



Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs

QARN

Quaker faith in action

Friends' work in the
area of forced migration

CAUTION



December 2016

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Unattributed quotes are from questionnaire respondents.

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Introduction

It has been said that Quakers have a simple faith in a complicated world. It is an experiential faith, a doing faith.

Each generation has faced situations that have challenged their faith. During the two world wars, Quakers struggled with their pacifism and how to live out their faith in the context of what seemed to many to be ‘just wars’. Each Quaker responded according to his or her own conscience. Some fought. Some became conscientious objectors and paid a high price for following their conscience. Some served in the Friends Ambulance Unit, providing humanitarian aid to anyone in need. Another generation faced the problem of unequal civil rights, and some fought alongside the great leaders of that movement, and again paid a price for that. Many are still on the frontlines of this struggle. Likewise, Quakers today face challenges: climate change, seemingly unending wars, the ever more powerful arms industry, and forced migration resulting from wars, extreme poverty and the effects of climate change.



Photo: Andrew Lane

As they always have, Quakers respond as their individual consciences dictate. The current report represents an effort to understand the Quaker response to the problem of forced migration. It looks at where individuals and groups of Friends are working, what they are doing, and what is working well. It also includes ideas for taking action that have come from the understanding of the problem developed through Quakers' work (alone and with other groups) in this area. The goal of this effort is threefold: to develop and facilitate Quaker networks to enable sharing our learnings, to understand what works and why, and to support and sustain these efforts.

“The treatment of refugees and asylum seekers is THE moral issue of our times.”

Quakers are working on this problem at the levels of both cause and effect. Some Friends are working at the level of the effect: grass roots efforts to aid asylum seekers and refugees in the camps throughout Europe and in the communities where they are trying to settle. This includes Friends working to help those who are helping the refugees and asylum seekers. Still other Friends are working at the level of the cause: the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA), the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) and Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) are working at the global, European, and national levels to address the root causes of the problem, including government policy. The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) works on the more immediate causes of misery to migrants – a flawed asylum and migration system in the UK which leads to cruelty and injustice. They are all united in their desire to see the Quaker testimonies to peace and equality honoured.

Some definitions

We often use the terms migrant, asylum seeker, and refugee as more or less interchangeable. However, they each have their own precise definitions as specified in the 1951 Refugee Convention:

A refugee is someone who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence and has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. They are unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. Once refugee status is granted, the refugee is under the protection of the government of the host country.

An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for refugee status. They are not protected by their own governments and seek protection from another. They remain asylum seekers as long as their application is under consideration (including appeals).

Between January and September 2016, 38% of refugees arriving in Greece were children.

SAVE THE CHILDREN, "CHILDREN ON THE MOVE" FACT SHEET
SEPTEMBER 2016

A migrant is someone who moves to another country to join family, improve economic situation, find work, or study. Importantly, under this definition, a migrant enters another country with authorisation and is under the protection of his/her own government. However, the term migrant is often used today to also include people who are fleeing persecution but haven't yet applied for asylum, making this term a confusing one. The

UN General Assembly suggests using the term “undocumented” or “irregular” migrant for those who have entered another state without the proper documentation or whose documentation has expired. Others suggest using the term “displaced persons”.



Poster at Friends' House, San Francisco, CA

What Quakers are doing in Europe

Individuals

The Quaker response to the problem has been typical: each person or group has responded in the way that suits his or her conscience and the local situation. Thus, the response of individuals has been varied. Because Quakers are relatively isolated in much of continental Europe, many Friends can only act individually or in conjunction with other (non-Quaker) groups.

This section seeks to list many of the different activities that individuals or groups of Friends have undertaken within the last year. It has mainly been generated by a questionnaire that was completed by many Friends from Yearly Meetings or equivalent Quaker communities in Britain, in Ireland and in Continental Europe. It is not meant to either be comprehensive or to overstate the level of activity that is being undertaken by Quakers. For some of the activities listed below, we are only aware of a small number of individual Friends having been involved.

“...the silent help from the nameless to the nameless, which is their contribution to the promotion of brotherhood among nations”

NOBEL PRIZE COMMITTEE

Babysitting/Childcare: There are examples of Friends coordinating childcare and play groups for refugee and asylum seekers. Sometimes this is in the context of a welcome centre, sometimes it is a stand-alone programme.

Language classes: In some places formal language classes have been established; in others informal language exchanges have been arranged between an individual Friend and a refugee.

Inviting refugees for meals: Many Quakers have invited refugees and asylum seekers for meals at their homes or at the Meeting House. In one place, refugees are using a meeting house as a venue to host Syrian food evenings as a means of raising money for a charity which helps asylum seekers. This has given an opportunity for Friends to get to know refugees as individual human beings and to understand them and their culture better.

