

NOTES FROM MARCH 29TH MEETING WITH AURA REPRESENTATIVE, ALEXANDRA KOTYK

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. WHAT IS THE PROCESS?

Fairlawn will be sponsoring a family whose name has been put forward by relatives already living here. Having this connection should help with the family's integration. But the relatives are not responsible for anything – we are. Fairlawn is responsible for 12 months of living costs.

2. CAN WE REQUEST A CHRISTIAN FAMILY?

No. It is the policy that refugees are selected by need rather than by religious beliefs. While we understand the desire to help persecuted Christians it is important to remember that there are a lot of minority groups that are being persecuted. AURA tries to help the neediest of the needy first.

3. WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL SPONSORING ONE FAMILY MAKE?

The UN asks countries to burden share. In Lebanon 25% of the population are Syrian refugees. This is putting tremendous pressure on their infrastructure. Canada and other countries are helping by taking refugees. Canada has committed to taking 10,000 refugees over three years.

It is important to remember that our actions have ripple effects. We do not know what contribution this family will make to Canada in the years to come.

4. WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE TO HELP THE FAMILY THRIVE ONCE OUR SPONSORSHIP PERIOD HAS ENDED?

The first 6 months after the family's arrival there should be a focus on English classes and helping the family learn English. Alexandra's past experience has found that a part time job in the final 6 months helps with integration and learning English. Alexandra reported that not being surrounded by others from the same culture helps with integration.

It is also important for us to remember that we are dealing with adults who bring their own skills and personal experience. Making sure the family feels respected is important. We need to explain to them what our role is and is not. When the sponsorship has ended we need to let them know that the friendships will continue but the financial support is over.

5. ARE THERE OTHER CHURCHES UNDERTAKING A SYRIAN REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP?

Yes, several United and Anglican churches have started the process, as well as churches outside our denomination. We will be able to exchange ideas and suggestions with other church groups.

6. HOW DO WE MAKE SURE THAT ONE VOLUNTEER DOESN'T TAKE ON TOO MUCH RESPONSIBILITY AND GET BURNT OUT?

The core team needs to organize and involve volunteers. The team should meet regularly even after the family has come to Canada. We should provide volunteers with precise short term jobs to share the work load.

7. HOW WILL THE FAMILY LIVE ON \$35,000 A YEAR?

This number is set by the government. It is based on social assistance rates. In the event that the family is not able to support themselves financially after the year of sponsorship, their standard of living will not decrease if they need to go on Ontario Works. We don't want to traumatize the family by providing a standard of living they cannot maintain after our sponsorship has ended. We do not want them to be forced to move.

8. DOES THE FAMILY GET OHIP RIGHT AWAY?

Yes. AURA has some sheets available for congregations that outline the steps. OHIP starts right away as well as limited dental and vision care for children under 18.

9. HOW CAN WE MAKE SURE THE FAMILY IS NOT EXPLOITED BY A LANDLORD OR OTHERS?

The refugee sponsorship team will find housing for the family and initially liaise with the landlord on their behalf. The team member overseeing housing will troubleshoot housing problems through the first year.

10. HOW CAN WE HELP THE FAMILY HANDLE THE CULTURE SHOCK THEY WILL EXPERIENCE COMING TO CANADA?

Christopher has offered to have a workshop on culture shock for the congregation so that we will be able to understand some of the confusion and stress that the family will face coming to a new country. Also, adult ESL classes in Toronto cover a lot of cultural issues and tips for day-to-day activities.

11. DO FAMILIES COME WITH SAVINGS?

No, not usually. Most families have used up all their savings by the time they arrive in a refugee camp. They are responsible for their own medicals and transportation here. The Gov. of Canada loans them this money if they don't have any but it must be paid back with interest.

12. ARE THERE ANY CULTURE ISSUES OTHER SYRIAN REFUGEE FAMILIES HAVE FACED AS A RESULT OF THE DIFFERENCES IN CANADIAN AND SYRIAN CULTURE REGARDING THE ROLE OF WOMEN?

Yes sometimes. In Syrian families the male is the head of the household. Alexandra reported that often women integrate quicker than men into Canadian culture and this can cause stress for the family. Sometimes the refugee process can cause depression in men, especially if they can't find a job.

We need to be sensitive to the cultural differences; for example, sending a male volunteer to the home of the family when the women are home alone would make the family uncomfortable.

13. WHAT ABOUT ADDITIONAL HEALTH COSTS?

The Canadian government will cover additional health costs for pregnant women and children. We are budgeting for this and will have funds set aside to cover things like dentist visits and glasses.

14. WHEN WILL WE HAVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE FAMILY AND WHAT WILL WE BE ABLE TO FIND OUT ABOUT THEM?

Several months before the family comes we will learn their ages, level of education, occupations, religion and background story.

15. DOES AURA HAVE A LIST OF ITEMS WE SHOULD COLLECT FOR THE FAMILY'S HOME?

Yes it is very basic. Alexandra suggested going room by room. We don't need everything before they get here. They may want to have some input.

16. HOW WILL THEY LEARN ABOUT CANADA AND LEARN ENGLISH?

The Canadian government offers refugees some training before they come to Canada. They will be enrolled in English classes when they come to Canada.

Alexandra explained that we will need to provide information to them multiple times and understand that this process is overwhelming and that they can take in only so much information at a time. Alexandra recommended not relying too heavily on translators.