

Introducing



The ExCoS Update

the newsletter that aims to keep you up to date with our activities and everything in and around Exeter relating to refugees and asylum seekers*

Our partner **Stagecoach South West** has generously donated 100 travel vouchers for the use of asylum seekers and refugees living in and around Exeter. Refugee Support Devon will administer the vouchers, which will go to people who are close to destitution and will help them get to medical appointments, English classes or just to see friends. RSD coordinator Neli Montes de Oca said "Every act of kindness makes a big difference to people trying to rebuild their lives". A big thank you to Stagecoach from all of us.

Photo: Stagecoach Helen Scholes with RSD Nelida Montes de Oca



Latest from ExCoS

We would also like to extend a warm welcome to the three **Syrian families** who recently found sanctuary in Exeter and wish them every success in building a new life among us. Exeter City Council is committed to finding housing for a further five families as part of the government's Syrian Resettlement Scheme, but is struggling to find homes for them. At ExCoS we are doing what we can to reach private landlords and encourage them to make accommodation available to these, the most vulnerable among the Syrian refugees. See what we've been doing to help in the **Campaigning** section below.

You can help

Refugee Aid groups across the South West are sending a **container of aid to Lesbos in Greece** through the auspices of OHAB (Open Hearts Open Borders). They are collecting essential items such as food, baby milk and food, toiletries, household goods and socks and underwear. For more information contact: info@ohob.org.uk

*We would love to know what you think of it, and welcome any suggestions for future newsletters – so feel free to get in touch! We hope you'll enjoy our updates, but if you don't wish to receive the newsletter, please let us know and we'll take you off our mailing list.

Campaigning

- **Resettlement of Syrian Families in Devon:** We share the concern of other Devon refugee support groups that Devon County Council's commitment to resettle at least 74 vulnerable Syrian families across the county is no longer secure and has been reduced to "over 40 Syrian families". <https://new.devon.gov.uk/refugees-in-devon/> The reasons behind this are not presently clear but we will be discussing it further with other Devon groups.
- Currently **Exeter City Council** is committed to housing eight families as part of the Government's Syrian Resettlement Scheme for very vulnerable families in UN camps bordering Syria. However, we understand that there has been a shortage of private landlords with suitable properties coming forward to Exeter City Council. We have therefore been working with them to highlight this need - including making contact with estate agents. This is an opportunity to play an important role in the overall resettlement process, positively changing a Syrian family's life for the better. ***Private landlords and those with a vacant, family sized property in Exeter who would be interested in leasing their property to the council are urgently needed. We are seeking independent accommodation - houses or flats where families can live independently. Rents are paid and grant money is available to cover other costs. If you know someone who could help, please ask them to contact:***

Vanessa Macdonald
Housing Team, Exeter City Council
01392 265685
Vanessa.macdonald@exeter.gov.uk

OR

Email the refugee team at Devon County Council who co-ordinate the SVPR programme across Devon:
refugeesupport@devon.gov.uk

- Many of our supporters we know were saddened by the Government's decision to close the **Dubs' scheme** and cap the number of unaccompanied children to be brought to safety here from France, Italy and Greece at 480 rather than the expected 3,000. We fully support therefore the current court action by '**Help Refugees**' to re-open this vital scheme. <http://helprefugees.org.uk/dubs-amendment-closed-shameful/>
Please show your support: #DubsNow
- Our thanks go to Joe Levy, Vanessa Newcombe and Ben Bradshaw for supporting our **Pledge of Support** – especially to Ben, who was the only South West MP to vote in parliament for the Dubs scheme to remain open. **Before the General Election we wrote to all the Exeter's candidates** requesting they remember the need for refugee protection and work to ensure that Exeter, and the UK, remain a welcoming, safe place for those fleeing war and persecution. We asked them to commit to working with us on five key objectives. These included the re-instatement of 'Dubs' and maintaining Exeter

City Council's commitments to welcoming Syrian families. The full Pledge can be seen on our website: <https://exeter.cityofsanctuary.org/campaigning>

Recent activities

Our sincere thanks to Exeter City Council for exhibiting our 'Tree of Welcome' at the Civic Centre in Paris Street. The 'Tree of



Welcome' is a public display of messages and images extending welcome, friendship and support towards the Syrian families and sanctuary seekers arriving in Exeter. We've been working on it as part of our awareness raising activities and work in Exeter schools since June 2016. Personal messages have been created on 'Hands of Welcome' by schoolchildren at Alphington, Ladysmith and St. Sidwell's schools as well as public workshops on the Quay during Refugee Week. We hope it will inspire others to

demonstrate that Exeter welcomes asylum seekers and refugees. In the photo: Tree of Welcome at Civic Centre, Exeter, with Exeter City Council's Amanda Leach, Operations Team Leader, and Stephen Clayton, Customer Support Lead.

"Let us heat your heart up with friendship after the coldness of leaving your home: you will always be welcome..." Yr. 6 child

See Images and exhibition report here: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/exeter-city-council/tree-of-welcome-is-currently-on-display-in-the-civic-centre/1326165054088199/>

- Our **awareness-raising group has been working in schools** to raise awareness of the global refugee crisis and the factors driving families' and individuals' need to seek safety. Who are refugees? Where are they from? Where do they go? How can we welcome them? Over the last year we have had a strong focus too on developing young people's understanding of the Syrian refugees coming to live in the UK, and in Exeter. Developing on from creating Hands of Welcome, we are now integrating readings from novels and poetry about refugees and encouraging children to write their own poems. An example of one of the poems, written by **Megan (age 10)**:

*Refugees have faced so much but
Even though this is not right, they deserve to be treated
Fairly, just like everyone else.
Undeniably they will need help and so*

Generosity is important. People should give freely because refugees deserve the same as

Everyone

Else

- It was great to be back at **TedxExeter** again and get our message out. Particularly moving was Nujeen's Mustafa's talk on her epic journey from Syria to Europe in a wheelchair. Told with humour, her talk concludes that refugees need compassion as much as shelter. "Different is not dangerous"

See her talk 'I Am Not a Number: A Refugee's Tale' here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3r4gnSouqQ&feature=youtu.be>

In a summer of often dark news, TEDxExeter brought us stories of hope and understanding, with other new talks including "*It's in the darkest skies that you find the brightest stars*" and *Misconceptions of Islam and Muslim life*. For these and other stories go to: <http://tedxexeter.com/talks/>

Date for the diary

What's going on where you are? Share your ideas with West of the Exe, a community engagement project for St Thomas, Alphington and Exwick run by David Lane and the Boat Shed Theatre. David will be listening to and recording stories and ideas from those involved in community activities, then celebrating them and making them visible at the Boat Shed during its pop-up residency on the Quay until the end of August.

To get involved contact David at david@davidjohnlane.com or phone 07870 488 252 by the end of July.