

Syrian family overwhelmed by love, generosity of Miltonians

By Julie Slack

CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of total strangers, a young Syrian family expressed their gratitude moments after their arrival in Toronto.

Councillor Zeeshan Hamid worked with Asad Chaudhry, president of the Islamic Centre of Milton, to help raise funds to sponsor 15 families. So far, more than \$160,000 has been collected out of the \$400,000 pledged over 12 months in Milton. Last Thursday, a tired, and teary-eyed mother, her son and her husband arrived at Pearson International Airport, after a short flight from Montreal where they spent their first two days on Canadian soil going through procedural paperwork and processing.

Hamid didn't hesitate to hand Nehle Yusuf a colourful bouquet of daisies. Shy and cautious of all the media attention, cameras and questions, she held her young son Murad Haci Ahmet close. He took pleasure in plucking the petals off



Councillor Zeeshan Hamid, who was instrumental in helping to raise funds to bring Syrian families to Milton, welcomes a young family at Pearson International Airport in Mississauga last Thursday. From left, Hamid, Subhi Haci Ahmed, Nehle Yusuf, and Murad Haci Ahmet. *Julie Slack / Canadian Champion*

the flowers. Dad Subhi Haci Ahmed was quick to say thank you to the kindness of strangers.

Holding his hands over his heart, and with the help of a translator, he said they are in shock and disbelief

over the warm welcome

"We are very, very happy," he said, through an interpreter. "We are exhausted, it was a very long journey and we are excited.

"We went through a lot (in Syria)

and we thank God we are here, and we appreciate all the kindness of the sponsors.

"They don't know us these people and they just gave money to help," he said, adding this will be the first

time in three years that he will have a good night's sleep.


The family stayed with Hamid until Saturday, when they moved in to their two-bedroom apartment. Most of their furniture and clothing has been donated.

Hamid said the family had escaped from Al-Qamishly, Syria three years ago. It is a city in northeastern Syria that borders Turkey, where they lived in refugee camps for the last three years.

"We had 125 donors and volunteers of every background and ethnicity...it doesn't matter when it comes to charity and humanity. That's what unites us," said Hamid.

Since the new family speaks only Arabic, it will take some time for them to adjust, said the local councillor, who drove them home from the airport.

There was a huge welcoming at the airport as numerous families arrived from Syria the same day. Canadians came equipped with presents, flowers, chocolates and hugs, in the heartwarming scene at the arrival gate.




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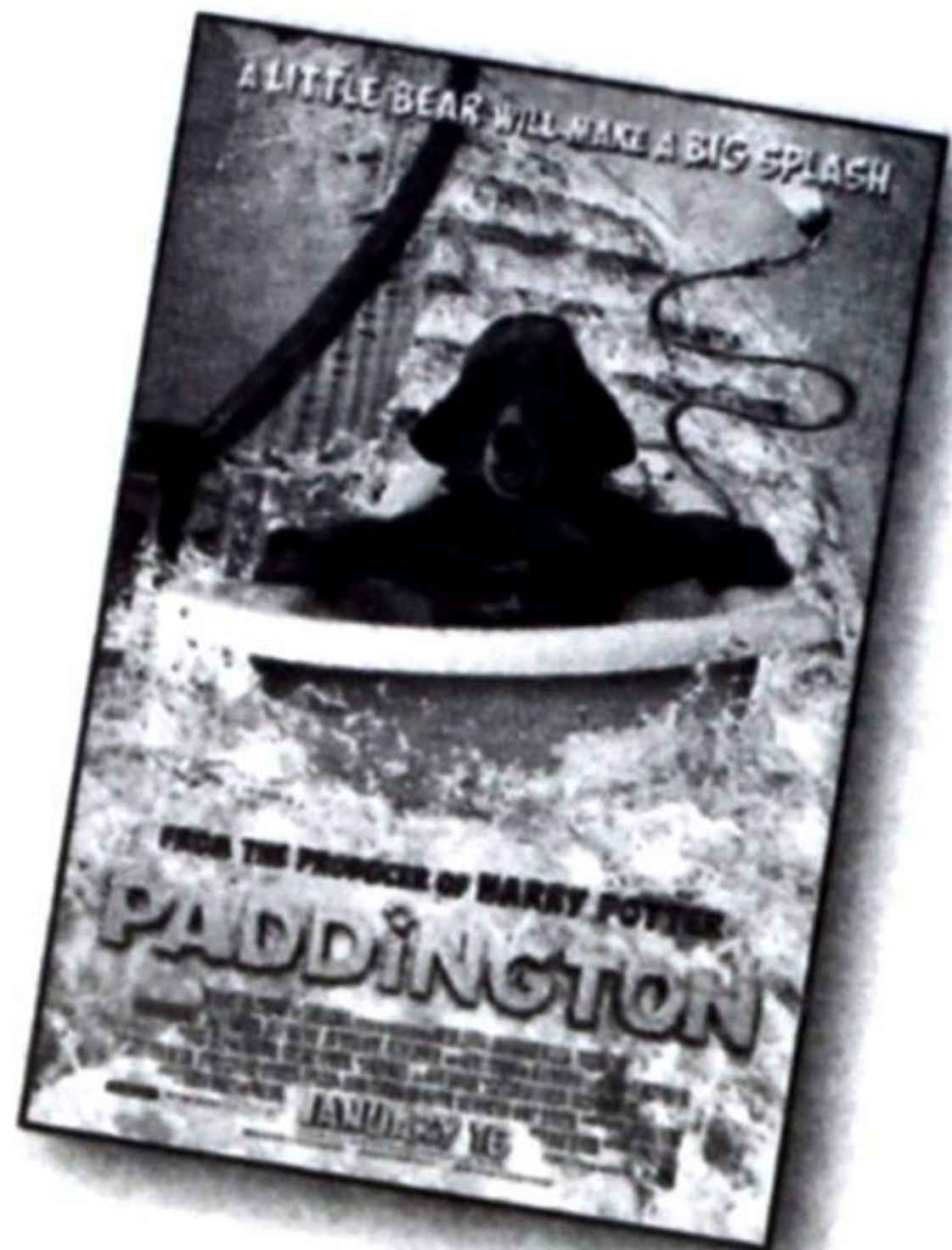
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