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We examine the experiences of sponsors who assisted Kosovar refugees in Northern Alberta. Although the sponsors of the Kosovars did not provide basic financial support to the refugees, many found their role to be onerous, particularly in terms of emotional investment and demands on their time. They would have liked more opportunity to debrief and to have contact with other experienced sponsors. Some of the sponsors' initial expectations of the Kosovars were at odds with reality; conversely, many sponsors felt that the refugees had unrealistic expectations of them and of life in Canada. Recommendations are made for future sponsoring arrangements.

In the first few months of 1998, the civil war between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosova was escalating. International pressure could not dissuade Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosovic from pursuing a policy of ethnic cleansing against ethnic Albanians. NATO felt compelled to launch air strikes against the Yugoslav armed forces near the end of March, 1999. During this civil war, about 860,000 ethnic Albanian Kosovars were forced to flee their homes to neighbouring countries.

In response to an appeal from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Canada agreed to resettle some of the Kosovar refugees who were displaced into Macedonia. Under the codename Operation Parasol, airlifts to military bases in eastern Canada took place in May of 1999 for about 5,000 refugees (another 2,000 Kosovars were sent to Canada to join relatives directly). After spending approximately two months at the military bases (sustainment sites) these refugees were moved to cities across Canada for permanent resettlement. Although approximately one third of the Kosovars chose to repatriate as soon as the war was over, the rest remained in Canada where they were helped by volunteer sponsors and settlement agencies, as well as representatives from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

In this article we examine the experiences of the sponsors who received the Kosovars. Not since the later 1970s and early 1980s, when the Vietnamese Boat People arrived, had there been such a large influx of refugees to Canada in need of support. At that time, researchers took a great deal of interest in the sponsor-refugee experience (e.g., Adelman, 1982; Fuhr, 1981; Indra, 1988; Lanphier, 1981; McInnis, 1983; Neuwirth & Clark, 1981; Tran, 1991; Woon, 1984). The situation

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of the Kosovars has both interesting parallels and differences. In each case, the Canadian public reacted very favourably to calls for sponsors. There was a great deal of media attention concerning both sets of refugees, and the public recognized the extreme circumstances in which the refugees found themselves. The IndoChinese, however, did not spend long periods in a sustainment site, nor were they faced with the option of choosing between Canada and returning to their homeland.

In this study, we will focus on the information about the sponsoring experience provided to us by 94 sponsors of Kosovars from 40 sponsoring groups who participated in 33 focus group discussions; 86 of the same 94 sponsors also completed a written questionnaire.

Uniqueness of the Kosovar Sponsorship Experience

The sponsorship of the Kosovars differed from that of most other refugees in several respects. First, there was a media appeal to which there was a very positive response, despite the fact that public attitudes towards immigrants and refugees were becoming “increasingly negative” (Holton & Lanphier, 1994: 135) in the years prior to the conflict in Kosova. Settlement agencies and CIC offices were flooded with calls from well-meaning Canadians who offered their spare bedrooms, basements or summer homes for the Kosovars. People from across Canada wanted to help, but many individuals and groups were told that they could not sponsor because of a decision that Kosovars be sent only to cities that had a wide range of newcomer services; the exceptions were the Kosovars who had family in smaller communities.¹ Normally, private sponsorship of refugees is unrestricted; many private sponsors bring refugees to small centres or rural areas.

Another unique aspect of the Kosovar experience was the fact that Kosovars entering Canada were all classified as high needs and thus were eligible for up to two years of financial support. This was a departure from the norm, in which refugee cases are evaluated individually; most government-sponsored refugees receive no more than one year of living support, and many privately sponsored refugees are expected to become financially independent almost immediately after their arrival to Canada, even though legally sponsors are responsible for them for longer. The Kosovars were treated as joint-assistance sponsorship refugees (JAS). Normally, in JAS cases, the federal government provides financial assistance for a portion of an agreed-upon time period, while the sponsors take on the responsibility for the rest of the sponsoring timeframe. The most striking feature for people who had sponsored refugees in the past was the fact that sponsors of the Kosovars were not required to provide any financial support (although some groups chose to supplement the federal funding).

