



Rama and her husband, Fares, didn't just receive language training and newcomer supports—they also gained a community.

The language of community

Rama and her husband, Fares, knew it was time to relocate to Canada from Syria when it became increasingly dangerous to even walk out their front door. "We often went through long periods without water or electricity," Rama recalls. "When I did have to leave the house, I would say goodbye to my daughter and I would never know if I would come back or not." The couple felt scared and increasingly hopeless as they waited four long years for their immigration and refugee application to be approved. When they learned that their new home would be Montreal, they immediately signed up for French classes—despite the risks. For months they travelled to school as the world outside their door became more and more dangerous.

When the family finally arrived in Montreal, it was huge relief. But they quickly realized they'd need more help to settle in to their new home.

"It's very difficult to come to a new country where you don't know the language," says Rama, who taught at a local university prior to arriving in Canada. "We had to get around and try to understand all the documents we had to fill out. There are so many things you need to do when you arrive, and this wasn't always easy."

Fortunately, they met some fellow Syrians in their

community who told them about CARI St-Laurent, a United Way agency that provides information, support and a variety of services to newcomers including childcare and settlement services. "We took French classes for eight months, full-time," says Rama. "Our daughter went to daycare at the agency, so Fares and I were able to learn French as quickly as possible. It was a little stressful, but we chose to see the experience as an opportunity for our family."

The agency also helped Rama and Fares, who worked as a lawyer in his home country, fill out forms, access health care, get insurance and complete many other important administrative tasks that come with moving to a new country. But Rama is especially grateful for the social aspects of the agency's programming. "The projects and programs here not only help newcomers integrate into the community, they also help Quebeckers get to know us," says Rama. "It lets us meet people here and talk about our different cultures—and we can practice our French!"

"When I think of the future now, I have hope," adds Rama, who is incredibly grateful to United Way donors like you who are helping new Canadians just like her receive a warm welcome.



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