

CASE STUDY 1: Sponsor Perspective

LYNNE

"FOR ME, IT JUST SEEMED TO BE A WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE THING TO DO. THE EIGHT OF US MET AND LOOKED AT THE PROS AND CONS. BUT REALLY IT WAS A NO-BRAINER IN THE END, WE COULD SEE THAT WE COULD OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES."



People who move to another country have good reasons to do so, and there's a lot of Irish people who are or have been migrants. And Syria is a terrible situation.

As a group we had some insights of what was happening in Syria because we had been supporting families in an emergency accommodation centre for refugees and later when we supported three Syrian families who were moved to a nearby small town.

It was far easier to become a community sponsorship group than we had anticipated. The fundraising was easy, it was fun actually! With the documentation, we just had to be organised.

We divided the work into eight areas of responsibility, one for each person. Whether it was fundraising, or housing, finance, documentation, these were the different types of areas. So, we were quite structured from the very beginning. But we also got support from other community sponsorship groups... and we are happy to give support to others!

The most difficult thing was the accommodation, but we overcame that. We went door to door asking everyone, and we eventually found the most wonderful landlord who had an apartment over a shop. He was looking to rent or sell the building, but he decided to take on the role of landlord instead.

One of the things we absolutely recognise is that every family is different. Many pre-conceived ideas about Syrian refugees, yet there is a huge amount of diversity. Syria was a beautiful country, very well developed.

On the day of their arrival, I took off with the group secretary, with a van and a driver to meet our new family at the airport. We met them with flowers, they were delighted to be in Ireland... not that they knew much about Ireland beforehand! They'd had to pack up years of their lives in Lebanon and move. It's a lot to happen in such a short amount of time.

The rest of the group had the house decorated to welcome them, with a stocked larder and meal prepared. We showed them round the home and gave them a list with all the contacts they needed for the group and made sure they were in a position that they could contact someone if they needed to. Their first few weeks were quite structured: a mixture of necessary meetings for registration etc., orientation and social events, accompanied each time by one of the group, but done in such a way as to hopefully not overwhelm them.

In the first few days, they had a loud knock on the door. A big man was standing there with a giant bar of Toblerone. He shoved it into their hands and said, "you are very welcome here" and ran off!

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One of the things that we are aware of is that you have to be aware of dependency or co-dependency. The idea is to support them, so they can become independent. Another thing that is really important is to let them tell their story if they want to; don't ask intrusive questions! The amount of goodwill in groups is huge, but if you wouldn't ask someone on the street a particular question, then don't ask them.

They are here on trust. They are hoping that they will finally be safe. It took three to four months in Ireland before they believed that they were

I feel delighted for them. But I also appreciate that this is just the first step of their journey.



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