The Kosovars also received more services than is typical for other refugees. For example, although many sponsors felt that medical and dental attention were inadequate, according to national CIC officials, the Kosovars had access to more assistance in these areas than other refugees. In some instances, Kosovars were allowed to stay in housing that exceeded the approved rate; CIC in Edmonton, for instance, subsidized housing costs in order to allow the Kosovars to settle in parts of the city that are usually too expensive for refugees.

The rationale for subsidizing housing came from the policy of keeping large family groups intact – another feature of the treatment of Kosovars that differed from that of other refugees.

At every turn, first in Macedonia, then at the sustainment sites and eventually in the settlement communities, CIC made a concerted effort to keep families in very close proximity.

Finally, each Kosovar family destined to Alberta (even KOFs who had family living in Canada) was matched with a sponsorship agreement holder (SAH), despite the fact that refugees who receive full financial assistance from the government do not normally have sponsors, but rather are provided with support from settlement agencies.

The Northern Alberta Experience

The staff in the Edmonton CIC office were responsible for locating sponsors within a very short time period for the Kosovars destined for Grande Prairie or Edmonton. Although experienced SAHs were sought, many of the participants in the sponsoring organizations had not themselves been involved with sponsorship in the past. In some instances the SAHs were national bodies, such as World Vision and other religious organizations. Given that these groups were already agreement holders, CIC felt that they could depend on the national organizations to provide orientation to the local sponsors. In most instances, however, SAHs did not provide direct training to their members.

KOFs and KOSs

Kosovars who had relatives already living in Canada were sent to join family members. It is for this reason that several KOFs were settled in Grande Prairie, a small city in northern Alberta, even though the services in place were minimal. In order to establish a critical mass of newcomers in Grande Prairie, a few Kosovars with no family in Canada were also sent there, but the majority of Kosovars were placed in the Edmonton region.

Procedure

Participants

Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided a list of sponsor contacts to the researchers. In early 2000, a letter was sent to each contact, explaining the purpose of the study and requesting the participation of three to four persons from each sponsoring group. An interviewer then telephoned each contact person to further explain the study, to identify participants, and to set an appointment time. In total, 94 sponsors from 40 groups participated in 33 focus group discussions (ranging from one to five persons in size). In addition, 86 of the 94 participants completed a written questionnaire. As in past sponsoring situations (Indra, 1988), the majority (95%) of the sponsoring groups were affiliated with religious organizations and 5% were associated with ethno-cultural groups. All were affiliated with SAHs. Sixty-five percent were first time sponsors. More than half of the experienced sponsors (54%) had first sponsored refugees before 1980.

Data Collection Instruments

Both a questionnaire and focus group discussions were employed. The questionnaire included fixed response and open-ended questions relating to each participant's personal involvement and that of the sponsoring group. Following the completion of the questionnaire, an interviewer led the focus group discussions (these were transcribed on site and checked against audio-recordings later). The participants were contacted individually a day or two later to provide insights that they had either forgotten or did not feel comfortable discussing in a group setting. The interviews were conducted between August 2000 and January 2001.

Research Findings*Sponsor Involvement*

When asked how they became involved with sponsorship, 62% of respondents said that their church was the impetus. Others mentioned that appeals from the media and non-governmental agencies influenced their decision to sponsor. Two percent of the respondents indicated that the refugees they sponsored were their own relatives.

Sponsor Orientation

CIC Edmonton arranged orientation panel sessions in which their staff, settlement workers from Catholic Social Services (CSS) and the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, representatives of the Red Cross, and others provided information to the sponsors in Edmonton. One CIC staff member also went to Grande Prairie to conduct an orientation. Somewhat later, additional orientation sessions were organized in Edmonton featuring speakers from the Centre for Survivors of Torture and Trauma; three groups reported having sent attendees.

