

Computers are being distributed to Syrians across New Brunswick

The computers designed to help Syrian families with employment and a search for employment

LAVERNE STEWART
THE DAILY GLEANER

Syrian families in New Brunswick will receive hundreds of refurbished computers in the coming weeks as part of a national initiative that will help both parents and kids adapt to their new lives in Canada.

Refugee families – both government and privately-sponsored – in Fredericton, Saint John and Moncton started getting computers Thursday. Families in Edmundston, Woodstock, Bathurst and Charlotte County will receive some of them over the coming weeks.

The computers, equipped with updated software with Arabic and English stickers for the keyboards, were delivered to both the Multicultural Association of Fredericton and Multicultural Association of Greater Moncton area Thursday.

More will be sent to the YMCA Newcomer Connections in Saint John on April 19. Others will be distributed to Syrian families soon.

Mohammad Alkheeb worked as a computer networking engineer in Syria before his family had to flee the country after the war started.

He's happy to have one of the desk



Matt Johnson shows Mohammad Alkheeb a Dell computer which has been equipped with Windows 7 Microsoft Office and set up with Arabic language support. PHOTO: LAVERNE STEWART/THE DAILY GLEANER

top computers so he can pay his bills through the Internet and stay connected with family who are living in other parts of the world.

"Everything in Canada goes through the Internet and technology so having

this is very important."

Suliaman Abazied said he is looking forward to using the donated computer to learn English, do online banking, and to keep in touch with family who aren't in Canada, he said.

Matt Johnson, a community liaison with the multicultural association, has been in charge of organizing the distribution of the computers. He said in 2016

PLEASE SEE → SYRIANS, A7

SYRIANS → A1

access to technology should be considered as important as access to electricity and water.

"We're looking at it from the point of view that it's kind of a human right at this point where people should have that basic access."

The computers have been donated by Computers For Schools, a non-profit organization that retrofits used computers and distributes them to schools and others in need.

Roy Crawford, the organization's executive director in New Brunswick, said they are mostly government surplus computers that have had their hard drives wiped clean and new software installed.

He said the federal initiative is part of the Welcome Refugees program. He said the 260 computers being given to Syrian families in New Brunswick is part of a national initiative that will see 7,500 computers being donated to families throughout the country.

This exercise has led to a partnership with Computers for Schools that will



Hundreds of computers will be delivered to Syrian families in the province, starting Thursday. PHOTO: EMMA DAVIE/THE DAILY GLEANER

provide more computers to other refugee families in the future, said Alex LeBlanc, managing director of the New Brunswick Multicultural Council.

Mike Timani, president of the New Brunswick Multicultural Council, said the computers are going to be extremely useful for the Syrian newcomers.

"These computers will help the students complete school assignments and

help the parents with the process of preparing resumes and looking for employment, both of which are critical for integration," he said.

Most of the Syrian families in New Brunswick still have family and friends overseas, so the computers will also enable them to stay in contact with their loved ones which is important for their peace of mind, Timani said.