

CHURCHES TOGETHER FOR CHIPPING BARNET

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REFUGEE SPECIAL

People in Barnet are asking what they can do to help Syrians and others suffering in the Middle East as the result of war and persecution. Several organizations and groups of individuals in Barnet are already responding: here is a provisional list.

1. Refugees from Syria

Under the scheme announced by the British Government, 20,000 children and adults with particular needs will be brought from the refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and provided with accommodation and treatment in Britain. Several cities with spare housing have offered to take some. London has so little spare housing that not many will be coming here, although Barnet council has agreed, under pressure from voluntary groups, to house and support 50. The Council would like to hear from landlords and homeowners who have houses or flats they could offer to refugee families, either for free or for rent.

These refugees will have all sorts of needs, and local groups are considering how these should be met. Barnet Citizens, part of the national community organising charity Citizens UK, is a lead player: the local co-ordinator is Charlotte Fischer:

charlotte.fischer@citizensuk.org. Barnet Council is willing to support local charities and faith organizations who are actively involved in co-ordinating support for refugees: refugeesupport@barnet.gov.uk. The British Red Cross has a dedicated phoneline for offers of help: 0800 1078727

The Barnet Multi Faith Forum is holding an event “Welcome the Stranger” on Tuesday 17th November at 7.00 pm at Hendon Town Hall, the Burroughs, NW4 4AX. This will give an opportunity for all people in Barnet to come together and voice their support, and raise any issues of concern in respect of the plight of those seeking refuge in our community. RSVP to info@barnetmultifaithforum.org.

2. Refugees remaining in the Middle East

It is estimated that 12 million Syrians have been forced to leave their homes and have moved to other places within Syria or to neighbouring countries. Many are living in camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. These camps are now severely overcrowded and the international agencies such as the World Food Programme, the United Nations, the International Red Cross, Oxfam and Christian Aid are running out of the money necessary to feed and care for all these people. Some organizations are sending them goods such as sleeping bags, but they are asking most of all for money so that the organizations’ local agents can purchase the things that are needed most urgently.

3. Other Refugees and Migrants

Syria is not the only country in turmoil. Among the hundreds of thousands of people risking their lives across the Mediterranean from Libya and from Turkey to Greece are people from Eritrea, Sudan, West Africa, Afghanistan, and even as far away as

Bangladesh. Some of these migrants are claiming asylum and refugee status, but identifying and registering them is an enormous task. Some are economic migrants trying to get into Germany and Sweden, where there are employment opportunities for people of working age.

The Barnet Refugee Council offers free advice for asylum seekers and refugees: www.b-r-s-.org.uk . They have clinics in West Hendon and Edgware, and an Outreach Clinic at Barnet College on Fridays 11.00 am -12.30 pm. Homeless Action in Barnet responds to anyone coming through their doors, whether refugee or migrant. www.habcentre.org.

Many migrants trying to get into Britain are stuck in the camp at Calais, where the local French people are struggling to give them the necessities of life. In Barnet, some local groups have collected food, clothes and bedding and taken it across to the camp. This is no longer recommended because the camps are becoming places of danger. Emmaus in St Albans have been a few times, most recently in September, and are planning to go again in November. They received an enormous response from people in Hertfordshire and beyond, and they now have enough money and more than enough goods for their next visit. To simplify the distribution, in November they will be taking only winter coats and trainers, in several sizes, for men and women. On their website they report that the camp in Calais is becoming an increasingly desperate, unpleasant, forsaken, squalid place as winter progresses. www.emmaus.org.st_albans

In south London, Calais Action has made several visits. There is useful information and advice on their facebook. They report that all vans are now being directed to a distribution area, so that clothes and food can be given out in an orderly manner. There are already loads of clothes there waiting to be sorted, but a shortage of men's boots and certain foods such as spices. See www.facebook.com/calaisaction. Another London group that has made visits is Indie Gogo: www.indiegogo.com.

4. Action by Faith Groups

In the diocese of St Albans, the Rev'd Bonnie Evans-Hill, their Interfaith Advisor, is putting together a strategy for short term and long term aid, including the training of volunteers. See www.stalbans.anglican.org

The diocese of Westminster is working with Caritas, <http://rdow.org.uk/caritas>, in giving advice on how congregations can prepare for the arrival of Syrian refugees in their communities by getting involved with projects for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers already living in the UK.

The diocese of London and the Church Urban Fund together have commissioned Capital Mass to co-ordinate and draw together local and diocese-wide responses into the immediate and long-term needs caused by the Syrian crisis. See www.capitalmass.org.uk and follow them on Facebook and Twitter.

The New North London Synagogue in Whetstone has a drop-in for destitute asylum seekers, providing a comprehensive range of services and practical support. Volunteers are welcome. Visit www.nnls-masorti.org.uk.

The Editor would welcome news of local projects or plans that could be usefully made known to others through this Newsletter. jennyremfry@btinternet.com.