



West End Refugee Service

strength through support



Issue 64: January 2016

Welcome to the January 2016 edition of the WERS newsletter. We would like to wish all of our supporters a very happy New Year. Since the October edition (now a long and distant memory), a lot has been happening on the wider world stage and at WERS itself.

Interest in offering support to help asylum seekers and refugees continues:

All things happening at West End Refugee Service

Festive Week

We were overwhelmed by the large number of festive donations received for the destitute clients. This year, clients received larger parcels as our long standing supporters were joined by the Mothers Union who sent over 100 filled shoeboxes and West End United Reformed Church in Fenham who sent filled gift bags. The level of financial donations for the Hardship Fund during December were also high which meant that we were able to offer the destitute clients a 'bonus' payment. Both were very well received.

WERS Hardship Fund

Since November we have received more than £11,000 in donations from both individuals and groups. An amazing response and our heartfelt thanks go to everyone who made a donation.

There have been some recent changes to banking regulations and anyone wishing to make a donation should make **cheques payable to 'West End Refugee Service'** and NOT 'WERS'. We would appreciate your support in the matter.

Fundraising events in February

If any of you would like to wash away the January blues with some rousing music, we have two fundraising events organised for next month and it

would be great to see you and your friends there. All of the money raised will go towards the WERS Hardship Fund which relies solely on donations from individuals and groups. Last year we gave out over £82,000 and demand this year continues to increase.

If you are whizzy with all things IT, we would really appreciate it if you could circulate information widely around your social networks; if not the traditional communication methods work just as effectively. The events are:

Ceilidh in Wylam: Friday 19th February 2016

(7.30pm to 10.30pm): The Angels of the North Ceilidh Band will be at Wylam Institute. A light supper is included in the ticket price of £10 per person (£5 for under 16's). Tickets are available from Wylam Post Office or on the door on the night.

Event at the Cluny: Saturday 27th February 2016

(7.30pm to 11.00pm): There will be live music from the band [Sleeping Dogs](#) followed by [JamJah](#) – "scorching DJ set from around the world". **Tickets (£10 each) are available from WERS; contact Melissa, the new Office Manager.**



WERS Clothing Store

We have received unprecedented levels of stock for the clothing store since the summer. So much so, that we were able to increase the allowance given to clients each week. In December, we had no storage space and therefore asked supporters to

delay the delivery of stock. We are now able to restart receiving donations. So please feel free to drop off any clothing (men, women and children) and small household items. We are particularly in need of bedding, towels and curtains. We are NOT able to take electrical items but can refer you to a community project that does.

Volunteer recruitment

Volunteers play a key role in delivering WERS services. An increase in recruitment means that we now have over 80 volunteers. We estimate that, collectively, they give more than 8,000 hours of support each year, almost doubling our staff capacity.

We have just taken the strategic decision to suspend volunteer recruitment. It is important that all volunteers receive high quality support and our current numbers are our full capacity.

New Office Manager

Now well and truly part of the team, Melissa Younger joined WERS as the new Office Manager in November. She is the first point of contact and is always on hand to deal with any queries.



Events on the regional stage

A shocking new investigation by The Times newspaper has highlighted that asylum seekers in Middlesbrough are being housed behind easily identifiable red doors, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and harassment. The newspaper uncovered that asylum seekers' houses had been targeted with dog excrement, eggs and threatening graffiti. 155 out of 168 houses identified by the paper had red front doors. The paper found one woman cowering inside her home as thugs shouted racist abuse outside.

Refugee Council Head of Advocacy Dr Lisa Doyle said: *"It's completely unacceptable that asylum seekers - already the victims of persecution and unimaginable horror in their home countries - are being subjected to further abuse here in Britain, the very place they hoped to find safety."*

Immigration Minister James Brokenshire expressed concern and announced an urgent audit of accommodation in the area. G4S has promised its subcontractor would repaint the doors.

Events on the world stage

Denmark is set to force refugees to hand over their valuables in order to pay for their accommodation while applying for asylum, in a move the UN has warned may fuel fear and xenophobia. The Danish government has secured a parliamentary majority in favour of legislation that will severely curb the rights of refugees. Norway is also considering similar proposals.

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