

TO: Co-operative Housing Federation of British Columbia

FROM: Vancouver Island Refugee Response Team: Alix Hotsenpiller and Andrea Westfall, Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society; Adam Yaghi, Resettlement Assistance Program and Elie Kozma, Refugee Assistance Program Manager, Intercultural Association of Victoria

REGARDING: Request for Housing Support for Syrian Refugees

DATE: February 27, 2017

We are requesting that the Co-operative Housing Federation of British Columbia and other co-operative housing organizations join an initiative to provide “One Syrian family housing for one year” to help address the housing needs of Syrian refugees arriving in Greater Victoria. Over 450 Syrian Refugees have arrived in Greater Victoria since December, 2016 in response to the current widespread humanitarian crisis in Syria. Public housing has no further availability, market rental rates are high above current newcomer affordability, and the competition to acquire housing in the rental climate of .5% vacancy rates regionally makes it difficult for families to obtain sustainable accommodations.

WHICH STAKEHOLDERS ARE INVOLVED IN REFUGEE RESPONSE?

The Capital Regional District, (CRD), Landlord BC, Municipal Mayors, City Counsellors, Members of the Provincial Legislative Assembly, Members of Parliament, School Districts, Vancouver Island Health Authority, the Anglican Diocese, the Urban Planning Institute, The Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria, BC Housing, Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, Victoria District Dental Society, the Greater Victoria Public Library, Provincial Trades and Employer Associations, Tourism Victoria, Camosun College, UVIC, Parker Johnston Industries, Cold Star Transportation and Freight and other stakeholders.

ASSURANCES FOR LANDLORDS

- For the first time in a quarter of a century, the federal government has designated Vancouver Island as a destination for refugees who have been identified as a vulnerable population by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. Through the Intercultural Association (ICA) of Greater Victoria, “Government Assisted Refugees” from Syria receive the federally funded *Refugee Assistance Program* towards their resettlement: Newcomers are connected with housing, school registration, health care, English language training, and the labour market. Their support is fully extended for at the minimum of one full year with the continued efforts to enable newcomer families the ability to be self-sustaining and efficient as they continue their life on Vancouver Island.

- Each refugee has a stable monthly income that is higher than provincial income support levels, plus an earning exemption of 50% for the first year, followed by employment/ income support in subsequent years.
- Each newcomer upon arrival automatically has a bank account established through VanCity.
- The Housing Coordinators provide each family unit with comprehensive orientation on tenant responsibilities and homes in Canada, with a **specialized focus on safety and protecting landlord assets.**
- Cultural differences are navigated through the Housing Coordinators, Settlement Staff and Case Managers who are consistently available and promptly ready.
- Landlord Incentives: VanCity Ready to Rend Interest-Free Loan on Renovations for landlords offering rentals to Syrian newcomers:
<https://www.vancity.com/AboutVancity/InvestingInCommunities/Refugees/>

EMPLOYMENT

Syrian refugees are already moving into training and employment in Manufacturing, Skilled Trades, Hospitality and Tourism, Elder Care, Small Business and Culinary/ Food Services. On January 3rd, Parker Johnston Industries hired 10 Refugees to become Architectural Sheet Metal Apprentices, who could make Journeymen wages of \$36/hour in 3 years.

PROTECTION OF HOUSING ASSETS

Public Housing providers represented at our Table have undertaken formal housing inspections for dozens of Syrian newcomer families. **In a recent Pacifica Housing report, 100% of Syrian families keep their homes in immaculate condition.** Pride of the home is an integral aspect for newcomer families.

PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF LANDLORDS

For Landlords who have stepped forward to create housing opportunities for refugees, stakeholders at the Refugee Response Housing Table are committed to providing public recognition through:

- Websites, Facebook, Twitter from Settlement organizations, Press Releases, etc.
- Launching a “Greater Victoria Landlords Welcome Refugees Housing Award”, on National Housing Day of Action Nov. 2017.

Thank you for your consideration! Please contact:

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