

The Bromsgrove and Redditch Welcomes Refugees Group continues to be very active since the arrival of the first six Syrian families in Redditch.

The committee is organised with various team leaders of volunteers from both towns, to support different aspects of the resettlement and welcome programme. We are advised by Refugee Action who brought the families over and settled them initially with essential support. The volunteers from our 'Practical Donations' team furnished 5 houses with household goods at very short notice, in preparation for the arrival of the families (2 of whom live in the same household).

The first 3 families arrived just a couple of weeks before our big fundraising welcome dinner at the Redditch Town Hall, on 9th July, attended by the Mayor. The new families felt able to join us and we welcomed them with gifts and speeches (with a translation done by one of our volunteers from the 'Interpreter's group'.) This was a splendid event, organised by the 'Fund Raising group', enjoyed by all, and attended by 150 people from both the Redditch and Bromsgrove communities, plus the three Syrian families.

Since then, the 'Befrienders team' organised a Welcome Lunch at Sandycroft centre in Redditch where they met and talked to all 17 of the Syrians to ascertain their needs and in what ways we could support them. The lunch led to some BRWR members organising Walks on Wednesdays visiting places of interest e.g. Arrow Valley Lake, Morton Stanley Park; an introduction to a local football club, cycling, personal friendship and invitations; visits to the mosque and a visit to St. John's Church, Bromsgrove, where the Syrian families actively participated in a service to remember Srebrenica.

During discussions with them we learnt about some of the challenges facing the families:

1. Everyone's difficulties in their not speaking or reading our language, and for one family being unable to manage cash payments in shops due to their disabilities.
2. The difficulties of sussing out the local transport systems to get to hospital appointments and generally finding their way around.
3. Loneliness in their location - for two families in particular who are far from the others and with difficult access to the town centre due to few buses.

We have an 'ESOL group' of teachers, who we hope will set up a conversational café to help them practice the language, which is obviously a priority.

All this is leading towards helping the resettlement and successful integration of Syrian families in our society.

We have collected over 2000 bags of helpful goods for refugees up to now from Bromsgrove and Redditch, in 6 collections to date. These are driven by a volunteer to People in Motion in Malvern and then, after sorting, to Calais or Dunkirk. These are clothes, camping equipment, bedding, books etc. See the People in Motion website <http://www.people-in-motion.co.uk/> for necessary things to donate. Next collections are on:

1st October; 5th November; 3rd December

We also initiated a scheme for Paypal donations of £20 each for Dignity Packs of toiletries for the Calais refugees. Last Saturday people also brought 4 big boxes of Dignity Pack items,

tinned food, & 2 large cheques. There has been an outpouring of generosity from people in this and other NE Worcestershire districts. Please keep informed from the local press and from the website <http://brwr.uk/>

The 'Fundraising group' have future plans for

- a) A sponsored Fun Run during Refugee Week next year
- b) A Multicultural Musical Concert at the Artrix
- c) An Interest Free Loan scheme
- d) A Sponsorship scheme

They have already set up a pledge scheme – see <http://brwr.uk/> and also raised money from coffee mornings and by giving talks in schools and to church groups.

Due to the resignation of one committee member, we are now looking for a volunteer co-ordinator and a lead for the Practical Donations team.

Our first AGM will be on Wednesday October 26th 7.30pm – venue to be announced.