

**“BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL,  
FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.”**

(MATTHEW 5:7)



## **OUR FAITH IN ACTION**

A Project Funded by TIA in 2016

### *Lethbridge Family Services Mental Health for Newcomers*

For 15+ years, Lethbridge Family Services (LFS) has assisted in settling government sponsored refugees and the Immigrant Services Branch (ISB) has worked hard to keep pace with their growing needs. These newcomers often arrive with health issues and ISB assists in getting medical attention. Through this process, a growing awareness for mental health support was identified. This became even more evident with the arrival of Syrian refugee families (most have endured 5 years of war and experienced the worst of mankind).

Eight years ago, the ISB assisted in settling a large group of refugees, and the settlement team approached the Counselling, Outreach, and Education Branch to offer assistance to the newcomers. With a small amount of funding, a counsellor stepped in and learnt to counsel individuals from different cultures using interpreters to bridge the language gap and tackle the hard subject matter. Counselling was new to most of the clients but gradually both the counsellor and the settlement team started to see a positive impact.

When the Canadian Government announced the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees, and that almost 300 would make Lethbridge their new home, LFS knew there would be a huge need for mental health support. When the newcomers started arriving, LFS ensured they knew support was available and although, counselling was a relatively unfamiliar concept, many reached out.

A Coping with Change Presentation was genuinely received. It explored integration into a new culture while not losing the values instilled back home. The group was very engaged and examined cultural differences through telling stories of their past homes, their Canadian experiences, and the little differences that are culture-shock inducing or simply amusing.

When conversations turned to trauma, they were open to sharing their devastating experiences. The horror of war falling upon one's home has touched each and every one of them in a deep impactful way.

Thankfully, LFS is uniquely positioned to help them overcome these traumas. The staff are hopeful because they see the newcomers as resilient and supportive to one another. They look forward to continuing to make a difference for people who often have nowhere else to turn.

Submitted by Peter Casurella, Coordinator, Advancement and Community Relations, LFS

