

Milestone reached for Bancroft's 2017 refugee family

By Sarah Sobanski

Bancroft's Social Justice Without Borders (SJWB) has raised a third of the money required to bring a Syrian refugee family to Bancroft.

At an information meeting Friday, Oct. 28, SJWB met with interested area locals, community anti-poverty leaders and members from two surrounding area groups with experience sponsoring refugee families.

SJWB chairwoman Judy Edgar said the not-for-profit group has raised close to \$20,000 of its \$60,000 goal - half of which will go to local anti-poverty efforts and community organizations, while the other goes to helping a family in crisis immigrate to Canada.

"We are doing very well with our fundraising, trying to raise \$60,000. We're doing awesome. We're a very needy community so this is an amazing feat," said Edgar.

SJWB has committed to sponsor the Jarad family to come to Canada in 2017. The Jarads are currently living as refugees in Turkey after fleeing Syria. Edgar explained they are in limbo, waiting to start their lives somewhere they are safe.

Sandra Onufryk of Abraham's Children spoke to her experience hosting and helping a refugee family of five settle in the country. She shared advice on what to expect.

"Things are going on in the other side of the world that are beyond what we find believable. People are starving. The whole infrastructure of Syria basically is gone. The most disturbing are the children pulled from the rubble, dead or barely alive. [As many as] 470,000 [Syrians] have been killed in the conflict," said Onufryk. "Every Syrian family I have met was happy before the war. They had friends, family [and] jobs. These are things people wouldn't give up if they had a choice."

Onufryk explained the family she now calls her own suffered tragedy in Syria. The father of her sponsored family had his leg broken by police. The family's children were used for target practice and the family was used as a human shield before military tanks.

"They're coming because they would die if they stayed. [Our] family certainly would have died if they had stayed," said Onufryk.

She later presented a \$5,000 cheque from her organization's fundraising efforts. She said they had the advantage of fundraising when the crisis in Syria was widely covered by the media. As such, they had a surplus and donated the money as an expression of thanks and to help SJWB support a family of its own.

"I'm really thankful to SJWB to have the vision for world poverty as well as local poverty," said North Hastings Community Trust's (NHCT) program co-ordinator Jane Kali. She said the trust is currently battling the need for wood in the community so people can heat their homes.

Edgar said SJWB is committed to the Jarads and NHCT locally.

Resettlement Assistance Program worker Maicel Neema of the New Canadian Centre in Peterborough was also in attendance to encourage SJWB.

"You will be able to see the impact on the families and see their progress," said Neema, using the example of seeing young children of a family arrive without English speaking skills only to develop them quickly and be able to communicate.

He also explained the process of immigration.

"Whenever the family arrives they instantly become a permanent resident to work and go to school. [They don't receive a] Canadian passport or right to vote. [They can] become Canadian citizen after four years."

According to Neema, it is important for community members to help their family understand things in Canada that are second nature to Canadians. He noted putting money in a bank would be foreign, as would things like utility bills. The value of the Canadian dollar, and how far a dollar can go would also be a new concept. The Peterborough centre provides care packages to refugees to showcase local and federal assistance like local food banks, or hydro assistance programs.

Town of Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick asked if Bancroft could prepare a similar package for the Jarads to show them what is available locally.