

## The best way to support refugees

**S**ince 1912, the House has supported waves of immigrants in building stable lives in Canada. Today, our Immigrant and Refugee Services continue to work closely with newcomers from around the world, helping them integrate into Canadian society and contribute to the community.

At West NH, we have followed the world's growing refugee crisis, and in particular the tragedy unfolding in Syria. Currently the number of UN registered refugees stands at 5.1 million worldwide, the highest since the end of WWII. Of those, approximately 4 million are Syrian. Yet as of September 2015, only 2,406 Syrian refugees have been resettled in Canada.

That is why we held a Syrian Refugee Assistance Forum on October 29 where community members, staff from other organizations, and local representatives gathered to ask questions, share information, and begin to answer the question – how can we help? The forum featured a presentation by Huda Bukhari, Executive Director of the Arab Community Centre and steering committee member for Lifeline Syria,

who provided information on how a group of ordinary citizens can come together to sponsor a Syrian family.

Also present were local Members of Parliament Arif Virani and Adam Vaughan who shared the new government's commitment to bring 25,000 government assisted refugees to Canada (in addition to any who may be privately sponsored). Audience members, staff and panelists alike emphasized the importance of working to improve the situation of all refugees while also recognizing the urgency of the Syrian crisis in particular.

Going forward we will continue to work with and advocate on behalf of all newcomers, but we will also ensure that some of our energy is devoted specifically to supporting Syrian refugees as they begin to arrive in Toronto. One of our settlement staff members is an Arabic-speaking Syrian, and will be central to our work with the Syrian community over coming months.

Finally, West NH will provide some support to local groups of citizens interested in privately sponsoring a Syrian family. If you are interested in joining a West NH sponsorship group or donating, please email Paulina Wyrzykowski at [paulinawy@westnh.org](mailto:paulinawy@westnh.org).

If you are interested in learning more about the crisis and helping out in another way, please visit [westnh.org/refugee-assistance-resources](http://westnh.org/refugee-assistance-resources) for a list of useful links that were mentioned at the forum.



**Syrian Refugee Forum:**  
Community members came together  
to learn more about ways to support  
Syrian refugees.

# The little program that could: FEPS grows across the province

**T**he Financial Empowerment and Problem Solving (FEPS) program is going through a big growth spurt! With support from the Government of Ontario, FEPS is growing in both size and ability.

In line with their Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, the provincial government sees FEPS as an effective poverty intervention. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is funding our original program, our sister programs in Jane/Finch and Scarborough as well as funding Prosper Canada to replicate FEPS in two additional sites outside of the GTA!

FEPS provides financial education, advocacy, and problem-solving services to people with low incomes. The program often works with people who are experiencing some kind of financial crisis, but also works to empower individuals to take action on their own financial matters. The program also identifies systemic barriers that do not work in the interest of low-income people and works with others for system and policy change.

Last year, FEPS assisted 6,300 people. We are delighted that through this additional funding, an expanded partnership and new sites, the program will be able to serve even more.

Thanks to those who understood and supported FEPS from the beginning and to those who nurtured it along the course of its development. The St. Christopher House Community Endowment and several supportive donors enabled us to get this program off the ground. Several key business and financial sector leaders grasped the need for this program and generously provided donations in the first few

years. We thank them for their vision and generosity.

Then with the support of United Way and TD Bank, we partnered with Toronto Neighbourhood Centres to expand FEPS to two sister neighbourhood centres: Agincourt Community Services Association and Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre. Now, with the support of the Ontario government, more people across the province will be financially empowered.

West Neighbourhood House also continues to explore new frontiers in the finances of people living on a low income by developing an understanding

of and FEPS services for low-income workers who are self-employed.

## TWO THINGS YOU CAN DO

### **Volunteer with FEPS**

Income tax season will be upon us soon so the FEPS Free Income Tax Clinic needs volunteers! If you would like to be a volunteer, please email Ingrid at [ingridxi@westnh.org](mailto:ingridxi@westnh.org).

### **Buy a holiday gift with impact!**

Make a donation on someone's behalf and we will send them a handmade card letting them know what a meaningful gift-giver you are! Visit [westnh.org/donate](http://westnh.org/donate) to learn more.



**FEPS staff work with participants to resolve complex money matters.**





In the GED Program, participants receive support from each other as well as from volunteers and staff. L-R: Linda (staff), Mario, Mauricio (peer tutor), Samantha and Auvil

## The GED program is all about opportunity

Getting your citizenship, finding work, inspiring your children – there are lots of reasons to write the General Educational Development (GED) exam but all of them share a common theme: *opportunity*.

The GED program at West Neighbourhood House works with adults who are preparing to write the GED exam and earn their Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate.

Danielle (not pictured), who has been in the program for just about a month, is recovering from a severe car accident that left her with both physical and brain injuries. She is committed to getting her GED so she can move on with the next chapter of her life. When

she passes the GED exam she plans to enrol at Humber College and become a property manager. Although she has trouble focusing as a result of her accident, she is committed to working through her challenges. “When I get discouraged I think of the future and that motivates me. I can also talk to people [at the GED program] when things get hard”.

Other GED participants like Auvil are here to upgrade their skills so they

can work in Canada. The program didn’t operate the way Auvil thought it would: “When I first got here, I thought I would have to sit there by myself and do things on the computer, but it’s not like that.”

The GED program provides structured time to study on your own but also includes group work. Auvil is impressed by the support of the volunteers in the program. “At first I thought they were all professional teachers!” he says. Last year, the program had six volunteer tutors who were giving a total of 23 hours of their time

a week; that allows for participants to receive a lot of one-on-one support.

Mauricio, who started as a participant and is now a volunteer, says the most important thing in the program is having the motivation to show up every day. Getting into a routine can be the hardest part – more difficult than learning new things. “When people think about the effort that all the volunteers and teachers put in, you put in your best effort to be here”.

Preparing for the GED exam is no easy task, but last year 32 program participants took the exam because they were determined to create new opportunities in their lives. The program works because of the commitment of staff, volunteers, and participants to work together. Samantha, a GED program participant summed it up like this: “If you don’t have a support system, this place can give you that.”



Gathering clothing for our drop-in: 11 Division Officers slept rough and gathered 3,000 lbs of clothing through their Warm4Winter campaign – Police Chief Mark Saunders arrived to the sleep out in his robe and slippers to support the team.

## Running with a purpose – \$16,903 worth

**W**e want to thank all of the fabulous runners, walkers, donors and volunteers who helped make our day at the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon so much fun (photos above). We raised \$16,903 for West Neighbourhood House! Interested in running or walking for us next year and raising funds for West NH? It's never too early to sign up! Email [kaleighwi@westnh.org](mailto:kaleighwi@westnh.org).

**Please consider becoming a West NH donor!**

- [www.westnh.org/donate](http://www.westnh.org/donate)
- [info@westnh.org](mailto:info@westnh.org) or call
- 416-532-4828

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