**BWPJC: The Current Refugee Crisis and Beyond**

Bulletin for High Holy Days 5776 ( September 2015)

We have been aware, for several months , that the numbers of people escaping African countries via Libya and the Mediterranean, and those escaping terror in Iraq and Syria via Turkey and other adjacent countries have reached proportions unseen since the end of the Second World War.

More recently, immoderate headlines in some newspapers, unhelpful comments by some politicians, and shocking news stories and photographs have brought into focus the need to do something more.

Responses have been many over the past week or so. The Government have decided to take up to 20 000 Syrian people from refugee camps, over the next 5 years, with a priority to take children who have lost parents. Religious and civic leaders have urged us to think about taking individuals and families into our homes. Several organisations in Bristol have already made collections of clothing , food, tents, cooking equipment, and have delivered these to an “informal” camp in Calais. There is a need now to be more coordinated and targeted in support.

International organisations have, for some time, been working within refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey where millions of displaced Syrian and Iraqi people are barely surviving. As people move into Greece, Italy, and then through Europe to destination countries, the needs continue.

Within Bristol, several organisations are already supporting refugees and asylum seekers . Some have been receiving unprecedented numbers of offers to volunteer, but don’t currently have the capacity to make best use of this. They need to continue their existing programmes, and make plans for expanding over time. The first Syrian refugees are currently expected before the end of December.

There are, admittedly, many views about what should be done. Our religious leaders urge us to show compassion, offer financial and practical help, and to “welcome the stranger, remembering that we were once strangers in Egypt ”. Our memories don’t need to go that far back to remember that similar arguments were heard in Britain during the 1930’s, and we know the consequences of a less than generous attitude then.

Many of us are already, and will continue to provide financial and practical support for people in need. We only aim to set out some ideas about how we, as a community, might make a contribution to the current crisis, and start to think about how we can provide support in the medium to long-term. As we get more information, and as we make links with other organisations, and as the situation changes( which it will), we will produce further bulletins.

Below, we make some suggestions about how you might help.

**Please do not forget** that we have already decided, as a community, to support **our Synagogue**, **The Julian Trust night shelter in Bristol, and Hand-in-Hand centre for Jewish Arab education in Israel** through our **Yom Kippur Appeal**.

Here are some suggestions about how you can help.

1. **Collection of emergency items at Synagogue**.

The Bristol- Calais Refugee Support Group advises us that we need to collect **warm and / or waterproof** clothes for younger men, and older teenagers. There is a need for **men’s trainers** (shoes) and Walking Boots, along with **socks, t-shirts and underwear**. These should be in very good condition, or new. Popular sizes would be most appropriate (UK sizes small, medium and large, and shoe sizes 7 to 10). Could we please label sizes clearly.

The other need is for **food** that can be prepared easily on simple, 3- stone fires. Food suggestions are as follows:

* **Tinned food, boil in the bag rice, cooking oil, onions, garlic, ginger, tomato puree, spices, sugar, flour.**

These should be put together in food packages; in plastic bags or other containers.

It would be great if we could prepare some **individual toiletry packages**: soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, tissues.

There is also an urgent need for firewood. This will need to purchased in Calais and, therefore, it would be best to make a donation to Calais Refugee Solidarity Bristol through Fundsurfer. We have been told that they will buy a batch when they make their next visit. (**Please do not** bring firewood to synagogue. )

There will be boxes, clearly marked, in the upstairs assembly room at synagogue, or downstairs in the lobby, depending on how busy the HHD Service is likely to be.

1. **Consider a donation to World Jewish Relief**.

WJF are beginning a humanitarian operation providing food, shelter, medicine and hygiene kits to refugees in Turkey, Bulgaria or Greece who are fleeing war or persecution. Please go to : www.worldjewishrelief.org

1. **Consider a donation to Bristol Refugee Rights**.

BRR has been running a “welcome centre” for refugees and asylum seekers in Easton, and now in St. Pauls, for several years now. Apart from providing a friendly welcome and a range of activities, snacks, a weekly shared meal, a “free shop”, BRR provides advocacy and information, English classes , volunteering and other opportunities. They were recipients of BWPJC Yom Kippur Appeal in 2009. Please go to: [www.bristolrefugeerights.org](http://www.bristolrefugeerights.org). They also list partner organisations in the city.

1. **Consider signing Parliamentary Petition 105991**

It states: “ Accept more asylum seekers and increase support for refugee migrants in the UK”.

Google: parliamentary petition 105991 and it will give you a direct link.

1. **Write messages of welcome and support**.

If you have any messages of welcome or support that you would like to be sent with our collection of emergency items, please place them in envelopes in the collection boxes.

*Madge Dresser, Valerie Russell Emmott, David Dwek.*