

Baby Sara first new Syrian-Canadian to be born in Dufferin

Marni Walsh

Little Sara Alhajali, weighing in at seven pounds, is the first baby to be born in Dufferin County from the Syrian immigration sponsorship initiative.

Brian and Philomena Logel, who spearheaded the Headwaters Refugee Sponsorship Committee that worked for months to bring the family out of Jordan, said Sara was named by parents Emad and Razan after their Canadian friend in Jordan who helped us with the translation of their documents and originally suggested they try to immigrate to Canada.

Sara arrived at 10:30 p.m. March 10, at Headwaters Health Care Centre in Orangeville. As a midwife in Syria, Razan had no other thought than to have the baby at home with midwife support. But despite her great respect and faith in her midwife team in Orangeville, complications meant she would deliver Sara in the hospital.

Sara is the first of Emad and Razan's children to be born on Canadian soil, and she will begin her life in a very different world than her brother and sister, eight-year-old Hamoudi and nine-year-old Fatema. They were refugees in Jordan for nearly four years, waiting more than half their lives for the Syrian civil war to end. The family arrived in Orangeville Dec. 14 as part of the refugee sponsorship program helping families escape the horrors of the war. More than 25,000 Syrians are currently finding new homes in Canada.

"I know they are thrilled with the arrival of Sara," said Mr. Logel. "Each family member lights up when the baby awakes and there is great competition with visitors as to who gets the privilege of holding her. They were a close-knit family before, but Sara seems to have pulled them together in an even tighter bond."

The family is working very hard to master English and encourage the children to "say it in English" around the home.

"They write new vocabulary down and practise words with the entire family," he said. "They only use Google Translate or their English/Arabic dictionary when completely stuck or when something important or technical has to be communicated."

He added that the children are anxious to begin English as a Second Language (ESL) night school classes offered by Upper Grand, but are worried there will not be enough students for the board to offer the classes in April. They attend Language Instruction for Newcomers in Bolton daily and are impatient to learn at a more rapid pace.

The sponsorship group will soon add private lessons for them in their home.