

[save.ca](#)
[homefinder.ca](#)
[wheels.ca](#)


NOTICE TO READERS:

[Register now to support your local journalism!](#)

[\(/community-static/8891523-register/\)](#)

Durham helping with relief efforts amid Syrian refugee crisis

Group of local Presbyterian churches raise more than \$145,000 to sponsor families

Community Oct 08, 2015 by [Kristen Calis \(/durhamregion-author/kristen-calis/2750C4B0-0073-4FC7-ACC5-68A7E6E23EDB/\)](#) [✉ \(mailto:KCalis@durhamregion.com\)](mailto:KCalis@durhamregion.com) Pickering News Advertiser
DURHAM -- The civil war in Syria is weighing on the minds of Canadians, and Durham residents, organizations, churches and municipalities are working on ways to help people flee the war-torn country.

"We really felt we need to do something," said Reverend Matthew Sams, minister at St. James and St. Luke's Presbyterian churches in Oshawa.

The churches are part of the presbytery of Pickering, a group of 25 churches in Durham and Scarborough, which is sponsoring five Syrian refugee families -- a total of 19 people ranging from the ages of eight to 60s.

"We've raised about \$145,000," Rev. Sams said.

It sort of confirmed to me what I thought to be true: that Durham is filled with good, kind, caring people and they just need an opportunity to show how. Audrey Andrews, Region of Durham

The money -- raised through donations both large and small, and events such as concerts and hot dog lunches -- will provide basic income to organize necessities such as food, clothing and a place to live before the refugees arrive.

The church is also collecting household goods to help the families save on costs.

"Everything from a toaster to furniture to a mattress," he said of the items that are being collected.

Liz Stark, a member of the Mission and Outreach Committee of Pickering Presbytery, explained the church was approached by a pastor and founder of the Arabic-speaking Life in Christ ministry in 2014 asking for help with the crisis.

"It didn't start off to be five families -- it started off being one family," she explained.

But after surpassing the original goal of \$27,000 needed for one family, it agreed to sponsor five.

"Out of the 25 churches, 14 came alongside to raise money to help with that," she said.

Even those who haven't raised money have been instrumental by collecting items to help.

Ms. Stark took part in bringing refugees to Canada from Cambodia and Vietnam in the late 1970s.

"They're just so thankful they have a second chance. What can compare to that?" she said.

And she's been a big part of making the refugee sponsorships a reality by filling out "incredibly complicated" application forms.

"That whole process of paperwork was extremely complex," she said.

Also, the visa offices in those countries are swamped and it takes time to get things moving.

Ms. Stark can't say when the families will be arriving, but the ball is rolling.

"The forms have been sent in for three of the five families," said Ms. Stark.

Once the forms have been cleared, the refugees will go through criminal, security and health checks and lengthy interviews.

When the families come over, the support from Pickering Presbytery won't stop.

"It's moral support, it's integrating them into the culture and fabric of life in Canada," Ms. Stark said.

In early September about 50 people gathered outside of Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Chris Alexander's election campaign office in Ajax to protest that Canada isn't doing enough to help the refugees.

On Sept. 19, Mr. Alexander announced the ministry is committing new resources and making targeted policy changes to speed up processing of its existing commitment to resettle Syrian and Iraqi refugees, without compromising screening. Canada now plans to meet Canada's current commitment of resettling 10,000 Syrians by September 2016 -- 15 months earlier than planned. Canada also expects to meet its existing commitment to resettle 23,000 Iraqis by the end of this year.

Plans include sending more experienced visa officers to embassies in the region; more than doubling the number of staff in Canada processing sponsorship applications; and temporarily reducing the documentation required for the sponsorship process.

Mr. Alexander could not be reached for comment.

The Town of Ajax has gotten on board to help the crisis in response to a challenge issued by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to help Syrian refugees. Ajax council unanimously passed a motion at a recent meeting to donate \$5,000 to Lifeline Syria.

The organization is recruiting, training and assisting sponsor groups to welcome and support 1,000 Syrian refugees coming to Canada as permanent immigrants to resettle in the GTA over the next two years.

The Town has also released a bulletin to raise awareness of the crisis and ensure residents, businesses, community groups and faith organizations have the information and resources they need to get involved to sponsor or support refugees.

