

## Understanding Culture Shock and Providing Support<sup>16</sup>

There are many tasks involved in the early weeks of welcome that are part of refugee sponsorship. In the midst of the many appointments, orientations, and introductions it is easy to lose sight of the less visible challenges that newcomers face when coming to Canada. Certain aspects of life in Canada may be unfamiliar and intimidating to a newcomer. As a result, many sponsored refugees struggle with *culture shock*, a period of disorientation experienced when encountering a new culture.

Culture shock is a normal part of cultural adjustment and can result in healthy learning. Psychologists have found that culture shock tends to follow four distinct stages (described on the next page). While the pace at which individuals progress through these stages is very individualized, it is helpful for sponsors to have some understanding of what the newcomers are going through in order to provide appropriate support. Keep in mind that it could take several years for an individual to work through the stages of culture shock.

**NOTE: The purpose of this section is only to provide basic information. This information is not intended to replace the expertise of trained professionals. If you believe that professional mental health support is needed, please do not hesitate to reach out to the appropriate support services in your community.**

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<sup>16</sup> Adapted from *RSTP Handbook for Sponsoring Groups*, pp. 80-81