The Steering Committee to Welcome Syrian People to Lethbridge is a broad-based community initiative led by Lethbridge Family Services to prepare for the successful settlement of refugee families and individuals from Syria. The Steering Committee includes a range of local public sectors including immigration services, education, health, employment, language, municipal services, family and human services, community agencies, private refugee sponsors, emergency services, and law enforcement.

The Steering Committee partners include: Lethbridge Family Services, Alberta Works, Alberta Child and Family Services, Human Services Alberta, Alberta Health Services – South Zone, Alberta Disability Services, the City of Lethbridge, Ecumenical Campus Ministry, Holy Spirit Catholic Schools, Islamic Centre, Lethbridge College, Lethbridge Fire & EMS, Lethbridge Housing Authority, Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Lethbridge Police Service, Lethbridge School District 51, Social Housing In Action, Southern Alberta Language Assessment Services (SALAS), and the University of Lethbridge.

Following are highlights of key activities, successes and challenges to date for various member agencies.
LETHBRIDGE FAMILY SERVICES (LFS)

Key activities to date

- Welcome and reception of families upon arrival at airport
- Settling of families at temporary accommodation and development of in-depth needs assessment on every member of the family
- Immediate initiation of Government Assisted Refugee (GAR)-specific orientations; rolling over to Integrated Services programming orientations for a period of approximately 6 to 8 weeks
- Facilitation of language assessments for adults and children
- Provide space for Alberta Health Services primary care clinics
- Referral to Youth Settlement (school) Services and the Community Connections Volunteer Program
- Provide leadership and coordination between the many local groups interested in the Syrian refugee initiative in Lethbridge. i.e. volunteers, private sponsor groups, service providers
- Providing coordination efforts for children with multiple activities at multiple locations

Successes

- All of the first six families are in permanent accommodation
- All of the adults from the first groups have had their language levels assessed
- Incredible collegiality between LFS and Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR) groups and other groups
- Steering committee attendance and communication is something to celebrate

Challenges

- Finding affordable housing
- Ensuring refugees take full advantage of sufficient language training

Media Contact

Sarah Amies, Director, Immigrant Services department
Lethbridge Family Services
403-320-1589
samies@lfsfamily.ca
Alberta Health Services (AHS) South Zone is coordinating the provision of health services for Syrian refugees in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat.

Syrian refugees, similar to Canadians, may have health concerns related to blood pressure, diabetes, healthy child growth, pregnancy and others. In addition, they may have unique concerns resulting from having experienced war in their country and the difficult living conditions within the refugee camps.

All Syrian refugees go through a medical exam, including screening for communicable diseases (such as tuberculosis) as part of the immigration process before arrival in Canada. In addition, all refugees will be screened for signs of illness when they arrive in Canada. The risk of infectious diseases among this refugee population is considered low.

Because refugees are permanent residents immediately upon arrival in Canada, refugees can access all basic health services offered in our communities, without delay or limitation. In addition, the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) provides a list of all health care providers that refugees can access upon arrival in Alberta, at which non-basic services (such as dental) are covered by the IFHP.

In Lethbridge, some of AHS’s key activities include:

- AHS is working closely with the City of Lethbridge, Lethbridge Family Services and other stakeholders to coordinate efforts and ensure the supports are in place to meet the needs of the refugees and the community at large.
- AHS is providing staff and support for multidisciplinary health clinics offered at Lethbridge Family Services. These clinics provide refugee families with information, assessment and referral on a variety of health issues: child and family health, immunizations, addiction and mental health, oral health, chronic disease management, public health, prevention and health promotion.
- AHS is working with the Chinook Primary Care Network (CPCN) to identify local physician clinics who will accept new patients. AHS is working with the CPCN to match refugee families to primary care physicians and provide learning sessions with clinical coordinators and CPCN staff.
- AHS is coordinating access to screening for oral health, immunization, communicable diseases and addiction and mental health issues.
- AHS has information for Syrian refugees (many components of which have been translated into Arabic) available online, at www.ahs.ca/refugees.
- A number of resources for community partners and health care providers are also available on this site, and through AHS. This includes access to telephone interpretation services for health care providers.

Media Contact
James Frey, Communications Director, South Zone
Alberta Health Services
403-388-6313
james.frey@ahs.ca
Key activities to date

- Supporting the efforts of Lethbridge Family Services through the Steering Committee. This occurs through stakeholder collaboration and assisting in the planning, integration and coordination of systems and supports in the community
- Planning and fostering cultural awareness and education for corporate and community partner agencies and the general public
- Providing communications support to the Steering Committee

Successes

- Positive impact of agencies and services coming together to make a difference in the community in support of Lethbridge Family Services in their resettlement efforts. This is a significant commitment of each of the agencies to create an informed system of services

Challenges

- Access to affordable housing now and in the future, especially for larger families
- Opportunities for integration and participation in community life

