

### **What if the families are not coming to your community?**

You can still help as many of you are already by sending support through the various agencies to those who are in the many camps and are now facing a long cold winter.

We will be putting out requests for help as the needs arise and these requests may come from different voluntary groups who your congregations may be part of. These may be able to give you ideas of things you can do to help.

### **Finally**

We are working closely with other groups such as AWAZ to ensure that racial and religious bigotry is tackled and that our communities can grow and change through this experience. If you witness anything but are afraid to address it yourself please contact the police, AWAZ or myself so that it can be passed on and addressed immediately.

**God calls us through Christ to love, to serve and to care. We have the example of Christ and his teaching to show how we are called to serve him through serving others. Let us live out our faith in all the world.**

### **Contact details**

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**AWAZ** - for website enter AWAZ Cumbria. *AWAZ - meaning "voice" was established in Cumbria to provide support for formal/informal community groups and empowering the voice of Black and Minority Ethnic people and communities in the county.*

## **Churches Together in Cumbria Refugee Support**

Dear Friends

We have finally heard that a family from one of the Syrian Refugee camps will be arriving in Cumbria imminently but as yet have no information as to where they will be housed or when.

With this in mind I hope it will be useful to churches to consider some of the points below regarding support we can offer, what may be needed and issues we need to bear in mind.

The people arriving in Cumbria will be family groups of between 3-5 people.

### **Support we can offer.**

#### **Accommodation is not required at present**

Our Local Authority Housing departments will find suitable accommodation which will be prepared for the family. This may be from housing stock or through private landlords. There should be everything provided by way of furniture from the stores build up by Housing Associations but they may ask for specific help on this.

***It is unlikely that there will be requests for single rooms etc. as the refugees will be in family groups.***

#### **Pastoral**

A big area of support we can offer is friendship, without overwhelming people, and being prepared to challenge comments and behaviours that will upset or frighten people.

We appreciate that there are people in our communities who do not share our values of love and care and sadly there may be members of our congregations who will hold views that do not necessarily reflect the love that Christ calls us to give. We need to be prepared to challenge gently but firmly and show people the love of God.

We do not know as yet what faith groups the families will represent but we could consider whether we could offer space in a church, hall or drop in centre to people to use as a prayer room.

### **Language skills**

We have already had a few offers from people with linguistic skills but families may come with some understanding of English or French as well as other languages so any language offers could be relevant.

### **Food**

This is a difficult area to think about as families from different faiths will have different dietary laws and requirements. If in doubt ask.

### **Transport**

As families settle in they may need help finding their way around and understanding of transport systems. Offers such as these need to be planned carefully and churches should bear in mind in all things

**Safeguarding** issues.

We must always be vigilant in everything we do with vulnerable people.

### **Children/schools**

Members of our congregations will have children in local schools which will be preparing the children for new pupils and it is worthwhile preparing our own children about welcoming the stranger. Those who go into schools to do assemblies should ask the schools

how they are working with the families so that there is a consistent message being put across.

### **What else may be needed?**

The whole range of household goods and good quality clothing **may be** needed as winter draws in but do not start gathering things together until we are asked as you could end up with the wrong things.

Toiletries and toys but we do not know as yet the shape of the families and each one will be different.

The family may need a contact local to them that can help with some of the basic needs of settling into a new community. Some areas have experience of welcoming refugees already, such as the Vietnamese Boat People and can share with us all the things they have learnt from offering support. Please let me have any ideas and lessons learnt.

### **Issues to bear in mind**

We are as followers of Christ to love our neighbour, to help those in need and to challenge situations where we find people being treated with abuse and hatred.

Refugees coming to the UK may well want to return to their homes when it is safe, where they can rebuild their homes, to know that their children will be safe and can live in peace. They have Refugee status and can stay in the UK for 5 years under this status.

Refugees will be fearful and may not know how to respond at first to people in a strange situation far from what is familiar just as we are when we move house. A smile and a wave can mean so much.

Most importantly we can pray and hold them in God's love.