

ROAR Sponsor Roles

Background

Based in Nanaimo, Reaching Out Assisting Refugees (ROAR) is a group of volunteers dedicated to providing a safe haven to LGBTQ refugees facing serious persecution.

There are very few organizations in the world that provide sponsorship to LGBTQ refugees. LGBTQ refugees have often fled extreme persecution. While other refugees may have the support of family or religious organizations, LGBTQ refugees usually have the support of neither. In fact family and religious groups are often part of the problem. LGBTQ refugees are often at risk in the countries to which they have fled. Many host countries are themselves extremely homophobic and transphobic. Discrimination comes from governments, citizens, and even other refugees.

When a refugee arrives in Canada, they are a permanent resident. They have reached safety, but this is only the beginning. Now they have to start their life all over again. They often don't know anyone in Canada. The vast majority speak only rudimentary English or French. They need to find a place to live, get a job, and learn to speak, read and write, often with little help. Getting health care, finding transportation, managing the weather, and dealing with all the intricate customs and rules of a foreign country: these are all things that we take for granted every day, but they are real challenges for resettled LGBT refugees.

Adjustment to this new life in Canada is slow and fraught with challenges. That's why a sponsorship group is here to help. The group assists them to settle permanently in Canada. The group prepares them for what they will find when they get here. The group helps them find places to live and get access to language classes, health care and education. With the assistance of others, the group provides financial assistance as well as all the other kinds of support.

In 2018 ROAR sponsorship groups brought two refugees from the Middle East to safety in Nanaimo. A third person was resettled from Africa in 2019. We have raised funds, created a sponsorship group, and submitted the applications to resettle two additional refugees. We are proud to be raising funds and recruiting people to participate in a sponsorship group for a sixth refugee.

Responsibilities of Sponsorship Groups

Individuals who wish to participate in a sponsorship group must be willing to commit to completing the sponsorship support of the individual(s) being sponsored. Once a person has been selected it may take a few months for sponsorship and settlement-related documentation to be completed and submitted to Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), then it may take many months, often well over a year, for IRCC to complete their approval process and for the refugee to be on a flight to Canada. Once the person arrives in Canada, the support provided

by the sponsorship group is for one full year. More intensive support is typically required close to arrival.

Each group is typically comprised of 5-7 people. Sponsors must be able to work as a team before the person arrives and in the first year the newcomer is in Nanaimo. Each sponsorship group should have at least one LGBTQ person in it. Sponsor group members must keep all information about the sponsored person and the sponsor group private and confidential.

Pre-arrival Duties

- Select the refugee(s) to be sponsored
- Assist in fundraising. The cost for each sponsorship is about \$20,000.
- Assist in collecting high quality furniture and household goods in anticipation of the refugee's arrival
- Meet the refugee upon arrival at the airport and welcome them into the community; provide orientation to the new neighbourhood and life in Canada
- Maintain contact with refugee applicants and update them
- The following tasks are usually taken on by the sponsorship group leader:
 - Submit fully and correctly completed refugee sponsorship applications
 - Work jointly with refugee applicants to avoid any delay or complication in the sponsorship process
 - Prepare refugees for an interview
 - Ensure refugees are aware of their interview and appear for the interview
 - Update IRCC about any changes in family composition
 - Update IRCC with any changes in the financial or other conditions of the sponsoring groups
- The sponsorship group meets during the prearrival process to make decisions and in order to stay in touch with other group members.

Post-arrival Duties

- Orientation - Provide the newcomer with an orientation to the new neighbourhood and life in Canada.
- Lodging - Provide suitable accommodation, basic furniture, and other household essentials.
- Care - Provide food, clothing, local transportation costs and other basic necessities of life.
- Settlement Assistance and Support
- Help register with a settlement agency

- Assist with required forms such as health insurance, social insurance, Canada child benefits registration, GST rebate, etc.
 - Help open a bank account
 - Facilitate access to English or French language classes
 - Help understand the rights and responsibilities of permanent residents
 - Facilitate access to employment
 - Facilitate access to community support groups, settlement services, and other resources in the community
 - Help register children in school and orient to the school system
 - Help with finding a family physician and dentist
 - Support empowerment and independence
 - Provide emotional support
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- Monitoring and ensuring that settlement needs are met are key responsibilities of sponsoring groups. After arrival, the group meets monthly, and more often during the first months after the newcomer's arrival.