

Syrian crisis: 'we have the capacity to help right now'

Continued from page 1

Fundraising is already in full swing for Brake's group. Between contributions of \$1,000 from its members and donations through the GoFundMe page they've already raised almost \$18,000. Once the \$30,000 milestone is met, the first application for one Syrian family will be submitted. The online fundraising page will then restart the process for the next group, and so on.

Brake said so far the feedback from the community has been positive, with another group already being formed between three local churches.

The local father used his knowledge of charitable operations to create a structure for the HHCR so that it can grow without creating a greater human resource load. Each of the groups of 15 will operate independently and contain an administrator, treasurer, application manager and resettlement supervisor, he said.

The members will find a place

for their sponsored family to live in advance of their arrival and assist them with enrolling in school and ESL programs, finding a doctor and a point of cultural connection, and accessing community amenities.

"The people that are coming, they were teachers, doctors, accountants, shop owners, etc. They won't be getting off a plane wearing rags. They already know how to live, but living here will be unfamiliar to them," said Brake. "We're helping them acclimate and resettle in the community so that they can start their lives again."

So why is this cause so important to Brake?

"For me, as a Christian, I believe everyone is created in God's image and are worthy of help and dignity. You don't have to be a Christian to help others, but it's hard to say you're a Christian and refuse to help others," he said. "We have the capacity to help right now, and I think we should."

He noted that Halton Hills has a history of accepting and acclimat-

ing people from other areas of the world who are in need.

"This isn't new for us. If you're a longtime Georgetown resident, your grandparents did this," he said. "We just have a unique opportunity; the people are coming from a different place, but we have the same opportunity to help. If it was me (in the position of a refugee), I would want someone else to help me, and I would be grateful if they did."

Individuals or groups interested in joining the HHCR can contact Brake at jbrake.hhcr@gmail.com or through the GoFundMe page below.

Brake acknowledged that the \$1,000 each group member is asked to contribute is "significant." Those who want to help with a smaller contribution can do so at <https://www.gofundme.com/HHCR4R>. The HHCR has also established a bank account at the Georgetown CIBC under the name Halton Hills Coalition for Refugees. The local branch will be offering free banking for two years to the refugees.



Halton Hills Coalition for Refugees creator Josh Brake and daughters Kathryn (left) and Olivia display their fundraising posters outside the CIBC in Georgetown, which will offer all Syrian refugees free banking for two years.

Photo by Melissa Laforge

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