

Notes from the West Island Refugee Network Meeting of May 4, 2016

Present - Rev. Heather Fraser-Fawcett, Rosalie Armstrong, Kerstin Birch, Wendy Buchanan, Nancy Mark, Eric Lasota, Susan Czarnocki, Susan Hawker, John Osborne, Sinclair Harris, Sheila Laursen and guest Lisa Byer-Deweever

1. Tour de Table and Updates

- a) Rev. Heather Fraser-Fawcett works with refugees who have experienced trauma or torture. She reported on a recent positive change in Canada's appeal process for refugees who had been refused to stay in Canada. In the past, only 1% of cases were approved in the final appeal under Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds. In December 2015, the Supreme Court found fault with that low percentage, and requested that there be changes made to that appeal's review of cases. Since December, 3 of Heather's refugee clients who had been refused status have since been approved on H&C grounds.
- b) Heather also noted that another federal change means that ALL refugees can now access medical and dental services free in Canada (not just Syrian refugees).
- c) Eric Lasota reported that the St. Michael's Choir School concert organized by St Veronica's and Resurrection of our Lord parishes along with St. Ignatius of Loyola raised \$5,000 for the sponsorship of their Syrian family. They have also received pledges of \$44,000, and received a donation from the Dorval Oldtimers. The family they are sponsoring through the Montreal Diocese is a grandmother with her adult son and daughter plus the daughter's husband and child. They have been in Lebanon since 2012. Eric noted that they hope to meet the Montreal-based family member soon.
- d) Susan Czarnocki reported on queries between other Canadian Unitarian congregations that are sponsoring refugee families about the need for extra insurance coverage when driving refugees in case of accidents. Lisa offered to connect us with St Lambert United Church which has brought refugees already, and Sheila will ask St Columba by the Lake about this and will check with ARM too. LUUC is hosting a benefit concert on Friday May 6 with folksinger Rob Lutes, singer Kerry-Anne Kutz, and the Lakeshore Community Choir. All welcome to attend!
- e) Susan Hawker reported that Merging Waters has received another cheque for \$1,000 for the SRSC refugee fund. She also has found two children's books that might help the Syrian family learn English, but has so far not found any for French. She is searching for CDs that could be mailed to the family in advance so help them learn words and how to pronounce them.
- f) John Osborne reported that the Rock Slinger performance raised about \$400 for the SRSC refugee fund. He will set up a link to a website through www.summerlea.ca which will contain updates, news and event information about the West Island

Refugee Network. It was suggested that links to other churches and groups involved with refugee work be included, and that fundraising goals and results also be able to be viewed.

- g) Wendy and Sheila will attend a workshop hosted by ARM on May 12 for one representative of each group and/or congregation ARM has been working with. This particular workshop will be in English and will cover topics such as Expectations, Codes of ethics and Advocacy. At that workshop, Sheila and Wendy will ask about whether extra insurance is needed, and whether we should consider sending funds to the matched family overseas to help their expenses out of their country.

2. Camp Cosmos Presentation by Lisa Byer de Wever

Lisa is a student United Church minister, serving part time at Kahnawake and at the Montreal City Mission. The Montreal City Mission, which has a long history of work with refugees, immigrants and seniors, worked with MAN (Montreal Muslim Arabic Association Network) to create child-friendly space for children of refugee families who had lost the space and place of “play” and the interaction that brings in their lives. They currently have 45 children from 4-16 years of age who have been in Montreal less than 6 months re-learning how to play and interact with children of various cultures.

A summer day camp, Camp Cosmos (downtown) was established in 1971. Refugee children are able to attend for only \$40 per week, thanks to donations by churches and individuals to support this program. This summer, Camp Cosmos will be held in DDO as well, for 6 weeks in July & August, with 15 spaces for refugee children. The West Island day camp will be for children 7-12 years old..

A multi-faith team from churches, synagogues, temples and mosques are making this West Island camp happen, which will have two sites; Ste Genevieve United Church and the Mosque near Riverdale High School. Programs will include sports, gardening, swimming, culture, farm visits and other excursions. There will be 1 staff person for every 3 children.

Lisa noted that several West Island churches have been supporting Camp Cosmos for many years, and she hopes that they, and other groups and individuals will offer to support the West Island Camp Cosmos too. The operational budget will be \$60,000 for the West Island site, and so support is much needed and would be greatly appreciated! She also described some of the other services offered by the Montreal City Mission, including a Sunday Drop In program, and special events to begin, and end Ramadan. Lisa promised to forward more information on those.

3. Questions, Comments and Varia

Eric Lasota noted with concern about news reports that some families from Syria who are needing to use food banks! Lisa noted that this underscores the importance of helping the family make a realistic budget, take language training, know how to use the Montreal transit system and seek work during the year of sponsorship support.

4. A Syrian/ Hootenany Concert Offer

Sheila reminded everyone of the offer made by Ely Bonder, to help West Island refugee sponsors raise funds through a Hootenany style event such as he helped put together in January at the Dorshei Emet Synagogue in Hampstead. That concert included Western and Syrian folk traditions, and attracted 400 people, raising \$5,000 towards Dorshei Emet's sponsorship of four Syrian refugee families.

Ely offered the support of the Syrian musician and his own "Musical Chairs" group in a West Island event. We would have to find a suitable venue, and equipment for sound and lighting, plus manage the promotion, ticket sales, etc.

In discussion, Sinclair and Nancy suggested Eglise Ste Ange on 16th Ave in Lachine as a beautiful and large venue for such a concert. As most of our sponsoring groups in the West Island have already raised almost all the funds needed for their sponsorship, It was suggested that a concert in the fall of 2016 could be to raise funds to send Syrian children to Camp Cosmos in the summer of 2017. The organizing team could include WIRN members, Ely Bonder and people from Montreal City Mission. More to follow.....

5. Upcoming Events

May 13 - Cedar Park United hosts "A Taste of Syria" event at 6:30 p.m. with two Montreal members of the family they wish to sponsor present. Food, music and presentations on "All you ever wanted to know about Syria and Islam and were afraid to ask". Freewill donations will raise funds for their refugee support fund.

May 21 - the Montreal City Mission will host "Delights of Syria" public event at St. James Square

Sheila Laursen, note-taker