




This is a blog post I researched and wrote for Halifax Helps (text follows) from May 2016:

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How you can help and welcome new Nova Scotians

May 12, 2016 By [Charmaine Dymond](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



Refugees to Nova Scotia
from ISANS

Last week [ISANS](#) launched its Welcome Refugee video series. These super short videos – only about two minutes each – are definitely worth a watch.


Go on: click that ‘play’ button on the first one up above. I’ll wait.

Are you feeling it? I know, right? You might want to grab a tissue to [watch the rest](#).

Some quotes from the videos:


“No one wanted to be a refugee. It was not my choice... I loved my

Tweets by @HfxHelps

**Halifax Helps**
@HfxHelps


A great turn out means a great community! This story is so heartwarming. #HalifaxHelps

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**Halifax Helps**
February 21

Bedford Relay for Life is looking for multiple volunteers! Can you Help?

Check out the link for details! #HalifaxHelps

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Some quotes from the videos:

“No one wanted to be a refugee. It was not my choice... I loved my family, my country.”

“In the refugee camp there was no security. There was always the fear... I didn’t have a hope. I was always waiting to die.”

“We were so afraid... we don’t know the culture. Maybe something we do normal back home, maybe that’s not normal here.”

“It’s a privilege to be in Canada. We owe it to Canadians for welcoming us.”

“Advice I could give to Canadians to make any newcomer or refugee welcome is to really genuinely just want to meet them as a person, as a human... Share a cup of coffee or go for a walk.”

There is no shortage of ways to get involved in helping refugees and newcomers, and some very worthwhile ones are listed at the end of this post. But that last quote up above – “genuinely just want to meet them as a person” – really grabs me. People. Families. Neighbours. Friends.

New friends.

It was this kind of thinking that prompted local mom Nicole Mosher El-Bitar to organize a recent playdate with Syrian and Canadian families at the George Dixon Centre in Halifax. Nicole says she wanted to do something to help refugees, and that as a stay-at-home mom to two kids, this was a natural way for her to do that.

“Everyone wants new friends. And the more connected [refugee families] feel to the community and the more access they have to people who can help... things like getting to the grocery store, practicing English, helps them at this point I can imagine,” says Nicole.

Those connections are already making a difference. Nicole met a mom at the playdate who asked for help finding a free preschool program for her daughter, and Nicole was happy to offer assistance.

About 15 Syrian moms and 10 local moms attended the first event – and a lot of kids, laughs Nicole. Moms brought toys and the kids had a blast zooming around the gym on ride-ons. Add in the coffee and Nicole says it soon felt like a “regular playgroup”, even with the language barrier. (Interpreters were on hand to help with this.)

Nicole plans to organize more of these get-togethers across the city. “My biggest hope is that we’d make these repeatable events and eventually we’d form real friendships.”

If you’d like to get involved, either by helping organize playdates or simply coming along to join in the fun, email Nicole at nmosher@hotmail.com.

But what if playgroups just aren’t your thing? No worries. **Here are some other ways you can help and welcome newcomers:**

- Come join the fun and give newcomers a warm welcome at the [SupperNova Multicultural](#)

[Potluck](#) on Saturday, May 14.

- English Conversation Group Facilitator volunteers are needed at the [Bedford Public Library](#) and at [Keshen Goodman Public Library](#). Arabic-speaking [Computer Skills Tutor volunteers](#) are needed at the Keshen Goodman Public Library.
- A number of informal groups have come together recently to organize furniture drives for government-assisted refugees. [Fatima Sabra](#) and Lindsay Wood are well on their way to helping 16 newcomer families, but need volunteers to help with sorting donations at Mount Saint Vincent University, as well as transportation. Donations are still being accepted, specifically couches, tables and chairs, dressers, bunk beds, high chairs, large pots and pans, vacuums, and curtains and curtain rods. If you can help, contact Lindsay at lindsay027@hotmail.com.
- ISANS is looking for volunteers to act as [Professional Mentors and Practice Interviewers](#).
- Many [private sponsorship](#) groups have popped up over the last year, and many are still looking for volunteers. If you'd like to get involved, check out this handy list of [Nova Scotian private sponsorship groups](#).
- [The Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Halifax](#) is looking for volunteers for the breakfast program at Shannon Park Elementary School. Candace Spencer, Breakfast Lead, says she believes there are about 13 Syrian children at the school, most of whom attend the breakfast program. She's looking for at least one more volunteer for each day of the week to meet the needs of the school. Volunteers, ages 14 and up, are needed from 7:30am to 9am to help with food prep, serving kids and cleaning up. For more information, please email Candace at breakfast.lead@bgcgh.ca.
- The new [Community Refugee Support Fund](#) is accepting applications from community and sponsoring groups for grants up to \$1000. Grants can be used for welcoming initiatives, social and cultural events, and honorariums for exceptional volunteers.
- And here's something you can do this very minute: Take the [Refugees Welcome Here!](#) pledge and add your voice to the thousands of Canadians who've already signed it. Bonus points: take a pic of yourself with the pledge and share on social media! #refugeeswelcomepledge



I will make a gesture of welcome to refugees in my community.