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First Syrian refugee family sponsored by Laurier arrives in KW

WATERLOO – Every day in the refugee camp in Lebanon, 5-year-old Mohamad Affan asked his mother, Fatima Alazab, “Can I go to school, mama?”

As Mohamad climbed into the van for the trip to his new apartment in Kitchener, his mother said to him, “Now you are in Canada. You will go to school.”

Mohamad, his brother Zaid, his father Issa Affan and his mother are one of three families who are immigrating to Canada with the help of Wilfrid Laurier University. The family arrived in Waterloo last Friday. Two additional families will arrive in the coming weeks, one settling in Waterloo and the other in Brantford.

The university began its campaign to sponsor three Syrian families this fall.

“I believe that universities have an obligation to engage with the world around them,” said Max Blouw, president and vice-chancellor. “The Syrian refugee crisis provides the global community with urgent need for meaningful action. It is deeply gratifying to see how quickly and generously the Laurier community has come together to provide support. As an expression of caring and engagement, it speaks highly about our university.”

The three families had fled Syria for Lebanon. The university worked with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to coordinate their sponsorship and resettlement. Laurier is participating in a “blended sponsorship” program with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) that sees the federal government partner in a cost sharing arrangement to support the refugee families.

The university raised more than \$81,000 in funds through donations from faculty, staff, students, retirees, alumni and community members. As well, more than 70 volunteers from Laurier’s campuses in both Brantford and Waterloo have been working to coordinate practical, emotional and psychological support for the families. This includes arranging housing, furniture, language classes, enrolment in school, health care and even job-search support.

“Building a long-term community of support is important as the families transition to life in Canada,” said Rob Donelson, vice-president of development and alumni relations, who is chairing the university’s response. “Supporting Syrian refugees is a major personal as well as financial commitment on the part of our faculty, staff and students at Laurier, but people have readily stepped up. They know that this initiative will not only transform these families’ lives, but also our own.”

[Find more information about the Syrian refugee families and Laurier’s fundraising campaign.](#)