

CONNECTIONS - Issue 5 – April 2024

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What's New: A Message from Marika

by Marika Elek



We now have a whole year of CONNECTIONS under our belt! Last April was our first edition and it's amazing how much has been achieved since then. And, there's more to look forward to – a new website with all the bells and whistles, [see the story by Jen Kett], results of our second research survey on relationship building [see the stories by Bill Croson and Jemima Sabapathy], more workshops and lunch & learns to keep our skills in good shape from our Training Committees. Our Services Committee is working on several projects – the development of practice guidelines and a regional service provider directory – for inclusion on the new site. The mentorship program you asked for is now underway, first as a pilot project to ensure that it meets all our needs.

Don't forget that we need your input into CONNECTIONS; we want to hear what you want included and how we can shape the future of this newsletter. You can find all our blog articles in one place at www.refugeesponsornet.ca/blog.

And, there is even more to come, we are focusing on the development of training modules based on our workshops and lunch & learns to be posted to the site; it may take a little more time, but we are getting there. Watch for the relaunch of our website in late May.

If you're eager to contribute to our achievements and make a difference to those we are settling, consider joining our committees. Reach out to us at info@refugeesponsornet.ca – your involvement makes a lasting impact.

Thank you for everything you are doing in settling newcomers in your communities.

A New and Improved PRSN website is on the way!

by Jennifer Kett



We're excited to launch our new, modernized website next month!

Led by Mike Thiel, a member of the Marketing Communications Committee, the redesigned website will have fresh look and feel, incorporating more visuals and better navigation to deliver a much-improved user experience.

One of the key features of the revamped website will be the introduction of on-demand resources for sponsors. Now, sponsors will have access to a library of past workshops (recorded from January 2024 onwards) and the newly developed best practice guidelines, developed by the Services Committee, along with a regional service provider directory.

Additionally, the website will feature information on open volunteer roles and an FAQ section to address common queries and concerns. You'll also be able to register for upcoming Workshops and Lunch & Learns more easily, streamlining the process so that sponsors don't miss out on valuable learning opportunities.

Throughout the year we will continue to evolve the site. Stay tuned for further updates as we progress with the redesign process. Your feedback and input are invaluable so don't hesitate to reach out with any feedback or ideas!

Creating Stronger Relationships with Settlement Agencies

by Jemima Sabapathy



I'm excited to update you on an important project that we last wrote about in our January issue.

Last year, the Partnership Committee undertook a survey to dig into potential communication gaps between sponsor groups and settlement agencies. At the heart of this research was our interest in understanding how those two groups can work better together to support the needs of newcomers and how PRSN can help bridge any gaps.

With the data we gathered in those surveys, we developed and put in place a PRSN action plan to address issues identified in the research. The plan covers three key areas – increased collaboration and awareness of roles, building relationships with existing and potential PRSN partners, and introduction of PRSN mission, vision and goals to IRCC policy makers around our Theory of Change. Much of the initial work reflects improved communications around roles and responsibilities, collaboration around training events, and delivery of post-arrival information, as well as co-sponsorships and research.

For those interested in the report and its results, you can find them on the PRSN website here, www.refugeesonsornet.ca/research. The report will be available on Re-Settlement Plus, a research platform operated by the Ottawa Research Hub, and on the IRCC research at a glance platform.

Thank you to everyone who filled out the surveys and supported this work! It will make a real difference in improving communication and relationship gaps and ultimately help make settlement more effective and efficient.

Building Trust in Settlement

by Joanne MacPherson



At a March Lunch & Learn session, Sevan Zokian, a well-being counsellor with the Arab Community Centre of Toronto, pointed out that building trust is the foundation of all settlement practice and is essential to any healthy relationship. It is one of the most important responsibilities that sponsors have both within their own sponsor groups, and with those they sponsor. She pointed out that trust can strengthen the bond between both parties, foster collaboration and promote constructive methods to solve any issues. She emphasized that when trust exists, people are more likely to listen to each other, to empathize with differing perspectives and work collaboratively together. She reinforced that developing trust leads to a deeper understanding, cooperation and commitment to the relationship. It is a win-win because when sponsors listen to refugees with empathy and respect, empowerment is the result, and great things happen.

Zokian identified some key behaviours that lead to trust such as:

- Be honest; ensure everyone is on the same page
- Listen actively; open communication, encourage dialogue
- Demonstrate respect, validate their experience
- Be genuine, open and authentic and not judgmental
- Be patient and compassionate
- Exhibit generosity of spirit
- Respond promptly to needs and concerns; follow-through on commitment
- Engage in shared activities and cultural exchange
- Respect boundaries; keep personal information confidential

Sponsors shared their own experiences with building trust in breakout discussion, and how it led to better relationships and more effective settlement.

Effective Settlement of LGBTQIA+ Newcomers

by Carol Smiley



There are many LGBTQIA+ people whose lives are at risk in countries around the world, who are facing violence and persecution. In February, PRSN's Skills

Development committee offered a training workshop to provide sponsors with a better understanding of how to support LGBTQIA+ newcomers by learning more about the unique challenges they face.

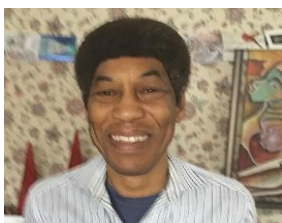
Layota Nugent, director community engagement, Rainbow Railroad, addressed the global state of persecution and why people are forced to flee from home due to sexual violence, job discrimination, human trafficking, mental health concerns, denial of healthcare and other social services. She pointed out that the humanitarian protection agencies and governments tend to make it laborious and retraumatizing for LGBTQIA+ people to make successful refugee claims, which is a requirement for resettlement. She recommended sponsors continuously educate themselves about the realities of this community, talk about the need for such sponsorship and fundraise to make it happen.

