



Dear Friends and Supporters of Delta Safe Haven:

I am writing to you to briefly update you before the summer really comes into full blossom on the activities of Delta Safe Haven and our three Syrian Canadian families.

We are half way through their first year – the six-month mark and we could not have done it without your encouragement and support.

Our families are in the midst of celebrating the Holy Month of Ramadan which involves fasting during the daylight hours and which will end in early July with the three-day feast of Eid. This is an important spiritual time for Muslim families.

Alongside of Ramadan the priority of English language training continues. When our three families arrived two of the adults has enough English to have basic communication accompanied by facial and hand gestures. 13 people knew no English at all.

At this point 5 of our adults travel downtown 5 days a week to a private English college – one of many that offered scholarships to recent Syrian refugees. Laptops and iPad were donated for that effort.

Excellent classroom instruction has brought our friends to the point that on Friday two of them shared with our MLA Vicki Huntington their stories in conversation. It was an amazing experience. They will continue full time until the end of the year.

All of the children at school had a good year and have progressed in their understanding of English. The children will attend English language summer school and resume classroom studies in the fall. They love school and speak English regularly at home to continue learning. Parent teacher conferences with an interpreter have brought the families into a team relationship with the school.

The immense efforts of the Delta School Board have been incredible and we are thankful.

Two of the adults have taken Ramadan off English training and will resume ESL at Ladner United Church with our awesome team of volunteers in July. Alongside of that in the fall school training resumes.

The younger children not yet in school are learning English as well from their families. Informal encounters and English learning circles about to resume with our volunteers will only enhance English skills, which are crucial for employment and integration.

We have been blessed by a variety of health care professionals who have stepped forward to support our families *despite their already full schedules*. We'd like to thank Dr. Ash and his team for all their dental work. Some years spent in refugee camps takes a toll on health.

Weekly meetings with our families with the support of many volunteers have taken place on a variety of subjects from living in Canada, sorting out paperwork, and best places to shop and learning how to budget on their limited government support. Many of us cringe when it comes to budgeting and know how challenging it is for us. Generous financial support has allowed us to supplement their barebones budget especially in the area of food, which is expensive in comparison to Jordan.

Canadians are told that spending more than 30% of your monthly income on housing creates a dangerous financial situation. Many government assisted refugee families in the Lower Mainland are spending up to 60% on accommodation.

Having had 6 months to settle in, get oriented and to prioritize English we are beginning to include the focus on employment. We have volunteers working on creating resumes. Tony Dales is our employment co-ordinator. We are connecting our families with persons who have casual and part time weekend work. The men are eager to work. One of our adults is working at the Ladner Village Market. Part time work allows the priority on English to continue and does not jeopardize government assistance.

Between 2010 and 2015 Canada admitted about 60,000 persons who had been designated refugees under the terms of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees and the Geneva Conventions.

By welcoming 25,000 in three months it is understandable that the system of settling newcomers is facing significant challenges and shortages of resources. Expecting 25% of the newcomers, the City of Surrey has had 50% of the Syrians coming to BC settle there.

A spokesperson for DIVERSEcity was quoted as recently saying that there is an overwhelming amount of needs and not enough time in the day or programming available to meet the needs. Waiting lists for various services including English language training and various programs exist. Despite additional funding challenges still exist.

We are so thankful that your generosity, encouragement and support has allowed our team to roll up their sleeves, pitch in and contribute in a significant way to the successful transition of our three families. They are very grateful and they have asked me personally to pass that on to you.

In the end its not just money or items or programs that helps newcomers feel at "home". It is relationships and friendships. There is a lot of that precious commodity in Delta. There are a number of new Canadian families from Syria in North Delta as well and as their needs become known we are thankful that volunteers and organizations are stepping forward to journey with them.

Blessings upon your summer days and we will be updating you again in the early fall.

Jim Short – Co – Chair

On behalf of the Delta Safe Haven Steering Committee