



Providing comfort and friendship to
refugees and asylum seekers

www.wtrrp.org.uk

NEWSLETTER: AUTUMN 2014

Welcome to our autumn newsletter. In this edition, Guy Buckler, puts the spotlight on our Drop-in Centre, which has now been up and running for two years. Also in this edition, there is coverage of our best-ever client party, and our volunteer co-ordinator, Marie-Jo Churchill, shares some experiences from her first year of volunteering with WTRRP. There is also a very descriptive 'holiday encounter' written by Joy Hobbs, our very experienced casework co-ordinator.

Drop-in Centre marks up two years!

The WTRRP's twice-weekly Drop-in Centre at St John's Church, Sutton Road, Watford, continues to accomplish much since it opened its doors two years ago, and there's a real buzz at every session. We now welcome as many as four or five clients at a time.

Some of them are people we already know well, but many others are making contact with WTRRP for the first time. When they get to St John's they find a relaxed and secure environment where they can talk about their circumstances. The WTRRP volunteer who is on duty then begins addressing their immediate needs: Do they need food or other essential supplies? Do they need accommodation or do they need money?

It is good to report that our free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes (run by Andrea and Marie-Jo) that started in earnest a year ago have rapidly become a regular fixture with demand beginning to outstrip supply and space!

Our latest news is that during the summer, WTRRP established a link with a firm of solicitors in Wembley

Park. The firm has first-class experience of dealing with immigration issues. We have arranged for one of their solicitors to be available at an occasional Tuesday drop-in session, ready to give legal advice to our clients.

A big thank you to all of the volunteers who help at our drop-in sessions. We couldn't do it without you! Thank you also to St John's Church for their ongoing generous hospitality.

Reminder

WTRRP AGM

24 February 2015 at 7.30 pm

St Lukes Church, Watford

Our clients...

are immigrants who are looking to shelter in the UK because they may have been sexually and/or domestically exploited, or persecuted because of their religious beliefs or political stance. Their lives could well be in danger if they return home. They do not have legal access to the state benefits that UK citizens enjoy. Until the government grants them leave to remain, which can take years, they are in desperate need of basic human essentials like shelter and food.

Our befrienders...

provide moral and practical support to our clients, such as listening, accompanying them to meetings, delivering food, helping to fill in forms and generally helping our clients adjust to life in the UK.

Magical Summer Party at St Mary's Church

Everyone who came to our summer party (on 20 September) enjoyed not just the singing, the dancing and the delicious food, but also the magic from

Sam Tutti Frutti the clown. Happy Birthday was sung to the birthday girl, who led us in a conga line to a table piled high with Ghanaian rice and chicken, and Caribbean and Albanian pastries alongside traditional British party food. After the meal each child got the usual goodie bag with books, toys and sweets plus the remaining balloons that somehow survived their action packed and fun-filled activities. Both established and newer clients had a chance to meet, share experiences and advice, while their

children re-ignited previous friendships and made new ones. All-in-all a really successful afternoon. In the words of one of our child clients: 'When is the next party? I wish it was tomorrow!'



My first year as a volunteer

My name is Marie-Jo Churchill. Last October, a friend told me that WTRRP was looking for an English language teacher. I didn't know much about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers but I was keen to put my teaching experience to good use, so I applied.

I received a warm welcome from Joy, Andrea and Dorothy. There was a venue available for classes next to the WTRRP Drop-in Centre, thanks to St John's Church. My first student arrived, a shy young Iranian who was concerned we might not understand each other.



In February, he was seized by the police and sent to Campsfield House detention centre near Oxford. Determined to offer him a small amount of 'normality', I packed my English teaching books to deliver my weekly lesson inside the detention centre. I was ill-prepared for the sight of grilles topped with razor-wires, and the general prison-like atmosphere. Although we didn't stick to the lesson plans, we talked and almost unintentionally I became a befriender. He was eventually released.

Our English class keeps growing: six students so far, all from different countries, with different abilities, and all willing to learn. Guy and his team at the Drop-in Centre offer a welcoming atmosphere. My first student has worked incredibly hard and is far more confident using his English.

