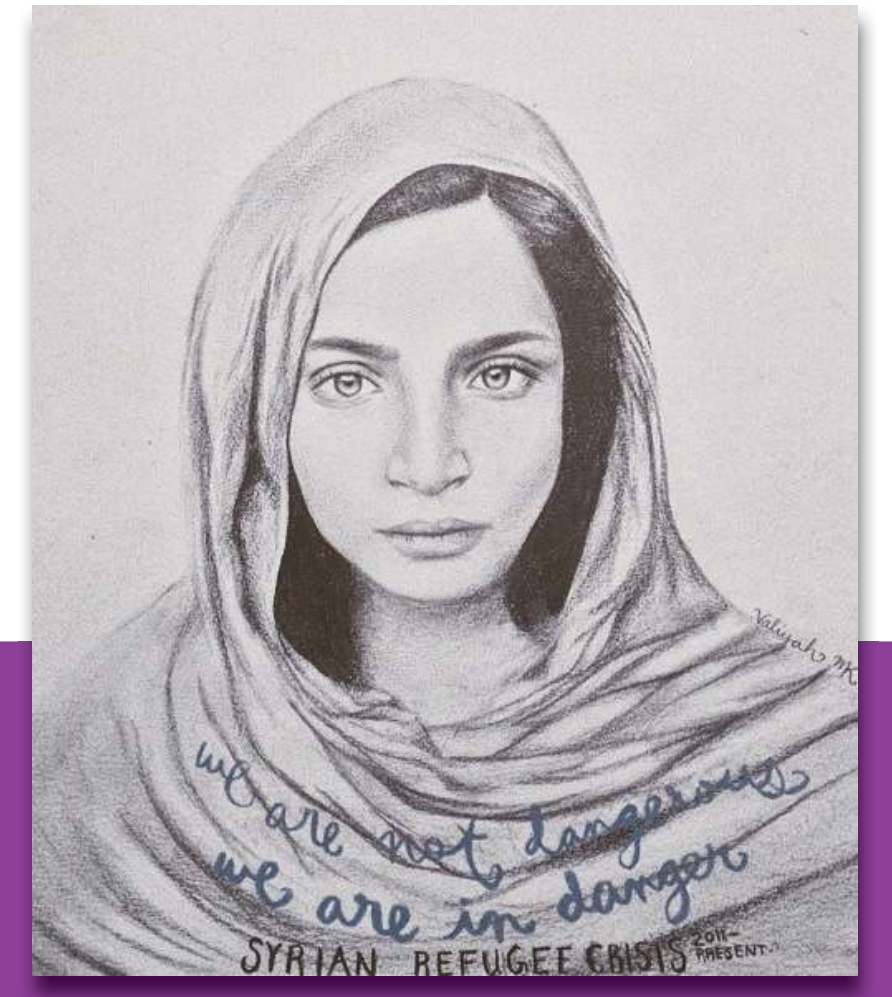


Community Collaboration for the Resettlement of Refugees

A Renfrew and Lanark Story



Since late summer 2015, groups have been forming in the region to support the resettlement of refugees into a variety of local communities. Seventeen groups have officially formed to date, representing over \$500,000 raised and thousands of volunteers assembled to carry out the work.

The Local Immigration Partnership engaged as a support mechanism for the groups, providing access to the required services where possible, enabling connections between sponsorship groups for sharing of best practices, and conducting a needs analysis so as to provide a coordinated and regional response for assistance. A website was developed in order to provide access to information about relevant resources, group listings and media stories. Chéla Breckon, Project Manager has also visited the majority of the groups in order to conduct an in-person consultation and develop relationships.

The most significant contribution that LIP is making to the groups is the provision of the Welcoming Syrians Workshop to any interested parties. The LIP project invested in well-developed, research-based curriculum to deliver to participants

via Chéla Breckon, Project Manager in a ninety minute learning session. Several workshops have already taken place in a variety of communities and the Project Manager continues to present regularly in a multitude of formats and messages surrounding the topic of refugee resettlement.

The LIP Secretariat has and continues to collect status reports and updates from the community groups for sponsorship of refugees in an effort to document this process and outcome via direct research.

Arnprior to welcome family from Syria within weeks

Taste of Syria meeting attracts about 100 people

January 29, 2016
Arnprior Chronicle-Guide
By Derek Dunn

Of the 25,000 Syrian refugees bound for Canada, five will call Arnprior home.

Elaine Lowe of Project Arnprior Welcome made the announcement to an enthusiastic crowd of some 100 at the Christian Education Centre on Jan. 28. The family comprised of two adults, two girls aged 9 and 11, and a boy, 2, should arrive in town before the end of February.

"I'm excited and a little bit terrified getting everything done," Lowe said following the event, called A Taste of Syria. "It's all new; everything ahead of us. But we have a lot of great people in Project Arnprior Welcome."



