

Time for an update about LERC!

The London Ecumenical Refugee Committee (LERC) has been diligently working for almost three years. LERC consists of two partners: the Karen Community of London (KCL) and seven Christian congregations in five denominations: The Church of the Epiphany (Anglican); Colborne Street United Church; The House Church on Horton (Anglican); New St. James Presbyterian Church; St. James Westminster Anglican Church; St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church and First Baptist Church.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) is the Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) for LERC and, in that capacity, oversees the refugee sponsorships that LERC undertakes. New St. James is the link between LERC and the PCC/SAH. In addition, New St. James holds LERC's funds in trust.

LERC wishes to continue sponsoring Karen people to resettle in London, even though there are other peoples who are in dire need of finding safety and a new start in a country like Canada. We, the seven congregations, wish to continue honouring our partnership with the KCL because there are still so many Karen people languishing in refugee camps with no hope of safely returning to the Karen State in Burma/Myanmar and living there in safety. Karen people who have resettled in Canada have demonstrated that they can make a new home here and contribute much to their new country.

For most of 2017, LERC was at a crossroads. We had successfully completed the sponsorship for our first family, but committee members' health and personal issues slowed us down, even though we were eager to take on a second sponsorship. LERC has the experience, the money and the household items for a second sponsorship, but now needs to pick a refugee sponsorship program to use for our second family. We used a Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) sponsorship to bring our first family to Canada (in February 2016) because the government assumed some of the paperwork and costs for this type of sponsorship program. Now that we, LERC, are back on our feet, we have learned that the possibility of getting another BVOR sponsorship for our second Karen family is very slim because such sponsorships are no longer being used to bring Karen refugees to Canada.

We have studied a document entitled Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programs and have sought advice from other sponsorship groups. We now know how to go about our second sponsorship and intend to submit an application by the end of June, 2018.

Leaders of both LERC and of the Karen Community of London met 25th February, and with their blessings, we (LERC) shall attempt to reach out and sponsor a family ~ from any where ~ this year of 2018, as we continue to work on the extensive paper work required to bring another Karen family to Canada hopefully for 2019 or 2020. Your continued prayers and support is appreciated.

LERC remains grateful for the strong support we get from First Baptist and our other churches connected to LERC.

London Ecumenical Refugee Committee
John Stewart (Convenor) and Karen Chiasson (Recording Secretary)

(Note: The above was penned by John Stewart, with some adjustments by Karen Chiasson)