“A deep level of mutual understanding from the heart is needed I think. Quakers can offer this.”

Helping asylum seekers with paperwork: Friends in several countries are helping with the paperwork needed to complete asylum applications. This is important for those who do not necessarily speak the language of the host country or understand the culture.

Legal advice: In a small number of cases, Friends with the appropriate knowledge help refugees and asylum seekers with legal advice, supporting their applications for asylum and appeals.



Photo: Catherine Henderson

Helping refugees to find work: In some places, Friends are helping unemployed refugees with job applications, job searches, and acclimatising to their new country's work culture. Quakers have also worked with under-employed refugees to help them find appropriate and sufficient work.

Listening, meeting refugees as people: Sometimes the most important thing that an asylum seeker or refugee needs is a listening ear. Our questionnaire found a number of examples of Friends providing this.

Working in the refugee camps: Many Friends have worked in the camps as volunteers on a temporary basis. For a day or a week or a month, they go and do what is needed. One Dutch Friend has spent the last year working in Calais as a permanent volunteer.



Photo: Refugee Info Bus (used with permission)

Collecting supplies for refugees: One of the most common activities undertaken by Friends has been to collect food, clothing, housewares, building supplies, blankets, tents, and other items for refugees and asylum seekers in camps and in their local communities.

Welcoming refugees into private homes: Across a number of countries we find examples of Friends hosting refugees and asylum seekers, taking individuals or families into their homes for short or long periods.

Safe rooms in homes for those who need them overnight: Some Quakers have provided a 'safe room' overnight for those who needed emergency shelter.

Translation: Friends are helping with translation services where they have the appropriate language skills. In other cases, Friends have arranged for refugees with the right languages to serve as translators.

“Success for me is simply to be trusted with hands and arms that have been cruelly touched in order to give them a different touch and try to affirm their humanity.”

Campaigning for policy change: Individual Quakers have written letters to their MPs, MEPs and in-country ministers to change policies with regard to refugees and asylum seekers. Friends have also signed petitions and attended protest rallies asking that conditions and policies be improved. Friends in Britain have made formal submissions to parliamentary inquiries into asylum and immigration detention.

Groups

Where Quakers are numerous they can act in groups, either formally as Meetings or informally as unofficial groups. This is particularly the case in Britain and Ireland, where there are more Quakers.

Offer meeting houses for use: Friends have offered their meeting houses as places for refugees and asylum seekers to gather, whether for language classes, child care, development of cultural awareness or just a simple meal. The Quaker meeting house has a long tradition of being a centre of community activities; the work with refugees and asylum seekers has continued that.

Cultural awareness activities: In some areas, Quakers have devised a programme of cultural awareness, where Friends learn

about other faiths and cultures, and refugees can learn about the culture and faiths of their host country.



Photo: Catherine Henderson

Conversation clubs/hospitality: Some Quaker meetings have developed conversation clubs, where refugees and asylum seekers can come and practice the language of the host country. These often also involve childcare and simple hospitality.

Help finding accommodation: Once refugee status is granted, some Friends are helping with finding accommodation. This can entail working within the system to find appropriate accommodation (e.g., with people of similar faith and/or cultural background) or simply helping to find a place to live outside the system.

Medical care: Friends in several places are involved in ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers have access to medical care. Sometimes this takes the form of helping them access the system, accompanying them to appointments, clarifying information. Other times qualified Friends provide the care directly, or set up clinics at the meeting house.

Psychological support: Qualified Friends work to help refugees and asylum seekers to deal with the effects of the trauma that they have experienced on their journey. Friends work regularly to offer psychiatric help to migrants within an association providing newly arrived migrants with primary and specialist medical care.

“Refugees give as much as they get.”

Helping the Helpers: A group of Friends in Italy has developed a programme to help volunteers deal with trauma – their own as well as that of the people they are helping.

Help in tracing family members: Working with the International Committee of the Red Cross, one group of Friends has helped refugees and asylum seekers to trace lost family members or to get in touch with family in their home countries.

Adapting to Life in the UK: One group in Britain has developed a training programme for refugees designed to ease the transition to living there. The training includes role play scenarios involving visits to the doctor, calling emergency services, and the role of women in society.

Special outings: Our research found examples of Quakers providing special outings for refugees and asylum seekers,

giving them an opportunity to have a day away from their normal routine. These might include a sports day, a trip to a nearby attraction, or a picnic in the park.

Working with others: Quakers do not do this work alone. Many Quaker groups and individuals work with other faith groups at local, regional and national levels, including City of Sanctuary and Churches Together, as well as secular groups providing aid to refugees and asylum seekers.



