

CRIER COMMENT: Blueridge rallies to support new neighbours

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Blueridge has always had a reputation as a tight-knit neighbourhood.

The community has your back, even if you just moved here. The family of Syrian refugees who recently fled their own war-torn neighbourhood and moved into the bucolic North Vancouver neighbourhood just found that out.

Things didn't start so well. In June burglars hit their home and stole the few possessions the family owned. The thieves stole, among other things, medicine, a laptop, cellphone chargers and the donated PlayStation that the kids used to play games and learn English, among other things. They ransacked the place.

As news about the robbery spread, the community was outraged. B&Es are rare here. And of all the homes to hit. This family had already endured so much.

Angela Duso of the Blueridge Community Association felt horribly for the family. She immediately took money over to the family and heard from other neighbours who also wanted to help. She later started a GoFundMe campaign to raise money so the family could replace their possessions. It didn't take long for the online campaign to raise \$3,000, with nearly 60 area residents contributing. Others donated money and other items to the family through the school.

"I was amazed it happened so quickly," Duso said, noting that the campaign spread quickly on social media. "People want to see that family succeed and felt horrible that should happen to them. It's a good community and word spread quickly."

The community didn't just share money. They also sent messages expressing sadness over the break-in and encouraged the family to feel safe in the community and in their home. One couple even offered to donate money for an alarm. Duso was among the group that recently delivered a cheque to the family. She said the family was so grateful that "all these people in the community would help them." The family invited them for dinner to return the hospitality.

"It's a very tight-knit community and that's a bonus about living there. People know each other," she said, adding that community members are more than willing to "donate time to make it a better place."

Eric Anderson, who has lived in Blueridge for nearly 30 years and is president of the Blueridge Community Association isn't surprised by the swift response by his neighbours to help the family from Syria. Part of the glue that binds the community is the Blueridge Community Association, which publishes a newsletter that's sent to 1,500 homes.

The association also has a Good Neighbour Greeting Team, which helps newcomers get used to the community, hosts Blueridge Good Neighbour Day and most recently, along with Cultivate Projects and the District of North Vancouver, created a Sharing Garden at Carnation and Lytton streets, across from Seymour Heights school, a place designed for "neighbours to come together to learn, grow and share with the community east of the Seymour River."

"It's a beautiful place and there are lots of wonderful people. I walk down the street and there's always people you know. People are so involved. People that move here tend to stay a long time. It's a great community."