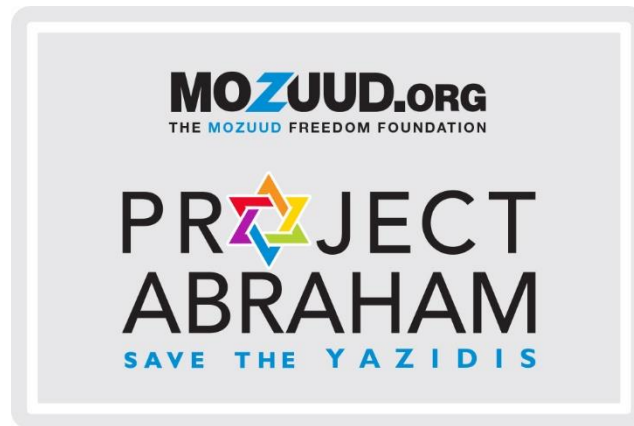


Report on the challenges of the Yazidi Refugees



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October 19, 2017

Refugee challenges

- Many of the traumatized Yazidi refugees come to Canada not knowing that there are Yazidis already established in Canada. They are not informed, and the government does not connect them with the established Canadian Yazidi community, which adds to their trauma, fear, and the feeling of isolation.
- Some Yazidis do not speak Arabic and are met with Arabic speaking government translators in Canada, which adds to their confusion and fear (some Yazidis thought they were back in the hands of ISIS).
- When it comes to finding housing, it is left up to the refugees to find their own. The housing NGOs just provide apartment listings, and it is then the job of the refugee to follow up on their own. This is without familiarity with Canadian culture, language skills, transportation, etc. Typical families consist of women with children who have lost their husbands.

(Note: We understand that there are legal restrictions for renting apartments. The restriction is 2 people per bedroom. Refugee families are usually larger than this, and larger apartments are beyond reach for them.)

- It takes 3-4 months for child benefit payments to come through. Until that happens, the amount of money allocated to families barely covers rent, let alone food and other expenses. Also, landlords are asking not just first and last month's rent (despite it being illegal), but up to four months rent in advance. This leaves the refugees with no money for food, transportation, clothing, and other necessities.
- Case workers who are looking after the refugees can each have more than 70 families in their case load, which leaves traumatized refugees isolated and without the full support they need.
- Culturally refugees from the Middle East have resistance to getting therapy to help them with their trauma. This is problematic since the system currently requires the refugee to inform the case worker that they need help. Since the women survivors of ISIS, and their children, are severely traumatized, there needs to be a better program of support to help them.
- When a refugee family does move into a home, it takes a week or two for the government to provide furniture – including beds. This means that they must sleep and eat on the floor until their furniture arrives.
- It makes sense for the Yazidis to be housed close to the Yazidi community. This is important for their sense of connection, and well-being. The Yazidi community embraces new Yazidi refugees, which goes a long way toward their healing. The contracted NGOs do not take this into consideration when helping them to resettle. This leaves the Yazidi refugees isolated, without language skills, transportation, and their natural network of support.

Project Abraham and our response to the refugee challenges

Project Abraham has seen these issues and problems, and with the help of over 150 volunteers, has been filling in these gaps. We work with the Yazidi community providing

- air mattresses and blankets for the Yazidis until their furniture arrives
- food until their family payments kick in
- clothes, household goods, kitchenware, linens, towels, etc.
- transportation to their appointments and community events
- translators (not all Yazidis speak Arabic)
- conversational ESL to the Yazidi community, which includes those Yazidi that cannot attend regular ESL classes
- opportunities for Yazidis to integrate into Canadian culture
- emergency support

The Mozuud Freedom Foundation's Project Abraham is the primary responder in the GTA helping the Yazidi community, and newly-arrived Yazidi refugees. We have been working with help from One Free World International (OFWI), as well as other community organizations.

The response from the Yazidi community has been one of extreme gratitude. Without the dedication of our volunteers, the Canadian experience of the Yazidi victims of ISIS would have been one of isolation, fear, and extreme hardship. We work in partnership with ORAT on family reunification, are working on partnering with COSTI and the Richmond Hill Welcome Centre, have spoken directly with MPs, and MPPs, yet we are still having a tough time getting official acknowledgement so that we can be part of the JAS program.

Project Abraham is a resource that the government can partner with to efficiently help the Yazidis resettle in the GTA. Through our now extensive experience, we are filling a gap in the resettlement program. Yet, we find ourselves outside looking in, helping to mend the cracks rather than preventing them. We are not being utilized by the government when we, although stretched, have volunteer manpower and can rally the support of the established Yazidi community.

Through the experience of the last two years, we have become the experts in the field with regard to supporting the Yazidi community in the GTA. It would be advantageous for the government to make use of us.