The majority of respondents indicated that their groups had received orientation. Two settlement agencies, the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and Focus Canada, provided additional sessions for Mennonite and Ismaili sponsors, respectively. In only two cases did sponsors report having received information from their umbrella SAH: "Our church office from Ontario also sent information regarding the sponsoring process, but the information was not specific to Kosovars." "We relied heavily on Canadian Lutheran World Relief ... in Vancouver." The findings of the focus group interviews suggest that sponsoring groups varied considerably in attendance at the orientation sessions; in some cases, all members of the group attended, and in others only one or two went.

There were also discrepancies in terms of how well those who attended relayed the information to other members of the sponsoring group. When asked how adequate or helpful the orientation was, the sponsors' opinions ranged from high praise to disappointment and frustration. On the whole, however, sponsors realized that CIC and the settlement agencies were under severe constraints themselves. Even though more than half of those who responded to the question indicated that they had received insufficient information, many recognized that no one in Alberta had the specific information that the sponsors wanted. Several people mentioned that they had

received inaccurate information in the sessions, and were thus taken aback when the refugee families arrived. How happy people were with the training sessions depended on a number of variables, including the degree of trauma their refugee families evidenced: “We were told at the beginning that the experience would be intense, but I don’t think we knew what ‘intense’ meant. I thought it would be intense for the first few months and then we would come and go and develop an ongoing relationship. I expected them to be functioning at that point.” Experienced sponsors were more likely than first-time groups to express positive views on the training they received.

Sponsor Group Size and Attrition

The number of people who stayed involved between the refugees’ arrival and the time of the interview (roughly a year), varied considerably. Within the KOF sponsorship groups, 75% of the respondents reported that at least half of the group was still involved, whereas the majority of the KOS sponsors (55%) said that fewer than half of their group members were still seeing the refugee families. The KOS sponsor groups may have undergone more attrition, but they started out with a greater percentage of large groups. Several sponsors shared the sentiments of this individual: “There were a large number of helpers available at first, but eventually it became a smaller core who specialized in particular areas of assistance, e.g., medical, education and recreation.”

Despite the smaller numbers, almost all the representatives interviewed indicated that their sponsoring groups were still in touch with the refugee families after a year and were still providing some assistance. As one might expect, the emphasis had shifted from immediate tangible needs to emotional and social support (as was the case with sponsors of Kosovars in Ontario, CRS & CERIS, 2001).

Sponsor Assistance to Refugees

In the initial period, sponsors provided a wide range of assistance (see Table 1). The federal provision of a second year of financial support for the Kosovars may have influenced the relatively low figures for sponsor assistance with job-seeking. Several sponsors reported that they encouraged the Kosovars to stay in ESL another year before entering the labour market, rather than looking for employment.

When we compared sponsors in Edmonton with sponsors in Grande Prairie in terms of activities undertaken most recently, we found that although a higher percentage of sponsors in Grande Prairie spent time talking with refugees, they had withdrawn completely from services that are normally completed in the first year in private or JAS sponsorship arrangements. In contrast, over a fifth of the sponsors in Edmonton were still conducting orientation, making appointments with CIC and so on, after the refugees had been in Canada for over a year.

More than four out of five sponsors were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance they gave to refugees (See Table 2) and that satisfactions increased over the year in all areas except shopping. While the majority of refugees were also satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance they received from their sponsors, satisfaction diminished over the course of the year with the exception of help with school for children.

Type of Assistance	% of sponsor respondents			
	KOS		KOF	
	First month	12th month	First month	12th month
Learning about the community	98	33	100	19
Opening a bank account/banking	92	0	80	2
Appointments with CIC	91	0	80	21
Appointments with doctor(s)	88	50	80	53
Appointments with dentist(s)	72	0	40	32
English language training	80	50	60	17
School for Children	65	50	40	43
Shopping	96	25	80	53
Filling in forms	93	50	80	33
Looking for a job	4	25	0	26
Finding an interpreter	64	0	40	7
Contact family/friends in Kosova	32	0	40	8
Social activities	91	75	100	46
Comforting when sad, etc.	82	25	40	64
Provision of furniture/clothing	98	0	80	31
Providing money	38	0	0	21
* Excludes people who sponsored both KOS and KOF refugees				

Sponsors' Initial Expectations of Refugees

The sponsors were asked to comment on their initial expectations of the refugees and whether those expectations were borne out. In some instances, sponsors assumed that Kosovars would behave in a similar manner to themselves (e.g., child rearing practices and gender roles), but with respect to other matters, such as psychological distress and religion, they expected differences. The majority of sponsors found one or more of their expectations to be contrary to reality.