Sophia Lowe, executive director of Capital Rainbow Refuge/Arc-en-Ciel de la capital, Ottawa, and her colleague Mauricio Oviedo pointed out the unique challenges in settlement around empowerment and a rights-based approach. They pointed out the importance of freedom of choice to be who one is and do what one chooses to do, and how much one decides to share. They emphasized that sponsorship is a lifeline to creating safe pathways and that it is not necessary for sponsors to be members of the LGBTQ community themselves.

An LGBTQ sponsor in Toronto, Bill Croson identified resources and agencies available to ensure efficient and effective settlement. He addressed the importance of safe spaces and why we cannot assume that all identified safe spaces are safe. He shared information about how to find settlement resources around housing and health while emphasizing that trust is a critical factor in LGBTQIA+ sponsorship.

Mentorship Pilot Project

by Jasper Miller



We're excited to update you on our Mentorship pilot project that we announced in our last issue of Connections.

This program is all about pairing seasoned sponsors with first-time sponsors to offer not only practical guidance but also empathy and understanding, fostering a nurturing environment for both mentors and mentees to thrive.

Our pilot project is underway to test the concept and find its strengths and weaknesses so that we can make adjustments before offering the program service to sponsors in

Ontario. The pilot will include four sponsor-to-sponsor group matches to address group questions through information-sharing and collaborative problem-solving. In addition, we are testing one-on-one issues mentoring around specific topics like housing, employment, education, among others.

If you are interested in mentoring around specific topics, let us know, and you can still be part of the pilot. And, if you want to be mentored, get in touch as well, because the more matches we make in the pilot, the better the program will be.

Mentors are good listeners, build trust and are prepared to share their experiences. They are role models who create a supportive learning environment and share insight to help problem-solve and strive toward best practice. They have an ability to transfer their knowledge based on experience, but one is expected to be an expert.

We will be gathering data about the matching experience, analyzing it and preparing a report with recommendations later this year.

If you're interested in being a mentor, or a mentee, get in touch with our volunteer administrator at b.sheffield@rogers.com, with a little information about yourself.

There are lots of ways to acquire or confirm skills, but our goal is help sponsors do a more efficient and effective job in settlement of newcomers through mentoring with this service.

Relationships between Sponsors and SAHs: A Survey

by Bill Croson



When it comes to successfully settling newcomers, it truly takes a village! From sponsors, to settlement agencies, to sponsorship agreement holders (SAH), it's so important that those relationships are as strong as possible, with clear and open lines of communication.

As you may know, last year with the PRSN Partnership Committee we launched a survey to learn about possible communication gaps between sponsors and settlement agencies and completed a report and action plan based on need for increased communication, services and collaborative programs. You can find the report on the

PRSN website or link to it -- <https://refugeesponsornet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/PRSN-Building-Relationships-with-Settlement-Agencies-research-report.pdf>

This year the PRSN Knowledge Exchange committee, again in collaboration with the Partnership committee, launched a companion survey focused on relationships between SAHs and private sponsor constituent groups. We want to identify the challenges SAHs have in working with sponsors, and sponsors have with SAHs. Our goal is to identify opportunities to work better together, particularly around post-arrival issues.

We want to capture promising practices and experiences that reflect the current environment in the sector to create new opportunities for PRSN to partner more effectively on behalf of sponsors. We believe that with improved relationships, newcomers will benefit from more efficient and effective settlement.

The survey to both SAHs and sponsors went into market in February with data collected analyzed in April and report writing soon to be completed in May. The report will be available for distribution following the development of a PRSN action plan based on survey results.

Since you Asked

by Cora Dusk



The refugee family we are sponsoring from Afghanistan is currently in Pakistan waiting to come to Canada. What is the cost of the new refugee exit visa from Pakistan and who pays this fee? Is assistance available?

The BBC and other news agencies reported in October 2023 that Pakistan was ordering Afghan asylum seekers to leave either voluntarily or via forced deportation. Many of these individuals entered Pakistan after the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, while others entered Pakistan earlier.

On November 1, 2023, the Pakistani government instituted an exit visa fee for undocumented refugees and illegal immigrants who had overstayed their visas. Afghans who were returning directly to Afghanistan were exempted from the fee but Afghan refugees awaiting resettlement in other countries were required to pay the exit fee before being able to travel to their new country. The exit fee of \$830 USD began to

be applied to all refugee and immigrant departures on Nov. 1, 2023. The fee applies to each member of the refugee family departing Pakistan for Canada and other Western countries.

When first announced, refugees were required to pay with a credit card and this was problematic as many did not have credit cards. As of right now, the Canadian government pays this exit fee and travel costs to Canada for the refugees settling here. These charges are then added to the overall travel costs to be reimbursed back to the Canadian government by the newcomers which means most Afghan refugees arriving via Pakistan arrive here with a significant debt load.

Don't Forget to Register for Upcoming Events

by Barbara Sheffield

Saturday, May 11, 2024

Empowering Newcomers: What does it take?: Learn about the issues and barriers newcomers face, how to create independence, support community involvement and other helpful tools & techniques

Wednesday, June 19, 2024

Managing Expectations: Why and How? how to acknowledge the positive and understand limitations

Watch for the flyers or let us know you want to attend by sending an email to info@refugeesponsornet.ca

Next issue: July 2024

Shape the content of the next issue, let us know what you want to share, and what you would like to see included in ***Connections***. Send us your “since you asked” questions around post-arrival issues. We would love to hear from you. Deadline for submitting ideas for our next issue is **June 1**. You can send story ideas to info@refugeesponsornet.ca

Contributors to this issue include:

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