

**Syria-Antigonish Families Embrace
Steering Committee Meeting**

January 11, 2021
6:00-9:00 pm
Online

Present: Mark Ballard, Mary Ballard, Jack Beaton, Bronwen Cooke, Marla Gaudet, Hatem Ghouma, Lucille Harper, Sheila Sears, Peter Wade

Minutes

Agenda Item: Minutes and Business Arising

Discussion: One correction noted regarding a clarification of the term deposits. The minutes should read "Sheila suggested that interest earned from the term deposits goes into SAFE's general fund."

Actions:

Jack moved to accept the December 8, 2020 minutes with the above noted correction.
 Seconded by Hatem.
 All in favour.

Agenda Item: Treasurer's Report

Discussion:

St FX for SAFE is hoping to do a Facebook auction. Please consider donating goods and services for the auction. The auction will run through to February or early March.

Actions:

Sheila moved the adoption of the December financial report, with the change of removing "TD0042 Rafa Ghentawi 24,112" from the list of Term Deposits since it is being included as part of the Total Assets.
 Seconded by Pete.
 All in favour.

Agenda Item: Clarification re Payments to Families

Discussion:

RSTP Recommendation that Supports Funds for Adult Children be Issued Directly to the Adult Child: Adult children, over 18 years, receive a \$150 allowance. It has been SAFE's practice to deposit this money with the RAP payments into the parents' bank accounts and not paid separately to the adult children.

Housing Costs and Payments: The Committee reviewed the chart that Marla prepared showing percentage of income used to pay rent. The chart highlighted that those with fewer children, or those with children over 18 year, use a higher percentage of their income to pay rent as the result of lower or no CCB payments coming to the household. The government definition of affordable housing states that housing (rent + utilities) should not be more than 30% of a household income.

It was suggested that if a family is given housing at a low-cost rental, that after a year this rental property should become available to any new family arriving. This would allow for more families to benefit from low-cost rental units. It was agreed by the Committee that families need low-cost rentals for longer than one year, that it would be disruptive to the families to ask them to move and that SAFE has no legal standing to ask families to move.

The need to connect with the Town and County, Antigonish Affordable Housing and our MLA, was highlighted. The issue of affordable housing affects many more families than just SAFE families and is broader community issue that needs to be addressed and needs a voice from many sectors of the community.

Transportation Allocation for Adult Children: It was recommended that we consider issuing transportation allowance to children 18 years and older.

Actions:

RSTP Recommendation:

Marla moved to continue to pay the \$150 to the parents' account as long as they are providing food and other necessities to the child in the household.

Seconded by Sheila.

All in favour.

Housing Costs and Payments:

Marla moved that families with adult children who pay more than 30% of the RAP payment (and other income excluding CCB) as housing costs (rent + utilities) receive a transportation allowance for each adult (18 years and older) child.

Seconded by Hatem.

All in favour.

Marla moved that families currently receiving funds through SAFE (RAP) will have their income adjusted retroactive to when they arrived, to include a transportation allowance for each adult child.

Seconded by Pete.

All in favour.

Agenda Item: Process for Accepting, Evaluating and Approving Requests

Actions:

Lucille will make suggested changes:

1. The statement "Generally, relatives or friends of the refugee can submit one application for a family in any given year provided they are not awaiting the arrival of a previously applied for family" will be changed to "Generally, relatives or friends of the refugee can submit one application for a family in any given year."

2. Add: “The Steering Committee will consider the capacity of our volunteers and the co-sponsor family in their ability to provide adequate support to the sponsorship.”

Lucille will prepare a separate document outlining the Process for Accepting, Evaluating and Approving Requests so that process is not simply embedded in the request form but is represented as part of our policies/ processes/ procedures.

Agenda Item: Sponsorship Requests 2021—spaces confirmed

Discussion:

The Sarah Dobson application has been withdrawn.

Alaa Hadhad has been given the application forms to start the application for Ibrahim Balkis and son.

We have not heard anymore from Pictou County Safe Harbour (family of 6).

CARE is requesting 1-4 spaces for the coming year.

Agenda Item: Sponsorship Requests—for reference to spaces for 2021

Actions:

Sheila, Hatem, and Bronwen will meet with Riyadh Ibrahim to further gather information about his capacity to support his family and about the family’s intentions.

Hatem will arrange the meeting with Riyadh.

Marla, Pete, and Bronwen will meet with Toufic Al Zhouri to explain that we can not offer sponsorship this year.

Bronwen will set up this meeting.

Lucille, Jack, Hatem and Sheila will meet with Yasser Almashhoud to discuss possible sponsorship.

Lucille will set up the meeting.

Agenda Item: Family Application Updates

Discussion: Meshal Mohammad Al Awad, linked application with sister Maysaa Mouhamad Al Awad submitted November 2019 with CG is the Syrian Family Reunification Project, Inverness. Application for Meshal submitted December 21, 2020 and approved for further processing on December 30 by Amman Visa Office

Agenda Item: Ghentawi/Altaieb Family Update

Discussion:

The Altaiebs were informed that there is currently no funding available for daycare and there are currently no spaces available in daycares. Aboudi has been put on a waiting list for several daycares.

Jack is working on finding funding.

SAFE and the Al Zhouris have agreed that SAFE volunteers will take the primary responsibility for transportation and translation for the Altalebs' appointments and the Al Zhouri family will take the primary responsibility for the Ghentawi family. It would, therefore, be helpful to have a list of available translators.

Both the Altalebs and the Ghentawis will be interviewed by a Saltwire reporter. Marla will attend and has arranged for translators for both families.

Actions:

Hatem will contact translators and create a contact list to distribute to the Steering Committee.

Agenda Item: SAFE Model and January 20 Meeting with Lena Diab and Zach Churchill

Actions:

Lucille, Jack, Hatem and Sheila will meet with Minister Lena Diab (Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Immigration) and Minister Zach Churchill (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning) on January 20 to present the SAFE Model, to describe the need for more support for refugee-newcomers in a rural setting, and to present solutions and seek support and opportunities for further discussion.

Agenda Item: SSHRC Project

Actions:

Lucille moved that we support the request for MITACS funding.
Seconded by Jack.
All in favour.

Agenda Item: Annual General Meeting, March 2021

Discussion: Marla, Sheila and Jack have all agreed to return for another term. Othman Soufan has expressed interest in joining the SAFE Steering Committee. For any volunteer involved with SAFE, a Criminal Record Check must be done and noted by SAFE. Some volunteers' CRCs have expired and must be renewed every two years.

Actions:

Jack will e-mail out Othman Soufan's letter of intent to the Steering Committee for review.
Bronwen will review the list of Criminal Record Checks to determine who needs to have theirs renewed.

Agenda Item: Metropolis Conference

Discussion: Norine Verberg has asked if anyone from the Steering Committee would like to represent SAFE in a panel discussion at the Metropolis Conference.

Actions:

Pete will contact Norine about the details of the conference.

Pete and Jack will sit on the panel and will consider asking a Syrian-Canadian to join them.

Agenda Item: Annual General Meeting—March 9, 2021

Discussion:

The AGM will be online. The meeting needs to be announced publicly. Reports from the committees will be tabled in an effort to keep the business portion of the meeting short.

Ideas for speakers include Evelyn Jones of RSTP.

Actions:

Sheila and Jack have agreed to sit on an organizing committee for the AGM.
