

## Asylum seeker support in St Albans

There are about 150 mostly single men at the Noke, and about 50 at Ardmere House Hotel, Lemsford Rd. We only work with the Noke residents. I believe Richard Watson, St Saviours and Liz Needham (St Albans for Refugees) are the link people for the Ardmere, and the Cathedral now have some asylum seekers coming to the conversation group.

### 1 **Conversation groups**

- a. Monday 2.30–4.15 Offa Room, Cathedral
- b. Wednesday 10–12 Greenwood URC, term-time only. This group will not meet at Greenwood URC from September due to construction plans. An alternative venue is being looked into.
- c. Thursday 10–12 St Barts

### 2 **ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)** – ESOL classes are held on

- a. Monday 10-11.30 at the Noke
- b. Monday 10-11.45 at Ardmere House Hotel
- c. Wednesday 10-11 at Ardmere House Hotel

### 3 **College** – In August 2022 we helped asylum seekers to enrol in Oaklands College to do ESOL classes. Some of the asylum seekers are now doing other classes at college such as IT. Other asylum seekers are going to West Herts College in Watford. Both the Cathedral and St Barts will help asylum seekers to enrol at Oaklands College for September 2023.

### 4 **Bikeability training** – about once every 2 months, depends on the availability of the HCC bike trainer.

### 5 **Bikes** – We have sourced second hand bikes, mostly through St Albans churches. I guess we have given out about 50 bikes to the asylum seekers at the Noke, and we have another 25 in our garden, waiting for the bike mechanic from Herts Welcomes Refugees to check them over. We ask for helmets, lights, locks and hi-vis jackets as well.

### 6 **Finance** – I have received donations from St Barts, Ashley Road Church, U3A cycling group, a parishioner from St Saviours Church, and a private donation. This money was used for lights, helmets and locks, as well as giving a few £100s to Ride St Albans bike shop, Watford Rd, who do small repairs for the asylum seekers. I have now run out of money for the bike shop, so that is urgent.

### 7 **Football** – Football training organised by Cllr Ajanta Hilton was weekly on Wednesday nights in Greenwood Park, but the coach is no longer available.

### 8 **Legal support** – Many of the asylum seekers do not have solicitors, as solicitors don't want to work pro bono. This means the asylum seekers are vulnerable, and do not understand the implications of some letters from the Home Office. We try to help them, but we do not have legal knowledge. We helped an asylum seeker who had a second interview with the Home Office (lasting 4 hours!), but his asylum was rejected. We have found him a solicitor who will appeal against this judgement.

### 9 **Volunteering** – Communities 1st have offered to find volunteering opportunities for some of our asylum seekers. We have had a couple of meetings with them. One of our asylum seekers comes to help cook soup at St Barts on Monday lunchtimes. Another one volunteers in a charity shop one day a week.

### 10 **Mental health** – Many of the asylum seekers have been in the Noke for 18 months, waiting for a Home Office decision. Those that do not go to college, join conversation groups, or volunteer

suffer from mental health issues. The doctor comes in once a week, but cannot see all who have problems.

- 11 **Clothes** – Liz Needham, St Albans for Refugees, has garages of clothes for the asylum seekers. Her phone number is 01727 576001, <https://stalban sforrefugees.org/> We have provided specific clothes for the people we know.
- 12 **Cooking and meals** – The food at the hotel is poor quality with no variety and no fresh vegetables. The asylum seekers wanted to cook and eat together. Meals were organised at St Barts in July and St Saviours in November (this was planned by the Masorti Synagogue). The Cathedral had a Pentecost celebration lunch for twenty asylum seekers at Holywell Lodge on Sunday May 28th. On May 29<sup>th</sup> the synagogue organised a picnic in Greenwood Park which the asylum families really enjoyed. Working with other faith groups has been rewarding for us all.
- 13 **Bishop Paul McAleenan** – Bishop Paul is the Catholic Area Bishop for Hertfordshire, with special responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers. He visited St Barts conversation group in April 2022.
- 14 **Daisy Cooper** – Daisy was invited to our conversation group at St Barts in July 2022. We sent details of each asylum application in advance. She spoke to all of the asylum seekers individually.
- 15 **Refugees Information Exchange** – Churches Together St Albans organised this meeting in June last year, and two of our asylum seekers spoke to an audience of about 130 people. It was a good opportunity to share the work that different groups are doing in St Albans to support asylum seekers.
- 16 **Christmas presents** – Over 150 presents were donated by South St Albans Churches and the Cathedral, so that each asylum seekers received a present at Christmas.
- 17 **Alban Pilgrimage** – Some asylum seekers joined us for the procession last year, and we had a picnic in the park afterwards. This year South St Albans Churches will be walking from St Stephens to St Peters to join the procession on Saturday 24 June and we hope some asylum seekers will join us. Asylum seekers from Ardmore House Hotel and the Noke will help to make packed lunches at the Cathedral for children involved with the procession and food will be provided for the asylum seekers as well.
- 18 **Christian discussion group** – This group meets at the Cathedral on Sundays after the 9.30 service. It was started at the request of some of the asylum seekers who have been baptised and is a very informal discussion based on their questions.
- 19 **Library membership** – The Librarian from St Albans Central Library visited the conversation group in April 2022 to join the asylum seekers. We then had a visit to the library in September 2022, and she is coming again in June this year.
- 20 **Clothes Giveaways** – The Cathedral organised two clothes giveaways in January and May for asylum seekers, the homeless and local people in need.
- 21 **Specific funding** – We were able to obtain specific funding (£400) to translate documents from Russian into English to support the asylum evidence of one of our asylum seekers.
- 22 **Asylum Seeker Art Exhibition** – The Cathedral organised an art exhibition in February of work by some of the asylum seekers. It will now be displayed in the Museum from 19–25 June, which is Refugee Week <https://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/seeking-asylum-st-albans>
- 23 **Herts Asylum Accommodation meetings** – I now attend these monthly online meetings, which are really useful for finding out what is going on in Herts hotels. Representatives from the hotels, Red Cross, Migrant Help, Care for Calais, Home Office, Herts Welcomes Refugees, St Albans for Refugees, and other community groups are all on these calls.

- 24 **ESOL teachers networking** – Helen Bishop from the Cathedral organises meetings with the ESOL teachers at the Noke, and now those at Ardmore, with leaders of the conversation groups to share good practice, inform others of events being organised for the asylum seekers, and to network and support each other.
- 25 **Graffiti workshop** – The Cathedral are organising a Graffiti Workshop on 25 June from 11-3.
- 26 **Lifts to appointments, solicitors, police station** – As the asylum seekers only receive £9 per week, they do not have money for bus or train fares. Helpers from the groups regularly offer transport to appointments, solicitors and to sign in at Hatfield police station.

The above is a summary of what we do, or have done over the last 18 months.

What we need now:

Money

Solicitors

Bike locks, helmets, lights

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