

## **March Monthly Outreach Focus - Refugees And Friends Together (RAFT)**

Our past;

Raft grew out of a refugee resettlement program in the late 1970's when the world responded to the needs of people fleeing Vietnam ("the boat people"). Since then "we" have sponsored people from many countries (including Guatemala, Bosnia – Herzegovina, Ethiopia and Iran).

Our present:

Currently our focus is in sponsoring Syrians. Seven of the sponsorships have arrived and one more is expected in the near future. (These sponsorships include a family of five, two adult brothers, a man, a family of five, a family of four, a family of four and a family of five.) Some of these sponsorships are "co-sponsorships", working with another faith group (Kamloops Islamic Association)

Before arrivals:

In preparation for the arrival of refugees (which they are until they arrive in Canada) RAFT secures housing sets up the residence including furnishing, household items and basic groceries. RAFT works to find doctors, dentist and other professionals. Concurrently establishes a "settlement team" of volunteers who will work with the family for the one year term of the sponsorship.

Upon arrival:

Each "settlement group" does the "hands on" work of introducing the new comers to life in Canada: registering children for school, teaching the family how to get to school, accompanying them to appointments, teaching them to use public transit, to shop, to bank, etc. – all with the goal of helping them reach independence. RAFT works with K.I.S. (Kamloops Immigrant Services) to ensure opportunities for adults to learn English, to access other services and learn about Canadian culture.

The sponsorship:

Each sponsorship is a one year term from the date of arrival. During the term of the sponsorship RAFT enjoys becoming friends with the new comers and some of these friendship remains strong years later.

Our future: RAFT will continue to sponsor more refugees (from both Syria and other countries of the world) based on our financial and volunteer human resource capacities.