Media Contact

Diane Randell, Manager of Community & Social Development
City of Lethbridge
403-320-3917
diane.randell@lethbridge.ca
FROM SYRIA TO LETHBRIDGE (PRIVATE REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP GROUP)

Key activities to date

- Education/Awareness re: scope of Syrian refugee crisis and the private sponsorship interest/initiatives in the city
- Facilitating events to share information and link members of the community, settlement agency, private sponsorship groups, and other interested parties
- Acting as a liaison between private sponsorship groups and Mennonite Central Committee (Sponsorship Agreement Holder for private sponsors)
- Contributing to material donations to be accessed by Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) and Government Assisted Refugees (GARs)
- Providing accurate information about arrivals of PSRs and ongoing integration in community

Successes

- Welcoming nine people from Syria to Lethbridge on January 8, 2016 (9 adults, five children between the ages of 4-10)
- Helping to connect various members of private sponsorship groups, settlement representatives, City officials, and other members of our community interested in helping respond to the Syrian refugee crisis
- Providing positive messaging and information sharing

Challenges

- Understanding the most effective and unobtrusive ways to help LFS and the GARs
- Volunteer coordination

Media Contacts

Pastor Ryan Dueck, Lethbridge Mennonite Church, rep for "From Syria to Lethbridge" group
403-795-3700
ryandueck75@gmail.com

Canon Erin Phillips, Anglican Church of Ascension/Ecumenical Campus Ministry
403-382-0294
efp2003@telus.net
Key activities to date

- Holy Spirit Catholic Schools are well positioned to be a welcoming, safe learning environment for our newcomers. Participation in the Steering Committee to Welcome Syrian Refugees to Lethbridge has been greatly beneficial.
- Preparation has included increasing support by adding an English as a Second Language (ESL) certificated teacher. This teacher will work with Lethbridge Immigrant Services and private sponsors supporting families in a warm transition into the school. Our ESL specialist also supports students and staff in development of English Language acquisition that is individualized to meet the varied needs of learners.
- Increasing our counsellors’ awareness of the unique needs of Syrian refugees as they enter the school system.
- Continually providing relevant and timely updates to school administration to support them in their roles in warmly and respectfully welcoming families into their school communities.

Successes

- Support of both Board of Trustees and Senior Administration to mobilize resources in response to the anticipated needs of our Syrian refugees.

Challenges/Opportunities

- Exploring alternate modes of communication with refugee families while they acquire sufficient English Language skills to engage in their children’s educational journey.
- Maintaining existing partnerships to ensure that, as a community, we are responding to the physical, emotional, spiritual, developmental, and environmental needs of these students and their families.

Media contact

Chris Smeaton, Superintendent of Schools
403-327-9555
Cell: 403-330-7752
smeatonc@holyspirit.ab.ca
Key activities to date

- SALAS to date has assessed the English skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) of 20 adults using a standardized English language test (this test is used all across Canada). We have referred most of these assessed clients to Flexibility Learning Systems and a smaller number to Lethbridge College. Most of the clients we have assessed, like elsewhere in the province of Alberta, are scoring at a basic level of English. The plan is for these clients to attend full-time language classes as soon as possible.

Successes

- We have been successful in accommodating their schedules in a very busy orientation time and are working closely with Lethbridge Family Services and the language schools.

Challenges

- Include having appropriate child care during the assessments as the clients and assessors need to concentrate on demonstrating the highest level of English possible to make the results of the test accurate. In most cases, child care arrangements have been working well.

Media contacts

Dr. Lucelle Prindle, President, SALAS Ltd
480-981-0171
f.prindle@shaw.ca

Linda Flaman, Client Coordinator, SALAS Ltd
403-328-4811
salasltd@telus.net
LETHBRIDGE POLICE SERVICE

Key activities to date

- Preparing additional cultural training for police members.
- Providing education to newly arrived refugees, which gives an overview of Canadian laws, Provincial laws, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- Exploring opportunities to interact with refugee families to foster positive relationships with police.

Successes

- Police have conducted one education session so far, and the feedback from participants has been positive.

Media Contacts

Staff Sgt. Dwayne Smith  
403-331-7578  
Dwayne.smith@lethbridgepolice.ca

Cst. Les Vonkeman  
403-330-5133  
les.vonkeman@lethbridgepolice.ca

LETHBRIDGE FIRE & EMS

Key activities to date

- Staff have received an initial briefing on the number of Syrian refugees we have received and are expecting as well as a reminder of the language translation services available through our Fire & EMS dispatch centre.
- We are awaiting delivery of an EMS visual language translator tool which uses pictures and some basic questions (in several languages) to allow our staff to more effectively treat patients who have a limited grasp of the English language.
- We are pursuing additional training for Fire & EMS staff on cultural differences of Syrian vs. Canadian peoples.

Media Contact

Deputy Fire Chief Dana Terry  
403-320-3800  
dana.terry@lethbridge.ca