

## **An Interview with our Newcomer Family**

Having been in Canada for 9 months, we sat down with the Alrashdans to learn more about their experiences in coming to Canada and settling in to their new home. The questions were asked by community, as well as committee members.



**When you heard that you would be coming to Canada, what did you think this country would be like?**

We were scared because we thought there would be culture shock. The people in this country have different thinking, different ways of life. Turns out there was nothing to be scared of. We were surprised that Canadian people were welcoming and nice and warm. We compared this to when we went from Syria to Jordan and in Jordan there was poor treatment. They were rude and bad to us. There were rats in Jordan camp and we lived in a big metal box. We were expecting worse here since, if Jordan is the same culture as us and they treated us so badly, why would Canadians be any better? The people in Jordan were supposed to be our family but they hurt us. And then here, you were kind with good hearts. It was unexpected.

**When you came out of Pearson Airport in Toronto, what did you first notice about this new country?**

The only thing that we really noticed when we came was that everyone was warm and welcoming. We noticed the snow, of course, and the cold and couldn't think how we were going to survive. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. When we went from Syria to Jordan we were investigated, treated like the enemy. We thought it would happen the same here. We had been promised help in Jordan but there was none. When we got to Montreal, we were just happy to leave Jordan. In the Montreal airport we met some people who spoke Arabic and we were told we would stay only one night then go on to Toronto and then in Toronto we would find people who would take care of us. We just went. We didn't have any other options.

**You had been told that Canada was dark most of the year. Have you been able to report back otherwise?**

(Mehsen) I spoke with my friend in Jordon and changed his point of view. It's not like we thought it was going to be, but we are treated like human beings. We told them about the summer which is like in Syria. The winter here is okay too and sun shines.



**What was the first meal you ate with your host family? Did you like it?**

Some of the volunteers had cooked for us. It was rice, kebab, butter chicken, pasta, lots of fruit and salads. No bread though. We kept looking for the bread since we have it always at home. (Hanaa): It's better for our diet without it!

**Is there any furniture in your apartment that you don't use and why not?**

We use everything. The dining room table we use for homework more than dinner. We eat together at the coffee table sitting on the floor, which is more like home.

**What TV programs do the children like to watch?**

(Isarra's) My favourite movie is *Frozen* and I love to watch the Bollywood shows!  
(Rashed, speaking for himself and his brothers): We like *Monster Machine*  
Little Jamal likes *Max and Ruby* and *Tom and Jerry*

**Who does the grocery shopping in the family?**

(Mehsen) I do it every Friday after prayers.

**Who does the cooking?**

(Mehsen) Hanaa still does the cooking. I don't know how and I'm happy with Hanaa's cooking. I wouldn't want to offend her!

**Is there some food from home that you cannot get here?**

Lots of our vegetables can't be found here but I heard there are places in Mississauga or Scarborough where you can get them. I haven't been there yet. Back home we make our own cheese, pickled vegetables, meats etc. and we can't do that here. A driver's license and car will get me to places to buy more food variety. I would like to drive a taxi but I have to go through the license system and then save for a car.

**Do Hanaa and Mehzen have any hobbies? If so what are they?**

(Mehzen) My hobby back home was breeding birds, particularly canaries. I would breed one hundred and fifty at a time. It started as a hobby and became almost a job. I was good at it and I liked it. I don't think there is anywhere here for me to do this though.

(Hanaa) Like all mothers there is little time for a hobby! I am too busy with the kids.

**Is Canada hotter in summer than you expected?**

Yes., but it's still hotter in Syria.

**Did other families you knew from your camp in Jordan come to Canada also? If so do you communicate with them?**

Others from the camp have come but they are in places like Edmonton, London, Toronto, St John's. These people were like family – neighbours, but because we were experiencing same thing, we were very close. We keep in touch with them all. All of them were government sponsored and not privately sponsored, like us.

**Do you have any concerns about the dental/medical care you have been getting since you arrived?**

Not at all. (Hanaa): Look! The dentist fixed my teeth! The dentist was so wonderful. The kids' teeth are so much better. Medical care has been very good and we're so grateful.

**What do the children like to eat as a treat?**

(Israa) – Strawberries are so good.

(Rashed) – I love pizza!

(Abed) – Candy!

(Hanaa for Jamal) – All of the above!



**Have you made friends with people in your building?**

We have friends here. We found that Arabic speaking people are more distant here though. At home, the door is always open, everyone is welcome. Here, everyone announces themselves, knocks first, and is private. We find this very different.

**Have you noticed any unusual Canadian customs or habits that puzzle you?**

There is nothing in particular. (Mehsen) - I do find the way women are treated is very different at home. At the bus stop I've seen men harassing girls, trying to touch them or get them to go out with them. To us, this is disrespectful. In Syria, we are hands off women. It is like there is a red line drawn around women, a line of respect. At home, if someone bumps into a man's wife, daughter of mother, even if they apologize, this is unacceptable. He should not be that close to have bumped her. We are very respectful of women and the role they play in our lives, and who they are.

**What is your favourite season?**

Definitely summer.

**What do the children think about their school experience? What are their favourite parts about school?**

(Rashed SK) – My favourite thing is recess. And drawing.

(Israa Gr. 1) – I like recess too, and art.

**Do the children have any favourite activities that they did in the summer (outings, camps, swimming etc.)?**

(Israa) – I liked when we went apple picking.

(Rashed) – I like going to the park with my dad.

(Mehsen for Abed & Jamal) – They like the park best.

(Parents) - The children thought they had too much camp. They had a wonderful time but said they were always busy and had no time to rest. We thought that was perfect!



**What do Hanaa and Mehsen feel is the best part about being here?**

(Mehsen) Feeling safe. The kids are safe. If something happened to me now, I can go peacefully because our kids are safe and far from danger.

**Is anything you wish to say to those who, through their donations, that helped you come to Canada?**

Mehsen - I wish that I could learn English more quickly so that I could say thank you in my own way and show them my emotions in my own way – the translation of my words does not let me express myself as I would like. I want to use the words I want myself, not someone else's to express our true emotion of gratitude.

You gave us a life and that is everything.

