

MCC Ontario: Best Practices in Private Sponsorship

“Sponsorship is an art, not a science.”

– Moses Moini, MCC Ontario’s Refugee Program Coordinator

Throughout 2017, MCC conducted in-person check-ins with sponsors across Ontario at varying stages of sponsorship. These check-ins included discussions about the joys, challenges, and lessons learned of refugee sponsorship. Sponsors also reflected on the key aspects that contribute to a successful sponsorship. This document is a compilation of the best practices identified from our experience and the feedback of our sponsors.

Section 1: Pre-Arrival

- **Getting to Know You Document:** MCC requires all sponsorship groups to fill out this document. Take the time to use it as a tool to discuss your team’s capacity and the resources available in your community. Your responses will help MCC make the best match possible.
Lessons Learned – MCC will not refer high medical needs individuals or pre-literate populations to small/rural communities as they do not have access to the necessary settlement and health care services.
- **Committee Roles:** It is important to gather a strong and committed core committee with clearly defined roles based on individual experiences and strengths. We suggest that this core committee consist of a minimum of 5 people. It is strongly suggested that teams have a wider “pool” of volunteers to reach out to as needed, to help avoid sponsor burnout. Refer to MCC’s **Committee Roles** template available on the **Resources** tab of the portal.
Lessons Learned – It is important that your core committee include members with daytime availability, especially during the first half of sponsorship. There will be multiple daytime appointments the family will need support in getting to.
- **Communication and Collaboration:** Maintaining regular communication within your sponsorship committee is very important. Assign this task to your committee chair and make use of online tools like email, shared google docs and/or private Facebook groups to keep everyone in the loop.
Consider creating a Sponsorship Code of Ethics that you create and commit to as a group. Find the **Model Code of Ethics** document on the **Resources** Tab of the Portal.
As a committee, communicate your expectations of each other, to each other. You may disagree on how to approach a situation that arises and need to know how to deal with this disagreement. If your team is not communicating well, this will affect the newcomer family and contribute additional and unnecessary stress to their settlement journey. Commit to working together for the best interests of the newcomer family.
Maintain your sponsorship group’s vision, knowing there are times when sponsorship may not work out the way you hoped/planned. Recognize that you will need to continually revise your

MCC Ontario: Best Practices in Private Sponsorship

goals of sponsorship. Each newcomer family is unique and your role is to ultimately support the family toward their own goals for settlement in Canada.

Lessons Learned – When the family you have sponsored has relatives already here, invite them into the committee and try to work in collaboration with them. Seek MCC's guidance if challenges arise.

- **Connecting with the Newcomer family prior to their arrival:** If you have sponsored through the BVOR stream of sponsorship, this is not always possible. Connect with MCC and they will instruct you on next steps to attempt pre-arrival contact.
- **Research:** Learn as much as you can about the sponsorship process and settlement services available in your area. Visit MCC's Portal Resource Tab as well as www.rstp.ca and www.settlement.org. Learn about the context from which the refugee family you are supporting has been forced to flee – visit [UNHCR's 'refworld.org'](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld.org) for the most up to date country profiles. Reach out to MCC and we can direct you to additional resources available depending on the refugee population.

Note: Research is helpful but remember that each individual and family is unique. They will process their experience in different ways and will share their story with you when they are ready. Do not push them to share elements of their story they are not ready to share.

- **Create a Resource Binder** for the newcomer family. Include individual committee member photos with names and corresponding committee role definitions and contact information. Include pictures and contact information for the nearest grocery stores, banks, community centres, hospitals, bus stops, etc. Include emergency contacts. This resource will help the family learn each sponsor's role and clarify who they should direct their questions to. Contact MCC for a template that can be shared.

Lessons learned – newcomers may ask the same question to multiple sponsors, multiple times. Ensure that you continuously direct those questions to the appropriate team member so that clear information flows from your team to the family. This will help avoid mixed messages. It is important for your team to communicate to the family as a unified voice.

- **Managing Expectations:** You will approach this experience with expectations and so will the newcomers. Use the tools below to work at managing these expectations together:
 - Watch this short RSTP video on [Managing Expectations](#)
 - Read through the [Managing Expectations Resource Kit](#)

Section 2: First half of sponsorship

- **Building trust:** This takes time and happens through relationship. The more time you spend together, the more the family will begin to see you have their best interests at heart and are committed to building a healthy relationship with them. When there is trust at the core of the relationship all challenges can be worked through. Access to interpretation assistance for crucial conversations is key.
- **Interpretation:** Certified and informal interpreters are both needed. Certified interpreters, as much as possible, should be accessed for important and confidential conversations including legal appointments, medical appointments and crucial conversations around finances and

MCC Ontario: Best Practices in Private Sponsorship

expectations. Interpreters play a key role in building trust with the newcomer family and act as a cross-cultural bridge.

- **English Learning:** Plan to invest time into tutoring. This additional one-on-one support makes a difference with both adults and children. Tutoring can be provided from you as sponsors or by accessing available settlement supports in the community – i.e. YMCA's often run homework clubs for children and youth.

Lesson Learned – Newcomer children who were placed at a grade level below their appropriate age seemed to do better in school. Sponsors shared that they saw the kids catch up more quickly as they began at a level they could manage. See if this is possible in your context; not all schools will allow/accept this request.

Note: Birth dates listed on refugee documentation are not always accurate and some families may not know when their actual birth dates are. Unless the family has a legal document proving their actual birth dates this will be difficult to change in Canada. Proceed with what their Permanent Residence document states and contact MCC if there is a discrepancy.

