



Welcome Circles FAQ

As JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) Toronto prepares for the arrival of Ukrainian newcomers seeking safe resettlement in Canada, we are grateful for the outpouring of support from the broader community and look forward to working with volunteers to support newcomers in need. This document seeks to answer some of the frequently asked questions about the Welcome Circles initiative.

What is a Welcome Circle?

Welcome circles are teams of 5-8 volunteers who will be matched with an individual or family unit of newcomers for a 6-month to 1 year commitment. The goal of Welcome Circles is to provide coordinated, wraparound support for newcomers by JIAS Toronto, volunteers, and community. Welcome circle tasks may involve; welcoming a newcomer at the airport, helping to find long term housing, informal English language supports, getting children registered for school and other programs, help navigating Canadian systems (public transit, financial, medical, etc), social support/friendship as well as communication with the family's JIAS Toronto settlement worker. Needs will vary depending on the newcomer's needs and circumstances. Not every Welcome Circle will provide identical support.

What is happening in Canada for the crisis in Ukraine?



JIAS is regularly updating our website regarding the ongoing crisis – focusing on updates regarding Ukrainians arriving in Canada and updates from the federal government. You can read more online here: <https://jiastoronto.org/ukraine-crisis-update/> and sign up for our newsletter at the bottom of that webpage.

Why Welcome Circles?

Welcome circles are inspired by a series of informal matching programs that volunteers have participated in through JIAS over the years, as well as by Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program. The PSR model involves a commitment on the part of Canadian citizens to provide hands-on settlement support to a refugee over the course of their first year in Canada and this initiative is world renowned for its success in helping refugees successfully settle and integrate into Canadian society. This is largely because of the social network built into this model. While Ukrainians are not coming to Canada as refugees, they are facing many of the same circumstances and challenges. The success of the PSR model as well as research in the field (Dr. Craig Smith, UofT, Department of Political Science) have shown volunteer social networks to be a key defense against newcomer isolation/despair and perhaps the greatest measure of successful integration. So, we have modeled Welcome Circles off the PSR model except without the sponsorship component.

How do I form a Welcome Circle?

While JIAS is positioned and prepared to match individual volunteers with others to form a Welcome Circle, there is some benefit to forming a Welcome Circle with your own network (family, friends, colleagues) as this model of volunteerism does require solid communication and coordination with other members of your "team."

If you are building your own Welcome Circle, consider having people with a variety of skills/knowledge and availability:

What kinds of skills or knowledge are relevant to Welcome Circles?

- Schedules (if some team members are working full time and have evening family commitments at home, it is helpful to have others with more flexibility in their schedules.)
- Communication/response time (someone who tends to be connected to their phone/email during daytime hours is a good pick to be a liaison/point person with the JIAS settlement worker)
- Familiarity with different “Canadian systems” (medical, transit, school board, bureaucracy)
- Organizational skills (for example: someone who might enjoy organizing a collection of goods needed to set up the newcomer’s apartment)
- Financial know-how (to advise on basic budgeting to help manage costs of living)
- Familiarity with the GTA (to help seek out long term housing options and navigate public transportation)
- Languages (*if needed, JIAS can also connect a Welcome Circle with an additional Russian/Ukrainian speaking volunteer)

Are Welcome Circles responsible for finding newcomers short and long-term housing?

Housing is certainly one of the main challenges that we can anticipate for these newcomers to Canada. JIAS has received a partnership grant from airbnb.org to facilitate short-term housing stays up to 30 days and is working with community partners to find a range of longer-term housing solutions. While Welcome Circles may be asked to help seek out long-term housing options, they are not responsible for securing or paying for housing.

How does a Welcome Circle get matched with a newcomer?

JIAS Staff will match welcome circles with newcomers to the extent possible based on demographic profiles, level of need/availability, language skills, and other factors as appropriate. There will be an introduction email between the Welcome Circle volunteer, the JIAS Settlement Worker, and the newcomer individual or family members.

When will our Welcome Circle be matched with a newcomer?

JIAS has already welcomed newcomers fleeing the war in Ukraine – but the timeline and scale of new arrivals is still uncertain. We anticipate that the need will increase significantly throughout the spring of 2022, but we do not know whether this will happen next week, next month, or in three months from now. If members of your Welcome Circle have commitments that will limit the group’s availability until a certain date, you can of course indicate this to JIAS and be matched after that time.

Is there training and support for Welcome Circles volunteers?

JIAS will provide a resource/reference guide along with this FAQ and offer a series of training sessions to ensure that volunteers are appropriately knowledgeable, informed, and supported in their interactions with and support of vulnerable newcomers. However, if a Welcome Circle volunteer ever confronts a situation, issue, or behaviour that they are unsure how to address, they should contact the newcomer’s JIAS Toronto settlement worker. As a settlement agency, JIAS Toronto is equipped to address a wide range of issues through direct services or referrals.

What about vaccination?

JIAS is requiring that staff and volunteers be vaccinated to provide in-person support for newcomers. However, as a social service agency, JIAS cannot require that our clients be vaccinated to receive support. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, JIAS Toronto has provided information to our clients about vaccination and has worked with partners to provide vaccine access to newcomers. JIAS will continue to ensure that the newcomers we serve have access to vaccination.

Are Welcome Circles responsible for financial support?

Newcomers coming to Canada as a direct result of the war in Ukraine will have substantial need for financial assistance. They have fled their homes unexpectedly and are generally arriving with few belongings and without access to whatever savings they may have. While CUAET (Canada Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel) does provide limited government benefits to Ukrainian newcomers and allows them to work in Canada, most will face significant barriers to employment in their first period of settlement and many -- as senior citizens and families with only one parent in the country -- may need ongoing support. Welcome Circles are strongly encouraged to help meet the financial needs of Ukrainian newcomers by fundraising for [JIAS Toronto's Ukraine Crisis Newcomer Fund](#) and are invited to set up a fundraising page -- contact naomik@jiastoronto.org to set up a page!

How do I become a volunteer as part of a Welcome Circle?

Because JIAS volunteers work with newcomers who are a vulnerable population, all volunteers must undergo an application process, interview, and background check. Groups hoping to form Welcome Circles are welcome to reach out as a group and be interviewed together:

- ✓ Email volunteer@jiastoronto.org
- ✓ Fill out the JIAS volunteer application form at www.jiastoronto.org/volunteer
- ✓ Interview with JIAS Volunteer Coordinator or Manager
- ✓ References and Background check
- ✓ COVID-19 vaccination required for in-person volunteering
- ✓ Matching process

Thank you for wanting to help, welcome, and support Ukrainian newcomers coming to Canada!

Further Questions: volunteer@jiastoronto.org

Read more about JIAS: <https://jiastoronto.org/about-jewish-immigrant-aid/>

Watch the Welcome Circle Orientation and Training Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY_e374pjpg