

We may have them Refugees may not.

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Waiting for an Exciting Evening

Welcoming a Group of Afghan Newcomers

by Ariana Yaftali

It was an exciting moment to be part of a group welcoming 22 Afghan newcomers at the Winnipeg airport. I had the opportunity to receive our sponsored family to join us in Winnipeg.

On April 17, 2008, four newcomer families arrived in Winnipeg. Two of the families arrived under the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) program, with one being sponsored by the Afghan-Canadian Women's Organization and one by the Canadian Foundation for Islamic Education, led by Dr. Ibrahim. The other two were Government assisted.

Each sponsoring group accompanied their families and drove them to the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council's temporary accommodation at 404 Qu'Appelle Ave.

I observed different feelings on the faces of the newcomers -- happiness, excitement and tiredness. They appeared to be overwhelmed with emotions.

One of them said, "We are happy to have reached our final destination."

No doubt their strength and resilience will help them settle smoothly in a peaceful and secure environment in Canada.

"It reminded me of my first day of arrival to Canada and what I experienced. I remember when Dr. Ibrahim and you came to welcome us at the airport," said Rahima, a member of one of the sponsoring group.

Rahima came to Canada almost five years ago under the JAS program and was sponsored by Dr. Ibrahim's group.

It was interesting to observe how Rahima greeted the newcomer families with her love and kindness. She

really made them feel at home. "We are happy that you are here. You came to the right country. You are safe and there are lots of opportunities for you and your children. Do not worry about anything. Everything will be fine with all of you," expressed Rahima.

She approached the newcomer children and caressed them with her love. It was a very emotional and unique moment to observe. Rahima could relate to their experience of arriving in a new country with so many things to think about.

"Soon after my arrival, I wanted to get involved in such a special program to help others. Once I got established and learned the language, I got involved with the Afghan women's group to help others as they are settling in their new home," expressed Rahima.

Refugee sponsorship is like a cycle. Firstly, refugees are sponsored by a group of sponsors, family or friends. Once they arrive and settle in their new home, they start thinking of sponsoring other refugees who are in situations similar to what they themselves were in before. After the completion of the sponsorship paper work, they await the sponsored refugees.

This is quite a fascinating experience, helping others, establishing friendships, and creating networks. In these networks, everyone works for a good cause! The refugees recall their personal experiences and are proud to share them with others.

Rahima is an example of being a bridge to help other newcomers. She is helping others so that they too can walk across the same bridge smoothly.

Refugee sponsorship is rewarding in that it provides an opportunity to help motivated, resilient and hardworking refugees come to Canada.

A publication of the



For comments/questions/suggestions please contact

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Refugees want to come to Manitoba



Refugee newcomers regularly drop in at Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place) to tell us about other refugees who want to come to Manitoba. Requests such as the following have recently come to our attention.

The fiancé of a man from Ethiopia, who came to Winnipeg as a refugee a few months ago, wants to join him in Winnipeg as soon as possible. *Will he be able to sponsor her?*

A Somali woman, suffering in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, wants to come to Canada to join her adult daughter. *Will a group sponsor this woman as a refugee, or will her daughter sponsor her as her parent?*

A Sudanese refugee is in Greece. His wife lives in Winnipeg. Canada has not been accepting refugees who found asylum in Greece. Furthermore, the woman in Winnipeg has a mother, an 18 year old sister, and two young adult brothers back home in Sudan. They all want to come to Winnipeg. The level of income of the Sudanese woman in Winnipeg is not quite high enough to qualify her to sponsor her mother and her 18 year old sister through the Family Class sponsorship program. Also, that would leave her brothers, aged 23 and 25, behind. On account of their ages, they no longer qualify as their mother's dependents, and Canadians are not allowed to sponsor their adult siblings. *Will this family ever be reunited in Winnipeg?*

A family of five fled to Ghana from Liberia years ago. This family wants to join their adult daughter in Winnipeg. However, some months ago Canada decided that it had become reasonably safe for exiled Liberians to return home, so privately sponsored refugees are now invariably rejected by Canada on grounds that it is now safe to return home. The woman in Winnipeg needs to have an annual income of over \$50,000.00 in order to sponsor her mom and her sisters and brothers through the Family Class sponsorship program. She does not have anywhere near that level of income. Moreover this Liberian family would not appear to qualify under the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. This is due, in part, to Liberian transcripts of training certificates being hard, if not impossible, to obtain. Being outside of their home country makes this all the more difficult. Furthermore, the mother is over the MPNP maximum age limit of 49. *How will this family ever find a way to come to Manitoba?*

A couple, who fled to Turkey from Iraq 10 years ago, wants to come to Manitoba. Their request to come to Canada as refugees was denied because Turkey is restrictive about issuing exit visas. The couple, however, has close friends in Manitoba who will assist them with the process of applying to the MPNP. *Will they be successful?*

A young woman, who fled from Ethiopia to Egypt, wants to come to Winnipeg. Her friend, a Falasha Jew who moved from Montreal to Winnipeg, wants to assist her even though she is not Jewish. He plans to contact a local Ethiopian association, a synagogue, or a neighbourhood church in his quest to find a sponsoring group. Or, he may try to form a "Group of 5". *Which of these sponsorship options will enable his friend to come to Winnipeg?*

A widowed mother has a daughter aged 10, a son aged eight, and two *de facto* dependents, her orphaned nephews aged 18 and 15. She wants to come to Winnipeg to join her brother. They have been staying in the Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana for years. *Will she be able to convince the Canadian visa officer that it is unsafe for her and her dependent children to return to Liberia?*

An Ethiopian man is in Italy. He is not a refugee any more, but he wants to join his brother in Winnipeg. The MPNP is about his only alternative. *Will he be arriving in Winnipeg in 12 to 18 months?*

A young, single woman from Burundi wants to come to Winnipeg as a refugee. Her friend in Winnipeg will ask his Pentecostal church to sponsor her. If that does not work out, he will try to form a "Group of 5". *Which of his two sponsorship options will prove successful in this case?*

A man in Azerbaijan wants to come to Winnipeg. His wife and their three children are in Beluchistan province in Pakistan. His friend in Winnipeg happens to be acquainted with a Canadian born person who belongs to the White Rose refugee sponsorship group. The two met in connection with their involvement in the shipment of medical supplies to countries, like Afghanistan, that are in dire need of supplies. *Will the White Rose group sponsor this family? Will this refugee family be accepted? Will the wife and children be processed simultaneously with her husband, or will he have to apply to bring them through the One Year Window of Opportunity program after he arrives in Canada?*

A 32 year old woman fled Ethiopia and ended up in South Africa. Her brother came to Winnipeg as a refugee, and she wants to join him here. He plans to ask his local Ethiopian church to sponsor his sister. Some refugees in South Africa are accepted to come to Canada as refugees when the Canadian visa officer feels that resettling in a country, like Canada, is their only option for a durable solution. Others are rejected by Canada because the Canadian visa officer believes refugees who fled to South Africa can integrate locally and eventually become permanent residents in South Africa. *Will the Canadian visa officer who interviews this woman come to the conclusion that she is eligible to come to Canada as a refugee?*

When will your group sponsor a refugee family wanting to resettle in Manitoba?