



# words of Welcome

Newsletter of the Host Program in Ontario Winter 2009

## From Friends to Hosts to Friends Part II

Memories of the origin of the Host Program, by *Pat Marshall, Ontario Host Coordination Project.*

Part I appeared in *Words of Welcome*, Fall 2008.

## Beginning of the Host Program

In 1981 or '82, Max Brem, a consultant, was researching newcomers' needs for Employment and Immigration. He came to Ottawa Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) and was impressed with our Canadian Friends program. He took all the information on the program and, as I recall, he proposed the concept to the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program. Employment and Immigration recognized newcomer-community volunteer matching as a valuable component of settlement, and decided to fund a new program. The name was changed to the Host Program but the concept was the same. There had always been some confusion about

the name "Canadian Friends" by people who thought that we were affiliated with the Christian group called the Quakers, or the Society of Friends.

## Transformation of Canadian Friends

Two factors spelled the end of the Canadian Friends program in its original format at OCISO. The first was the arrival of Polish refugees to Ottawa. It seemed that their experience of living under a Communist regime made the Polish newcomers somewhat wary about being matched with a Canadian family that they did not know. There was much hesitancy to share any personal information. When the Polish Canadian community was approached to join, the response was similar and so the idea of expanding the program to the new arrivals was dropped.

The other factor was the obvious fact that finding a job was the key to integration. In the summer of 1984, unemployment was the most serious problem facing the refugees and so Canadian Friends' focus changed to pairing Canadians up with newcomers in order to help them find jobs. The program was renamed the Volunteer Employment Assistance Program (VEAP). The goal was to create a network of contacts for immigrants and to match up volunteers and newcomers who had worked in a similar field. Besides helping with basic job-finding skills, résumés, covering letters, interview skills, the volunteers would also counsel the newcomers



about the cultural norms in Canada in the context of “selling oneself” to a prospective employer. Once every two weeks the volunteers met in groups of ten to discuss how their newcomers’ job searches were going and to give and get advice and sometimes contacts from each other.

By the mid-eighties, the Host Program was funded by the Immigration and Settlement Adaptation Program; it came to life in Ottawa at Catholic Immigration Services, and since then has expanded across the country.

I am currently working with the Ontario Host Coordination team on a consultation of Host Program newcomer and volunteer participants. I see that the newcomers’ basic needs are the same as always: better language skills and employment and so they expect the volunteer host to help them improve their English and find a good job. The volunteer hosts want to have more information on the newcomers’ cultures and both groups would like to have more planned activities. I realize that it was far easier to run the Canadian Friends program where all the newcomers came from the same country than it is to run a Host Program where newcomers are from so many areas of the world. Our newsletter only had to deal with information in two languages and articles about one culture. Often the Vietnamese newcomers would provide the entertainment at the drop-ins as they were a cohesive, organized community.

Another difference between the two programs is that now many Host

volunteers were not born in Canada. They know the pain of being uprooted from their homelands; they appreciate what it means to be a Canadian, and want to help others to cross that bridge.

As one newcomer said during our recent consultation, “I love the Host Program!” Well, so do I! To think that 28 years after those first meetings with Project 4000, the program is now nation-wide, is wonderful. I love this program because it is a double blessing, Both Canadians and newcomers get to know each other, and in most cases they become FRIENDS.

## Host Match Stories

### Our Best Christmas Ever

Thank you to author *Tracey Truman, a Host Volunteer at SISO-Hamilton* for sharing her story of experiencing Christmas through her Host match’s eyes.



*Pa Ti Po family and their match the Truman family enjoy Christmas*



This Christmas was the best one ever!

We invited our Host match family to have Christmas dinner with us and it was so much fun. We showed them Christmas crackers, and told them about everything they were about to eat. Lay Htoo, the mother in our Host match family, ate everything but probably only out of kindness, while the kids ate the turkey and stuffing but pretty much left the veggies! Maggie, one of the match children, even helped with clean up! After dinner we gave them gifts. The kids loved the toys they got but when they opened PJ's they said, "clothes... yuk". We thought that was so funny because our kids used to say that too! And so we said not clothes, PJ's, and they laughed at us!