Gathered together after the Taste of Syria event at the Christian Education Centre on Jan. 28 are, from left, Sobhah and Tasneem Chowdhury, Cathy McCaig, Ahmed Khalifa, Elaine Lowe and Hazen Mazhar.

The group includes community members and various churches in town. Since forming in October, it has raised \$21,000 of \$27,000 to bring two families over. They acknowledge the challenges - translation, transportation, affordable housing, jobs, schooling and ESL, medical facilities, and employment - but are finding solutions.

The evening was a chance to learn more about Syrian culture including food, books, and a slideshow presentation by an Arabic man who calls Deep River home. Ahmed Khalifa showed photos of a modern, civil Syria before civil war erupted. Then showed it today. On the left side of a slide was Saint Mary's Church, built in 50 AD. On the right was the same building in ruins.

"The bombs don't differentiate," Khalifa said, clicking to the next slide. "Here is a refugee camp. They are in tents 24/7 in the snow. We camp here for three or four days, a week, then go home and say that's nice. They can't leave."

He talked about traditions and cultural practices that the family will bring to Arnprior. Family is first; children respect their elders all the way down to how they sit up straight. Parents take on the name of their first born, such as The Father of X. The elderly are highly respected. An elderly father's hand will be kissed. There are few nursing homes.

Many women dress modestly to gain respect and protection. In many Arab countries, such as Khalifa's home of Egypt, women hold high levels of office. The said displacement

"You will love them all and they will always be appreciative."

-George Four

Perth welcomes first Syrian refugee family this week

February 17, 2016
Perth Courier
By Laurie Weir

The Community Alliance for Refugee Resettlement (CARR) just received news they've been waiting for - a Syrian refugee family will be arriving this week.

"After five months of preparation and hard work on the part of over 100 volunteers they have recently been matched with a Syrian family," said Krista Hearty McLean, an executive member of the CARR.

The family, consisting of three small children, arrived in Toronto on Sunday, Feb. 14. They will stay in Toronto for intake processing and then be welcomed to Perth by their host family this week.

Hearty McLean said their new home (location is under wraps to protect the family) has been prepared by CARR volunteers and furnished through the donations both cash and in-kind of their many donors. "It is quite fitting that our new neighbours (arrived) on Valentine's Day as this has certainly been a labour of love for so many members of our own community and beyond. A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone for their support."

The CARR's initial objective was to help resettle three families

"We are confident that people of Perth and the townships will welcome our new neighbours with open arms."

-Krista Hearty McLean

New community sponsorship group launched at meeting in Petawawa

February 22, 2016
Daily Observer
By Ryan Paulsen

On Thursday evening, Feb. 18, a group gathered in the hall at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Petawawa to talk about a complex issue that has been making headlines across the country for months: the plight of Syrian refugees.

Organized by the Women's Initiative Network and hosted by Lee Torvi, who has been instrumental in the efforts of a variety of refugee sponsorship groups across the region, the evening also featured talks given by Jandark Kassar, a Syrian Canadian who immigrated back in 2000, and whose family members are still in her homeland, hoping to come join her in the Ottawa Valley as soon as possible, and Chéla Breckon, project manager at the Local Immigration Partnership Renfrew Lanark.

The night's presentations began with a frank discussion about the true extent of the collapse of infrastructure and government in the war-torn Middle Eastern country, and how that collapse has made every Syrian resident, by definition, a refugee.

"A refugee is someone whose government cannot or will not keep them safe," said Torvi. "And that means everyone in Syria today."



Jandark Kassar, who herself immigrated to Canada from Syria in 2000, speaks at a gathering at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Petawawa about the plight of Syrian refugees. The event, held on Thursday evening, Feb. 18, also launched Petawawa's community refugee sponsorship group

Kassar was able to speak to what life in Syria was like before many of the cities she grew up with were rendered unrecognizable by ferocious warfare, and spoke vividly about places that were shown in an accompanying 'before-and-after' slide show, with lush, modern city streets on one side of the screen and dusty, demolished piles of rubble on the other, but both images taken from the same location.

"These people who are living through these terrors, they need help," she says, pointing out that the desperation of their plight has only increased as the fight came closer and closer to densely populated urban centres of the country.

"These people who are living through these terrors, they need help."

-Jandark Kassar

www.renfrewcountywelcomesyou.com/refugees/

Outcome

A significant increase in the number of individuals who are now engaged in welcoming community activities through their humanitarian response to the refugee crisis in the Middle East. The addition of LIP support has enabled tracking of this outpouring of interest and action, more collaborative and well-developed settlement plans, improved access to information available equally to all groups, and increased capacity for the community to serve and embrace newcomers via workshops and presentations. The pro-active research role LIP played also enabled effective communication and message delivery concerning status reports relating to wait times for family arrivals to Federal Members of Parliament and the Minister's office.