



WYCOMBE REFUGEE PARTNERSHIP

NEWSLETTER JULY 2020

Communities
come together to
combat coronavirus

News from families
past and present

New grants
for WRP

A volunteer's
experience

CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

The best of people in the worst of times

There are some wonderful things happening in our town. Because of the awfulness of the pandemic, connections are being made between people of goodwill who might never have come across one another otherwise. Just look at the Roll of Honour on the right!



When lockdown started, we rapidly became aware that there were refugees and asylum-seekers in Wycombe who were in desperate straits because of coronavirus. In some cases, they were waiting for a decision from the Home Office on an application which was not being processed because of the pandemic. In the mean-time, they

were not allowed to work, they had no recourse to public funds and the friends who had been supporting them could no longer afford to do so.

Trina Richards, the head of our Donated Goods team, is driving a whole new programme focussed on getting food and other essential items to those who have asked for our help. She has built up links and collaboration with a range of wonderful groups.

She asked the refugees and asylum-seekers what their needs were. At the top of the list was halal meat, which is expensive and not always available in local shops, so Trina (who is a vegetarian!) buys and delivers halal chickens as well as other food twice a week to 18 families and individuals. The funding for this to continue until the end of August has come from grants (see next page).

WRP has allocated a contact person – Arabic-speaking if necessary – to each family or individual and they and Trina have been able to relay people's needs to us. We have responded to requests ranging from a move from a cockroach-infested room to providing Amazon Fire tablets to enable people to study.



Roll of honour

We are all aware of the terrific work being done by High Wycombe Coronavirus Mutual Aid and Bucks Angels, but there are many other saints at work out there too:

- Trina Richards, who runs the WRP programme
 - Trevor Snaith and Cllr Khalil Ahmed of Wycombe Food Hub
 - Suhail Aslam and colleagues from WISE (Wycome Islamic Society)
 - Meals from Marlow and Charmaine from Khepera – cooked meals
 - Mel and colleagues from the Disraeli Coronavirus group – donated food
 - SEED1 in Marlow – donated fruit and veg
 - The Baby Bank, in Maidenhead – donated clothes, shoes, books and toys
 - Katie Nokes, who sources and delivers requested items
 - Ros and colleagues at the Islamic support group Seerah Today – food parcels
 - One Can food bank and our referrers Richard Goldstraw and Stuart Lord
 - A number of kind donors of laptops, bikes and other items
- A HUGE thank you to all of them!

Settling in

Mellor House is now home to WRP's 21st family. Here's how they are doing. Schooling is a somewhat vexed question at present, but the two younger children are now both registered for schools, and the two older children have been supported to apply for schools. One of our volunteers is giving them help with English, and another with maths. The mother is also getting two lessons a week from, again from one of our volunteers, and she is registered with a local language school for when classes can start again.

Happy endings

Four years ago, we were giving some support to asylum seekers near Heathrow. Because I couldn't get a local GP to see them, I took three of them to Hillingdon Hospital's A&E department. At her request, I accompanied one of them in to her appointment, and found myself translating "You're pregnant and there is a possibility it is ectopic" into "You're going to have a baby. It is possible that it is in the wrong place." She was utterly shocked at being pregnant but, when I took her for a scan the next day, she was already desperate not to lose the baby. Happily, all was well.

She was no longer in contact with the father of her baby, but wanted to let him know that she was pregnant. She managed to get his number but was then daunted at the prospect of ringing him and, to my astonishment, asked me

to do so on her behalf. After initial disbelief and rejection, he decided he wanted to be a proper father to his baby and drove hundreds of miles to rescue her from the mouse-ridden asylum seekers' hostel to which she had been moved. I was delighted recently to receive a photo of him and the TWO little girls they have now, all of them beaming with happiness.

Stephanie Rybak



Skilled work

In 2018, before the father of one of the families that we were helping had found a job, a supporter in Marlow Bottom commissioned him to put his cabinet-making skills to good use by creating this Little Free Library book sharing box. Little Free Library is a not-for-profit movement which fosters book exchanges around the world.

Right: The book sharing box in Marlow Bottom

New grants

WRP is grateful to Heart of Bucks, Buckinghamshire Council, the John Lewis Partnership, World Peace Flame and Trinity United Reformed Church, as well as to private individuals, for grants and donations which are helping us to provide food, other essential items and supermarket vouchers to local refugees and asylum seekers.



VOLUNTEERING

Humbling and uplifting

Volunteer English teacher Jane Knight finds that her work with refugees is a learning experience for her too.



In 2015 I arrived back in the UK from France. The refugee crisis was at one of its highest points and, despite offering my services to the local council to teach English, I had no positive response. Spotting a tiny advert for Wycombe Refugee Partnership on a fund-raising event flyer, I contacted them, and was enthusiastically greeted and soon given my first student, a lady from Aleppo, Syria. Her stories of her family experience were so shocking and something that she wanted to tell me about – we all have a

story to tell and this was hers. It was hard not to be touched. There is more involved than simply teaching English as a volunteer with WRP.

As an English teacher, I probably have more regular contact with the student than most. I'm currently teaching four hours a week with one family on Zoom, something that I had to rapidly master following lockdown. We also had to scrape together some computer equipment for the family. The mother is studying for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) qualification which will allow her onto the pathway back into her career as a doctor, so two of my four hours are spent with her, and the rest with the teenagers who will start school in September. They haven't been to school in seven months and now coronavirus has meant further delays. WRP have found an excellent maths teacher for them too, so at least they have two people to speak to in English! It will be lovely to meet them all face to face one day.

It is overwhelming what you learn as a middle class westerner working with refugees – humbling, heart wrenching and uplifting, and they have so much to teach us! English language is the key to being able to settle, work and feel part of a community again. What a gift it is to give, and it is always gratefully received!

*Unless someone
like you cares
a whole awful lot,
nothing is going
to get better.
It's not.*

Dr. Seuss,
The Lorax

HOW YOU CAN HELP

MAKE A DONATION

Contribute money towards initial housing costs and all the things which each new family needs but cannot afford, from nappies to school shoes, as well as the salary of a part-time administrator to support our volunteers.

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

There is a whole range of jobs for volunteers, depending on how much time people have available and what skills they can offer.

LET A HOUSE OR FLAT


Let a house or flat to one of our refugee families. Contact us to see how your income and interests will be protected.

ACT AS A GUARANTOR

Act as a guarantor to a family wanting to rent. The minimum income required of a guarantor is about £36,000pa. Contact us for more details.

<https://www.wycombe-refugees.org/how-you-can-help>

 www.wycombe-refugees.org

 0845 643 2873

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 Refugees Welcome in Wycombe

