

Happy New Year!

People in Upper Wharfedale and Littondale were very generous over the Christmas period. Through various collections and carol singing over £2,000 was raised to help refugees, along with about 25 'snug packs' (packs of underwear, gloves, hats and scarves).

This newsletter is hoping to build on the Christmas spirit. Below, we note some of the events that will be happening in 2018 and we look forward to your continuing support.

Collecting for Calais

A number of people are volunteering and collecting goods for Calais (and other camps) this winter.

Donations can be left with Heather at the Hedgerow in Threshfield (or contact Yorkshire Aid). The items most needed are:

Small tents, sleeping bags and blankets.

Men's clothing: coats, trousers, hoodies, fleeces, shoes, hats scarves and gloves and new underwear – anything warm and robust, in small and medium sizes.

Toiletries: deodorants, toothbrushes and toothpaste, Skin moisturisers and lip salve, razors and shaving gel.

Food: healthy snacks in packets e.g. nuts

Who are we?

The **Upper Wharfedale Refugee Support Group** comprises a network of individuals living in Upper Wharfedale and Littondale who are concerned for refugees and wish to help in some way.

We fundraise, donate clothing and household items, welcome refugees and write to/ lobby elected representatives.

We have no 'structure', no officials, no minutes of meeting or anything formal and individuals respond as best they can, drawing on the support of others in the network to make things happen. So if you would like to do something to help refugees but need some help or support, please get in touch.

Plans for 2018

The National Trust and UWRSG are hosting a tree planting day for refugees on 15 March 2018. If you would like to help (or make a cake!) please get in touch with Jane Way jane.way@outlook.com.

Our 3rd Welcome Day will be in September - cricket and football, country walking and good food. Contact: stella@stellaperrott.com.

Christian Aid Lent lunches at Church House Grassington each Wednesday in Lent (14 Feb - 21 March) at 12 noon and on 28 March Elbolton, Hebden Rd. Contact Joanna Clarke jo.clarke12@btinternet.com. We will also have a coffee morning and carol singing later in the year.

There will be a collect of household items – furniture, bedding, cooking utensils etc. for BIASAN in June. In November we will collect toiletries, gloves, scarves, and children's toys for BIASAN for Christmas. All donations gratefully received (May onwards).

Contact: stella@stellaperrott.com

What is the best way of helping refugees?

We are often asked 'how can we help?' or 'what is the best organisation to give money to?'. Some people want to help refugees locally while others moved by the plight of those they see on television new bulletins. Some people are worried that donations don't get to the right people or that money gets lost in bureaucracy. There is no 'right' answer to these questions and there are as many different views as opinions sought!. The following is a summary of the different approaches taken to date and their merits:

95% of refugees or displaced people remain on their countries' borders, primarily in refugee camps. These refugees are facing starvation and disease and the level of funding falls woefully short of need. We have fundraised for the UN food programme, the International Red Cross and Christian Aid; all well-established international aid organisations. The organisational skills and expertise required to support whole cities of refugees means that it is the larger, better established organisations that can provide aid quickly and negotiate access.

The number of refugees arriving in Europe continues to grow year on year, as do the number of deaths at sea or in some of the camps. The reasons why they come to Europe are complex, including their vulnerability in refugee camps closer to home. There is no evidence that rescuing those adrift at sea, or providing refuge in Europe encourages more refugees to make the crossing. Some are living in refugee camps; some are in 'self-made' camps such as those in Calais; and some are living on the streets in European cities. The plight of children has been particularly acute. European Governments have failed to implement plans that would allow for fairer dispersal across the EU or the richest countries taking on a greater share of the financial burden. In the absence of effective co-ordinated Government action, individuals and voluntary groups have tried to fill the gap. Organisations tend to be small scale and reliant on volunteer help but, over time, they have gained some expertise and know the best means of supporting refugees. Care4Calais(which operates elsewhere in Europe too) <http://care4calais.org/> and <https://en-gb.facebook.com/YorkshireAid/> (Facebook page) are two organisations. Heather at the Hedgerow in Threshfield also takes donations all year round and there are a number of people locally who have volunteered in the camps or on the streets. Locally, we have had collections (winter coats, snug packs, camping equipment) and we will publicise these through the newsletter.

Even closer to home, there are a number of refugees living in Yorkshire. Refugees tend to cluster where there is some support, shared language and culture and good access to services and facilities and so Upper Wharfedale is not an ideal place for refugees to live. People in the Dale are supporting refugees in Skipton and Bradford through befriending, the provision of language teaching or donating to organisations with expertise. We have also held 'welcome days' in the Dale where we have shared our beautiful countryside and renowned Dales hospitality with refugees from Yorkshire and Lancashire (together!).

If a person is accepted in the UK as a refugee, they are provided with some Government assistance and are free to seek employment. The Government rejects over 60% of those who apply for refugee status although some may successfully appeal this decision. Additionally, the Government will only grant 'leave to remain' for some refugees, particularly young people, for three years or until they reach 18 years of age. At which point they become a 'failed' asylum seeker and lose entitlement to state help or right to seek work. Most cannot return home as it is unsafe for them to do so. Some are detained in immigration custody but most are homeless and penniless on the streets of our cities. totally reliant on voluntary effort. BIASAN in Bradford (with whom we work closely) is one organisation that provides assistance.

In addition to providing financial, material or practical help for refugees people can also write to elected representatives and support local efforts to influence policy makers. Julian Smith, our local MP, has indicated that the role of local people in building support for refugees within their communities is vital in shaping Government and public policy. Put simply, without public support for refugees, politicians can ignore the problem. The attached (recently updated) information sheet may provide some help in those discussions.

refugees@upperwharfedale.net