

## CRC Refugee Sponsors - In Their Own Words

by Adele Konyndyk, World Renew



Is your church involved in sponsoring refugees through World Renew to help them build a new life in Canada?

In the midst of a growing global refugee crisis, World Renew is deeply grateful that churches continue to welcome refugees through sponsorship and resettlement. In 2015, a total of 184 refugees came to Canada under the auspices of World Renew's Refugee Sponsorship ministry.

Asking refugee sponsors to describe their experiences can be a great way to capture some of the impact of reaching out to God's image bearers in this way.

When you think of refugees, you may think of terms used on the news such as "foreigners" or "immigrants." You may also remember the Biblical call to "welcome the stranger." But if you ask Alice Van Stempvoort and others involved in sponsoring refugees as they come to Canada, the word that comes to mind may simply be "friend."

"I value the friendships that the refugee families sponsored through my church have offered to me, and have been blessed by them," said Van Stempvoort, who is a member of Grace CRC in Chatham, Ontario. Her church belongs to a Joint Refugee Group of four churches.

"God uses people to change us. When you get to be involved with refugees, your world view enlarges and changes, if you are willing for that to happen," she said.

Eleanor McComb, another refugee sponsor, echoed this same theme of friendship when talking about sponsoring refugees with her church, Willoughby CRC in Langley, British Columbia.

"Sponsoring is much more fun than I ever dreamt it would be! And there is lots of help from the congregation. Besides registering for English classes, and other services, we have them over for dinner on a regular basis, celebrate birthdays, etc. We have taken them on trips to surrounding areas...Stanley Park, Whistler. And we just have fun with them. They are our friends," she said.

Refugee sponsors acknowledge that the process can come with challenges, such as changed plans and periods of waiting. Many sponsors, however, speak about these challenges as opportunities to trust God and see him work in new ways through the process of welcoming refugees to Canada.

“Personally, I feel blessed to be involved in this ministry,” said Henny Drope, who belongs to a group of churches in Southwestern Ontario that have been sponsoring refugee families through World Renew for the past 20 years. “It can be draining at times at the beginning of each sponsorship, as there is a lot of work involved. I feel you need to be prepared for anything. God calls us to be a blessing to our neighbors, here and far away.”

Drope also shared examples of how God was working through their latest refugee sponsorship experience, this time with a Muslim family from Syria. Church members have been helping this family with everyday activities, such as settling into their accommodations, grocery shopping, and driving the children to school. On one of these rides, volunteer Harry Menniga heard a little voice pipe up from the back of the van and say: “Mr. Harry, I love school.”

“Moments like this make everything we do worthwhile,” said Drope.

To keep up with opportunities to assist and learn about refugees, visit World Renew’s website at [worldrenew.net/refugees](http://worldrenew.net/refugees).

***Photo: World Renew, all rights reserved. Grace CRC members with a refugee family from Myanmar.***