

King For Refugees holding meeting

There are many in King who would like to contribute something or give our time and talents toward helping a refugee. King For Refugees (KFR) has been formed from such a community interest. The goal is to co-ordinate a King Township-wide response to the historic humanitarian crisis, known as the Syrian Crisis, by welcoming some of the refugees here.

There will be a very important meeting for all people interested at 7 p.m., on Wednesday, Dec. 9, at the King City Library. The first community meeting held Sept. 11 was well attended. People came to learn about the conditions for Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, and Eritreans, the UN efforts to help them, how specifically refugee sponsorship works in Canada, and the effort to re-unify a local Syrian-Canadian with her family. Now after much more learning and meetings, a number of people have begun ?King For Refugees? to concentrate the goodwill of individuals, businesses, faith groups, civic groups, and local organizations toward action.

The meeting Dec. 9 will, in part determine how many refugee families King residents can ?rescue? and to formally begin the process.

Before the meeting, organizers hope to hear from you. Any of you interested in helping in general or in specific ways, need to send them an email with your name, general location in our area, and what you would like to do ??king4refugees@gmail.com

The emails received will determine the agenda for Dec. 9 meeting.

The King community will not be alone. Many people and organizations have already pledged their support. Humanity First will be our SAH and share the responsibility for our sponsored families. The local group is preparing to support the families for up to one year. The majority of refugees from Syria are self-sufficient well before one year, however, it depends on the individuals of course, and how much emotional and social support they receive.

There are about 80 Sponsorship Agreement Holders, or SAHs, which are recognized by the Government of Canada and the UNHCR and help to facilitate the resettlement of refugees in a community. The King group will be working with Humanity First in regard to resettlement efforts here in King. Their national office is conveniently located in nearby Concord. The chair of HF, Dr. Daud, has offered to King For Refugees, their full support. KFR?will be working with them closely at every step. The Mennonite Central Committee, MCC, is another SAH and they too have been very helpful as well as the Anglican and United Refugee Alliance, AURA. MCC (1920) is the oldest non-governmental organization in Canada that has been fostering peace and helping refugees around the globe. If in the future KFR?has extra funds, they will go to the relief of suffering in UNHCR camps via MCC.

There will be a ?King For Refugees? bank account for receiving donations and it will be announced shortly in this newspaper. Availability of public transit is important to the newcomers and will allow for their independence in such things as exploration, job searches, visits with friends, travel for post-secondary education, and appointments. Consequently, accommodation within reasonable walking distance of public transit is critical. King City is ideal since it has schools, shops, and offices as well as both the GO and York Region buses readily accessible by foot. Families therefore, will need accommodation in King City but will need support from all of King Township. If possible, another option may be discussed, and that is to loan a car with insurance, gas and maintenance included, if the accommodation is not near public transit.

Here is a list of some things that will be required:

First off, KFR is going to need help organizing. They will be separating the various duties into teams, such as Administration, Accommodation, Donations, Reception, Communication, Special.

Monetary donations to cover livings costs, clothing, food, etc., including rent if necessary.

Accommodation in King City ??an apartment above a garage, a basement apartment, house rental, etc.

Furniture and household items. Donated items will not have to be purchased.

Storage space for donated items.

Apart from these physical donations, people are needed to donate their time to be of emotional and social support. It is important that the community warmly welcome and help to integrate our new neighbours in many ways, such as:

Interpreters; travel buddies for public transit/ walking around the town to help orient; drivers to pick them up and bring to King, other occasions as arise; King friends to accompany to the doctor, dentist, enrolling children in school, go to bank, shop, show how to use transit, Service Ontario, Service Canada, etc.

Also needed are child-minders to help watch the children as the parents are in appointments; ESL?teachers; social invites to local events; children, to meet the new children of same age or interests; people willing to be a friend and help to find others of similar interests in the community, and help to find employment.

Anything that you can do to reach out, learn about where they came from and have them learn about here, share foods, music, etc.

It will be as much a learning experience for locals as it will be for them.

KFR stresses that we must be sensitive to whatever may be their unique situation. Mental health is very important. Generally speaking, children manage to learn the language quickly and may integrate well at school, but are likely to be more upset about leaving home than the adults who better understand why it was necessary. The adults generally are more concerned about the future and how they will manage to learn about a new culture and speak a new language, as well as find work to support their family. Safety and security have been their priority and we must make sure that we respectfully help to alleviate those concerns. We need to care with compassion while ensuring that our help respects their dignity.

In other words, the kind of things that we Canadians do pretty well already. Just try to put yourself in their shoes.

As you may well know, after a time for rest and initial adjustment, the most important thing for everyone is that we give a warm welcome and that we try to include our newcomers in all aspects of community life here. While we respect of course their own interests, abilities, and wishes. The more they can feel truly supported and safe, the faster will be their recovery and ultimate success as brand new citizens of Canada.

Folks in King who step up and offer a commitment of caring and compassion, will be the richer for it. These people will be our new friends after we share the experience of getting to know each other and learn about our different cultures but similar values. Let's give them hope again for a peaceful life.

Email KFR (king4refugees@gmail.com), read more details in the King Weekly Sentinel, and try to come to the King City Library at 7 p.m. on Dec. 9.