- **Partnerships:**
 - As much as possible foster connections between the newcomer family and their local ethno-cultural community, including connecting refugees with churches of their own faith traditions. Contact MCC if you need help establishing these connections.
 - Partner with other churches in your area. Many sponsors have commented on the strength that comes from working together and having access to a larger network of support.
 - Connect with an experienced sponsor. If you are a first time sponsor, MCC will happily connect you to an experienced sponsor. If one is not available in your area they may connect you with one you could consult with over the phone or online.
- Participate in **MCC's Monthly Province Wide Call-In** meeting. Tune in on the last Monday of every month at noon! These meetings help sponsors process the joys and challenges of sponsorship. It helps them stay connected with MCC, other sponsors and updates to the ever changing refugee sponsorship world. To tune in follow this link:
<https://mcc.zoom.us/j/657119613>

Overall, balance short-term and long-term planning. Keep the end of sponsorship in mind, but recognize the first few months can be overwhelming and families may need to take things day by day.

Section 3: Second half of sponsorship

- **Empowering Independence:** This is unique to every family, and month 13 or 25 planning should be kept in mind throughout sponsorship. It is especially important as you reach the halfway point to begin to ask yourselves as sponsors, *"Is my support currently empowering independence or fostering dependency?"* Plan to meet with the family to discuss their goals/vision for the end of sponsorship to determine what is realistic and how you as sponsors can support them on this journey.

Here is a list of resources that are helpful in planning for the end of sponsorship:

- Chapter 8 of the Refugee Sponsorship Training Programs Handbook, [The First Year and Beyond](#).

MCC Ontario: Best Practices in Private Sponsorship

- [RSTP's Month 13 Planning Resource Kit](#). The **checklist on page 7** will be helpful in guiding key focus areas for this next phase of sponsorship.
- Continue to check MCC's Portal for the latest sponsorship announcements and resources – we have a Month 13 Section on the Resources Tab that will be helpful.

Section 4: Overall Challenges/Lessons Learned

- **Sending Money Overseas:** At times families you are supporting will ask if you can send money to a relative in need overseas. As sponsors, your first responsibility is for the newcomer's settlement in Canada. You are not legally required to give extra money for a family member not under your sponsorship agreement. When communicating with the family, be clear that the funds raised are intended for their settlement in Canada. However, the family can choose how they will use any savings/contingency money they have. Many newcomers will sacrifice their needs here and live modestly to be able to send some support to relatives overseas. Contact Kaylee and Moses at MCC if this becomes an issue.
- **Sponsor Burnout:** If you are not working well together as a team, and too few people are carrying too much of the load, sponsorship burnout can occur. To avoid this, make sure you have a strong network of support. Have a back-up pool of volunteers who can step in if someone needs a break, and share the load through collaboration and communication. MCC is always here to support you and we care about your wellbeing. Don't hesitate to contact us if there is anything we can do to help!
- **Managing expectations:** This will be an ongoing process throughout sponsorship. See Section 1, page 2 of this document, for tools and resources.
- **Sponsors are not Parents:** Challenges will arise and newcomers may make decisions for themselves that you will not agree with. A sponsor is always a guide and advisor in the midst of changing emotions and conflicting desires for settlement. If your relationship with the newcomer family has become significantly strained please contact MCC for support. We will help you and the family navigate these challenges and work together to determine the best next steps.
- **Creating a Will and Testament:** Especially when sponsoring a single parent household, sponsors are encouraged to support the establishment of a will and testament for the refugee family during the sponsorship period. This will protect the children if anything were to happen to their legal guardian in Canada.
- **Financial Literacy:** Some newcomers may arrive with no understanding of the concept of budgeting, and newcomers who are pre-literate in their first language often have a very difficult time with budgeting. Sponsors have found that working with cash helped with the pre-literate populations. Start with the basics, and support the process of distinguishing between wants and needs. Reach out to local settlement agencies who often offer Finance 101 workshops for newcomers, and if this is not available in your community, reach out to MCC for support.

Section 5: Post sponsorship

- **Maintain relationships with the newcomers post sponsorship:** Stay friends, become family, build community and make our country a better place! Sponsorship is what peacebuilding in Canada looks like.

MCC Ontario: Best Practices in Private Sponsorship

- **Consider becoming a Mentor:** MCC would love to connect you with a first time sponsor in need of support and guidance. We also love seeing newly arrived newcomers get connected with more settled newcomers. Newcomers can be the greatest sources of support for each other!
- **Share your stories with us:** Document highlights of your journey, meaningful moments and overall lessons learned about the transition from stranger to neighbour. These stories help us continue to inspire engagement in this life changing work!

MCC Ontario: Best Practices in Private Sponsorship

Your Refugee Resettlement Support Team at MCC Ontario!

Moses Moini, Refugee Program Coordinator

mosesmoini@mcco.ca, Tel: (905) 646-3161 ext. 267.

Address: 22-595 Carlton St. St. Catharines, ON L2M 4Y2.

Kaylee Perez, Refugee Sponsorship and Settlement Associate

kayleeperez@mcco.ca, Tel: (519) 745-8458 ext. 251.

Address: 203-50 Kent Ave, Kitchener, ON, N2G 3R1.

Peggy Pickett, Refugee Program Administrative Assistant peggypickett@mcco.ca. For finance related inquiries, email finance@mcco.ca.

Tel: (905) 646-3161 Ext 269. Address: 22-595 Carlton St, St. Catharines, ON, L2M 4Y2.

Stephanie Schreuders, Refugee Program Assistant

stephanieschreuders@mcco.ca. for name inquires, email refugee@mcco.ca

Tel: (905) 646-3161 Ext 268. Address: 203-50 Kent Ave, Kitchener, ON, N2G 3R1.



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**