

Syrian children start school in Dufferin

Monday, January 4th, was a milestone day for Fatema and Hamoudi Al Haj Ali. Not only was it both their birthdays, but the children 8 and 7 years old, headed off to their first day of school in Dufferin County and by all reports had a great day with a wonderful, caring teacher.

The new Canadians, children of Emad and Razan Al Haj Ali are the first of several refugees from Syria expected to re-settle in Dufferin County. The family of four arrived safely in Orangeville after an exhausting 30-hour journey from Jordan on December 14th. Since then, they have learned much about many Canadian traditions including decorating a Christmas tree and baking a birthday cake to celebrate the children's special day.

They are so happy to be in their new house and each day we notice more signs of nesting, reports the Headwaters Refugee Sponsorship Committee, who worked for many months to bring the family out of Jordan where they fled at the beginning of the war. It is a busy schedule for the Al Haj Ali's as they build their new life as Canadians. There is a long list of systems that the family needs to become a part of and familiar with in order to function day to day - all at the same time they are learning to speak English. Brian and Philomena Logel who shared their home and Christmas with the young family as Headwaters Refugee Sponsors, say the family has continued their smooth adjustment to life in Canada, and their English skills are progressing steadily due their diligent practice. It is truly amazing how much their English has improved.

The children are quickly learning about the different Canadian coins; they acquired library cards and borrowed books and DVD's to improve their English; Emad and Razan went to Erin for their English as a second language assessment; and on Friday, January 8th, the family attended a meeting to discuss Dufferin County's plan for Syrian re-settlement.

Many people have dropped around with additional household items and the family appears to be happy to see all visitors and greets them enthusiastically, said Brian Logel. The Al Haj Ali family has been able to connect with other Canadian Syrians in Hockley Valley and Brampton and enjoys visiting and receiving visitors in their new home. The housing arrangement is part of the sponsorship plan to help provide for the family for one year.

The Headwaters Refugee Sponsorship Committee is seeing the rewards of their efforts in the smiles of their new Canadian family. With the backing of the community, the Committee has become a part of the re-establishment of Canadian generosity on the world stage as Fatema and Hamoudi take their first steps to their new school and a new life.

By Marni Walsh