Photo: Kate McNally

Welcoming signs in shops: Friends in Ireland have worked to identify shops which sell appropriate food for different religious groups and/or simply cultural familiar goods and have put signs in those shops indicating availability.

Winter shelter: An Area Meeting in Britain supports a nightly reception centre for 10 destitute male asylum seekers during winter months.

Political action: While most of the political activity of Friends in continental Europe consists of signing petitions and participating in marches and demonstrations, there is more organised activity amongst Friends in Britain. Our questionnaire showed that Friends in Britain have organised public meetings, coordinated letter writing campaigns and other activities aimed at challenging detention for asylum seekers. Much of this work has been coordinated through QARN.

Fundraising for individual refugee and asylum seeker needs:

Friends have organised fundraising for student fees for refugees, for DNA testing for asylum seekers, and for general living expenses of both refugees and asylum seekers. This has taken several forms, from crowd funding efforts to dinners cooked by the refugees for the community.

Collecting for needs of local refugees and asylum seekers:

Friends collect food and clothing for local refugees and asylum seekers whose allowances are not sufficient to support them. In one area, Friends are working with the government resettlement scheme for Syrians. This has involved working with the local authority and helping to provide accommodation with essential furnishings.



Photo: Catherine Henderson

Policy level

Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA)

QCEA brings a Quaker vision of just relationships to the European institutions. The Council of Europe and the European Union developed during the post war period when Europe was experiencing its own refugee crisis. QCEA uses a mixture of advocacy and quieter work to encourage changes to European policy.

During 2015 and 2016, QCEA has been engaging directly with policy makers to dissuade them from using military responses to migration. This work focused on the EU's naval force in the Mediterranean. As well as meeting with the officials who propose changes to the mission, QCEA staff held a series of meetings with national ambassadors responsible for agreeing the response. This specific work is connected to other work strands of QCEA's advocacy aimed at countering hate crime and xenophobia in Europe.

QCEA is a founder member of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), and is deeply involved in promoting peacebuilding policies to European governments and institutions. This means they advocate for policies and tools that would better prevent violent conflicts which force people from their homes. QCEA is also working to reduce the influence of the arms trade, which currently means preventing the arms trade accessing large EU research funds.

As a member of Christian Group on Migration, QCEA has taken part in joint advocacy to find safe alternatives to the dangerous journeys that many have made to Europe. QCEA supporters have been able to participate in these efforts through the QCEA action alert calling for humanitarian visas.

For more information visit www.qcea.org

Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN)

The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) is a UK-based organisation established in 2006 as a vehicle for advocacy and campaigning for radical change to the asylum system.

QARN has a growing membership of more than 100 Friends active throughout the UK, most often with local action groups. Members seek to work for justice and compassion in the asylum system and believe that an informed and principled critique of current asylum policy should be part of our corporate Quaker witness, in keeping with our testimony to equality.

QARN has produced statements for use by Friends on Indefinite Detention (2012) and on Destitution (2014), as well as submissions to two parliamentary inquiries: Asylum (2013), Immigration Detention (2015) and most recently to a Home Office consultation on changes to asylum support.

Members of QARN represent Friends on a number of national bodies, including the **Detention Forum, Still Human Still Here**, and the **National Refugee Welcome Board (NRWB)**. Members of QARN have participated in meetings of the refugee group of **Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)**, and the **Churches Refugee Network (CRN)**. QARN also signed a joint letter from the **Jewish Council for Racial Equality** expressing concerns about the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean and joined with QCEA in promoting a proposal from the European Churches for safe passage.

For more information visit www.qarn.org.uk

“Refugees are the human face
of international injustice.”

MICHAEL BARTLET, FORMER BYM PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICER

Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO)

QUNO works to protect and strengthen the rights of refugees and migrants at the UN level. It seeks to uphold the dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of circumstance, and works to see this equality of all people better reflected by the international community in the treatment of people on the move.

QUNO works with the UN human rights mechanisms, as well as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other organisations to advocate for responses to refugees and others forcibly displaced that are firmly rooted in international human rights principles. Using traditional methods of bringing different actors engaged in this work together, it aims to create a more humane global vision and approach.

QUNO is actively engaged in the follow up to the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, a high-level document agreed by States on the 19th September 2016 focused on addressing large movements of people. The declaration sets in motion a series of processes at the UN level which aim to improve global governance in this area. QUNO sees this as a significant opportunity to develop a more rights-respecting global framework for addressing large movements of people.

QUNO also engages with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees on refugee protection issues (in particular related to conscientious objection to military service), ending statelessness and other matters related to forced displacement.

