

Refugee Sponsorship

St Clement's has had a long history of aiding refugees.

In the mid 1970's and under leadership which included Jill Hanney, a family of boat people from Laos were settled very successfully in North Vancouver.

Later, we became aware of the plight of Karen people, living in refugee camps on the Burma/Thai border. This was through the advocacy of Mary Davie (a parishioner at St. Clement's) when she was living in Bangkok. We donated bags of warm clothing and the Sunday School offerings sponsored a student at Nohbo Academy for a time.

Mary Davie, on the right, travelling by boat to remote camps along the Thai/Burma Border.



In 2009 PWRDF (the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund) celebrated its 50th anniversary by acting as a sponsoring agency for 50 refugee families. St Clement's, together with the NV Deanery and Highlands United Church were asked to sponsor two visa-ready Karen families. Their camp, deemed unlivable by UNHCR, was in process of being closed and our parish was determined to provide these two young families with a better and safer life in Canada. Later that summer we welcomed Kler & Ehmoo and little Eh Thanay as well as Lu Wah, Pak Gay and Lau Ra to Vancouver. They settled very successfully in Surrey where there is a good-sized Karen community. It was a huge step of faith that paid wonderful dividends to us all. Both families attended some church services sometimes dressed in traditional Karen clothing.



Kler, Ehmoo, Eh Thanay and Juliana (born in Canada). All are now Canadian citizens and proud owners of their own home.

History seemed to repeat itself in 2015 when REST (the Regional Ecumenical Sponsorship Team) very rapidly brought together 10 churches and individuals and soon welcomed Said, Honada and family from Syria and Bukhari Ali Salat, a young blind man from Somalia. By 2017 REST sponsored Malis and his children and worked with Gulnar to co-sponsor Asmaa, Ahmad and their children.

In May 2019 the adopted daughter of Malis's brother Mambo finally arrived. Mambo waited seven year for Neema Grace. Later that year we welcomed Nasrullah whose family had suffered terribly whilst fleeing from Afghanistan.



Bukhari and Dave at
Upper Lynn
Headwaters Park



Welcoming Mambo's adopted
daughter Neema Grace
at Vancouver Airport.



Malis, with his family and brother Mambo, being welcomed at St. Clement's 3 days after arriving in Vancouver.



Neema just before leaving for university, holding a quilt gifted by Delayne and handmade by Leah and her mother.



FatemeH
welcomes
Nasrullah

Through partnership with Canadian Memorial United Church, we are facilitating the sponsorship of Nasrin & family (Nasrin is FatemeH and Nasrullah's only surviving sibling) – as with all things, the pandemic slowed everything down as flights were cancelled and the world went into lockdown. We are worried about this little family who endured so much suffering and whose health is impacted by the ongoing stress and hardship of their lives.

Saber (a young Palestinian Iraqi refugee) was sponsored by REST and Joanne Graham sponsored Saber's elderly parents who would have been left alone in Turkey. Joanne is also currently involved in the sponsorship of Shayla, a young Kurdish woman with two young children.

Over the Thanksgiving weekend of 2019 St. Clement's helped keep the food budget to a minimum with extremely generous donations of food and snacks for a Refugee Retreat at *Rivendell Retreat Centre* on Bowen Island. We had record numbers of children, mainly Eritrean, as well as two Syrian families participating. Apparently, this was a big hit with all the participants who frequently asked the facilitator (Mambo, who works in Burnaby as an immigration settlement worker) when they can go again!



Some of the young
participants at the retreat
held at Rivendell for new
comers.

So, we thank you for your support over the years – as you can see many people have benefitted from your willingness to participate.

If you feel you would like to contribute to this story and bring new hope into the lives of newcomers to Canada there many ways to do this. Financial contributions of any amount are always welcome and, over time, build so that what seemed impossible can be done.

At the time of settlement (typically sponsors are responsible for settlement and support for one year) there are many tasks needing attention including things like: providing clothing, furniture, household effects, school supplies, phones, helping with transport to medical appointments, housing, completing forms for health benefits, Social Insurance Numbers, orientation (how to open a bank account...) etc.

As always, encouragement and friendship beyond the first-year are also a great help. In other words, to be finding a way of saying '*welcome to your new life in Canada*'.

Feel free to talk with Dave & Wilna Parry, Joanne Graham, Chris Trendell or Ian Thomas if you would like more information.