The sponsors cited a number of expectations and consequent surprises upon meeting the families. Several groups said that they thought the Kosovars would be rural people, "old-fashioned" individuals with no English language skills. These individuals were surprised that their Kosovar families were modern, urban people and that in several cases, some family members could speak English. Interestingly, several people expected that all the Kosovars would speak English, and those groups who received families in which no one had English were frustrated by communication difficulties and the lack of interpreters.

Many sponsors were also expecting devout Muslims. They were under the mistaken impression that all the Kosovars would be teetotalers. As one individual noted "There were misunderstandings about the consumption of alcohol. They say they're going for 'language lessons' meaning they are going for a beer". "They're not actively religious."

Type of assistance	% of respondents satisfied or very satisfied			
	Refugees		Sponsors	
	First month	12 th month	First month	12 th month
Learning about the community	74	74	90	100
Opening a bank account	83	75	93	100
Appointments with CIC	83	82	88	100
Appointments with doctor(s)	83	83	87	94
Appointments with dentist(s)	80	75	84	87
English language training	88	81	91	100
School for children	85	94	95	100
Shopping	83	77	98	85

Many of the sponsors expected the Kosovars to be psychologically traumatized. In some instances, their expectations were accurate. In other cases, however, the sponsors expressed surprise at how well adjusted their refugee families seemed.

In comparison to Canada, Kosovar society is quite patriarchal; although some sponsors were expecting clearly defined and distinct gender roles, many others were surprised by family relations: “We had confusion on the gender issue. We tried to do things to show how Canada is different.” A male sponsor said the following: “I took them food and told them that I had made it. [The father] now tells me that he vacuums but I think he’s teasing me.” “The daughter-in-law had to stay home to take care of in-law elders and as a result, she did not go to ESL. She would have liked to go.”

Similarly, several sponsors commented that they were surprised by the unruly behaviour of Kosovar children, and the apparent reluctance on the part of their parents to discipline them.

The sponsors were taken aback at how quickly the Kosovars made decisions about whether to stay in Canada or to return to Kosova. All of the sponsors of families who repatriated expressed disappointment. Some individuals commented on how much time and energy they had spent getting ready for the refugees and how emotionally involved they had become; they were quite hurt by the Kosovars’ sudden return.

There were no noticeable differences in expectations or surprises across experienced and inexperienced sponsors of Kosovars. This similarity may be partially attributed to the media attention given to the Kosovars and to the orientation sessions many of the KOF and KOS sponsors received, at which some inaccurate information was presented, especially with regard to religious practices and cultural differences.

Sponsors’ Perceptions of Refugees’ Expectations

Demands for immediate assistance

The majority of sponsors felt that the Kosovars had unrealistic expectations, the most often cited of which had to do with the sponsors being “on call” at all times. One sponsor’s account describes the frustration felt by many of the sponsors: “I was in bed at 11:40 p.m. when I got a phone call saying, ‘Could you please come over, my friend caught some fish’. I got up, got dressed, and picked him up to take him over to his friend’s house. His friend was cutting up the fish at midnight and I had

to wait for 30 minutes while they cleaned the fish. Then they said, 'We do not have room in our fridge, so can you take it to yours?' So, at about 1:00 a.m. after putting the fish in my fridge and driving him home, I went to bed. There was no comprehension that I get up at 5 or 6 a.m. This is what you go through."

Money, material goods and services

Other unrealistic expectations had to do with the provision of material goods or money. "They expect us to take care of everything. They were told at the military base that sponsors are responsible for everything." "They wanted everything new, including a new house." "Their expectations were totally unrealistic. No one could have lived up to their expectations. I think this attitude was fostered at the military base. Somehow they were under the impression that they would receive \$20,000 in cash when they arrived in Edmonton. They were given all kinds of stuff at the military base. They constantly kept asking where the money was. They expected an upper middle class existence."

