

How can we help refugees?

Currently District and Borough Councils all across Hertfordshire are preparing to receive refugees on the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme. The group Herts Welcomes Syrian Families was set up to campaign for this and to work with the councils to support families when they arrive. To find out more please go to <http://hwsf.weebly.com/> or the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HertsWelcomesSyrianFamilies/>. You will find details of other local initiatives supporting refugees here too. These include collections for Calais and individuals volunteering in Greece.

Almost 40 'unaccompanied minors' have made their way to Hertfordshire this year and are currently being cared for by the county. If you are interested in fostering, please visit www.hertsdirect.org/fostering or follow on facebook at www.facebook.com/hertfordshirefostering or twitter @HCCFosterAdopt. Alternatively, you can call the recruitment line on 0800 917 0925.

There are a number of asylum seekers in Watford supported by volunteers at Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Project www.wtrrp.org.uk. Asylum seekers in the UK receive just £36.95 a week to live on and have to wait many months for a decision on their application. They are not allowed to work. Single asylum seekers who have had their application refused and are at the end of the process are usually left destitute. Proposals in the current Immigration Bill threaten to increase destitution among all refused asylum seekers, including families with children. Those granted refugee status have 28 days in which to find accommodation. As a result many are left homeless.

It is currently not possible to take refugees into our own homes, though there is likely to be a sponsorship scheme allowing for this which will be based on the Canadian scheme. If you would like to support a refugee in your own home you could consider taking a destitute asylum seeker (see Still Human Still Here below). If the Immigration Bill goes through there may be children as well as adults left destitute. Families in this situation may be tempted to 'disappear' to avoid having their children taken away by social services.

If you would like to find out more about destitution and also about immigration detention centres such as Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire, you can visit these websites:

<https://cityofsanctuary.org/> <https://stillhumanstillhere.wordpress.com>
<http://detentionforum.org.uk/>. Britain is the only country in the EU to practice indefinite detention of asylum seekers. The law presumes these people guilty until proved innocent.

Please do consider writing to your MP, MEP and local newspaper on any of these issues. It is particularly important to challenge xenophobic language in the press and to do what we can to expose myths about migration. There are several helpful sites including http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/immigration-myth-buster-733 which also contains an

interesting and inspiring video about the Mediterranean rescue organisation set up by an American businessman and his family, MOAS, <http://www.moas.eu/> .

Finally, you will be aware of the many organisations currently supporting refugees, including those on the Guardian's Christmas Appeal

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/24/guardian-and-observer-charity-appeal-2015-refugees-katharine-viner> . These include Doctors of the World www.msf.org.uk

Christian Aid www.christianaid.org.uk and the Red Cross

<https://www.icrc.org/en/homepage> , who also support asylum seekers in the UK and are involved in refugee resettlement.

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I am happy for people to contact me on cat_hen@hotmail.co.uk (cat 'underscore' hen) to discuss any of these issues.