

 **FORMING A COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP GROUP**

Participation in community sponsorship is voluntary and applications are open to all kinds of community groups, including local community groups, faith groups, businesses, neighbourhoods, and charities. Under community Sponsorship, individuals and communities come together to form Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs).  A CSG must be comprised of a minimum core group of five people (including a primary and secondary sponsor), all of whom must be over 18 and legally resident in Ireland.

**Not a refugee sponsorship expert? No Problem.**

You do not need previous experience to get involved. You likely already have a variety of transferable skills that will be valuable.

**Will I have support throughout the process? Yes**

Your RSO as well as the training, supports and resources available to you are there to guide you and your group throughout the sponsorship journey.

**Do I need to know everything straight away? Not at all**

You are not expected to solve every problem - your role is to provide guidance in navigating any problems, and connecting the family or individual with the relevant people or services for support.

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**Finding Group Members**

When you are thinking about becoming a community sponsor, you may discover you are already part of a group – be it a faith group, a business or a community group – which can provide the foundation for your sponsorship group. Alternatively, you may find that you need to form a group from scratch. This might mean that you need to establish new links and connections in your local community to seek out like-minded people who also wish to provide practical assistance to refugees.

The following are some ideas for outreach to establish your group:

**Social media**

You can use social media to inform others that you are looking for sponsorship group members to welcome refugees in your community.

**Word of mouth**

Spread the word to others to gauge their interest in sponsoring refugees together. This can be through friends, families, religious institutions, places of employment, sports clubs, universities, etc.

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**Community events**

Local agencies, organisations, or institutions may organise information sessions that you can attend to learn about sponsorship and meet others in your community who are interested in sponsorship. You may wish to set up a table at a local farmer’s market, library, or café. At the table, you can chat with other community members about refugee issues, show videos about the journeys of refugees, and gauge interest in donating funds or forming a sponsorship group.

**Be creative!**

For example, a person created little notes attached to tea bags, inviting neighbours to a sponsorship learning session over tea. They went door to door and left these invitations in people’s letterboxes.  Those who attended the session ended up forming a community sponsorship group.

**Group Considerations**

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Forming a Community Sponsorship Group will provide you with opportunities to share ideas and to delegate sponsorship responsibilities. You may wish to consider the factors below in determining your group composition.

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1. **Number of sponsorship group members**

There is no perfect group size (although there is a minimum of 5 people required); larger groups can share settlement responsibilities between more people while smaller groups can make group coordination easier.

1. **Location/proximity to sponsored refugees’ resettlement community**

Living in reasonably close proximity to where the refugee family will live is highly beneficial, as you and group members will be more easily positioned to support them more efficiently and effectively. What is considered a reasonable distance will vary for each sponsorship.

1. **Availability:**

The more time your group members can contribute, the more effective the group is likely to be in resettling a refugee family. That said, limited availability should not discourage you or others from sponsoring. The members in your group with more limited availability might consider pairing with other members to carry out sponsorship tasks. A few elements to consider:

* Settlement tasks like housing and orientation require a high level of commitment only at certain times of the sponsorship period.
* Some settlement tasks will happen predictably at certain times of the day such as school and appointments; these tasks may be easier to coordinate.
* Having someone with day time availability is useful for emergencies and appointments that can only occur during business hours.

1. **Roles and contributions of each group member**

Some members of your group may prefer to focus on specific settlement tasks. They may also have useful skills for certain settlement tasks (e.g. speak the relevant language, have large social network, experience in fundraising etc.). Learning about each potential group member’s interests, experiences, and skills helps to ensure they’ll contribute effectively to the sponsorship. Your group members’ roles and contributions may change over time depending on the sponsorship needs.

1. **Group’s capacity to communicate and collaborate through sponsorship challenges**

It is beneficial for you to work with people who are open to ongoing communication and collaboration. The needs of people you are sponsoring may change unpredictably; for example, if a refugee family trusts and relies on a particular group member for certain tasks such as helping with medical care and housing, how will the group adapt without overwhelming that particular member with sponsorship tasks?  You do not need to have the answers to questions like these at any specific moment. Rather, having group members who are willing to work collaboratively and maintain good communication throughout the sponsorship is crucial for dealing with any eventuality.

1. **The length of the sponsorship period**

The sponsorship period lasts for 18 months.  It is important that your group considers your collective ability to maintain its capacity to provide support to the refugee family for the entire settlement period.

1. **Date of the sponsored refugees’ arrival**

The date of the refugee family’s arrival may inform each member’s responsibilities based on their capacity at that time. It may also impact the ways in which your group contributes – finding seasonal clothing, for example.

1. **Commitment and responsibility**

Make sure your group members fully understand the collective and individual responsibility they are undertaking by joining the community sponsorship group.