

UWRSG Update - December

Dear friends

It has been another grim month (but a bit more cheer further down the email). The Israeli Hamas War has led to tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands more displaced people. Pakistan has started to expel Afghanistan refugees and Tunisia continues to push refugees into the desert without water and food. In the UK the number of refugees reaching our shores has dropped while those who have crossed the Mediterranean this year have doubled (so far). Even closer to home, Robert Jenrick, the Immigration Minister ordered Home Office staff to issue 7-day eviction notices (rather than 28 days) for those receiving an asylum decision. As you will understand, this had led to mass homelessness amongst refugees (which Suella Braverman argues is a 'lifestyle choice'). Local agencies are collecting tents for refugees and if you have one that you no longer need, please get in touch (not large, heavy, canvas ones please).

On UWRSGs behalf I wrote to Julian Smith about Braverman's comments re tents

"Suella Braverman announced yesterday that she is seeking ways to criminalise charities that provide tents for homeless people. In October, Robert Jenrick cut the 28 day eviction notice period for those gaining asylum to 7 days and, by the time the notification reaches refugees, there are just 3 or 4 days in which to seek and find accommodation; a difficult enough task in the current housing crisis. As a result, all of the refugee groups in your constituency have been collecting tents and sleeping bags for distribution to homeless refugees. The Home Office is making people homeless and yet wants to criminalise those mitigating the worst consequences - law abiding citizens of 'mature' years in your constituency. I hope you can intervene to put a stop to this nonsense. I would also add (taking off my refugee hat), that this policy announcement, a week before Armistice Sunday, is crass and cruel given the extremely high number of service veterans who are homeless, often a result of PTSD incurred through defending the UK."

And received this reply:

"I note the concerns you have raised about Suella Braverman's comments on homelessness and tents, and I hope it goes without saying that I wholeheartedly disagree with the comments the Home Secretary made. I have sent your email, together with a letter of my own, to Suella Braverman, the Home Secretary. I will write to you again as soon as a response is received. You may also be interested to know that the Prime Minister has not endorsed the Home Secretary's plans on tents and homelessness and her plans were not included in the legislative agenda outlined in the King's Speech."

Small mercies!

The **Upper Wharfedale Christmas Collection** will run between 29 November and 10 December (though I can cope with a few straggler items). The Schools Federation, the Churches and Buckden Singers as well as members of UWRSG will be collecting toiletries and other goods up until 10 December. There will be **collection points in schools, churches and at choir**. Please add items to your shopping list! We have been collecting toiletries for many years now. The 'fancier' products will be for presents (the BIASAN Christmas Party is on 17 December) and things like soap and shower gel can be distributed throughout the year when money is tight. Please, also, **print off the posters** and put them up on your notice boards.

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Other events:

Monday December 4 at 11am. There will be a Labyrinth for Peace (see attached).

Ukraine

The war in Ukraine continues but the number of people coming to the UK has slowed to a trickle. The last of Ukraine's families in Upper Wharfedale moved into their own accommodation this week. We are pleased they are remaining in the area and we are lucky to have them, even though the circumstances are not what anyone would have wished. The Ukraine scheme is a fantastic example of British care and hospitality and shows what can be done with a few wonderful people supported by their local community. There are talks of replicating the scheme for other refugees and [Homepage - Refugees at Home](#) have extended their geographical areas. We are still too far away from essential services (for refugees) to be practical but are an option in an emergency. Also, North Yorks County Council www.northyorks.gov.uk/fostering are seeking hosts for young unaccompanied asylum seekers.

On much brighter note

Richard Hargreave's account of the Buttered Peas Dales dance event at Arncliffe. A truly Yorkshire event and welcome. Many thanks to those who donated to help with refugee transport from Bradford. Our visitors had a wonderful time (and may come again!).

"Nearly 60 people came from far and wide to make it a happy and vibrant hall that afternoon. The Buttered Peas band played and the caller Terry Evans took the circles, squares or lines of dancers through the moves of traditional dances from the Dales and elsewhere. Then everyone had a go, people of all ages, some with experience of this kind of dancing but most with none. The hall seemed to buzz with the energy, noise, smiles and sometimes hilarious laughter of people on the move, mostly under control but sometimes verging on the chaotic. It looked and felt like FUN! It was good to see a good number of children joining in – entry was free for them – and above all it was great to welcome some refugees. The band's flute and guitar were able to play two Ukrainian tunes for a Ukrainian family now living in Skipton and the Anchor Project in Bradford brought a minibus with 15 people, mostly refugees. Caller Terry quickly adapted her programme so that several small African children could join in. Joyously, they did!

Many thanks to Sarah Paul and the Amerdale Hall team for the excellent tea and cake refreshments and for all their help to "Buttered Peas" in putting on such a happy afternoon in the hall. "Buttered Peas", by the way, is named after the well-known Dales dance which was done that afternoon to tunes from Dentdale and Langstrothdale. Come and join them next time – Grassington Town Hall, Saturday evening 2nd March 2024, 7pm – 10pm.

If anyone wants to organise another inter-cultural event in the dales please get in touch. Or, if you are putting on an event and would like to offer free places to refugees, we can usually raise some funds for their transport.

And an even brighter note As this is 'going to press' we learn Suella Braverman has been sacked and will be replaced by James Cleverly – a more measured and thoughtful approach to refugee and asylum matters will be welcome (if past behaviour is indicative of likely future behaviour). The further good news (in my view) is the success of the police operation on Saturday. It represents a change in the public mood and a turning away from division and divisiveness. Braverman's sacking is probably a reflection of that. [The peace march: the Met's success is Braverman's failure](#)

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yorkshirebylines.co.uk UWRSG is non (party) political and, as Richard's account of the Dales dance shows, the community, of all political persuasions and none, have a welcoming heart. Today I feel more optimistic than I have in a long time. Our efforts have been worthwhile – keep the light going in the darkness.

Best wishes

Stella

Stella Perrott