Because the Kosovars generally were in close contact with each other, they compared sponsors. Since some groups were in a position to provide their families with many extra things, other refugee families felt that they should have the same amenities: "When one family got a bike, they all needed a bike." "There developed an idea of favouritism amongst the refugees and this ended up being a big issue."

Expectation of expertise

Sponsors were also concerned that the Kosovars expected them to know everything. "We were seen as the experts. They assumed we knew everything about what was going on. As it turned out, sometimes the refugees would know more because they shared information throughout the community." "They expected solutions immediately. We were supposed to find solutions overnight."

Gender roles

Not surprisingly, some Kosovars expected gender roles in Canada to be similar to their own. Some refugees were taken aback by the role of women, and in particular, women sponsors. "They expected men to take care of everything and the reality was that more women sponsors were involved in the day-to-day activities. It became more acceptable after some time and the refugees got used to it."

The Other Side

There were, of course, sponsors who felt that the refugees were very grateful and who reported that they weren't in the least demanding. "They were trying to adjust to us as much as we were trying to adjust to them." "Initially, I don't think they had expectations when they first arrived... I think they were surprised at the amount of support they got here." "They were grateful and overwhelmed by what strangers were willing to do for them."

Multiculturalism

Another factor that emerged from the discussions of refugee expectations was tied to Canada's multicultural nature. The refugees evinced both positive and negative reactions in the perceptions of the sponsors. "[We] took the refugees to Heritage Days. They were surprised that so many cultures were living together and not fighting." Some sponsors commented that the Kosovars were astonished by the diverse nature of their ESL classes, and that people who were from such different backgrounds could get along.

A few sponsors were surprised by the negative comments the refugees made about others, based on difference. "I must say, I was constantly amazed – even though they had been through all kinds of tensions of that kind – to see them judging people by their names. You don't know people, but you don't want to talk to them because of their names." "Good God, I had to listen to tirades about Chinese people, making fun of someone else's accent. I don't know why that surprised me that much, but I would expect anyone to know that there are lots of different kinds of people in this country."

*What Sponsors Wanted*Clarity, consistent information, and follow-up

Both experienced and inexperienced sponsors reported that they were frustrated at not having sufficient information, or at having been supplied with incorrect information. This ongoing problem involved nearly every aspect of the initial settlement experience. "CIC could never tell us when the refugees were coming. Why not? They were in charge. Is this a random universe?" "CIC should be more helpful ... CIC stopped answering the telephones directly and a person had to navigate the voice mail system. There was no human being to talk to." "The medical information was in sealed envelopes. They didn't share this information with us. There needs to be some follow-up on the medical requirements." "We need to know not only medical situations but also psychological difficulties. We were told not to ask questions, yet this information is critical."

Skilled interpreters

A range of problems was cited with reference to interpreters. In addition to there not being enough English/Albanian bilinguals, some sponsors had concerns regarding the quality of the interpretation. Furthermore, the Kosovars were sometimes unwilling to talk to Serbian interpreters. "We would have liked to have more access to interpreters. We needed them so badly and they were run off their feet." "We were not sure if [X] was interpreting or telling us his own ideas." "The interpreters were an issue. Serbian interpreters were used. Our family would not talk with [Y] because they thought she was Serbian."

Full federal coverage for medical and dental expenses

A recurring theme throughout the focus group interviews had to do with dissatisfaction with the handling of dental and medical expenses. There was a great deal of confusion over the coverage; the federal government indicated that the Kosovars' dental and medical needs would be paid for,

but it is the responsibility of provincial governments to administer health care. The communication regarding federal involvement was unclear at the outset, which caused problems for health care providers, the provincial government, sponsoring groups, and the refugees themselves

Appreciation for CIC

Although several people expressed frustrations at the lack of information when they needed it, some people felt that CIC did an excellent job. Experienced sponsors, especially, were pleased with the support of the CIC office in Edmonton. “The CIC contact was very responsible and available. They were very responsive to our requests and were very patient” “I was constantly amazed at how much the government supported us. I expected them to be like they were before, when we had to figure everything out on our own, but no. Every time I called they were really helpful with all the information we needed.”

