

Neighbourhood Orientation¹⁵

During the first days after the arrival, the sponsoring group should give the refugee(s) an orientation to their new neighbourhood to make them feel more comfortable with their surroundings. An orientation can include, but is not limited to, the following:

Food and Shopping

It is good to show the refugee(s) where they can go grocery shopping while keeping their budget in mind. Bulk stores and local produce stores may be much cheaper than the big-chain grocery stores. Ask the newcomers about their preferences and needs when it comes to food, whether it be halal or certain ethnic food items. Helping the refugees stock foods that are familiar can go a long way towards easing the stress around all the new things they face in the settlement process. There might be food items that can only be found in certain stores. Little by little you can also introduce them to Canadian food items either from the grocery store or by preparing a meal for or with them.

Remember that the refugee (s) might be very unfamiliar with cooking for different reasons and might need a lot of guidance with preparing meals, especially in a Canadian kitchen. Cooking on a budget is another good thing to go over.

Shopping might be very different in their country of origin and they might be used to bargaining for prices at the stores. Explain to the refugee(s) the customs around non-bargaining in Canada.

Parks, Trails and Beach Areas

You may wish to provide refugees with a local map and take them to places where they can enjoy the outdoors in their new community.

Transportation

Many refugees are dependent on public transportation. Before arrival, you may want to pick up a public transportation map and a map of the city. To understand how the public transportation system works, it is often easiest to take the refugee(s) around and assist

¹⁵ Adapted from the “Refugee Sponsorship Training Program”

them in learning how to buy and use tickets, how the bus system works, how the subway and streetcar system works, and other things related to the transit system. Keep in mind the limited resources the refugee(s) have to make sure you find the most economical options.

Library

The public library usually gives people access to free services such as borrowing books, music and DVDs, internet access, computer access, etc. Some branches also have computer-learning centres where people can take computer classes for free. For those with a valid library card, some library branches also provide free passes to access various museums, art galleries, and other cultural venues. To learn more, visit your local library about how to apply for a library card. Families will likely need to bring along a valid name *and* address identification.

Clothing

If the refugee (s) arrive in the winter, you must provide some weather appropriate clothing for them at arrival. If new clothes are needed, accompany the refugees to the store and help them find clothes that are appropriate for the weather (and suit their cultural and budgetary needs).

Advise the refugee(s) on how to dress appropriately for the climate local to their area – winter will probably be colder than they have expected. If they arrive during spring or summer, make sure you remember to help them find warm clothes before winter (through either donations or shopping).

Some sponsoring groups get donations in the form of second-hand clothing for the arriving families. *It is important for sponsoring group to be aware that some cultures have different views on second-hand goods.* In some cultures, it is completely acceptable, but in others, it can be seen as an insult to give other people used goods. No matter which culture the refugees belong to, it is a good idea to explain why you are giving them used clothing and explain how this is viewed in Canadian culture.

Laundry

Offer to demonstrate how to operate the washer and dryer, make payments, and use

laundry products. If there are no laundry services inside their unit or the building, it may be necessary to take them to the closest laundromat and explain how the process works.

Place of Worship

Ask the refugee family if they are interested in attending a specific religious place of worship and help them explore their options in your area. Feel free to invite them to attend a service at your church but ensure that they feel no obligation or pressure to do so.