

## Sharing the narrative for World Refugee Day

[Becky Zimmer](#) / Humboldt Journal

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Members of the Humboldt and Saskatoon refugee communities spoke about their journey to Canada and the challenges that still exist during the World Refugee Day information session on June 20. The Humboldt Area Refugee Coalition put on the event to act as a bridge between refugees and the community. photo by Becky Zimmer

The Humboldt Area Refugee Coalition had some special guests to their World Refugee Day on June 20.

Members of Saskatoon's refugee community, as well as Abdulkerim El Halaf El Degerli and Sena Muhammed El Halef, Humboldt's Syria refugee family that was adopted by the Humboldt Area Refugee Coalition over a year ago.

Helen Smith-McIntyre with the Catholic Crosscultural Services has been working with refugee sponsorship in Saskatoon for over 30 years and spoke about how sponsorship has changed over the years.

Also in from Saskatoon were Sakna Al-bedin and her husband, Majeed Moosa, who have lived in Saskatchewan for over 10 years. Al-bedin also acted as translator for her brother and sister-in-laws Jameel Al Hasani and Ahlam Moosa, mother-in-law Hander Oufi, and nephew, Mustafa Jameel, all of which arrived in Canada only two-and-a-half months.

When discussing why they have come to Canada, all of them responded, through Al-bedin, that they came for a better life for their children, even though living in Saskatchewan as refugees can be lonely.

Al-bedin is looking for a better life herself, as well as for her daughters, as she hopes to continue her university education.

Part of the reason for coming to Humboldt was to meet new people and explain the political situation in Iraq and Lebanon that caused them to flee, says Al Hasani.

"The most important thing we want to explain is how much the people suffer. They have a hard time in Lebanon. That's the people they left behind (sic)," he said through Al-bedin.

Living as refugees in a new country, the family spoke numerous times about isolation and wanting more interaction with Canadians.

"They have to know one thing about it; we like them, we love them, we are happy to lead with them. They have to know we're peace people [sic] and there is no difference between me and them," says Ahlam.

Having the family in from Saskatoon was a way of broadening the narrative without putting all of the focus on Abdulkerim and Sena, says Odessa Sherbaniuk with the coalition.

"Everyone's experience is a little unique in their journey to come to Canada so we thought the more information to share the better."

Politics and the vast spread of information is playing a large role in the refugee experience, especially with the amount of information, and misinformation, available, this opened up positive conversation, she says.

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This is the first time since the Syria family was brought to Humboldt that the Humboldt Area Refugee Coalition put on an information session regarding refugees in the Saskatchewan, says Sherbaniuk.

“(It) was a good opportunity to reengage with the community and give an update on some of our work and rebuild some of our momentum.”

Since the family has reached their one-year anniversary, the coalition is now looking into sponsoring their next family, however that goal is still a long way away.

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