



NEWSLETTER
April 2017

Welcome to our first newsletter of many! This edition is full of information on what we're about, our hopes for accommodation for refugees, a fascinating account from Ruth on working with refugee children (page 2), how Miriam was supported, and information on Refugee Week (page 3).

Who are we and what are we trying to do?

The members of Malvern Welcomes are a mixture – young and older, successful business people, lawyers, academics, health professionals and social workers – so the group contains a wealth of expertise. What brings us together is our commitment to demonstrating that Malvern can welcome, and will benefit from, families from other cultures who need to be part of a community. We are currently seeking charitable status.

Malvern Welcomes Syrian Refugees, now Malvern Welcomes, was established about 2 ½ years ago by a group of people who were driven by the constant news of cold, hungry and displaced refugees arriving from the Eastern Mediterranean, notably but not exclusively Syria, to do something to help. Our motives are above all humanitarian - "As a mother, I just can't watch the news without doing something" – and based in a belief in human rights.

We know that most people think it's a good thing to welcome refugees and that this

kindness shows Britain in a good light. Here in Malvern we believe that our community would be enriched by people from different cultures.

We understand that many people are concerned about pressure on local services from newly arrived people, and there is genuine anxiety about possible criminal, or even terrorist activity by asylum seekers and refugees.

Numbers will be very small, probably less than twenty – we're talking about a few individuals and then maybe 3-4 families, so nothing which would place undue pressure on schools or health facilities.

All incoming asylum seekers and refugees are rigorously checked. None of us wants to welcome any individual into our community who could be a threat. Sadly as we know recent terrorist activity has been carried out by British born individuals.

So surely there's nothing to stop us welcoming vulnerable families into the community.

Accommodation news - Everything Crossed!

Many will know that a main barrier to refugees coming to Malvern under the Home Office scheme for Syrians has been the shortage of available accommodation. In order to receive refugees under the scheme there must be a cluster of houses and they must be in the private sector. To date our efforts in appealing for landlords/house owners to come forward have met with little success; however now we have 3 opportunities that look very promising. We are working closely with Spring Housing who will act as landlord and deal with any tenancy issues and hope that come the summer we will be able to welcome Syrian refugees to Malvern. Fingers crossed!

Watch this space!



This is Ruth, who lives in Malvern - she has been teaching children and singing with in a refugee camp in Greece.

This was my second visit to a small refugee camp in the Epirus region of Greece, on an ex-military base and run by the UNHCR, with a population of Syrian, Kurdish, Afghani and Iranian families. Non-governmental organizations, staffed by volunteers, provide much needed services. Sadly the refugees feel forgotten by the world.

At home, I was troubled every night when I went to bed by the thought of the many thousands of people who can't sleep in peace in their homes and the children who have had their childhood so cruelly snatched away. As a music teacher, I felt that if I went with my guitar to sing and make music with children in a refugee camp they would feel a small beam of light and some brief respite from the situation which they are in.

I was working with Project Hope4Kids which aims to provide some stability and basic

schooling for children aged 6-14.

Although the children have been through so much in their short lives, they have not lost their natural sparkle and curiosity. One little boy sits on the step outside the school every day waiting for school to start. A teenage brother and sister always carry notepads so that they can write down the answers to their many questions about English grammar and world events. An 11-year old girl is so bright at Maths that a volunteer with Maths expertise is needed to devise more advanced work for her.

The children were so absorbed that they didn't hear us tell them that the class was over. They begged to be allowed to stay 'One more minute! Please! One more minute!' It was heart-breaking to have to stop them, knowing that they do not have access to reading and study materials. What a tragic waste of young potential! They are so desperate to learn.

Even in a refugee camp there can be happy moments of sharing music, laughter and tea. The healing power of music for both adults and children is always a magical thing to see and much time was spent singing and dancing. Women and their babies visiting the 'Female Friendly Space', run by Lighthouse Relief, loved to relax with songs. Refugee Support runs a warehouse which provides clothing, toiletries and food items. They do this with great care, creating attractive 'shopping' spaces where the refugees can go to choose items.

I hope that these families will be granted asylum and that this will happen soon. They all deserve a better life.

See also *Project Hope 4 Kids Facebook page*

Get in touch -

info@malvernwelcomes.org – we'd like to hear from anyone with news, comment and information about support for refugees and asylum seekers in our community.

Website <http://www.malvernwelcomes.org/>

Memories of Miriam

After 5 weeks of a 2 week stay (!) Miriam is leaving for her new home this week (mid April). She came to us as a destitute asylum-seeker having failed in her application to the Home Office and had to reapply for accommodation and support (which she now has...somewhere). If all that sounds odd, try reading Section 44 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. It does explain it but not in a way I could explain it to you or Miriam, it's a real muddle and in the middle of the muddle is Miriam.

This process of destitution happens regularly and that's why Malvern Open Homes has recruited hosts to make their home available (free of charge) for a short period while things get resolved.

Miriam is pleased to have this sorted but is sad to go. She says people in Malvern have been so kind to her and have shown her such love and

care. She is very grateful and weepy about it all and it can't feel good that she will be picked-up and taken to a new town and new home somewhere she may or may not know anyone.

We are glad she stayed with us and know she was in a desperate state 5 weeks ago, she has been a perfect guest, helping where she can and accepting all the kind invitations to meals and sightseeing. In 14 years living in UK she never experienced the countryside and likes it a lot. Miriam has a quiet fortitude (supported by a lot of praying) that gets her through from one day to the next. But beyond that nothing is clear nor settled and as an older person this must be very hard.

We hope she will get some security but doubt if it will be soon.

Dick and Diana Stockford

Refugee Week



Malvern Welcomes and People in Motion would like to invite the local community to get involved and celebrate this brilliant event. Refugee Week will take place across the world from 19th - 25th June. In the UK, Refugee Week is a nationwide

programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK. It encourages a better understanding between different communities and successful integration, enabling refugees to live in safety and to continue making a valuable contribution to society. We would love to see local groups, including schools, churches, sports clubs, for example, celebrating this wonderful event in a way that works for them.

There are some brilliant resources for individuals, groups and schools on the Refugee Week website, and we can advise on how to make your event a success.

Please look at the national Refugee Week website <http://refugeeweek.org.uk> for information on events, and e mail us with information on your events on refugeeweekmalvern@gmail.com no later than 1st May.

Already we know that there will be a reading in the community bookshop, music, drama, a Buddhist service for refugees, and a number of exhibitions in Malvern. We are also organising talks by speakers with first hand experience of working with refugees.