For more information, see www.quno.org

Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW)

Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) helps Quakers in Britain to live out their faith in the world. QPSW works at a national level on behalf of Quakers, running peacebuilding projects overseas, campaigning on behalf of Quakers, and provides resources to strengthen local Quaker action. QPSW is part of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and the staff are based in Friends House in London.

Concern has been growing among Quakers in Britain about the worsening repercussions of forced migration in the UK and across Europe. While the work of other QPSW programmes relates to this issue, until now it has not responded directly to it. A new Forced Migration Programme is now being established, and in December 2016 a new position, Responding to Forced Migration Programme Developer was instituted at QPSW.

It is important that the QPSW response to forced migration adds value to existing action, by doing something that is not being done by anyone else, and/or by doing something which Quakers are particularly well-placed to do. The new role will explore possibilities and bring in recommendations in late 2017 for future work.

Senior BYM staff and other Quakers were amongst the signatories on an inter-faith letter to the UK Prime Minister in September 2016. The letter urged the UK government to do more to welcome refugees and to ensure that it adhered to four refugee principles:

1. The UK should take a fair and proportionate share of refugees.
2. Safe and legal routes within Europe, including within and to the UK, should be established.
3. There should be access to fair procedures to determine eligibility for international protection. Read the full letter at interfaithrefugeeinitiative.org.

For more information, see www.quaker.org.uk

What does this tell us?

Unmet needs of individuals

When compiling information about the work Quakers are undertaking with refugees and asylum seekers, we have also asked Friends to share their perception of the needs in their local country or local area. Here is a summary of what they said:

At the level of individual refugees and asylum seekers, there are many unmet needs. In most countries, asylum seekers normally wait several years for a final decision. During this time, in most cases, they are unable to work or to begin official language learning programmes. Often this gap is filled by the work of volunteers.

Much of the work of dealing with basic human needs of refugees and asylum seekers is done by volunteers, including Quakers, who are not trained in specialty areas such as dealing with the effects of trauma and depression.

“The tremendous and unexpected amount of work with refugees (ca. 1.3 million as of now for Germany) awakens powers within the communities and among neighbourhoods that everyone had thought were lost - a surprise and win-win situation.”

The needs of asylum seekers and refugees are different. Asylum seekers need support dealing with the system, understanding the process they must go through in order to have their claim processed. While they wait, they need accommodation, food, clothing, medical care and psychological support. They also

need occupation: some way to fill the days while they wait. Depression can be a problem, as well as the trauma associated with their journey from their home to the country in which they seek asylum. In all European countries they are not permitted to take part in government sponsored training programmes, whether for basic language or job skills.



Photo: Kate McNally

Family reunification is difficult, especially for unaccompanied minors, who are the most vulnerable. When a census was done of the camp at Calais in late summer 2016, more than 1000 unaccompanied minors were counted. These children are particular at risk for many dangers, including the possibility of being trafficked.

Many Friends reported that accommodation for asylum seekers is often of poor quality and mixes individuals from different countries, cultures and religions. This can cause friction as they may not have the skills and/or language ability to communicate with each other effectively. Friends reported that the cash allowances provided asylum seekers are enough for basic food and not much else.

Friends have also noted the problems of destitute asylum seekers. These are people whose claims and appeals have been turned down, although the government may recognise that they cannot be deported. They have no recourse to public funds and are dependent on the charity and good will of non-governmental bodies. Hosting schemes provide accommodation. The Red Cross in Britain estimates there are many thousands in this situation.

The situation for refugees is different but still difficult. Once asylum is granted, refugees are eligible for language lessons and are permitted to work. Often the problem is that their job skills are rusty or out-of-date after several years of waiting. They must begin to learn the language at the same time that they desperately need it to find and do a job. Many refugees with professional qualifications do not have the appropriate credentials with them to find a job for which they might otherwise be qualified, and so must accept a job at a much lower salary. In many cases where the credentials are available they are not accepted in the host country.



Photo: Kate McNally

Both refugees and asylum seekers need training to live in and with other cultures. In the refugee camps, in accommodation for asylum seekers, in the communities where they finally make their lives, understanding of how to live with those who are different is important. Training to help them understand the culture of the host country is also important.

For both refugees and asylum seekers, volunteers provide human contact, sometimes the first contact with their potential future culture. Friends report that the lives of volunteers are enriched through contact with the cultures of refugees and asylum seekers.

Mental health implications

Trauma counselling for asylum seekers is desperately needed. Where it exists, wait times are so long that people risk falling into depression and despair.

Depression is common among asylum seekers and refugees. For asylum seekers, the trauma of their journeys is often compounded by the lack of occupation. Inability to speak the local language leads to isolation, lack of basic social contact with the local community.

