

Refugee Support Committee Update

January 21, 2018

Good Morning. My name is Jann Van Vugt and I am grateful for this opportunity to give an update on the activities of the Refugee Support Committee.

We are anywhere from 10-15 people who have been working for the past 3 years to sponsor families from Syria and help them to resettle in Kingston. Most of you know the Mora family who joined us just 2 years ago. We have also been working for over 18 months to welcome Catherine Mora's brother in law, Bassel Haskour, as well as the Nasseh family, very close friends of the Mora's.

I would like to tell you a bit about Bassel and the Nasseh's.

Bassel is 30 years old and is a trained Civil Engineer. He fled his home in Aleppo several years ago and has been living as a refugee in Beirut. And this week we received very good news that Bassel has been cleared by the Canadian Immigration visa office in Beirut and he is expected to depart for Canada on February 22. He is the brother of Joseph Haskour, who is Catherine Mora's husband. Catherine is sponsoring her husband as part of the family reunification program and he is expected to arrive in Kingston near the end of March.

The Nasseh's are a family of four comprised of the father, Samaan or Simon, who is an engineer, the mother Elias Daad, a son Gabriel who is 28 and has an honours degree in Business Administration, and a daughter

Sandra who is 23 and is looking forward to continuing her studies in architecture here in Canada. Joseph Mora and Samaan Nasseh worked in the same office together in Aleppo and the families are very dear friends. The Nasseh's fled Aleppo shortly after the Mora family and have been living in very difficult circumstances in Beirut for several years.

The Nasseh's are Maronite Christians, and while Arabic is their first language, Sandra and Gabriel both speak English, and have some knowledge of French. I have had several telephone conversations recently with Sandra, and have learned that she is a resourceful and exceptional young woman. Sandra wanted me to express to all the people of St Georges, how grateful she and her family are to have the opportunity to begin their lives again in Kingston. Tomorrow the Nasseh's are scheduled for their immigration interview at the Canadian visa office in Beirut. And on Tuesday they are scheduled for their required medical exams. We are expecting they will be joining us within the next 2-3 months, perhaps sooner.

So now our committee is working very hard to gather furnishings and household items for our new arrivals. And here is where you can participate. We have received generous donations of linens, kitchen supplies and furnishings from many of you, but a long list remains. You can view this list on the st George's website in the next few days. Besides many smaller items, we need several significant things: a computer and printer, a microwave oven, and a food processor. If you have any of these items that are gently used and can donate them, we would really appreciate that. Or if you would like to make a donation so we can

purchase one of these items, we can provide a donation receipt from the church office. You may drop smaller items at the church office or contact me to arrange for pick up.

Finally, our committee needs more volunteers to help our new arrivals get settled. Activities like setting up bank accounts, getting bus passes, establishing health care, and registering for and attending English classes are important priorities for newcomers to Canada. If you can help, please contact me or Ruth Oliver, or Bob or Connie Gardiner. This is significant work that is also very gratifying. I think I speak for every member of our committee when I say that getting to know new families from another culture and developing new friendships is a profound blessing. Thank you so much for your support.