



# Respect Works Here

## Community Champion

When **Aly and Lynn Aly** heard news that Syrian refugees would be coming to Vernon, they knew they wanted to help. As a young man Aly had left his native Egypt, disillusioned with the ongoing war. He knows what it is like to leave your home and start anew in a strange country with very little.

"We went to the Vernon and District Immigration and Community Services Society (VDICSS) and said we would like to help," explains Aly. "They were thrilled to know I speak Arabic and could help with translations."

In 2016 the community was organizing to help settle refugees coming to Vernon. At various meetings with Immigrant Services, a group of five families ranging from a young couple, to middle-aged, to retired people were united in a common goal of secular support for a refugee family. Friends Beyond Borders (FBB) was formed.

When the first Syrian family arrived in Vernon, FBB all pitched in to welcome them and help them adjust to a totally different culture and language. FBB formed a tight bond of friendship and were amazingly cohesive. The diversity of the group extended the network to address the many varied needs that arose.

For Aly and Lynn there is huge satisfaction in the seeing positive changes.

"We are helping human beings in total distress," Aly says. "Seeing what they have gone through and where they are now, is remarkable. They come with nothing."

"And they're so generous," adds Lynn, recounting a story of how immediately after moving into their home, the family hosted and fed 22 people to say thank you.

Aly and Lyn have spent a lifetime helping people. They first met in London as travelers. She was on her way home to Canada after a year of nursing and travelling in Africa. He was enroute to the US after leaving Egypt.

They met up again later in 1971, and after becoming a couple, settled in Vancouver. Lynn worked at St. Paul's hospital and Aly went on to post-secondary education.

After graduation, the opportunity to run a child development center took them to Dawson Creek where Aly founded a summer camp for children with disabilities.

It was the desire to raise their two children, Farrah and Clifford on a farm that brought them to the north Okanagan in 1979. The farm demanded a supplemental income so while Lynn nursed, Aly took work as a labourer at an Armstrong fibreglass manufacturer (now Kohler).

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With his work ethic and strong people skills, he quickly advanced to human resource and production manager.

These skills come in handy helping refugees get settled but Aly credits their success as their own and due to their willingness to work hard.

For Lynn, one of the most rewarding experiences has been starting a women's group with "Kindred Spirits" another support group. The connections cemented between the women while gathering for walks, meals or simple conversations, have been life-changing.

For Lynn and Aly what started as a simple desire to help with translation and settlement quickly became a fulfilling passion that keeps them busy, has built community and forged priceless friendships.