What Sponsors Would Have Liked to Have Known

As noted above, many sponsors indicated that they would have liked more clarity on the federal and provincial governments’ regulations regarding medical and dental support and other requirements (e.g., income tax). Most of the other topics for which sponsors needed information had to do with the refugees themselves and information on what a sponsorship commitment would entail.

Information about refugees

Several people expressed a desire for more information about the families they were working with: “We would have liked to have had a family profile -- something more than names, dates and gender. Sometimes we asked questions which resulted in a torrent of tears and I felt bad and didn’t know what to do. This was traumatic for both the sponsor and the refugee.” Some indication of the psychological state of the refugees was mentioned by sponsors whose families had relatively severe distress.

Other sponsors felt that the information they received in the orientation sessions could have been organized differently; instead of trying to cover everything in one session, there should have been staged orientations, the first of which would deal with immediate needs. Sponsors reiterated the need for accurate cultural information, and some indicated that they would have liked to have had Albanian language resources to help them communicate in the first few weeks.

For those sponsors whose refugee families repatriated, there were other concerns. They would have liked information about the situation in Kosova at the end of July, 1999 to advise their families. They also didn’t have practical information such as what the Kosovars could take back with them. In addition, there were concerns about the government payments, which were reduced in the last month in Canada for those refugees who decided to repatriate. Sponsors indicated that they needed specific guidance or, at the very least, a heads-up on these and related issues.

Information regarding the sponsoring experience

Given the numbers of inexperienced sponsors, there was a perceived need for more support at the outset regarding the mechanics of sponsoring. “They could have mentioned it’s really a full-time

job.” “We should have been advised to work as a larger group from the beginning.” Closely related to this need for information on the sponsoring experience was a desire for follow-up from CIC.

Will Sponsors Participate in Sponsorship Arrangements in the Future?

Despite the heavy time commitment and the frustrations felt by many of the sponsors, only 17% said that they would not sponsor again. Sixty-two percent stated that they would be willing to sponsor refugees, and another 17% said they would consider it after a period of a few years. The remaining 4% either did not know, or indicated that it was not their decision, but that of their church to make.

Sponsors' Suggestions for Future Refugee Initiatives

Although the majority of sponsors expressed willingness to be involved in sponsorship in the future (as was the case in Ontario, CRS & CERIS, 2001), they had several suggestions for the federal government, which are discussed below. Many suggestions for improvements tended to be quite specific, such as ensuring that refugees are housed in the same area as the sponsoring group; simplifying the forms that refugees are required to complete, and utilizing more interpreters.

Level of support

Several of the experienced sponsors suggested that all refugees should enjoy the same level of support received by the Kosovars. They reported that they had considerably more energy to devote to helping refugees without the demands of fund-raising. “It is my understanding that this is the first time that the Canadian government did not make the sponsorship group make a financial commitment. I think that helped the sponsorship program. I think it removed a barrier by not having to come up with \$1500 or more a month... I think more people would be willing to sponsor newcomers if the federal government decreased the financial commitment. ... What we have been able to give to our refugee family is much more important than the money.” Not everyone agreed with the level of support provided to the Kosovars. A minority voiced concerns such as the following: “Too many resources were thrown at them. Too many people involved. It's like sending a school bus to pick up two people.”

Integration of refugees into labour market

Some sponsors expressed concern over the problem of finding suitable jobs for refugees, echoing calls from settlement agencies, academics, and the popular media for the federal government to address this issue. They were particularly concerned about professionals, who have great difficulty re-entering their previous occupations: “The refugees need to have their credentials recognized. To have credentials evaluated is time consuming and expensive.” Others felt that the Kosovars, in particular, expected to get good jobs right away: “They see only the result, not the process, like being a janitor first and moving on to be a manager. They want to begin in Canada by being a manager.” A few sponsors felt that refugees should “work for the money they are receiving” and that they should “do community service jobs.” The motivation to work was also discussed: “When a refugee earns money his/her cheque is reduced for that amount over 25%. This is a de-motivator. If the government expects refugees to become independent, it has to do something about this

current policy. Perhaps it could reduce the amount over 25% by only half for each dollar earned. The refugees would gain Canadian job experience and most refugees would work anyway because of job satisfaction.”

