



Newsletter - December 2017

Dear friends

Since the AGM, the group of five - Clare, Jen, Nick, Phil and Wendy - who took on the Management Committee role have met three times. Our discussions and planning have been focused in the following areas.

- Campaigning
- Awareness raising in schools
- Working with the University
- Communications
- Pledging

You can read reports on the first three areas in this Newsletter (where we are trying out a new communication tool - hopefully successfully!). The ExCoS Twitter account is being revitalised. The Facebook page continues to provide news updates and the website holds useful resources. In the New Year we hope to obtain further pledges of practical support for asylum seekers and refugees from local organisations.

Good news - since September we have been joined by five new volunteers who are helping with these activities.

Best wishes

Wendy

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News from Campaigns ...

A Life Away From War



GOOD NEWS! - Syrian Family Resettlement in Exeter

Exeter City Council has now secured the eight private properties they pledged for resettling Syrian families from UN camps. Six properties have been fully approved by the Council and two more are in the pipeline. ExCoS has been supporting the Council's efforts to find interested landlords since May, by making direct contact with estate agents, Exeter organisations and city residents as well as widely distributing flyers and information. We are heartened by the really positive response and interest this resettlement scheme has received and want to say a huge thanks to all the volunteers and supporters who helped with this campaign..... and to the landlords who have stepped up to offer housing.



Photo: ExCoS rep. Clare Henry and campaigners from Plymouth and Cornwall with Lord Dubs; Parliament 24/10/17

Unaccompanied Children in Calais and EU: Action at Parliament

On 24th October (the first anniversary of the demolition of the Calais 'jungle'), ExCos joined

with campaigners, including the charities Safe Passage and Help Refugees, community leaders and former child refugees resettled here from Calais, for a rally and subsequent lobbying sessions with MPs at Parliament. There was praise from speakers for the UK Government's actions last year ensuring that 750 young asylum seekers were legally brought to safety here - most to join relatives.

In a moving tribute a group of former young asylum seekers from Calais thanked the British people and Parliament for "giving us peace" and presented a plaque to Lord Alf Dubs, who led the campaign to ensure children were given safe passage to UK. (See further reports here: <http://safepassage.org.uk/news/> and #childrenofcalais)

Concerns: Amid the thanks however, there were very serious concerns raised for the welfare of hundreds of desperate lone child refugees still sleeping rough in woods around Calais, with thousands more in Greece and Italy. Some were approved for transfer here over a year ago and there were reports of children sinking into despair. Josie Naughton, CEO of Help Refugees highlighted the need for urgent action on both family reunification and the 'Dubs' scheme:

"The government promised to resettle 480 children under the Dubs Amendment. But one year since the closure of the camp and nearly 300 of these places remain unfilled. We are here today to demand that at the very least all 480 places are filled before the end of the year, to protect at least some of the children of Calais from freezing temperatures this Christmas."

Campaigners urged their MPs to advocate for these children directly with the Home Secretary and Immigration Minister and to attend the forthcoming Parliamentary debate on this issue.

Parliamentary Debate 2/11/17

Over 40 MPs attended the debate and Brandon Lewis, Immigration minister, announced that 4 new accommodation centres for lone children would soon be opening near the Calais port. He also confirmed that some young people were imminently arriving in the UK from the EU under 'Dubs'. More on this here: <https://exeter.cityofsanctuary.org/campaigning>

We are extremely grateful to all our ExCoS supporters who got behind this campaign, attending our public meeting in Exeter, writing to their MP and ministers or rallying other local and Devon based refugee groups. Unfortunately Ben Bradshaw, MP, was unable to attend the debate but is supportive of pressing the Government to act and has written to relevant Government departments.

Please keep an eye on our Facebook and Twitter pages for ongoing news about upcoming campaigning for family reunification in the context of Brexit and ways you can help.

News from the University ...

Students for Sanctuary: a University of Exeter & ExCos Partnership

The Department of Geography at the University of Exeter and Exeter City of Sanctuary are endeavouring in a unique partnership commencing in 2018. Under the supervision of Dr Jen Bagelman, and in collaboration with ExCos, 100 Geography students will be creating 'zines' (mini-magazines) which will address and consider how to promote the goal of

welcome and hospitality in Exeter. This partnership hopes to encourage younger generations to engage, at the local scale, in pressing issues relating to displacement.

Moreover, this project hopes to nourish links between the city and university in an effort to make Exeter a more welcoming home for all.

News from the Schools ...



After our previous successful workshops in primary schools, we are now looking at running some more in the Spring term. We have approached several new schools and we will be fixing up dates at the start of next term. At present all their thoughts are on productions and Christmas festivities!

We feel that the the Hands/Tree of Welcome has achieved it's aim in terms of work in schools. We are now developing new ideas and creative activities to help promote the awareness of how refugees might feel in a new home and country and what would make them feel welcome. We want to offer assemblies as well as workshops and see how we can tailor these to different ages! While using our original team, we are also benefiting from support and help from student volunteers. A big thank you to everyone who helped in the previous workshops!

Others News ...

EXCos had a stall at the Picturehouse for the showing of **Human Flow** a detailed and heartbreaking exploration into the global refugee crisis directed by Ai Weiwei (www.imdb.com/title/tt6573444/). We were also present at the Bike Shed during the run of **The Claim**, described as *a comically absurd and quietly shattering journey to the heart of our tolerant and fair society*.

We have news from City of Sanctuary that **Care4Calais** are running a campaign to get coats for refugees in Northern France <https://www.facebook.com/care4calais/posts/1743931665639783> and are in need of drop-off points in your area. **Can you help?**

Clothes for Refugees at Calais and beyond are urgently needed. It has been snowing in Calais and hundreds of refugees are sleeping outside in the woods, including lone children and young people. You can now leave specific donated items at Exeter Labour Party's offices at 26B Clifton Hill, Exeter, EX1 2DJ (call 275004 over the holiday period to check someone is there, if not leave a message).

Clothes Items Needed: *Duvets; Blankets, Jumpers and Fleeces; Jackets and Coats, Hats, Scarves, Gloves, Socks, Shoes, Boots. Also needed are toiletries, nappies and sanitary towels..* Please ensure that all donated items are clean and in good condition. Donated items will be taken by volunteers to a collection point in Taunton and sent by RAFT to refugee camps.

Our friends at **Open Hearts Open Borders-Refugee Aid (OHOB)** are again collecting essential aid items for another large container of aid going from the South West to Greece and France. Drop off for these donations in Exeter is at: Armadillo Self Storage Exeter (formerly Quickstore) 103 Grace Road West, Marsh Barton, Exeter, EX2 8PU (*Tinned food items only at Exeter armadillo storage. Please see OHOB's Facebook page for the list of*

items needed <https://www.facebook.com/groups/openheartsopenborders/>



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