Helping Syrian Refugees

Deborah Stewart, NASA Communications Officer

Millions of Syrians continue to be displaced due to conflict in their homeland. This ongoing conflict in Syria has triggered the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today. Half of Syria’s pre-war population – more than 11 million people – have been killed or forced to flee their homes.

Much has been reported about the Syrian conflict and the millions of refugees that are living in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Europe. The gravity of this tragedy has impacted people in all nations of the world.

The Canadian Government has agreed to take 25,000 Syrian refugees, with 10,000 arriving by the end of this year and the remainder to arrive by the end of February 2016. The government is working with partners such as non-governmental organizations across the country to ensure the successful integration of these refugees.

According to the Government of Canada, 346 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada since November 4, 2015. Currently, 65 communities across Canada are preparing to welcome the refugees.

Educational institutions such as the University of Alberta have demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting Syrian refugees.

Earlier in fall, the University of Alberta announced financial aid for up to 10 Syrian students to study in this country. The President’s Award for Refugees and Displaced Persons Fund will help Syrian students make a fresh start at UAlberta. This Fund will cover the cost of tuition and living expenses for undergraduate or graduate students (https://uofa.ualberta.ca/giving/projects/presidents-award-for-refugees-displaced-persons-fund).

In an effort to help the campus community connect with this initiative and for other ways to support the Syrian refugees, UAlberta has also created a refugee support website (https://uofa.ualberta.ca/news-and-events/refugee-support).

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The Syrian refugees will need a significant amount of help as they settle in Canada. There are many ways Canadians can help give these refugees a strong start in their new homeland. Donations of cash as well as furniture and winter clothing are good places to start. Volunteering is another way to help out. Contact one of the settlement agencies in Edmonton such as Catholic Social Services, Edmonton Immigrant Services Association, and the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers for specific information about the different ways to help when the refugees start arriving in this area.

- Catholic Social Services: http://www.catholicsocialservices.ab.ca/CatholicSocialServices/default.aspx
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association: http://www.eisa-edmonton.org
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers: http://www.eisa-edmonton.org

To find out about other ways to get involved, contact 1-844-61 SYRIA (1-844-617-9742).

Canadians need to come together, as we have done in the past, to not only open our communities but also our hearts and welcome these refugees to their new home.

Source: GlobalPost
NASA’s Community of Members at Work

Donna Coombs-Montrose, NASA Membership Chair

A critical part of the package any member expects to receive from their union is services. New members often ask: “what do I get for the dues I pay?” Included in the range of services NASA offers its members, Membership Services play a strategic role.

Among the benefits available, members receive subsidized tickets to selected popular activities, discounted deals for merchandizing, door prizes at union events, and specially organized social and cultural events. Subsidized tickets to West Edmonton Mall for family use of recreational activities is one such event to which members have subscribed. Our NASA Day at Fort Edmonton Park for family activities attracted hundreds of subscribers. Members enjoy some key strategic events organized principally for them. Our NASA Breakfast combines an appreciation of local history with an outstanding campus social event. Our current NASA Breakfast was formerly the Klondike Breakfast, which was held within the period that commemorated Alberta’s gold rush days.

Significantly, our Celebrate the Season event recognizes the presence and contributions of people from all walks of life, who are the core of NASA’s membership and the backbone of the University of Alberta. When we celebrate, we recognize these contributions and have added several layers to draw on the creative skills that you, our community of members bring to the table. Our Photo Contest is one such example that encourages members to fulfill their passions for photography.

While many of our membership activities are geared towards meeting the needs of our members in the employ of the University of Alberta, we have also sponsored several events for the wider community of Edmontonians. For the past 12 years, NASA has financially sponsored and provided volunteers to help with the annual Edmonton and District Labour Council Labour Day BBQ. This event feeds 3,000 unemployed and underemployed persons in the City of Edmonton. The team of NASA member volunteers have been a substantial anchor for this annual activity. From time to time other food drives are planned, executed, and supported by our members.

But underlying all of this membership activity and development is a cadre of our members who are devoted to being of service. For several strategic reasons, these members can gain several personal benefits from their contributions to the team. In addition aiding in the development of membership programs, members who volunteer for this Committee have an opportunity to grow and develop an understanding of the strategic role our labor/skills play in the operations of the University [education], opportunities to help organize projects and events [training], to engage with a team of members to promote the objectives of our Union [teambuilding], embrace the opportunity to attend or participate in other labour or community activities and conferences [networking], and overall to enjoy providing a very meaningful service to our members. Our collaborations with various labour, progressive, and community organizations have helped to increase the respect and regard for the work that NASA does on campus. If you support the goals and objectives of our team, we welcome your contributions.