Rather than simply change policies, some sponsors advocated a direct involvement of CIC in program delivery, parallel to the services provided by settlement agencies. “[CIC] could help with filling job applications, preparing refugees for job interviews, advising them about job opportunities, offering job experience and providing some training projects.” One individual commented on the complexity of the issues: “Monetary support from the government is very important to allow more people to participate in the sponsoring of refugees. Somehow the financial model needs to change, though, so that there is a real incentive for the refugees to enter the workforce faster. How to do that may be very difficult.” As another sponsor put it, “the sponsors need more help with employment issues and the refugees need an employment sponsorship that includes counselling about employment.”

Sponsorship training programs

There were two types of comments on sponsorship training, the first of which came primarily from individuals who had no previous experience. It was suggested that the sponsor group should have a core group of about 5 or 6 members. Second, sponsors expressed a need for ongoing support. On the whole, sponsors were appreciative of the orientation that they received, but would have liked more information. They also wanted easy access to someone at CIC who could answer their questions immediately.

Elimination of delays in the sponsorship process

Several experienced sponsors who had been involved with either private or JAS sponsorship programs in the past commented that the length of time it takes to get a refugee family here from a refugee camp overseas is unreasonably long. Having seen the speed with which Operation Parasol was conducted, these sponsors recognized that it is possible to expedite the process when there is a national will and money to do so.

Support for medical and dental treatment

This theme emerged at several points in the focus group interviews. In general, the sponsors were in agreement that medical and dental treatment should be made available in the settlement period, with few restrictions, even if there are procedures involved that are not ordinarily covered. The sponsors also felt that the communication around health care provision needed to be improved.

Specific information on refugees

The sponsors felt that they received insufficient information on the refugee families they were helping. They wanted information not only on the background of Kosovars in general, but about the specific people who were put in their care, especially medical and psychological information that could advise their actions in assisting the refugee family.

Sponsors' Recommendations

As might be expected, the sponsors held disparate views on nearly every issue; in fact, they sometimes expressed assessments that were diametrically opposed. What they shared, however, was a concern for refugees, and a desire to help newcomers integrate successfully into Canadian society. Because it is customary to focus on problems, the 'lessons learned' identified by the sponsors were heavily weighted to addressing the difficulties they faced. However, there were positive responses to the government's approach to handling the Kosovars as well. These included the broadening of the definition of family, the practice of keeping extended families together both in the sustainment sites and in the cities to which they were eventually destined, the rescinding of the right of landing fee (ROLF), the subsidy of housing costs as required, and the speed with which the government acted.

Discussion*Lessons Learned*

Many of the responses reported above are indicative of unwarranted assumptions made by both sponsors and refugees (cf. Woon, 1984). Although it would be impossible for CIC to anticipate every misconception, both sponsors and refugees would have benefitted from more information about their respective roles. For example, the complaint of some sponsors that the Kosovars expected them to be on call may have arisen from the experience at the sustainment sites, where there were people available to meet the refugees' needs 24 hours a day. Settlement agency staff routinely explain to their clients that unless there is an absolute emergency, they should call during office hours only. However, unless a sponsoring group explained time boundaries to their families, the Kosovars would have only their experience at the military base to judge by.

Sponsors, too, made faulty assumptions about the Kosovar families. The sponsors' reaction to the children's behaviour reflected a lack of information regarding typical responses on the part of both parents and their offspring to conditions of war (see Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Weine et al., 1993; Zivcic, 1997). Matters of discipline vary from one culture to another: if sponsors have no access to information about differing child-rearing practices, they tend to judge from the viewpoint of their own backgrounds.