In Britain, the experience of immigration detention is in itself damaging for mental health. The regulations stipulate that torture survivors should not be detained. However organisations like Medical Justice have found that that this regulation (Rule 35) is frequently ignored.

The lack of interaction with the local community can affect not only the asylum seekers but also the local citizens, who do not have the opportunity to get to know them as individuals with a story to tell. Thus it becomes easy to label asylum seekers as ‘them’, which contributes to backlash against them.

For refugees, the long term effects of unaddressed trauma can be devastating, especially among children. They can interfere with their integration into the local community. Again, not speaking the local language means that it's difficult to integrate. For locals and refugees, the opportunity to get to know each other on a one-to-one basis contributes to healthy integration into the community.

Trauma counselling is not only needed for refugees and asylum seekers; it's also needed by the largely untrained volunteers who deal with them. Secondary trauma and burnout are common among the volunteers.

Government policy

The Dublin agreements, aimed at limiting the number of countries in which a person could seek asylum, have produced an unfair distribution of refugees in Europe. The countries which are on the borders of Europe are necessarily the first ones in which asylum seekers land, and it is in those countries that they are supposed to be processed. This means that countries like Greece and Italy have up to 7% of their population seeking asylum, while the number in Europe in general is 1-1.5%. Ireland has almost none.

Family reunification is difficult under the current agreements. Minors, especially unaccompanied minors, have difficulty reaching family members. Often they are housed in camps, where they are vulnerable to traffickers.



Photo: Kate McNally

Government staff are not only overwhelmed; they are often ill-trained. One Friend reported that they knew of a multi-generational family of asylum seekers who arrived together.

Because they had different last names, their requests for asylum were processed by different staff. In the end, although they all presented the same background and the same information, they had different answers and different statuses.

Current moves to harden the Dublin agreements will only exacerbate this problem, and lead to more camps like those in Greece and France, and will keep children vulnerable.

Internal inequalities make supporting refugees harder. Quakers in many countries report that current government policies have the effect of pitting refugees against the poor, the homeless and the unemployed. The backlash against refugees and asylum seekers can spill over to foreigners of all types.

“Given that being an asylum seeker is essentially a political status (they are people whose state has failed them and they seek the protection of another state), the issues cannot be solved by volunteers!”

Friends report that the situation in Germany is different: there is a recognition that immigrants add value and skills to the economy and enrich the culture. However, Friends also report that this is changing, with more hate crimes reported and a less welcoming atmosphere.

Overall, there is a lack of long term integration strategy for refugees. Much integration work is left to NGOs and volunteers, who are overwhelmed by the task. In general there is a lot of work but little coordination of efforts.

For those who are waiting for an asylum decision, the inability to work is crippling. Not only are they subject to depression, they

lose the desire to get out of bed in the morning. Their skills become rusty, and they lose hope.

Many asylum seekers are men who have left their families behind, with the goal of gaining asylum, finding work and then bringing their families to safety. Families with limited means to fund the journey are faced with the difficult choice of who to send. Often it is the family member who is most likely to be able to tolerate the journey and find work at the other end – the younger men. The long waits for asylum decisions for the younger men mean that these families are forced to stay in situations of danger. They wait, along with the asylum seeker, separated and hoping that they can survive the wait. When a decision is finally made they must begin the long process of application for family reunification. At the end, if the family is reunited, it may have been 5, 6, 7 years since they have seen each other. This can mean that children do not know their fathers, wives are further traumatised by the time without male protection, and fathers are devastated by their inability to provide for their families.

For others, the asylum journey may start as a move across a national border for reasons of safety and poverty, followed by a further move. For example a Sudanese refugee in Calais had worked for 9 years in Libya, and sent money home, until it became too dangerous and he moved on. He had not started out with the intention of coming to Europe.



Photo: Kate McNally

What you can do

When looked at as a whole, the situation can be overwhelming, leaving individuals unsure how they can contribute or what they have to offer. Friends historically have offered their skills in ways that bring people together, human to human. There are many opportunities to do this. Some suggestions:

Make your voice heard to change government policy: To address the root cause of forced migration, governments must change their policies. Friends can have an impact on these policies through supporting QCEA, QARN, QUNO and QPSW.

Friends can write letters to government officials, sign petitions and join demonstrations and marches. All of these keep pressure on officials to change policies with regard to refugees and asylum seekers.



Photo: Kate McNally

It is also arguable that large scale demonstrations may change public opinion. This is especially important when the tabloid press has an anti-migrant campaign.

