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**Syrian Muslim refugee
Moustafa Assad tells his
story through an interpreter.**

Refugees And The Jewish Tradition

Putting a human face on the
Syrian refugee crisis.

More than 135 people — an intergenerational crowd — gathered at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills on Dec 8. The evening's timely topic: What does the Jewish tradition say about refugees?

Billed as a "community learning experience," the program was organized and hosted by The Well, Metro Detroit's 6-month-old pluralistic Jewish community-building, education and spirituality outreach initiative.

Rabbi Dan Horwitz, founding director of The Well, said his goals for the evening were twofold. "First, to put a human face on the Syrian refugee crisis. Regardless of how people affiliate politically or their proposals for how to deal with the crisis, it was important to me to provide an opportunity for folks to remember that the facts and figures we see on the news and in political rhetoric are actual human beings.

"Second, I really wanted to create a pluralistic and contemporary space for engaging in one of the most ancient forms of Jewish learning: text study in small groups or with a partner."

The evening began with Farmington Hills resident Shadi Martini, a Syrian Muslim refugee now working for the Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees, sharing his personal story. An eloquent speaker, the room was silent as Martini detailed his journey out of Syria and his continuing efforts to help those still struggling to escape the regional violence.

Attendees then broke into small groups for text study. Each participant received a packet of texts, ranging from Jewish-authored poetry, to Biblical and classical rabbinic selections and commentaries, to contemporary Syrian rap lyrics, along with suggested discussion questions.

Participants were invited to read, decipher and discuss these texts within their

groups. A select cadre of young adults with extensive text-study experience worked the room as volunteer facilitators.

After text study, Moustafa Assad, a Syrian Muslim refugee who settled in Metro Detroit with his family just six months ago, told his story. Assad shared how he, his wife and five children had escaped the war in Syria to a border town in Turkey, made their way to Istanbul to find work, and from there began the lengthy paperwork and interview process to come to the United States as refugees.

Horwitz then shared the answer to the overarching question of the evening. "As Jews, when put in the position to help save the lives of others, we must act," he said.

The Well is geared to the needs of young adults and those who haven't connected with traditional institutions. Its philosophy is that Jewish ethics, values, spirituality and community can be directly applicable to people's lives and should drive them to positively impact the world.

The evening closed with attendees meditating on what spurs them to act in their lives, singing the blessings and lighting Chanukah candles together. They were sent forth with a closing charge to illuminate the world. ✧

details

Event partners: AJC ACCESS-Detroit, NEXTGen Detroit, JCRC, Repair the World, Detroit City Moishe House and Royal Oak Moishe House.

Host Committee members: Audrey Bloomberg, Alicia Chandler, Sammy Dubin, Rachel Klein, Miki Levrant and Celia Shechter.

Text-Study facilitators: Vadim Avshalumov, Joshua Goldberg, Jessica Katz, Ariella Morrison, Ruby Robinson, Rachel Rudman, Jordan Weiss and Samantha Woll.



**Attendees broke into small groups to
study texts.**



Rabbi Dan Horwitz addresses the crowd.