The best and most touching part of the night was that they had brought us gifts, which we weren't expecting, and beautiful cards in which they had, in English, written beautiful sentiments to us. It was so touching. They had a card for "their brothers", my sons, and one for my husband Jason and me. They gave the kids a beautiful church that lights up with fiber optic lights and gave Jason and myself a Christmas dish set. Needless to say we were surprised and touched. They said "thank you for helping our family" in the card which was so nice, but really they have been the ones to help our family. They have taught us so much about how important kindness is and we have become much more aware of the challenges that immigrants face, especially refugees. This has helped to foster more compassion in our family.

Most importantly we have seen that families want the same things for their children no matter where they are from. I wish I could get them to understand that they are very important to our family. This Christmas experience was something I don't think I'll ever forget. The 14 of us had a very special Christmas, thanks to SISO and the Host Program. This is going to be a great year!

*Tracey Truman, husband Jason and four sons, Hayden, Kade, Ethan, and Teague decided to volunteer at the Host Program in part because of their desire to find an opportunity to volunteer together as a family. They have wonderful stories, like the one above, of sharing and caring from their time with the Pa Ti Po family, a newcomer family from Burma.*

## Winter Driving - Be Prepared!

*Jodi Larivière, Network Coordinator, Ontario Host Coordination Project*

As temperatures drop and snow and ice make driving more of a hassle, it is important to be prepared with an **emergency car kit**. While newcomers may be especially unprepared for the challenges of driving in the winter time, a well-stocked emergency kit is essential to any Canadian who is driving this time of year.

Pre-made kits can be purchased in many stores through out the winter time. But you can make your own kit. Following is a list of items that everyone should keep in their car at all times.

- Flash light with extra batteries
- Blanket
- Booster cables
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit



- Bottled water and non-perishable, high energy foods such as granola bars, raisins or peanut butter
- Maps
- Shovel and ice scraper
- Tire repair kit and pump
- Flares
- Anti-freeze/windshield washer fluid
- Tow rope
- Sand/salt or non-clumping cat litter
- Cell phone with charger, or change to make a phone call
- Extra warm clothing such as hat, mitts, sweaters and socks
- Photo copy of important documents such as health cards or insurance information
- Bag that zips closed to hold these items so they do not roll around in your trunk

You never know when you may need these items, but simply having them with you will help give you peace of mind while driving in less than favourable conditions.



## Celebrating Together

**Community Celebrates Eid and Christmas Together for Shelair Kittani, Host Counsellor and Group Activities Coordinator, Host Program, SISO-Hamilton**



*An artisan displays traditional painting on ceramics to shoppers at the Eid / Christmas Bazaar.*

On Friday December 5<sup>th</sup> the Riverdale Community Centre in East Hamilton provided an opportunity for community to come together to celebrate at an Eid/Christmas Bazaar. In every culture, celebrating holidays is about family, friends and community. The bazaar was an opportunity for family, friends and community to share similarities and explore new traditional celebrations such as sharing examples of cooking (meals and deserts), different ways of dressing and accessories/art.

One example of an Eid celebration that was shared was the art form of Henna tattoo. Henna tattoos are a non-permanent tattoo drawn on the hands, arms by henna artists. Many cultures use henna tattoo and on this day the Pakistani women demonstrated how they would draw Henna tattoos for all the women and the girls one day before Eid. The tradition is a sign of the celebration which mean the family is ready for the festivities.



When Henna is not used that means the women of the family are sad or grieving and/or they have not been able to properly prepare for the Eid celebration.

Celebrations are also about art. Iraqi Christians who brought their painting to show the way they celebrate Christmas. These paintings and those of the other artisans were appreciated by all and reflected the way the ancient Iraqi Assyrians and Chalcedonians celebrate Christmas. The traditional paintings were on beautiful ceramic plates and some found them to be lovely items for gift giving.



Sharing food is above all the favourite way of partaking in another culture, and this event was no different. Home made cookies were shared from different countries around the world; each kind presented by a group of people who want to share their heritage and tradition with each other and the community. Cookies from Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Turkey, India, Pakistan and China were available. Of course we did not want to miss sharing the established community's traditions: volunteers from the local English Conversation Circle brought ginger cookies as well as traditional hand crafts.

It was a great day of being proud and sharing our traditions with each other. It was also a day of creating understanding and an opportunity to ask questions about each other's cultures as we celebrated together. Creating a welcoming community does not get any more enjoyable than this!

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*We value your feedback and welcome any comments, ideas or suggestions you may have for our upcoming issues.*

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