



Saanich Peninsula Refugee Initiative Group

UPDATE #23

February 19, 2019

**WAITING is not easy while Safaa and her children remain vulnerable in Lebanon.
THANK YOU for your understanding, your continued support and your patience.**

Yes, it has been a long time since our last UPDATE #22 in September 2018. Since then we have not had anything to report, as we continue to wait for Safaa's refugee application to be determined. In this UPDATE #23 we look back on our journey from its beginnings to the present.

It was October 2015 when we were moved deeply by the image of a little child on a beach and we came together to bring Syrians into our community away from the danger of war. Donations flooded in. Very quickly St. John's United Church was holding approximately \$70,000 in its Refugee Sponsorship Fund.

SPRIG was formed under a formal agreement with St. John's United Church. We were helped by the Inter-Cultural Association. Some of us took sponsorship training. We connected with Osama and his family, the first Syrians to arrive in Victoria in December 2015 who anxiously wanted to bring Osama's sister, Safaa, and her four children here. We prepared a sponsorship application for this vulnerable family who had fled to Lebanon from their home in Syria because of the cruel war. Safaa's refugee immigration application was submitted in May 2016 – 34 months ago.

After funds were allocated for Safaa's sponsorship, we still held enough money to sponsor a single refugee. A young Syrian woman, Fatma, arrived in September 2016 with her parents and young brother. For the next twelve months we supported her. Today she and her family are making their way in Victoria, speaking English, building circles of love and support.

The SPRIG Steering Committee continues to explore a variety of actions to move things forward. There is little more to be done at this time. While waiting, we connect with Safaa most weeks via Skype and we regularly receive word through MP Elizabeth May's office about the status of the application. According to Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) the expected wait time for refugee applicants from Lebanon is now 33 months (it was 8 months when we applied). They say the application is only slightly delayed. The security check stage is done through international agencies, so there is nothing we, or Canada, can do to speed the process.

In December 2018, IRCC requested and received a certified copy of the St. John's Refugee Sponsorship Fund bank statement to show that the funds with which we have undertaken to support Safaa and her family continue to be intact.

The long wait has been much more difficult for Safaa and the children than for any of us. She tells us she is homeschooling the children who are now 5, 7, 12 and 13. Please pray that her situation will be resolved soon. Good news: Safaa's brother Osama and family are now eligible and preparing to become Canadian citizens.

www.sprig.me

info@sprig.me



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