

We may have them Refugees may not.

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Lots of Hope and Dreams: From Crisis to Opportunities

by Ariana Yaftali

New Canadians are assets to this country. They come with dreams and hopes for a better future. They bring many things with them including different cultures, customs, languages, faiths, skills, qualifications and experiences.

Yasmin is among many new Canadians who settled in Winnipeg successfully. She and her children arrived to Winnipeg in 2003 as privately sponsored refugees. Like many new Canadians, she experienced severe culture shock.

"The lifestyle is quite different from my country of origin, Sudan, and from Egypt, the country where my children and I lived for six years prior to arriving in Canada," said Yasmin, "I knew a little bit of English and that is how I survived for my first year in Canada."

After Yasmin arrived in Winnipeg, her parents and her siblings helped her deal with settlement related matters.

"One of the most important things my family did for me was to rescue me and my children from the refugee situation I was in. I am so grateful for their help," said Yasmin.

"After I arrived in Winnipeg they told me how I could become a successful person and use my opportunities for a better life," expressed Yasmin.

After a few weeks, she joined an "English as an Additional Language" class and completed the final level.

New Canadians encounter barriers to becoming employed and to integrating into their new society. As for most new Canadians, getting a job was one of Yasmin's most difficult challenges despite her knowledge of English.

"I knew that I would have to prove to the employer that I was the best in order to get a job. I applied for many jobs through an employment agency, but none of the employers called me for an interview. I asked my employment counselor about this. She told me that perhaps they did not call you as you did not have

Canadian experience," Yasmin expressed.

With the help of her family, she found a day care where she worked as a volunteer, since this was related to her experience back home. After a few months, she was hired to work in a day care as a part time worker.

"This experience as a volunteer really helped me find a job. I was so thrilled to be hired and continue working in a day care system where I meet different people and work with children," said Yasmin. "I am a people-centered person. I enjoy helping others. In my country of origin, I was a teacher and worked with students of different ages. I thought this would be the best job for me" said Yasmin.

"As newcomers, we should have a strong sense of determination," said Yasmin during my conversation with her.

The message Yasmin is giving to new Canadians is one of hope. Nothing is impossible! You are likely to succeed.

"The support of my family and friends was the main factor in my successful life in Canada. I came to this country as a refugee. You can make it just the same as I did," Yasmin advised.

Once again, hearing stories like Yasmin's gives us hope that, when people are given the opportunity and the help they need, they will achieve their goals.

Refugees do not choose to become refugees. They are forced to leave their countries due to various forms of persecution and conflict but, when they arrive in a country like Canada, they arrive with strong determination to live peacefully and work successfully for a better future for themselves, their families and their children.

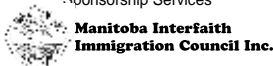
Refugee sponsorship is one way to rescue them from their plight. If you and your group want to be part of this rescue mission, please contact us and we will guide you in how you can help!

A publication of the



For comments/questions/suggestions
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Sponsoring refugees with special needs

Is your group interested in sponsoring refugees with special needs? Great! And welcome to an amazing network of groups in Manitoba who sponsor refugees with particularly high needs. In 2007, nine Manitoba groups sponsored 25 refugees with special needs. These refugees fled countries such as Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Colombia, Congo (Kinshasa), Ethiopia and Somalia.

Special needs can include at risk women and children, large families, those severely traumatized, refugees with disabilities, and those with medical conditions. For refugees with special needs, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) provides basic living costs, usually for the refugees' first two years in Canada, when sponsoring groups commit to providing personal and other settlement support.

What kind of information would your group appreciate having about refugees with special needs? How would this information help you decide which refugee family to sponsor and how will it help you plan and prepare for the arrival of the refugees you sponsor?

Your denominational or organizational Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) representative has access to information about refugees with special needs -- refugees currently waiting for a group, like yours, to sponsor them.

Recently information regarding 13 refugee family units was posted on a secure CIC web site which lists refugees with special needs. They fled countries like Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Burma, Chad, Colombia, Iraq, Liberia, and Somalia. Some refugees with special needs are in more urgent need of being sponsored than others.

The configuration and the size of these refugee families varies anywhere from two parent families of four to eight people, to one parent families of two to eight people, to single women, and, in one case, to a sister in her late 20s together with her teenaged brother. Most of the adults recently listed were between 30 and 50 years old. The youngest adult is 18 and the oldest is 65. The children range in age from one to 20 years.

Some of these family units have no medical needs. Others have medical requirements ranging from low to high. Particulars regarding the medical requirements of these refugees might, for example, indicate that one of the children is mentally handicapped, that someone in the family will need a wheelchair, that one member of the family has cerebral palsy, or that someone has a physical disability.

Many of the refugees with special needs do not speak English or French. Some do. The refugees with special needs recently listed speak languages such as Azerbaijani, Dari,

Farsi, Hindi, Karen, Kurdish, Kru, Russian, Sango, S'gaw, Somali, Spanish, and Urdu. Almost half of them are illiterate. Most of the others have nine to 13 years of education.

"Travel ready" status indicates that refugee eligibility has been determined and that, through medical, police and security checks, admissibility has been confirmed.

Additional information about refugees with special needs is available upon request from your SAH representative. This can include the refugee's country of asylum and the refugee's type of work experience. The religious affiliation and ethnicity of the refugees may be available and can be provided, if required for your decision making or planning purposes. Medicals expire in a year, so the expiry date may be provided when that date is imminent.

Once a group has signed a sponsorship application, travel arrangements are made for the refugees. This includes obtaining exit permits and booking flights. The estimated time from when a group undertakes to sponsor a refugee family with special needs to the time when the family is expected to depart for Canada is sometimes provided. This time period can vary from several weeks to several months.

Out of consideration for refugees with special needs, CIC makes only limited information available to prospective sponsoring groups. Group representatives are advised to use this information only on a need-to-know basis.

Sponsoring groups are encouraged to reach informed decisions about which refugee family to sponsor. The decisions need to focus on the best interests of the refugees being sponsored, and on the availability and number of people who will be involved. For example, a few of the members of your group will need to be available during normal, daytime office hours in order to accompany the refugee newcomers to places where they can register for their Manitoba health card, apply for a social insurance number, and so on.

Join the Manitoba refugee sponsorship network. Sponsor a refugee family with special needs.

With your support and care, the needs of refugee newcomers will receive the special attention they require. And, as you and the refugee newcomers get to know each other, you will, in all likelihood, become special to each other as dear friends.