"The Syrian refugee crisis has moved people around the world to take action," said Ajax Mayor Steve Parish. "The Town of Ajax has a long-standing history of welcoming and supporting refugees in times of need. We are calling on the compassionate residents of Ajax to do what they can to help Syrians find hope and stability."

The Town hosted a sponsorship information session in March and encouraged other municipalities within Durham to meet AMO's call.

The Region of Durham held a meeting of its own on Sept. 30 and it too has committed \$25,000 to the crisis.

Audrey Andrews, manager of the Region's diversity and immigration program, said while selection and processing of potential refugees is within federal jurisdiction, the Region is facilitating access to information for Durham residents who wish to know more about the private sponsorship of refugees.

She said 62 people registered for the event that included presentations by Lifeline Syria and Catholic Crosscultural Services.

"It's a lot to think about. It's a big commitment," she said.

Durham is not traditionally a landing spot for new immigrants.

"Durham Region is traditionally a place of second landing for immigrants," said Ms. Andrews.

According to a Durham Workforce Authority study on immigration and commuting patterns, numbers from Statistics Canada show that between 2006 and 2011, 8,950 individuals from outside Canada settled in Durham.

In Durham, Ajax and Pickering have the largest proportion of residents born outside of Canada, both hovering around a third. The highest proportions of recent newcomers are found in Ajax (2.8 per cent), Pickering (1.8 per cent) and Whitby (1.7 per cent).

While immigration numbers are not as high in Durham as in Toronto and Mississauga, Durham has services in place for new families, such as language classes and help finding jobs.

The Region is working to share information on sponsorship and the supports available in Durham to those interested in sponsoring refugees.

"There are lots of services funded by a variety of different funders and we're gathering that info in a simple format to assist with decision making," said Ms. Andrews.

Anyone interested in getting on a mailing list can send an e-mail to ldipc@durham.ca (<mailto:ldipc@durham.ca>).

Ms. Andrews is pleased to see the good work being done in Durham, and a willingness of residents to give time, energy and money to help people fleeing the crisis.

"It sort of confirmed to me what I thought to be true: that Durham is filled with good, kind, caring people and they just need an opportunity to show how," she said.

She believe refugees can contribute greatly to society.

"Generally speaking I think it's fair to say refugees have really good long-term outcomes as Canadian citizens," she said.

Uxbridge gave \$250 to the Red Cross after the AMO appeal and Oshawa donated \$100 to the AMO fund. Other municipalities, such as Pickering, expect to address the issue at future council meetings.

HOW THIS IMPACTS YOU

- More than 75 per cent of Syrian refugees are women and children
- Fewer than one per cent of Syria's refugees will ever get a chance to be resettled overseas
- Nearly four years after the civil war began, more than 250,000 people have died, more than half of whom are believed to be civilians
- Refugee sponsorship and international resettlement offer a new life to the most vulnerable

- Information from Lifeline Syria

by [Kristen Calis](#) ([/durhamregion-author/Kristen-Calis/2750c4b0-0073-4fc7-acc5-68a7e6e23edb/](#))

Kristen Calis is a reporter with Metroland Media Group's Durham Region Division. She can be reached at KCalis@durhamregion.com (<mailto:KCalis@durhamregion.com>). Follow DurhamRegion.com on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/newsdurham) (<https://twitter.com/newsdurham>) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/newsdurham) (<https://www.facebook.com/newsdurham>)

Email: KCalis@durhamregion.com (<mailto:KCalis@durhamregion.com>) [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/newsdurham/) (<https://www.facebook.com/newsdurham/>) [Twitter](https://twitter.com/newsdurham/) (<https://twitter.com/newsdurham/>)

Tags: [News](#) ([/durhamregion-news/](#)), [Durham](#) ([/durhamregion-news/durham/](#)), [Community](#) ([/durhamregion-community/](#)), [News](#) ([/durhamregion-news/](#))

HEADLINES NEWSLETTER

TOP STORIES, delivered to your inbox.

[Sign Up](#) ([/community-static/4220296-durham-region-newsletter-sign-up/](#))

[/durhamregion-news/federal-election/](#) → [See Full Coverage](#) ([/durhamregion-news/federal-election/](#))



Federal Election 02:00 PM

[Sign, sign, not everywhere a sign: Election candidates reminded of bylaw](#)

The regional municipality of Durham is reminding federal election candidates to be mindful when placing their...

