

First Line for Syria seeks sponsors for refugee family

By Marni Walsh

In the summer of 2015, a small band of neighbours on the First Line of Mono Township launched a campaign to sponsor a Syrian refugee family.

First Line for Syria's fundraising efforts brought the Huseyin Alos family out of a refugee camp in Turkey to begin a new life in Shelburne.

A year later, young Helin and her parents Kahleel and Sabah have become active and treasured members of the community.

The Huseyin Alos were the first of two families, including a family of nine in Shelburne, which were, and continue to be, guided by First Line for Syria with the help and support of the community and Primrose United Church.

Now, stretched to the limit, First Line for Syria is reaching out to the community seeking new sponsors for another refugee family in need.

Before the war, Inaam Alabed was a professional woman, a wife and mother of two young sons, working in a managerial position in Syria. Her full and happy life was robbed from her in a single night. Her husband was killed when the mosque where he was praying was bombed by Syrian war planes and, in the same attack, her nine story condominium was razed to the ground, killing her young sons and leaving her permanently debilitated.

Inaam came to Canada a year ago.

She has no family here and deals with constant physical pain and depression as she faces her life alone.

First Line for Syria and the Dufferin Sponsorship group from Orangeville learned of her plight through common connections with their own sponsored families.

Some of the sponsorship group members have visited Inaam in Toronto. She is holding on to the hope that her niece and husband might join her in Canada. Together they could support each other as a single family.

However, the niece and husband need sponsors to help to bring them to Canada and unite them with Inaam.

"We are hoping that another group will step forward possibly and take this woman's cause on for themselves and sponsor her niece and her husband," says Jeff Cottam, a First Line for Syria member. "This would bring hope and a little light to the end of [the] very dark tunnel she finds herself in, through no fault of her own."

"It need not be a recognized group or organization. It could simply be a group of like-minded individuals getting together to make a difference, just like First Line for Syria was formed just over a year ago."

Jeff spoke warmly of the rewards of the heart that his group has received as sponsors,

"Our Syrian family have transformed our lives too - it is not a one way situation when you help people in need."

With over 25,000 refugees arriving in Canada last year, the Muslim community has been drained of its resources.

Dufferin sponsorship groups have been able to give Inaam some financial help, but Mr. Cottam says it is just a "stop gap measure."

"It is sponsorship for her niece and husband that is key," he says "and why we are seeking support from elsewhere as we are all strained to the limit too."

Anyone interested in helping, may contact Jeff Cottam and First Line for Syria and they will facilitate meetings with Inaam and give sponsorship advice. Jeffrey Cottam may be reached at 519-378-5704 or www.aromatica.ca.