Open the Meeting House: Friends meeting houses can be a community centre, not only for Quakers, but also for refugees and asylum seekers. Where it is possible to open the meeting house for conversation clubs, child care, language lessons or meals, Friends can establish all-important links with individuals. Using community contacts, Friends can also connect those in need with legal assistance or help with job applications.

“It’s important to involve local communities in the settlement of refugees. Imposing decisions without consultation is unlikely to lead to successful integration.”

Language lessons: Language lessons for asylum seekers can help them in many ways:

- They can enable communication, which eases the transition to the new environment.
- They can give a head start on the ability to find a job when asylum is granted.
- They can begin the process of acquiring the local culture, which is very important to successful integration.
- Language lessons give the opportunity for social interaction.
- They can provide occupation for asylum seekers during their long wait.

Resources: Berlitz, BBC, Host nation language sites, British Council, Alliance Française, local language schools and learning sites. Google ESL and a locality to find them.

Human contact: On a human level, the simplest thing you can do is to speak to a refugee or asylum seeker. Ask them about themselves and their family. Ask them where they live and what they like about your community. What do they find difficult? Strange? Interesting? Surprising? This way you may find that they need help with language, understanding how to use the supermarket, how to find clothing, how to use public transport. These are all things that you can help with.

Volunteer in camps: Where Friends have the opportunity to work in the camps, for a day or a week or longer, they bring skills

that are desperately needed: organising, cooking, teaching, mediation.

Open your doors: Friends have found it both challenging and rewarding to open their homes to refugees and asylum seekers. People can be welcomed for a day or a week or longer.

A day out: Friends in some areas have provided the opportunity for a day out for refugees and asylum seekers. This might involve a football match, a trip to the country, a swim at a local pool or lake, a visit to a museum, etc. Sometimes just a break from their daily life can help.

Cultural / civic training for refugees: Many refugees come from cultures that are very different from the ones in which they will live, especially with regard to the roles and status of women. Friends can help with cultural training aimed at understanding cultural expectations, as well as how to use basic services such as police and fire, the medical system, and the post office. Also important is how to negotiate local government services, basic rights and responsibility of citizens, and the roles and rights of women.



Photo: Kate McNally

Welcoming signs in shops: It's possible to contact local shops who sell food appropriate to foreign shoppers and ask them to put signs in the windows, or to publish a list of sources of ethnically appropriate foods and other products.

“Adopt” a refugee: The challenge of settling into a new country and culture can be daunting for newcomers. “Adopting” someone offers them the possibility of having someone to phone to ask how to navigate the health care or school system, how to find children’s clothing, where is the best dry cleaner.

The simple act of accompanying someone to a supermarket and answering questions about unfamiliar foods can make an enormous difference in the lives of newcomers.

Helping women access services: It may be difficult for refugee women to access services unless they are in women friendly/only spaces. One NGO, Women for Refugee Women, aims to enable refugee women in the UK to have a voice. For more information, see www.refugeewomen.co.uk

Where do we go from here?

Where do we go from here? Over 60% of questionnaire respondents expressed an interest in 'linking up' with other Friends working in the area of forced migration. This ties in very much with ideas expressed in the December 2015 QCEA/QPSW conference in Brussels, "Castle or Community? Quakers' role in building a new Europe." There Friends expressed a strong desire to share experience and ideas - what does and doesn't work well.

Newsletter: There were requests for articles and 'real stories' to enable us to compare different European perspectives, both our own and our governments'. The QCEA publication 'Around Europe' might be best-placed for this, and each issue will have articles on migration and refugees going forward.

Online discussion forum: There were a significant number of requests for an online discussion forum. An online forum could create a space for Friends to support each other in a variety of ways.

Such a network hub would provide space for sharing personal stories, discussing and sharing ideas, keeping up to date with news across the continent, co-ordinating campaigns and exploring ways we can challenge negative media and xenophobic opinions. It would be a dynamic platform from which we could all draw strength.

There is a recognised need for support. Many Friends said they were struggling, both practically and with the emotional distress and feelings of helplessness that threaten to overwhelm all of us from time to time. There were several requests for 'positive stories'. We can encourage and support each other in an online community. To that end, a Facebook group called "**Quaker Refugee Hub**" has been set up. Please join it and share your experiences.

Case Studies

The Doncaster Conversation Club

The Doncaster Conversation Club (DCC) was founded in 2000 by Quakers who wanted to teach English to Polish immigrants. Today DCC provides a wide range of services each week to approximately 150 refugees and asylum seekers from many countries. The focus has changed from language teaching to providing services needed for new refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into the community.

Today, in addition to English lessons, DCC provides food parcels, help with paperwork, and help tracing families through the Red Cross. They also provide a place for medical screenings and health checks. These services are provided by a group of approximately 20 volunteers in the meeting house in Doncaster. Funding comes from grants and from collections from Friends meetings in the region.