In June, I took on the position of volunteer co-ordinator. Most of the existing volunteers know far more than I do, so my first priority will be continuing the recruitment of new volunteers that we undoubtedly need. With so many exciting challenges ahead, I'm looking forward to another year with WTRRP.

Joy's holiday encounter!

In September on a Monday afternoon I was boarding a flight in Rome, bound for Luton Airport.

As I travelled in the swaying airport bus towards the plane, I was struck by a couple standing close to me. She was 15 or 16, excited to be on a great adventure, clutching her blue passport as she had no pockets in her oversized tracksuit bottoms and no handbag. She spoke good English with an American accent. Her sweat shirt hood was pulled over the top of an African 'turban', and she was hanging onto her partner's arm.



Joy Hobbs, busy as always, preparing food parcels with one of our previous clients, Alice, who is now a volunteer.

He was white, about 28 years old, with dark black hair and a neat full beard. He wore a bright green tee-shirt and bright trousers and had his hair in a pony tail. He was not that affectionate to her, but accepted her attention. They boarded the plane after me, and sat in a window seat. He carried an almost-empty holdall.

As they left the plane in Luton, I noticed that the man's pony tail was gone. He went through UK nationals' passport control and she through the non-European channel, so that they were not seen as a couple. They collected no baggage. They had chosen a smaller airport, on a Monday, and had possibly taken an indirect route to the UK.

I suspected she had been trafficked into the UK, so I slipped her a scrap of paper with the details of WTRRP and a landline telephone number. She took it and put it in her sweat shirt pocket.

In our work with WTRRP, we hear many stories of young women who have been trafficked into the UK. This is why WTRRP exists: to support immigrants who may have faced sexual, domestic, financial and emotional exploitation at home and in the UK. None of us can right every wrong in life but we can do the best we can where we find ourselves. With your help, WTRRP can continue to support refugees and asylum seekers in the Watford area.

Food supplies

A BIG thank you for your Harvest donations – supplies of food are always welcome. They help to feed refugees who can't put bread on the table because they have no legal right to benefits or paid work.

Our food stocks need regular replenishment all year round – we particularly need the following items, can you help?

Pasta and pasta sauce, long life milk, cereal and rice (small packets, preferred), tinned meat, tuna fish and vegetables, nappies, toiletries, shampoos and liquid/gel detergents.

For more information, contact 01923 252434

Thank you!

Coming up in our next newsletter...

An interview with our outgoing and incoming new treasurer; and news too about our progress to becoming a charitable organisation.

All images in this newsletter are either from royalty free photo libraries or are reproduced with permission of the individuals shown in the photos.

Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership

What do we do?

- Befriend asylum seekers and refugees (our clients)
- Give practical help – food, toiletries, nappies etc
- Help in finding accommodation
- Work with the statutory authorities on our client's behalf
- Publicise the plight of our clients

What you can do to help

- Become a volunteer, befriend and offer practical support
- Donate canned/dried food, toiletries, nappies and other basic household items
- Donations, large or small, to support our work (donations to WTRRP treasurer, 23 Kingsfield Road, Watford WD19 4PP, 01923 460508)

If you can help, or if you need to refer a client please contact **01923 252434**.

Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership Standing Order Instructions

If you use online banking: Please set up your standing order and complete sections B and C

If you do not use online banking: Please complete all sections (A, B and C)

Return this form to WTRRP, c/o Chris Carter, 23 Kingsfield Rd, Watford WD19 4PP. You can also make donations by cheque, payable to Watford and Three Rivers Refugee project. Please send to Chris Carter at the above address.

Section A

To the manager.....Bank plc

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

Please pay to Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership at:
Lloyds TSB Bank plc, Edgware Branch
P O Box 1000, BX1 1LT

Sort code 30-98-07 Account 03770168

Section B

The sum of £..... (figures) (.....) (words)

commencing on theday of20..... and a like sum:

(annually) (quarterly) (monthly) until (notified)/.....20.....

(delete as appropriate)

This order cancels all existing standing orders in favour of the Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Project

SIGNED.....DATE.....

Section C

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

Account name.....

Sort code.....Account number.....