

A sign of hope in King Township

By George Elliot, King for Refugees

As the first 11 government sponsored refugees arrived at Pearson airport destined for a new home in Milton, the King for Refugees group held its second public meeting at the King City Library on Dec. 9. Sixty-two community members and leaders filled the room to capacity. The King for Refugees Planning Committee were there to welcome everyone and outline the evening's agenda.

The primary purpose was to put together six working teams who will facilitate the welcome and integration of Syrian refugee families in King Township. In addition, we heard from two speakers, Debbie McGrath, from HR.com, and Dr. Aslam Daud, the volunteer Director of Humanity First. Ms. McGrath explained that the website securely shares info, takes donations and issues tax receipts. Dr. Daud outlined the process for sponsoring refugee families and provided important insights from his work.

Humanity First in Vaughan is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with years of experience in guiding sponsorship groups like ours. Five of the six working teams are now hard at work: Welcome and Support; Donations and Fund Raising; Administration; Special and Communications. We are off to a tremendous start and it is very encouraging to see the number of people who are volunteering. The only exception is the Accommodations Team, for which we still have no volunteers. In fact accommodation is our limiting factor at this point, as we need to find reasonable accommodation in the King City area. Without accommodation, nothing can move forward. If you have any leads, please be in touch with us.

A lively Q & A session filled the latter part of the meeting. What is our time frame? Once accommodation is secured it could be a matter of two or three months. Will there be single individuals coming? Yes, there is a long list of potential individuals that can be sponsored privately.

How will the five Welcome Centres in York Region, which are sponsored by our federal government, assist us in the process? They have assisted over 68,000 refugees in the Region with paperwork, ESL training, counseling and support. How much does it cost to sponsor a family? For a family of four the government requires that the sponsoring group has \$28,000. The sponsor is responsible for the family's needs for a maximum of one year.

What can you do to help? Do you know of a space for rent that has at least a separate entrance, kitchen, bathroom, and living space? We will soon be requesting donations of clothing, furniture and household items. We have temporary space in the old Holy Name School, thanks to King Township. You will soon be able to make a financial donation, too (tax receipts will be provided). Information will be in the local papers. There will also be a link for online donations. Contact us at king4refugees@gmail.com if you would like to volunteer on one of our teams. Come out to our next meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 6 at the King City Seniors' Centre on Fisher Street at 7 p.m.

At a time when fear and darkness can so easily touch our lives, we can together make a positive difference in the lives of those who we hope to sponsor. Thanks to everyone who joined us on the 9th. You give us hope.