that the funds are not going to Lifeline Syria but towards your sponsorship.

**I am fund raising and want to give tax receipts and am hearing different stories. Please clarify**

According to the Canadian Revenue Agency funds donated directly to individuals or families do not qualify for tax receipts. Any funds donated by co-sponsors, friends and relatives, or community donors for the benefit of a specific individual or family are considered to be acts of private benevolence which, according to Canada Revenue Agency guidelines, do not meet the criteria for a donation tax receipt.

**Does LS have a platform for crowd funding?**

No

**Does LS have a fund raising handbook or materials?**

No.

**Should we be working with any one particular bank re: the funds we raise?**

Your group should designate a financial person to work with their regular bank.

**How much cash do we need up front?**

A good rule of thumb is to have four months worth of the total you have raised or pledged plus the start-up costs needed to resettle a family.

**Where do the numbers in the financial table come from?**

The come from the federal government and are based on an average of social assistance rates across Canada. You can expect costs in Toronto to be higher and you should aim to raise more. But make certain the budget you provide for the refugee family is sustainable once the year is over.

**When will the sponsorship Handbook be ready?**

There is a draft edition on the Lifeline Syria website now It will be amended and added to as we advance.

**What health-related costs are we responsible for?**

All sponsored refugees arrive in Canada as permanent residents and immediately qualify for OHIP upon arrival. Children under 19 also receive basic dental coverage. But resettled refugees who do not receive, and have not received, governmental resettlement assistance through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) are not eligible for expanded Health-Care Coverage.

### **Many refugees may arrive unvaccinated. What do we do?**

If the sponsored refugees do not have immunization records with them, they will be required to get the required vaccinations in Canada, even if that means they will be repeating the vaccinations. Public health clinics around the city provide vaccines.

### **How do we find appropriate housing?**

Look for temporary housing when the refugees first arrive. Then work with the refugee family to find suitable accommodation. Settlement Agencies can assist and Lifeline Syria's Sponsorship Handbook provides you with some tips.

### **Will we know the language skills in advance?**

Yes. But plan to have a translator with you when the refugee family arrives just to help ease the transition. Lifeline Syria can help you obtain the services of a translator if necessary.

### **Will we know what financial resources the refugees have?**

Forms require refugees to identify the amount of money they will be travelling with but the information may be out of date.

### **Do we give the money to the refugees?**

Yes. But the budget should be developed together with the sponsored refugee, not created for them without their input. The sponsoring group must recognize that even though they may be providing the funds, the refugee should make the final decisions on how to spend it. Try to get the refugee's name on the tenancy agreement and utility bills. This allows them to develop a credit rating quickly.

### **Will you provide an on-line list of settlement resources so we can start to reach out now to various organizations?**

Lifeline Syria's Sponsorship Handbook describes how you can best reach and work with settlement organizations.