

COMMUNITY PARTNER DESCRIPTION*:

SAFE is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), which means we have an agreement with Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to sponsor or co-sponsor (with community groups) a set number of refugees annually. We started as a sponsor group and became a SAH in 2017. We are the only rural SAH in Nova Scotia, so we have dialogue and relationships with many groups around the province that sponsor refugees in their rural area. SAFE's mission is to sponsor Syrian refugee families displaced from their homes by war to resettle and start a new life in the Antigonish area. We are committed to supporting and advocating for refugee and human rights (from our website). Groups we partner with have newcomers from several countries in the Middle East and Africa. We are a non-profit. We have no staff or grants. We rely entirely on volunteers to run our program.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

To begin, all refugees who are resettled in rural areas of Nova Scotia are sponsored by a group of people who use the Private Sponsorship of Refugee program. One of the responsibilities of these sponsor groups is to provide settlement assistance to children and youth in the education system. Our experience is that the children transition very well; however, older youth (ages 13-21) have some real challenges. For example, some may have had a considerable interruption in their schooling where their families were living as refugees. Some worked to help the family survive, but many just couldn't go to school. Some have limited English when they come to Nova Scotia. This is a really big problem for students who want to graduate high school or attend college or university.

There is also the issue of racial and ethnic inclusion, especially for students of African descent and Muslim women who wear a hijab. For some youth, refugee trauma is a barrier that groups have tried to address. We have seen some real successes, which we should talk about and highlight, but our group has been reached by other sponsor groups either to share how they handled challenges or for advice on how to handle them. This goal of this project is to learn from sponsor group volunteers about the educational experiences of older (former) refugee youth, and how sponsor groups and schools help these students settle in, what barriers exist, and how they have been addressed.

PROJECTED BENEFITS:

SAFE believes that the education system in Nova Scotia, especially rural areas, had to pivot in many ways to address the unique circumstances of refugees. Groups have gone on learning curves when they identified issues and barriers, and worked with the youth and schools to help them settle in. Documenting what sponsor groups learned and how they address issues could be documented so that SAFE can share the information with new sponsor groups and schools. As well, we have identified ourselves issues that have policy significance, so it would be important to know if our experience is shared by other groups. If so, we can proposed policy changes to facilitate the educational success of older youth being resettled in rural communities by sponsor groups.

* [These are excerpts from the Community Partner's original proposal]