



West End Refugee Service

strength through support



Issue 63 October 2015

Welcome to the October edition of the WERS newsletter!

An update on Syria



During the last couple of months WERS has received numerous offers of help and support from people who had seen the appalling images of asylum seekers' suffering on their TV screens and the internet. Some people were already acutely aware of the issues that asylum seekers face both globally and in the UK, and for them the harrowing images brought about a heightened indignation at the suffering of those fleeing persecution and war. For others it was perhaps the first time that they had been made aware of the desperate attempts of thousands of asylum seekers of all ages to reach a place of safety somewhere in the world.

All of the people who contacted WERS shared an urgent desire and determination to help in some small way and this has been fantastic. For those of us working in asylum support it has, despite all the horror and unbearable suffering of those trying to reach safety, brought encouragement and a resounding affirmation of the work that we have been doing for many years.

Many of us regard the UK Government's response to the refugee crisis as grossly inadequate and have felt a deep sense of shame that the UK has been vilified by other European countries for its decision to offer sanctuary to

such a small number of refugees. David Cameron has made it very clear that he opposes the 'quota' scheme whereby European countries would try to share the responsibility fairly between themselves.

How Syrians have been coming to the UK

Over the last 18 months Syrian asylum seekers and refugees have been coming to the UK in two ways: the normal UK asylum process and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme.

The asylum route

Since 2011 around 5,000 Syrians have been granted humanitarian protection in the UK under the normal asylum process. These have been individuals and families who have managed to reach the UK independently, claimed asylum and submitted their evidence to the Home Office in the usual way (finding safe and legal routes to come to the UK and claim asylum is of course getting increasingly more difficult for everyone). Some of these asylum seekers were dispersed to Newcastle. WERS supported 21 Syrians in the last year, providing them with the support services offered to all asylum seekers who are sent to live in Newcastle.

UK Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme (SVPS)

This is a separate scheme which was set up early in 2014 to bring Syrians to the UK. It is different from the normal UK asylum process as people are granted Humanitarian Protection before they come to the UK and therefore do not claim asylum. The UK Government opted to set up its own scheme rather than being part of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Many refugee support organisations, including WERS, thought this was unwise and joining the existing UNHCR scheme which had a broader infrastructure already in place would have been preferable.

A tiny number of Syrians - 216 since March 2014 - were subsequently brought to the UK and the Government was widely criticised for this pitifully low figure - there are thought to be a million Syrian refugees in Lebanon,

for example. We understand that Central Government fund the accommodation, integration support, health and education etc. for the first year. Newcastle City Council has announced that they are going to take up to 10 families under this arrangement. Syrians who come via SVPS are given 5 years humanitarian protection which is not quite the same as refugee status but shares most of the same key rights of refugee status: the right to work, eligibility for welfare benefits, access to statutory services such as health and education and the right to apply to bring family members over to join them (family reunification).

There is as yet no detailed information about the 20,000 who will arrive over the next 5 years.

Thank you for all the donations!

We have been overwhelmed by the number of donations we have received over the last 2 months: money for the Hardship Fund, all the fantastic items for the Clothing Store, collections of toiletries and lots of Harvest Festival gifts from schools and churches in the region.



The Year 13 business class at the Northumberland Church of England Academy decided they wanted to support refugees living locally and collected a fantastic array of donations which they brought down to WERS.

All the Harvest Festival produce was very gratefully received. For the last few weeks when we unlock the door in a morning, we have been greeted by the delicious smell of apples – lovely!

Since the beginning of August £5,810 made up of one-off donations has been paid into the Hardship Fund – a fantastic response!

Festive Week 2015: 14-18 December

WERS has already started collecting gifts to give to the destitute asylum seekers who are being supported with £15 weekly payments from the Hardship Fund. Of the 100 destitute clients, only 10 are women, so men's gifts will be particularly welcome. If gifts can be brought to WERS by Monday 7th December, that would be great!

We are collecting the same things as last year which are:

Toiletries (no razors)
Bars of chocolate (no nuts)
Woolly hats
Scarves
Gloves
Socks

We will also need 100 bags to put the gifts in. Now supermarkets are charging for plastic carrier bags, we would very much appreciate gifts of paper or plastic carrier bags too!

PLEASE NOTE

Christmas and New Year closing
WERS will be closed Wednesday 23rd December to Friday 1st January, re-opening on Monday 4th January.

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