

Joint Refugee Sponsorship

In 2016, the three congregations of the United Church of Canada (UCC) on the Semiahmoo Peninsula, in partnership with the White Rock Muslim Association (WRMA), sponsored the resettlement of a refugee family from Syria.

Background

In the autumn of 2014, the UCC congregations formed a committee, the Refugee Settlement Team (RST), to plan and carry out a joint refugee sponsorship. The RST hosted a special community event in January 2015, with speakers from the BC Muslim Association, in response to the terrorist attacks in Paris. Members of the WRMA attended this event, and in turn, expressed interest in joining the refugee sponsorship project.

Most of 2015 was spent fundraising and planning the sponsorship, and in October, the RST agreed to a request to sponsor a particular BVOR (Blended Visa Office Referred) case. The family of six included a disabled father with special medical needs, a mother and four adult children, and they arrived in Canada on January 28, 2016.

Sponsorship Summary

The 12-month sponsorship began when the family arrived and the contract with the Government of Canada will expire at the end of January 2017. Although our financial commitment will be completed, it is expected that volunteers will continue to assist with resettlement when asked by the family.

In addition to providing a furnished apartment, specialized medical care, access to language training and employment programs, the RST provided an annual income of \$42,000 for household and personal expenses. This amount was based on the federal Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), and it included a federal contribution of \$22,000. Uninsured dental expenses totalled an additional \$10,000 by the end of December 2016, and of this total, over ½ of the cost was very generously donated by two dentists, one from the UCC and one from the WRMA. The family's doctor was also from the WRMA and we had the generous assistance of a professional interpreter from the Muslim community throughout the sponsorship.

Despite excellent medical care, the health of the father was precarious and he died unexpectedly of a heart attack in December. His tragic loss compounded the suffering the family has experienced over recent years. Members of the UCC and the WRMA joined the family in prayer at the Surrey Jami'a Mosque on the day of his burial.

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The young adults in the family have made significant strides over the past year. The two sisters enrolled in an ESL program at the Invergarry Adult Education Centre and progressed from Level 2 to Level 5 of the seven level program. They hope to pursue post-secondary studies in the future. Their two brothers have also improved their language skills and by the end of December, one was employed fulltime at a commercial bakery and the other was participating in a job-readiness training program.

This joint refugee sponsorship was made possible through the generous financial support and many volunteers from the UCC congregations and the WRMA. This opportunity to work together with our Muslim neighbours on the Semiahmoo Peninsula on a project of compassion and service, has been a rich and rewarding experience for all involved.

In faith and hope,

Peter Jones

Chair, Refugee Settlement Team



2016 Refugee Settlement Team

Back: (L to R): Dr. Farhan Haque, Dr. Mildred Chang, Sandro Colasacco, Leona Towers, Kathy Booth
Front: (L to R): Elizabeth Winkler, Peter Jones Missing: Amanee Elchehimi, Rabea Syeda