

RAFT Refugee Sponsorship Training Session

More than 100 Kamloops residents attended the RAFT Refugee Sponsorship Training Session for new volunteers on November 21, 2015, at the Hills of Peace Church, 695 Robson Drive, Kamloops.

Volunteers were shown the **Philosophy of Refugees and Friends Together (RAFT)**, which is to welcome and support refugees; facilitate the healthy adjustment of refugees to Canadian society; help refugees move towards independence; and, recognise that refugees have all the rights of a Canadian citizen, including the right to freedom of religion.

RAFT brings in refugees after adequate funds have been committed to support the family for one year.*

RAFT expectations of volunteers include: respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the sponsored families; supporting the family to achieve their goals for their new life in Canada (with the help of our resource and settlement groups); keeping open the lines of communication with RAFT and other members of the group; and asking for help when needed.

Responsibilities of the sponsored families include: take English classes; enroll children in school; commit to staying in Kamloops for the duration of the one-year sponsorship period; and learn about and obey Canadian laws.

Two guest speakers from **Kamloops Immigrant Services**, Matthew Coutu-Moya and Coby Piazza, described many of the services their organization provides to refugees and immigrants, and emphasized the importance of respecting the privacy of the refugees.

The topic of **Cross-Cultural Sensitivity** was discussed through the idea of the cultural iceberg where only 1/10 of a culture is visible through dress, food, art, language and celebrations; while 9/10 - the deep beliefs and understandings of a cultural group are not visible and take a longer time to appreciate. Using our Muslim community as an example of a lesser-known culture in Kamloops, we learned about the five pillars of Islam, and some aspects of the Muslim practise that differ from the better-known Christian-based habits of many Kamloopsians. Volunteers were advised that many of our refugees may experience the typical cycle of “culture shock” in their first year in Canada. We also learned about Trauma and Language – how seemingly “minor” variations in word choice can invoke significant perceptions in vulnerable people.

Volunteers moved into working groups for the remainder of the training session. The Resources Group finds accommodation; household items; and, human resources (medical, dental, counselling, tutors, translators). The Settlement Groups, who will be in direct contact with the refugee families, met and discussed the responsibilities of helping the refugee families to settle in Kamloops.

* The November 21, 2015 training session was prior to the announcement of Federal Government program for Syrian refugees.