Asylum seekers find DCC through the welcome packs that are provided at their local accommodation. In addition, volunteers go to the accommodation to provide more information as needed.

DCC has recently developed a programme called “Adapting to Life in the UK”, which uses a series of role play scenarios to help newly arrived clients understand how life in the UK differs from their home countries. The focus is on how to call for fire, police, first aid help, but also on domestic abuse, as the situation of women is often different in the UK from what they are used to.

In addition to the services noted above, DCC provides opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to have a day out with some physical activity.

One problem that DCC can face is that their clients do not have a lot of opportunity to use their new English outside of lessons. They speak their native language at home, and do not have a lot of interaction with the local community.

Another problem is that as an asylum decision can take up to 5 years, the greatest need for the asylum seekers is occupation. They are not allowed to work and so their days are long and hard to fill.

For more information, you can subscribe to the DCC newsletter by sending an email to **paulfitzp@aol.com**

Renke Meuwese

Renke Meuwese is a Dutch Quaker who worked in the camp at Calais from mid 2015 until its destruction in November 2016. His work is supported by Dutch Quakers. As one of the relatively few 'permanent' volunteers, he saw the camp grow to over 10,000. He worked in the warehouse which accepted and distributed donations to camp residents.

In the warehouse, Renke organised donations of clothing so that distribution could take place in an orderly fashion. Donations came in from all over Europe, and were sorted into type of clothing, size, things for men, women or children, etc. They were distributed on a first-in, first-out basis, thanks to the system that he devised.

For the camp at Calais, clothing was distributed at published distributions points and at published times and days. The same items were distributed at all sites: shoes on Tuesdays, shirts on Mondays, etc.

Since the destruction of the camp, Renke continues his work in the warehouse which continues to function, receiving donations, sorting them and distributing them to camps in Paris and northern France, as well as to refugee camps in Syria, Greece and Lebanon.



Photo: Kate McNally

The Dublin Welcoming Refugees Group

The Dublin Welcoming Refugees Group (WRG) was started in 2015 by three Dublin Friends. The group has done its best to learn about the situations facing refugees and asylum seekers, discover what is already being done and identify areas for possible action. WRG has heard from support organisations, such as the Refugee Council, those who have travelled and worked in some of the current war zones, from faith representatives and from both those with refugee status and those still seeking it. They have listened to the reports from meetings with the Government Task Force and supported existing initiatives, such as collecting household goods for distribution to those leaving Direct Provision. Dublin Friends' Meetings have raised money. Individual Friends have helped one asylum seeker with finding accommodation. Most of all, as the chosen title suggests, they wanted to make these new arrivals feel welcome. There has been a very successful social evening at Rathfarnham, monthly tea and chat events at Eustace Street and planned cultural activities, such as a guided walk around St Stephen's Green. However, the numbers of asylum seekers at these events have been in single figures and the WRG are keen to widen their contacts.

There has been learning for all involved.

The WRG were hosts in early September to 33 Friends from 9 Meetings and 8 counties of Ireland. They heard speakers from the following groups:

Failte Isteach, set up in 2006 (initially as a pilot project) to address the language needs of new migrants. It was extended nationally in 2008 and now, mostly thanks to word-of-mouth recommendation, has 92 groups working out of a variety of social centres.

Athboy Development Forum (ADF). The current population of Athboy is made up of about 40% who were born and bred there, another 40% who are 'blow-ins' from Dublin, with the remaining 20% consisting of recent migrants, mostly Lithuanians and Poles, but including refugees and others from beyond Europe.

With support from Meath PPN and funding from Meath County Partnership, the ADF put together a set of SIMS (Social Integration Measures) to address the problem of integration, making use of their primary assets: people and organisations. Nowadays, for new arrivals in the town, there is a 'meet and greet' welcome: their cultural and ethnic needs are recognised and they are signposted to appropriate shops and services for their health and well-being, including advice on safety and security. Families are allocated their own 'sponsor' family for support and advice in their first few months in the town. The resulting social cohesion has not only benefited the individuals involved, but resulted in thriving community and sports associations.

One Friend working with **Tusla** – the state Child and Family Agency – is involved in Aftercare, a service for young people of 16+ who are leaving care or otherwise homeless, and has found herself working increasingly with children 'without status'.

To date, Ireland has been disappointed in the number of refugees who have arrived. So far, 48 individuals from Lebanon, mostly in families, have arrived out of the 4,000 planned. The Red Cross believes that the relatively small numbers involved give Ireland the opportunity to carry out the tasks of resettlement and integration properly.

