

Region is ready to welcome Syrian refugees

By Bill Rea

Syrian refugees have come Peel, and Regional authorities are ready for them.

Regional councillors were updated on the situation last Thursday by Gayle Bursey, acting commissioner of human services.

She said 161 refugees were expected to arrive at Pearson International Airport that evening, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau expected to be among those on hand to greet them, and some of them would be staying in Peel. By the end of December, it's expected there will be 83 refugees in the region, she said.

Plans to deal with this influx were discussed at a recent meeting of representatives of Peel-based agencies, hosted by the United Way. Bursey added there were also representatives of the three local municipalities at the session. About 100 community partners were represented, she said.

"There's a great deal of interest in the issue," she remarked.

The needs of these new residents have been broken down to two categories; immediate and long-term.

The immediate needs include making sure these people have access to necessary services, and supports, as well as assistance in navigating the system to obtain food, shelter, etc.

The longer-term needs will more involve understanding the Syrian culture and the necessity to be inclusive.

Bursey observed that most Canadians are descended from immigrants, so they should be respectful and accepting.

As well, Bursey also said there are supports for sponsoring families, since they are facing a long-term task.

The federal government is taking on a lot of the responsibility. Bursey said new arrivals are receiving Social Insurance Numbers at the airport. With the exception of paramedics, there is no on-the-ground role for Regional representatives at the airport. The roles for local officials will come later, and there will be a need for flexibility.

"I'm confident that we're ready," she told councillors.

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie was impressed with the results of the recent meeting organized by United Way.

"It was quite overwhelming, the response," she remarked, adding there were about 200 people in the room, working on trying to help these people get settled and integrated.

She added there are a number of websites people can consult if they want to help, including www.findmyspark.ca and welcomeontario.ca

Crombie added more information is on the City's website at www.mississauga.ca

"Lots is being done," she said.

Brampton Councillor Martin Medeiros had thought there would be more refugees coming to Peel. Bursey said there will be in the longer term.

"The numbers are really evolving," she remarked.

She added Peel usually gets about 56 immigrants per day.