

## Deep River Welcome

As you may be aware, there is currently an ongoing refugee crisis in Syria and surrounding countries. In following a tradition of over 200 years, Canada has pledged to take in several thousand refugee families displaced by civil war and political unrest. As of 2016 February 27th, Canada has welcomed over 25,000 refugees fleeing conflict in Syria.

In the fall of 2015 a group of volunteers in our small town of Deep River, ON Canada, came together with the aim of sponsoring one of the Syrian refugee families. Now known as Deep River Welcome, this group is a joint effort coordinated by St. Barnabas Anglican Church, the Ottawa Valley Islamic Centre, the Deep River Community Church and members of the general public.

Our community has already collaborated in an incredible way to support the sponsorship of one family, who are currently residing in Deep River. We encourage everyone to continue to welcome and make welcome Ahmad, Alaa Albakhit and their four children. Shahed, Mariam, Hamzeh and Faisal.

Funding is on-going, either to support a second family to Deep River or to help raise funds for another sponsorship group. One method is through the web at <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/pages/deep-river-welcome>.

### **Refugee Sponsorship Report for Upper Valley Presbytery, United Church of Canada (mostly per Lee Torvi from 2016 April)**

Upper Valley Presbytery's support for refugees is ongoing. The Colombian family that arrived in Pembroke on 2014 Dec 11 completed their one year of sponsorship this past December. They continue to live in Pembroke, the children attending school and their mother working part-time and still looking for more work as a cleaning lady. They have a circle of friends and are quite well established here.

Our Presbytery's efforts to sponsor Syrian refugees are also ongoing; Lee Torvi is aware of at least 10 sponsorship committees in Renfrew County. Of those, 4 are supported by Upper Valley Presbytery: Valley Welcome in Eganville, Project Welcome in Pembroke, Renfrew Refugee Welcome and Petawawa Welcome.

We (and the government too, Lee presumes) are dealing with the frequent questions:

1. Why aren't the refugees here yet?
2. When are they arriving?

The circumstances are that it was faster for the government to sponsor most of the 25,000 refugees that arrived by the end of February. Processing applications from community groups was an extra step. Not many refugees were made available to community groups. The government advised sponsorship groups to connect with people in Canada who had friends or family needing sponsors, and our committees in Renfrew, Pembroke and Petawawa have done that. Unfortunately at the end of February the additional staffing that was provided to process applications was cut back to normal levels. We have been advised that applications received before the end of February (that includes Pembroke's Project Welcome) will see the people they apply to sponsor arriving in 2016. Later applications, we are told, will not arrive until 2017. When we have made connections with specific people, the additional waiting is extra difficult. The main difficulty appears to be the level of staffing, and hearty lobbying has apparently caused a slight improvement.

We have also been advised that the Sponsorship Agreement Holders –such as the United Church of Canada- do not know how many sponsorship applications they will be allowed to support this year, and they have not been given lists of refugees to match with waiting sponsors. In fact, at the moment the United Church of Canada has 200 sponsorship groups waiting for refugees. Therefore our Renfrew and Petawawa groups have to apply as Community Groups, meaning that they have to provide evidence that all their funding is in place rather than simply providing a guarantee from the United Church of Canada. There are a few more forms to submit but otherwise the process is the same.

Therefore, as we stand now, 4 sponsorship committees are associated with Upper Valley Presbytery. Three groups have their funding in place and applications complete; one group is just starting:

- Eganville is actively involved with the family they have brought in (7 people) and is waiting for 7 more members of that family to arrive.

- Pembroke is waiting for 5 people, (a family of 4 plus one young man). They are friends of and cousin of a Syrian Canadian woman who lives in Petawawa.
- Petawawa is preparing its application and fundraising to bring in 2 more members of her family and hopes in future to bring in 2 more. She is an active member of that committee.
- Renfrew is awaiting approval of their application for a family of 5 whose sister lives in Ottawa.

Smaller communities such as ours will benefit from the arrival of young, skilled and educated people such as these refugees, and we are ready and waiting. Further support from Upper Valley Presbytery could be two-fold: lobbying the government to speed up its processing; and making donations to the committee that is still fundraising, Petawawa Welcome (Upper Valley Presbytery –Petawawa Welcome).