

## First Line for Syria seeking help from public

By Marni Walsh

Currently guiding two Syrian families, including a family of nine in Shelburne, First Line for Syria members find themselves stretched to the limit and searching for compassion for yet another refugee family in need.

In the summer of 2015, neighbours on the First Line of Mono launched a campaign to sponsor a Syrian refugee family. Supported by the community and Primrose United Church, the group was so successful they were able to help a second family settle in Shelburne. Through mutual acquaintances with one of their sponsored families, First Line for Syria has been approached to help Inaam Alabed, a new Canadian facing a desperate future. They are reaching out to the community for help.

The group says that with over 40,000 refugees having arrived in Canada last year, the Muslim community has been drained of its resources. Dufferin sponsorship groups have been able to give Inaam some financial help, but Jeff Cottam of First Line for Syria says it is just a "stopgap measure."

Before the Syrian civil war, Inaam Alabed was a professional woman, a wife and mother of two young sons, working in a managerial position in Syria. Her full and happy life was robbed from her in a single night.

Her husband was killed when the mosque where he was praying was bombed by Syrian war planes, and in the same attack, her nine-story condominium was razed to the ground, killing both her sons and leaving her permanently debilitated.

Ms. Alabed came to Canada a year ago. She has no family here and deals with constant physical pain and depression as she faces her life alone. First Line for Syria members who have visited Inaam in Toronto report the young woman is holding on to the hope that her niece and husband might join her in Canada. Together they could support each other as a single family.

However, the niece and husband will need sponsors to bring them to Canada and unite them with Inaam. "We are hoping that another group will step forward possibly and take this woman's cause on for themselves and sponsor her niece and her husband," says Jeff Cottam.

"This would bring hope and a little light to the end of a very dark tunnel she finds herself in, through no fault of her own," Mr. Cottam says, "It need not be a recognized group or organization. It could simply be a group of like-minded individuals getting together to make a difference, just like First Line for Syria was formed just over a year ago."

Anyone interested in helping, may contact Jeff Cottam and First Line for Syria and they will facilitate meetings with Inaam Alabed and give sponsorship advice. Jeffrey Cottam may be reached at 519-378-5704 or [www.aromatica.ca](http://www.aromatica.ca).