



WYCOMBE REFUGEE PARTNERSHIP

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2020

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AGM

Rising to the challenges

Wycombe Refugee Partnership held its AGM via Zoom this year – a challenge in itself, but minor in comparison to some that the organisation has had to surmount recently.

AFTER A WELCOME from Chairman Hugh Ellis, the AGM heard about Wycombe Refugee Partnership's achievements over the past year.

Mellor House

Purchased by Chilterns Area Quaker Meeting in 2018, WRP operates Mellor House as a half-way house for refugee families in High Wycombe, while they establish themselves in the UK. Michael reported that it has housed three families so far, the third moving in just as lockdown was taking hold, making the provision of our wraparound support service somewhat challenging! But we succeeded in providing the help they needed, as you can see from the wonderful letter of appreciation they wrote us: <https://tinyurl.com/y573bjdu>. This family found themselves in a position to move on in August, and the refurbished Mellor House is now ready for a fourth family.

3
families
accommodated
in Mellor House
over the year

Community response project

As Stephanie pointed out, for five years WRP had a clearly defined remit: to resettle families with refugee status in High Wycombe. Then, on 30 March, a week into lockdown, an asylum seeker living in High Wycombe approached us for help, and it soon became evident that there was a wider need in the community. We applied to Heart of Bucks and were granted £5,000 to provide emergency support to refugees and asylum-seekers in the area.

A great deal of this work has been done by Trina Richards – visiting applicants, identifying their needs and providing for them with supermarket vouchers, fresh food from supermarket overstocks and a number of local support groups, halal meat where required, and other items specific to people's situations, such as bicycles, laptops, school stationery, furniture, shoes and clothes. Nationalities of beneficiaries vary widely: Palestinian, Kuwaiti, Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, Algerian, Moroccan, Sudanese, Albanian, Uyghur, Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan.

AGM 2019/2020:
WRP has continued to provide support with housing, food supplies, education, befriending, and a host of other needs.

80+
5 December is
International Volunteer Day.
WRP is a volunteer-led charity
and we would like to thank
our 80+ regular volunteers for
their amazing work
and commitment.

18
We soon had other
applicants, like the
18-year-old refugee whom
Brent Council swept up off
its streets and parachuted
into a cockroach-infested
room in High Wycombe
with no food and
no money.

91
At the height of the
pandemic, Trina was
taking food to 91
people twice
a week

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP?

www.wycombe-refugees.org/how-you-can-help

Education

Both the education team and the English as a Foreign Language (ESOL) volunteers – managed by Saleema and Sue respectively – have worked hard to support children and adults in our families amidst the challenges that this year has brought.

The second family to occupy Mellor House, between October 2019 and March 2020, included six children who needed schooling. Places were found for all of them, with none of them needing to wait for more than six weeks.

With the onset of the pandemic, the team ensured that families had access to online learning, as well as supporting asylum-seeking families with school admission advice, and help with uniforms and bus passes.

Adult family members, where possible, are directed to Millbrook Adult Learning Centre. Sometimes, those who are working towards requalifying into certain professions are referred to Marlow Refugee Action and, in turn, to the Marlow Language Centre. When it is not possible for families to go to language class, the ESOL team provide home tuition. While these centres were closed during lockdown, our volunteers provided online support.

Befriending

The befriending team, led by Tanveer, have also been doing fantastic work. As well as providing befrienders to the three families settled in Mellor House this year, the team also fulfills the ongoing needs of around a dozen of the 21 families that WRP has supported over the years. In addition, four families have been helped to move to new homes, and one family with a newborn child has been supported through the transition to parenthood.

Sadly, the pandemic has curtailed a great many socialising activities, but, in August, we arranged for families to attend a Family Day at Amersham Field Centre, which was organized and funded by The Getaway Foundation.

Volunteer coordination

In 2016, WRP had eight volunteers. Today, Nasheeda told us, we have 200 on our database. Of these, over 80 are involved in regular activity, helping to support our families. While volunteers used to find their way to us via word of mouth, now they also come through WRP events and google searches.

We are currently working to streamline the recruitment process and to put in place structures to better support volunteers, and we now produce this regular newsletter which is distributed to all volunteers and supporters.

ONE FAMILY MEMBER WANTED TO VOLUNTEER LOCALLY, and so we helped him find a suitable placement, providing an interpreter so he could understand both the role and the health and safety guidelines. For some of the families, we have been able to provide online English tutoring, and many other little things to help them navigate life in the UK.

FROM ARRANGING SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND UNIFORMS, to addressing daily school email queries, sorting free school meals and bus passes and even making sure that the children have school 'buddies', we have offered a supportive educational environment.



Downley donates!

We have found the people of Downley incredibly generous. After putting a call out to Mel of the Downley Coronavirus Community Response Fund, Trina Richards ended up collecting a whole carload of the items that our families are most in need of.

Also in Downley is Martina, collecting items throughout this time as and when requested, including clothes, shoes, toys and books.

21
families
resettled
by WRP since
2016

200
volunteers on
our database

7
A young man in a hostel was referred to us. When a food parcel was taken for him, the warden asked, "What about the others?" We now support seven young men there.

DO YOU HAVE SKILLS THAT COULD HELP REFUGEES IN WYCOMBE?
www.wycombe-refugees.org/how-you-can-help



A grand day out

In August, six of our families attended a family day at Amersham Field Centre, organised by the Gateway Foundation. They thoroughly enjoyed various activities including pond dipping, a treasure trail, natural art, making bird feeders, and generally enjoying being outdoors after weeks of lockdown. The children loved toasting marshmallows around a campfire, a new and exciting experience for many.

Finance

Raz reported that WRP's budget is split between its main activities: education, Mellor House, other housing, family interview, new family set up, annual bus passes, administration, admin and governance, advertisement and a contingency and emergency fund. It is then split into sub activities.

We have a fundraising team who have been doing a brilliant job writing applications to grant-making bodies (see right).

Sincere thanks were expressed to all those who helped to make these things happen and, in particular, to Hugh Ellis for his contribution as chairman! The remaining business included the election of trustees and officers, (see box), and a summary of WRP's objectives for 2020/2021.

Objectives for the coming year

The AGM agreed the following objectives for 2020/2021:

- To continue to improve communications by:
 - using WhatsApp for working groups
 - extending the availability of Zoom meetings
 - implementing a programme of social events when health restrictions allow
 - continuing to issue a newsletter and update the website
- To establish the use of a wellbeing questionnaire for beneficiaries
- To implement the training programme of volunteering skills
- To recruit two new trustees
- To welcome three new families each year to Mellor House
- To develop partnership working to support locally resident refugees and asylum seekers

Financial support

We are very grateful to have received grants from:

BP Collins Fund
Heart of Bucks
Nationwide Community Grants
John Lewis Partnership
Rothschild Foundation
Wycombe Community grants
Marlow Refugee Action

Trustees and officers

The following officers were appointed unanimously:


Chairman
 Dr Michael Bowker
Vice Chairman
 Dr Stephanie Rybak
Treasurer
 Razwan Baig

The following trustees offered for re-election and were appointed unanimously:

Revd Hugh Ellis
 Dr Michael Bowker
 Dr Stephanie Rybak
 Razwan Baig
 Dr Tanveer Choudhary
 Dr Saleema Burney
 Dr Nasheeda Mariyam

Contact us

 www.wycombe-refugees.org

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