

City hopes forum will raise awareness of refugee housing issues

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Phil Hossack / Winnipeg Free Press Files

Abdikheir Ahmed, Director of Immigration Partnership Winnipeg, is a panelist at an interactive discussion on the state of refugee housing being held by the city this Wednesday.

Many refugee families are unable to find adequate housing in Winnipeg, forcing them to overcrowd small homes two or three to a room and leaving their children unable to sleep at night.

That's according to Abdikheir Ahmed, Director of Immigration Partnership Winnipeg and a panelist at an interactive discussion on the state of refugee housing being held by the city on Wednesday, June 14.

"The housing portfolio in Winnipeg does not respond to the needs of refugees," said Ahmed.

"Many have large families and many have low incomes. They are unable to afford housing in the private market and the social housing component is designed for traditional Canadian families of three or four. Many of these families are struggling and compacted in small units, with kids struggling to sleep at night and struggling to concentrate at school due to the conditions of their homes."

The discussion, which will be held at the Carol Shields Auditorium at the Millennium Library between 6 and 8 p.m., will provide information on efforts towards assisting refugees' transition to Canadian life, as well as how organizations and citizens can assist in the process.

All panelists are individuals currently involved in issues surrounding refugee housing and services.

Seating is limited for the event and a question and answer period will follow the panel discussion.

"Overall the province has been quite supportive of refugee claimants, but my goal for events like this is that individuals in the community or private sector will step up to help the refugee claimants," said Ahmed.

He went on to say the recent decision by the provincial government to cut funding for the Rent Assist program will have a negative impact on refugees, many of whom rely on that funding to afford housing and basic necessities.

Azarias Butariho of New Journey Housing will be another panelist at the event.

"We really hope that the government will look into all these issues and instead of cutting the Rent Assist program, the government should think about increasing it," said Butariho. "I understand the challenges of the government, but newcomers are really struggling."

At the panel Butariho plans on speaking about the challenges he faced coming to Canada in 2007, after fleeing the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and spending 10 years in a Kenyan refugee camp.

Following his arrival in 2007, Butariho spent time living at Welcome Place, IRCOM House and Manitoba Housing, before purchasing his own home. He has worked as a housing

advisor with New Journey Housing since 2011.

The event is part of the ongoing Housing Speaker Series organized by the city. Each series aims at raising awareness of a particular housing issue and addressing the challenges surrounding it, in order to ensure the diversity of housing needs in the city are being adequately met.

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