NASA MEMBERS NEEDED FOR MEMBERSHIP SERVICES COMMITTEE

NASA currently has vacancies on the Membership Services Committee. The term for this committee expires in May 2017. For more information, see https://www.nasa.ualberta.ca/volunteer-opportunities

If you are interested in serving on this committee, please submit a brief biographical sketch indicating why you would like to serve on this committee. Send to the NASA Office by 4:30 pm on Wednesday, December 23, 2015. Applications can be submitted by email to nasa@ualberta.ca
Parkland Conference

Elizabeth Johannson, NASA President

NASA was pleased to participate in the Parkland Institute's 19th annual conference on November 20 to 22 by sponsoring a panel titled Common Ground, Common Good: New ways to fight for advanced education.

One of the panelists, Claire Polster, spoke about the need to combat the corporatization of Canada’s universities. Funding reductions have pushed universities to seek out corporate sources of funding and this has been gradually pushing focus toward corporate needs and away from society’s good. Polster suggested that the traditional efforts to lobby for more public funding would not counteract this trend if new public dollars are then channeled into a corporate model. We need to redirect the patterns and pathways.

The conference was well attended with engaging presentations and good discussions. The opening keynote from Alex Himelfarb was about taxes. You might think that would appeal primarily to accountants and policy wonks but it was very down to earth. Having a conversation about building the society we want means talking about how taxes are applied and used. Himelfarb suggested we need to move to a model of wage-led growth.

Attending conferences like Parkland's gives people an opportunity to hear about ideas, ask questions of experts, and engage with people from across the province who share a progressive vision.

There are videos of a number of the presentations available on the conference website http://www.parklandconference.ca/livestream. I encourage you to take a look and consider attending next year’s conference.

Ryan Williams, NASA Political Action & Member Education Chair
Elizabeth Johannson

Elizabeth served as Treasurer for fourteen months before deciding to run for President. Former President Rod Loyola resigned in May 2015 after being elected as the MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie. A by-election was called and Elizabeth was the successful candidate.

Her vision for NASA includes finding more ways for member involvement and enhancing a sense of community within NASA. Support staff at the University of Alberta are all members of the same union and need to support one another. Members need to feel happy and proud to be part of the union.

Prior to becoming President, Elizabeth worked in the Family Medicine Research Office. That position was her first unionized job. She wanted to know what was happening with the union and desired to be a part of it. She got involved with the union by first attending general meetings and then by running as Treasurer in 2014.

Before coming to the University, Elizabeth worked for Computers for Schools, a not-for-profit organization that provides refurbished computers to schools and other not-for-profit organizations.

Elizabeth hails from Manitoba. The daughter of a United Church Minister, she lived in various parts of the province. She is proud of her prairie roots and is happy to be making Edmonton her home.

Elizabeth attended the University of Winnipeg where she received a BA (Hons) in Theatre and Drama. Acting and directing has always been a big part of her life. In fact, it was at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival where she met the person who would become her future husband. They moved to Edmonton and to this day, she is still actively involved with the Fringe Festival – the Edmonton Fringe Festival – as both a director and a performer.

Elizabeth continued her studies on a part-time basis, successfully balancing family, work and school. In 2015, she received her CPA/CGA, finishing in the top ten in Alberta.

Elizabeth was brought up in a strong social justice family and is committed to helping build a better society. She is actively involved with organizations that support women’s issues. She has been vocal in calling for an inquiry into the missing and murdered indigenous women.

Elizabeth is a proud member of the Metis Nation of Alberta. Her heritage is that of the Red River Metis. Growing up, her mother shared the family history and many stories of her heritage, but Elizabeth did not become active in the Metis community until she was an adult.

When not working or volunteering, Elizabeth enjoys spending time with her family – her husband and two daughters. Together with her husband, she helps teach improv to her daughter’s junior high class.

Elizabeth has her own style of leadership and is excited to help move NASA forward in the days and weeks to come.

"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

Arundhati Roy
On November 26th, University friends and colleagues got together to say goodbye to long-time building service worker Emily (Emilija) Zeks. Emily had been working for the University of Alberta since November 27, 1972 - a date she still remembers clearly after an impressive 43 years of service.

It was hugs all around as dozens of colleagues came together to wish her a happy retirement. Her co-workers describe her as dedicated, hard working and someone with a great sense of humour, and truly someone who will be missed on campus.

Even after 43 years, Emily remained characteristically humble as her many years of service on campus were celebrated. When asked to give a speech, Emily became visibly emotional, briefly thanking her colleagues as she held back tears.

Emily said her favourite thing about working for the University has definitely been the people; her co-workers, the students and everyone else she has gotten to work with on campus - they are what she will miss the most in her retirement. Emily's final day at the University was November 27th, 2015, and NASA wishes her all the best!
New Staff At NASA

Brendan Van Alstine, Communications Assistant  July 2015
Nancy Furlong, Director of Operations  August 2015
Christina Cooper, Bookkeeper  October 2015
Nicholas Ternes, Office Assistant  November 2015
NASA Office Closure

The NASA Office will be closed from noon on **December 24** until 8:30 am on **January 4**. For emergency contact information, call the NASA Office (780-439-3181) and listen to the recorded message.