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Student refugee program gets a big boost from donor

A student-driven initiative to help refugee students achieve their education has received a significant boost from international educator and former University of Lethbridge professor, Dr. Al Barnhill.

Recently, he donated funds to support refugee students sponsored through the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) local committee for studies beyond their first year at the U of L. WUSC's Student Refugee Program sponsors a refugee student for one year but some students may not be financially able to continue their education without some assistance. That's something that Barnhill knows very well. He has travelled to more than 80 countries, teaching and consulting in 19 of them.

"My experience is that student refugees are incredibly hard working, motivated and have overcome huge obstacles to seek an education," he says. "In many cases, they are learning a new culture, even a new language, in addition to their studies. Providing a small amount of financial assistance while they build their life in Canada is important to their long-term success."

The funds will be used to establish an endowment that will help future student refugees continue their education beyond year one.

"I am excited about the continuation of this program because of the impact it has on so many lives," says Elise Pundyk, one of the students who founded the WUSC Club at the U of L. "It affects not only the refugee students who will benefit and be able to navigate their future differently through increased access to education, but also all the WUSC members who will be touched by the experience of sponsoring a student. The program brings together students of all backgrounds, from all areas of study, under a common purpose. It enables us to truly see how the work we do can make a difference."

The Syrian refugee crisis that made global headlines in 2015 was the catalyst for Pundyk and other concerned U of L students to act. They joined forces, and with the help of Dr. Anne Dymond, a professor of art history, they formed a local WUSC committee. Their membership grew and within a few months they had raised the \$26,000 needed to bring a qualified United Nations refugee student to the U of L for a year.

In the fall of 2016, Abdullah Mouslli, a Syrian living in Jordan, began his studies at the U of L. The program was life changing for him and he opted to continue his education following his year of sponsorship. In a 2017 referendum, U of L students voted to support a \$2 fee each semester to help sustain the Student Refugee Program. In the fall of 2018, the U of L welcomed a student from South Sudan and plans are in the works to accept another student refugee in the fall of 2019.

The student levy supports a refugee student through their first year and Barnhill's donation will provide bursaries to help cover costs in subsequent years of study. To make up the difference, the WUSC committee continues to fundraise and has a gala scheduled for Saturday, April 6 at 5 p.m. at the Lethbridge Multicultural Centre. Tickets are available through the [WUSC Facebook page](#).

Barnhill's experience working around the globe has provided him with vital insights into the advantages of teamwork, the boundless benefits of education and the need for a shared value system where compassion for others is a guiding principle.

"One person can make a significant difference, but when our efforts are combined with others, the results are much great—like playing hockey or other team sports. They're synergistic," he says.

To contribute to the WUSC Student Refugee Bursary visit uleth.ca/shine.

Read the full story and watch the video in the [Donor Impact Report](#).

The investment is part of the U of L's SHINE campaign and highlights the community's involvement in supporting students and promoting opportunities for them to thrive while working to achieve their academic goals.

This news release can be found online at [Student Refugee Program](#).

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