The Coalition for Work with Psychotrauma and Peace

The Coalition for Work with Psychotrauma and Peace (CWWPP) works with both medical and psychological aspects of the situation of asylum seekers and refugees that are being largely ignored:

- Psychological traumatising that occurred in their home region, during the journey, and in the region of reception;
- Integration into receiving communities, so that both sides understand what is going on;
- Work with volunteers and staff members of receiving organisations, including “lay volunteers” and auxiliary personnel, to prevent secondary traumatising and to be able to better work with the beneficiaries;
- Training of trainers who will be able to transmit this knowledge and these skills and attitudes.

The CWWPP sees its work as long-term, not only for the asylum seekers and refugees themselves, but also for those working with them and for the social environment in the receiving region. Thus, it must be continuous for long periods.

The work is very human. While there are laws and rules surrounding it, the CWWPP feels that the accent needs to be on the people receiving the work. This is different from the work of many groups, who we see as concentrating on the judicial aspects.

At the CWWPP, the trauma that people have gone through and their reactions to it are viewed as reactions and not as pathological disorders. Thus, if we think about people in their situations, most of us, given similar circumstances and similar knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes, would react similarly and can understand and feel the reactions.

In this sense, CWWPP see themselves as facilitators of the processes of adaptation to the new situation. They open safe spaces – physical, emotional, and in terms of time – where the reactions can take place. People learn about human reactions and the background to them. They learn for themselves new methods of reacting, taking into account their personal circumstances.

In this context, people need to take responsibility for themselves. Many have done that already, through their flight and through their actions during the flight. Yet, the CWWPP emphasises that the decisions and the initiatives must be theirs, not those of the trainers.

Beneficiaries of this work include:

- Asylum seekers and refugees themselves; even with people moving around, current technology allows them to communicate with us and with one another;
- Volunteers and staff members working with various organisations and institutions;
- “Auxiliary” personnel, that is, lawyers, cleaning staff, guards, etc. – anyone in contact with asylum seekers and refugees.

The CWWPP now wishes to train trainers in the above content, methodology, and attitudes. They thus wish to create a pool of people who can take this work further and train and supervise others.

The CWWPP feels that this work is essential from a number of standpoints. The first reason is that it is human, and must be done for humanitarian reasons. However, there is danger in not doing it. The frustration of bottling up trauma is well known. This easily can explode into violence, within the person him/herself, in the domestic environment, and in society. This not only applies to the current “first generation” asylum seekers and refugees. Their children, and future generations, also are

affected by it. The creation of integrated societies will be problematic if this work is not done, and there is a great danger of increased violence and hatred within societies.



Photo: Sandra Marić

Helping the Helpers

Sara works in Italy with refugees she first met in a refugee camp in Lebanon. She enjoys the work but alludes to challenges in her relationship with her friends from the camp as they moved to Italy.

Maya works in the UK for Voices for Creative Non-Violence, organizing talks in schools about militarisation and making regular visits to peace team partners in Afghanistan. She talks about the trauma she sees in the children in both countries and struggles with deep sadness processing her own experiences traveling back and forth from a war zone.



Photo: Evan Welkin

Nuran recently moved back to Istanbul to work with Mavi Kalem, an organisation for the empowerment of women and girls. She's moved by the memory of two colleagues kidnapped and killed in Syria while working on relief projects.

These are three of the 12 Helpers who joined the “Helping the Helpers Training”, September 1st-6th at a rural retreat centre in central Italy. The training focused on community-based trauma awareness and prevention techniques for people working with migrants in Europe and Turkey. With the immediate goal of offering skills and techniques to help “Helpers” understand trauma, including its impact on their own lives, the longer term dream is building sustainability for the migrant support network.

Dr. Leyla Welkin, a Quaker psychologist who worked with the UN in Turkish refugee camps, led the training with Trauma Sensitive Yoga instructor Kirsten Voris. Welkin describes how her frustration working with international institutions and their staff to offer programmes for Syrian refugees inspired the content. “People who serve survivors of trauma, like refugees, are at risk of becoming affected by ‘secondary trauma’,” says Welkin. “This accounts, in part, for the high turnover and frequent burnout of those serving traumatised people. We created this training in order to offer tangible skills to relief workers.”

Pairing psychological awareness with Trauma Sensitive Yoga creates a full body application of the material, shared Voris. “My very first clients were members of the aid community in Turkey. I could see what a great benefit they were getting from their yoga practice. Their stress levels went down, they were able to sleep and to leave their jobs behind when they came home in the evening.”



Photo: Evan Welkin

For more information visit

www.facebook.com/HelpingTheHelpersTraining



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