The expectation on the part of some of the sponsors that Kosovars, particularly the KOSs, would know about the degree of diversity in Canada was somewhat naïve. The refugees had no intention of leaving Kosova until just a few months before they arrived in Alberta. Not only had they not planned to leave, but they had few choices in deciding where they would go during the airlifts. Canada's multicultural nature and approach to integration are quite distinct from those of many European countries, and must be surprising to many newcomers.

In one case, a sponsor imposed her views on matters of birth control and portrayed them as "the Canadian way" even though "the Canadian way" is, in fact, a matter of personal choice. The natural inclination is to assume a shared value base; when values differ or one group has inadequate knowledge regarding another, misunderstandings result. The focus group transcripts

indicate that over time the sponsors and the refugees made adjustments to each other, but much of the confusion might have been alleviated had both groups had an understanding of the boundaries of their roles and some basic awareness of each other's cultural norms (Haines, 1996; Indra, 1988; Woon, 1984). The sponsors and the refugees would have benefitted from bicultural brokers, who could have intervened to prevent and clear up misunderstandings.

Moreover, it would have been useful for inexperienced groups to be given examples of the procedures followed by experienced, successful sponsors. Had the responsibilities and various approaches to meeting those responsibilities been clarified early on, perhaps some of the group dynamics and distribution of tasks would have been better.

Recommendations

In the future, appeals for assistance from the Canadian public should be carefully planned in order to avoid disappointment for those whose offer of help is not accepted. The response to the Kosovar situation was influenced by several factors: many have argued that the level of support was high because Canadians felt guilty about the government's involvement in the war; others have said that the CNN factor made the situation much more real to Canadians than other conflicts, and finally some have argued that the fact that the Kosovars were European (and white) made a difference. The nature of the airlift and the suddenness with which the government and sponsors had to respond also influenced people's decisions to volunteer as sponsors. Those who were turned down as Kosovar sponsors were in some cases, experienced sponsors who could have been asked to take a family from elsewhere.

The plan to destine KOFs to the location of their relatives and the effort to keep large families intact had an interesting result. The majority of the Kosovars sent to Grande Prairie have stayed there, whereas previously, more than two thirds of refugees sent to Grande Prairie relocated to a larger city shortly after their arrival (Abu-Laban et al., 1999). In the case of the Kosovars, there appeared to have been a critical mass to provide the support they needed. In future, the federal government should attempt to keep extended families together, particularly if smaller centres are to retain refugees.

It is clear that new sponsors need ongoing support. An initial orientation is insufficient. Although a training package had been developed for SAHs, it was not available to sponsors in Alberta at the time of the crisis. On-site training of sponsors is necessary. For example, a settlement agency could be retained by the federal government to offer ongoing training with a cultural awareness component (specific to the refugees in question) and an overview of the responsibilities of the sponsoring group. Included in this instruction should be organizational structure guidelines such as term of office, roles, and size of group, that have proved successful for sponsoring groups in the past. Debriefing at regular intervals is essential for helping new sponsors understand the boundaries of their roles, for allowing a forum for ongoing questions, and for providing guidance and support. This crucial element was missing for the sponsors of the Kosovars.

To facilitate access to information, all sponsorship documentation should be made available on the CIC website. Email would make communication easier and would ensure that information is disseminated to sponsors who have Internet access.

Finally, the financial support provided to the Kosovars removed a barrier that faces many sponsorship groups: without a financial commitment, sponsors could concentrate on their primary purpose: to assist with social integration. Given that 60% of the sponsors in Northern Alberta were new, an expectation has been established. To ask these same people to provide funding for refugees at some later date, in addition to social support, may result in negative responses. Anecdotal evidence of this reaction has already been reported in the case of refugees from Sierra Leone.

Although there have been significant changes to Canadian immigration with the introduction of the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act in 2002, Canada will continue to receive refugees. The unique experiences of the Kosovars have pointed to ways in which the sponsorship process can be improved.

Notes

¹ The abbreviation KOF refers to Kosovar refugees who joined family members who were already living in Canada. KOS denotes Kosovars who had no family in Canada prior to their arrival.

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