

Syria-Antigonish Families Embrace

September 14, 2021

7:00-8:10 pm

Online Zoom

Present: Najlaa Alzaanin, Mark Ballard, Mary Ballard, Jack Beaton, Bronwen Cooke, Annette Daemen, Harry Daemen, Karin Fleuren, Marla Gaudet, Lucille Harper, Betty MacDonald, Othman Soufan, Maria vanVonderan, Norine Verberg, Peter Wade

Regrets: Sheila Sears

Minutes

Agenda Item: Welcome

Agenda Item: Overview of Family Sponsorships to Date

Lucille Harper

Discussion:

SAFE has been working to sponsor refugees since May, 2015. We began by sponsoring 2 BVOR families and have continued to sponsor families since, through the BVOR program and the PSR program.

Currently, we are awaiting the arrival of 12 families (2 linked applications to equal 10 family units).

Private sponsorship applications have been submitted for these applications in the follow years:

2017: 1 family

2019: 2 families

2020: 3 families

2021: 4 families

Families are living in very difficult conditions and we are deeply concerned about this. However, we have concern about settling a large number of families if they all come in a short period of time. Therefore, we have decided not to submit further applications until a portion of the 10 families have arrived.

As a SAH, we are working with other sponsorship groups. Our responsibility is to ensure that Constituent Groups (CGs) follow through with their sponsorship responsibilities.

SAFE is a SAH for 6 applications through the following sponsorship groups:

Tri-Heart, Antigonish County

CARE, Antigonish

Syrian Family Reunification Project, Inverness

Fair Hearts, Pictou County

Agenda Item: Changes to By-Laws and Memorandum of Association

Lucille Harper

Discussion:

Given the increased responsibilities that the Steering Committee has with regards to being a SAH, some changes are needed to our Memorandum of Association and By-laws.

Actions:

Peter Wade moved that we adopt the following changes to the Memorandum of Association:

1. "Syrian refugee families" becomes "refugee families"
2. Change to our geographic region covered to include the Counties: Antigonish, Pictou, Inverness, Richmond and Guysborough, Nova Scotia

Seconded by Harry Daemen

All in favour.

Peter Wade moved that we adopt the following changes to the By-Laws:

1. Increase the Board of Directors from a maximum of 10 to a maximum of 12
2. Increase board terms to 3 years and limit successive terms to 2 terms, then at least a year's break
3. A minimum number of meetings per year be 8 meetings

Seconded by Mark Ballard

All in favour.

Agenda Item: Settlement Committee Update

Bronwen Cooke

Discussion:

Two families arrived at the end of 2020. Through Covid restrictions, we have worked to support these families in discovering their new home of Antigonish. The families have been introduced to community resources, had support in setting up bank accounts, were provided with access to translators, have been taken to beaches and other attractions in the area, have been given drives to appointments and classes, have been supported in getting their drivers licenses.

SAFE maintains contact with other families who were sponsored in previous years and continues to provide support as needed. Even during Covid restrictions, contact continues to be maintained through electronic means.

Many thanks to the volunteers who have shown the families remarkable community support through their sponsorship and beyond.

Agenda Item: Housing Committee Update

Peter Wade

Discussion:

We expect that two families will be arriving soon. Apartments have been obtained for both. There continue to be challenges in finding affordable housing. The rent supplement has been helpful in this respect. SAFE continues to receive donations of furniture.

Support is occasionally given to previously sponsored families. This year volunteers helped one family that needed to find new accommodation.

Agenda Item: Education Committee Update

Jack Beaton

Discussion:

Twenty one SAFE family members attend grades Pre-primary through to grade 12. Families are supported in registering for school, arranging parent-teacher meetings, and arranging for translators for school-related meetings.

A grant from the SRCE this summer helped with tutoring expenses. A Provincial grant has provided for a paid English language instructor for adult learners.

Y-Reach provides English language training while ACALA provides a pathway from the English learned to pursuing further education.

Adults are being encouraged to access online instruction opportunities through ISANS.

It is clear that we need to continue to look at language learning in the long term, not just the first year after arrival.

Agenda Item: Employment Committee Update

Mark Ballard

Discussion:

A thank you to Y-Reach and ACALA for the work that they are doing in English language training. It is becoming increasingly evident that English is integral to employment. Employment is a long-term project that doesn't end after the first year of sponsorship.

Antigonish businesses that have been accessed and supportive over the last year include Levy's Leathers, Brian and Karen Clifton, Tall and Small, Superstore, the library, St FX, SRCE, The Wheel, Sobey's, Shannex.

In the last few months discussions with ISANS have encouraged collaborative work and support with SAFE and Nova Scotia Works. The wage subsidy programs that ISANS provides are very helpful.

Agenda Item: Questions and Open Discussion

Discussion:

ACALA has services that are sometimes provided by volunteers. It would be great to utilize these services.

In reflecting on research conducted by Norine Verberg, it is evident that sponsored refugees look for more hours of EAL instruction and need the instruction to be more goal focussed.

An effort is being made to move learners toward more independent learning. Often learners do not know how to identify their goals because they do not know what opportunities are available.

Actions:

For next Steering Committee meeting, include more discussion about ACALA volunteer services that are available.

Agenda Item: Adjournment

Next meeting: Once Nova Scotia enters Phase 5 we are hoping to have in person meetings with SAFE membership.