[/news-story/9595043-sign-sign-not-everywhere-a-sign-election-candidates-reminded-of-bylaw/](#)

Federal Election 09:01 PM

[Trudeau avoids Bill 21 as he stumps in Quebec](#)

[/news-story/9595079-trudeau-avoids-bill-21-as-he-stumps-in-quebec/](#)

Federal Election 08:34 PM

[Where the party leaders are Saturday](#)

[/news-story/9596252-where-the-party-leaders-are-saturday/](#)

Federal Election 07:11 PM

[Online posts, past views haunt candidates](#)

[/news-story/9594825-online-posts-past-views-haunt-candidates/](#)

→ [See Full Coverage](#) ([/durhamregion-news/federal-election/](#))

Do you know how to improve content of this page?

[Send us Feedback \(/pages/feedback/\)](/pages/feedback/)

Helpful Links

- [Submit Content \(/user/submit-story/\)](/user/submit-story/)
- [Contact Us \(/community-static/3839848-durhamregion-com-contact-us/\)](/community-static/3839848-durhamregion-com-contact-us/)
- [Give us feedback \(/pages/feedback/\)](/pages/feedback/)
- [Join our team \(https://metroland.com/join/\)](https://metroland.com/join/)

Become A Customer

- [Subscribe to The Star \(https://www.thestar.com/subscribe\)](https://www.thestar.com/subscribe)
- [Signup for email newsletters \(/community-static/4220296-durham-region-newsletter-sign-up/\)](/community-static/4220296-durham-region-newsletter-sign-up/)
- [FAQs \(/community-static/3839900-frequently-asked-questions/\)](/community-static/3839900-frequently-asked-questions/)

Advertise With Us

- [Place an Ad \(https://metroland.com/digital/community-news/\)](https://metroland.com/digital/community-news/)
- [Post an Obituary \(http://yourclassifieds.adperfect.com/default.html?session=ComboAd:AC1E02941b8b21D7A6SnCD61E785\)](http://yourclassifieds.adperfect.com/default.html?session=ComboAd:AC1E02941b8b21D7A6SnCD61E785)
- [Post a Classified \(http://yourclassifieds.adperfect.com/default.html?pubid=COA801E61b3961B34ArjIIB18001&chanid=COA801E61919a192BCUMx23FAF92\)](http://yourclassifieds.adperfect.com/default.html?pubid=COA801E61b3961B34ArjIIB18001&chanid=COA801E61919a192BCUMx23FAF92)
- [Flyer Distribution and Printing \(https://metroland.com/flyers-and-direct-mail/\)](https://metroland.com/flyers-and-direct-mail/)

About Us

- [About Durhamregion.com \(/community-static/3839840-durhamregion-com-about-us/\)](/community-static/3839840-durhamregion-com-about-us/)
- [Commenting guidelines \(/community-static/4805458-metroland-media-group-commenting-guidelines/\)](/community-static/4805458-metroland-media-group-commenting-guidelines/)
- [Torstar's Story \(https://www.thestar.com/about/aboutus.html\)](https://www.thestar.com/about/aboutus.html)
- [Investor Relations \(https://www.torstar.com/html/investor-relations/index.cfm\)](https://www.torstar.com/html/investor-relations/index.cfm)

© Copyright 2019 Metroland Media Group Ltd. All Rights Reserved

[Metroland News \(http://www.metroland.com/newspapers?id=about\)](http://www.metroland.com/newspapers?id=about) | [Advertising Terms \(http://www.metroland.com/advertising-terms-and-conditions\)](http://www.metroland.com/advertising-terms-and-conditions) | [Terms of use \(http://www.metroland.com/terms-of-use\)](http://www.metroland.com/terms-of-use) | [Privacy Policy \(http://notices.torstar.com/privacy-policy/index.html\)](http://notices.torstar.com/privacy-policy/index.html) | [Accessibility Policy \(/community-story/8859238-accessibility/\)](/community-story/8859238-accessibility/)

Don't have a Torstar account? Register to continue reading.

[SIGN IN](/user/login)

[REGISTER NOW](#)

[\(/user/login\)](/user/login)

