

## NORTHALLERTON REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP- UPDATE FOR CHURCHES

The group was formed in the Autumn of 2017 under the umbrella of One Northallerton who have provided both Volunteers and financial support. In February 2018 the first four Syrian Refugee families arrived to be followed by a further two families a little later. After the worst of the Pandemic subsided six new Syrian families arrived in the early part of this year. And in the last few weeks we have welcomed two Afghan families who have been helping the British deal with the Taliban in their own country. We think a further two such families will join us in the next few weeks once housing becomes available.

The original families have settled well and are being integrated into the Northallerton community. Their children are doing well in the town's primary schools & generally are successful in their studies aided by a special unit of the Education service which provides extra individual help when required. In the main the Syrian children have attended Alverton school, a few have gone to Romanby and others to Mill Hill. The new Afghan children will go to Mill Hill. Without exception the schools have welcomed them warmly and provided them with strong support to give them a good start in their life in Britain. Twelve of the older children are now attending the secondary school. Four children have been born to the original Syrian group and on two occasions a volunteer has had the honour of being asked to be present at the birth.

About half of the original Syrian men are in work in the town as Pizza delivery drivers and one in a maintenance role. Two of the wives have worked making sandwiches for sale to the local shops. This work has significantly impacted on English language capability. Sadly, the pandemic has prevented some of the men from completing mandatory safety courses that they require to work on construction sites in the UK. We hope this might be rectified in the coming months. Over the Pandemic the Syrian men helped to deliver medicines & food to those confined to their homes. Prior to this they had worked in Charity shops.

As a Support Group we have become Befrienders to individual families to help them with their English, untangle bureaucracy & teach them our customs. This has formed strong bonds. Sadly, Covid has prevented us visiting homes to get to know the most recent six Syrian families - most interaction has been behind masks on their doorsteps! We are looking forward to being able to meet them face to face at our weekly Drop In the Methodist Church Hall in the town before long. This is helpful for the wives particularly to exchange information about where particular items could be found in the town and for the pre -

school children to play together. Three weeks ago we took the families to Saltburn where the children played football together and used the swings & slides in the Gardens there whilst enjoying the packed lunches they had brought. The children let off steam with various Football chants, whilst they played on the various roundabouts & swings. Then we took the miniature railway around the Park and the children treated us to Syrian songs. No-one on the Park could have been in any doubt that there were some very happy children enjoying their freedom on that day. This was followed by a dip in the sea for almost every child present with their fathers keeping a careful eye on their safety. No-one complained of it being cold! Ice creams were then enjoyed by everyone (courtesy of the generosity of ONE NORTHALLERTON church members!)

Several of the Volunteers are providing additional English language tuition to the adults to supplement the formal ESOL teaching they receive. The children's English is now very good and a bit ahead of that of their parent's!

The Support Group have, for example, provided Televisions, Licences, lawn mowers and large cooking pans because they cook for their large families from scratch and many of the things which turn "a house into a home". All families arrived in Northallerton with nothing other than clothing so the provision of toys and games have been warmly welcomed.

In addition, we have arranged trips to local beauty spots so they can appreciate the countryside 'of North Yorkshire.

The Support Group's resources are now substantially depleted. Any monetary gifts to help supplement the basic furnishings supplied by Broadacres would be greatly appreciated.

Judith Puttock our Treasurer at 3 Cottage Close, Northallerton DL6 1EB would be very happy to receive them. Alternatively, your Church may make another arrangement for such donations.

Thank you for your support! Please get in touch if you would like help with the families!

Sue Bush