



YMCA of Greater Toronto touches lives of refugees

Existing programs as well as future initiatives to impact lives of Syrian refugees across the GTA

TORONTO – FEBRUARY 3, 2016 – The YMCA of Greater Toronto’s [Newcomer Settlement Programs](#) (NSP) play a direct role in the lives of thousands of refugees and immigrants each year.

With the first of more than 25,000 Syrian refugees now in Canada, the YMCA of Greater Toronto will respond to the needs of many of those refugees through our Newcomer Information Centres (NIC), Language Assessment and Referral Centres, Newcomer Youth Leadership Development (NYLD), and Employment Centres, as well as through active partnerships with immigration committees, settlement councils, advisory committees and government partners.

“The YMCA of Greater Toronto has been focused on increasing access to our newcomer services for recent and expected Syrian refugees,” says Jane Pyper, Chief Operations and Service Officer, YMCA of Greater Toronto. “We are committed to supporting the arrival and long-term success of Syrian refugees in our communities, and our staff and volunteers are ready to extend a warm and supportive welcome to these new Canadians.”

Since November 4, 2015 Canada has welcomed more than 14,000 Syrian refugees, approximately 8,500 arriving in Ontario. The YMCA of Greater Toronto has played an important role in helping many of these new Canadians start their lives in this country. By the end of January 2016, the YMCA has provided service to more than 400 Syrian refugees since April with approximately 200 since December.

Taniel Tanielian, 23 years old with a bachelor’s degree in Psychology, was one of the first Syrian refugees to arrive in Canada in December 2015. Taniel left Syria in 2013 after his hometown was attacked, making his way to Lebanon before applying to come to Canada. He came to the YMCA for a language assessment and currently uses the Y’s Employment and Newcomer Information Centre services in Etobicoke.

“There are 25,000 Syrians coming to Canada. I bet you’ll hear 50,000 stories. Each one has a different perspective about Syria, about Canada, about being a refugee, but one thing is common: They’ve lost something inside,” says Taniel. “I’ve come to Canada with so many goals and ambitions to achieve...so hopefully I’ll be able to help build healthy communities, like it says on the YMCA sign.”

Upon landing at Pearson Airport, refugees receive information packages that include an outline of the programs and services the YMCA of Greater Toronto provides. Our seven Newcomer Information Centres located throughout the GTA provide immediate support, working with families to create a settlement plan that includes referrals to community settlement and government agencies.

Referrals are also made to YMCA services when appropriate that include:

- Booking required language testing
- Helping someone embark on their job search through YMCA employment centres

- Connecting youth to YMCA programs to help them throughout their resettlement journey
- Connecting a family to financial assistance if a program, such as YMCA child care or YMCA Health and Fitness, is out of reach

Tarik Dabbagh has been working with the YMCA of Greater Toronto for nearly six years as a Certified Information and Referral Specialist. “We have every type of information possible available to newcomers when they arrive,” says Tarik, who has helped hundreds of refugees and newcomers – and finds the job both challenging and ultimately very rewarding.

“In some cases, being able to find an employer who will hire someone with limited English skills is definitely a challenge, but we are overcoming that issue,” says Tarik, who can relate because his wife was in the same situation when she arrived in Canada. “The rewarding thing is changing people’s lives. I love being able to help them with their future in Canada. There are many success stories from both refugees and newcomers to Canada.”

Beyond our current services, the YMCA is also developing new initiatives to support Syrian refugees. These include:

- Creating greater awareness of settlement services and Y offerings to those sponsoring refugees, including employment as well as child care and health and fitness services
- Developing Arabic fact sheets and information sessions
- Recruiting Arabic and Armenian speaking volunteers
- Preparing for the Spring 2016 launch of new programs including eNIC (Electronic Newcomer Information Centre) and YPALS (Youth Pre-Arrival Learning Site) – two exciting opportunities to provide pre-arrival initiatives to young people and adults overseas via the Internet as they prepare to come to Canada, ensuring they have secured support

Please visit the YMCA of Greater Toronto’s [Welcoming Syrian Refugees](#) BLOG for more information about the ways the YMCA is helping Syrian refugees.

-30-

For more information and media interviews please contact:

Talia Noya, Public Relations Specialist

YMCA of Greater Toronto

E: talia.noya@ymcagta.org | T: 416-928-3362 x 22486 | M: 647-962-0360

About the YMCA of Greater Toronto

For well over a century we’ve provided leadership and worked with partners solving complex social problems to create real, measurable outcomes that have strengthened the social health and fabric of communities. As a charity, the YMCA offers a variety of programs responding to the needs of the community, including education and training, employment and immigrant services, family and youth services, health and fitness programs, childcare and camps. Serving the population of the GTA, Durham, Peel, York, Halton Region and Dufferin County, last year the YMCA connected with more than 489,000 people across 370 locations. www.ymcagta.org