

## **Our Refugee Family: From the First Five Months, to the Future**

By Debbie Matheson

Lama and her four children arrived in mid-September 2018 after months of waiting, and moved into a fully equipped home near Fraser and 58<sup>th</sup>, thanks to your very generous donations of money, clothing, household goods, and heavy lifting.

Their lives have changed dramatically in their five months here. Few members of the family had ever been to school, and none had lived outside the Arabic-speaking world, so they experience both exhilaration and exhaustion as they go to school, bump into new cultures, and struggle to master strange symbols and sounds.

Lama attends language classes in Burnaby and is showing increased skills and confidence, despite her fatigue as a single mum raising four needy souls while living far away from her parents. She misses them deeply, but always tries to stay positive.

Ahmad and Majd are in grades 5 and 6 at Moberly Elementary nearby. Ahmad (11) is sponging up language as fast as he can, and always in the thick of things, like dancing the Macarena at the school Hallowe'en dance. In contrast, Majd (12), avoids new experiences and struggles emotionally, but recently joined the school basketball team where he's a valued player. The girls, Doha (14) and Sedra (16), attend the Literacy Program at Tupper Secondary where they have several lovely Arabic-speaking friends. Fatigue and illness sometimes sideline them from school, but they have made strong connections and really like to go.

A core of committed volunteers does the weekly grocery shop with Lama, drives them to appointments, and tutors twice a week. More volunteers are needed to take on a role, get to know the family, take them on outings, fill in for absent volunteers, prepare for next steps, and share the load, which is carried primarily by Mary Lymburner.

Lama's parents, Nasriddin and Fatmeh, and her youngest brother, Ward, are going through the refugee screening process in Lebanon, and have passed most stages. In anticipation of their arrival perhaps by summer, we must find a large enough rental house for them to be together again. What a tremendous improvement this will be for them all!

As we look to the family's future, we must prepare now. Donations will be gratefully received. Cheques can be made to St Philip's with Refugee Fund on the envelope as well as on the memo line. For more information or to offer help, please contact Mary Lymburner at [kmarylymburner@telus.net](mailto:kmarylymburner@telus.net) or 778-898-5117.