

Asylum seekers

Chiswell Green Community Garden – Some of the asylum seekers helped to plant flowers and vegetables, and have been watering them. They can take any vegetables that they need, particularly lettuce and tomatoes.

Clarence Park tea – The Masorti synagogue organised cakes and drinks on 27 August for asylum seekers from Ardmere House Hotel. Some of them have asked for bikes to enable them to go to Oaklands College. The ESOL teachers from the hotel were also present.

Job Description for AS helpers – We have worked together to produce a job description. This has been sent to Chris Blandford who forwarded it to Westminster Diocese. This is so that the AS helpers can be DBS checked, but the Diocese does not have a standard JD to fit what the AS helpers do.

Asylum seekers conversation group – This weekly group is now part of the parish Social Justice and Peace group.

Home Office interviews – Some of the AS in our group have had second Home Office interviews. They have to travel to Croydon for these, and the interviews can be 2-4 hours. Most of our AS do not have solicitors, as Legal Aid does not pay very much. We try to prepare the AS by giving mock interviews, checking that they have their stories clear, and reminding them to present any evidence.

Permission to Stay – One of our AS was given Permission to Stay, which is positive, but he had to leave the hotel within 10 days, and had nowhere to go. SADC have a long waiting list for accommodation. Open Door in St Albans was suggested, but in the end this AS decided to go to Halifax, Yorkshire to stay with some friends. When granted Permission to Stay the AS does not receive the £9 per week any more.

Asylum rejected – 2 of our group have had their asylum rejected and have found solicitors to lodge an appeal.

Bikes – We still need bikes in good condition as well as helmets, locks and lights. Most of the AS at Ardmere House are women who need smaller bikes.

Bike training – We are not now offering Bikeability training at the Noke Hotel, as many of the AS who sign up for the course do not attend. I am trying not to be involved in bike training at Ardmere.

Volunteering – Working with Communities 1st we have found volunteering opportunities for a number of AS. These include gardening, library shelving, working in a charity shop and soup making at St Barts on a Monday lunchtime.

London Marathon – One of our AS wants to run the London Marathon backwards! I have put him in contact with the Jesuit Refugee Service who have places for this event.

Conversation Group – This group meets on Thursdays from 10-12 to practice English conversation. Lessons are planned to take account of the wide range of English abilities.

Food Pantry

Progress:

Since our last meeting in July;

- We are still supporting 5 families plus the parishioners who continue to take for themselves, family, friends and neighbours from the pantry table at the back of the church
- I talked about St Barts Food Pantry at the 3 weekend masses before the summer break and it was well received as we had a significant rise in food item donations as a result
- This was important as food donations were beginning to drop off over the previous few months and we needed a steady supply for our families especially, throughout the summer hols
- At the July PPC meeting, the PPC agreed to adding financial donations as an easier option for some to contribute – this has been very successful (£515 to date) This will enable us to support more individuals and families as we go into winter. We will be able to bulk buy the staples to ensure that we can always, hopefully, meet the minimum requirements of those we support
- I have been liaising with St Adrian's (Martha and Emma supporting!), the leads and key volunteers of the SVP, Warm Hub/Monday Soup Lunch and the Circle of Friends to see how we can alert each other to those who might be in need of food support and, reciprocally, those in need of these groups' support. I'm feeling very positive about these closer collaborations
- Sinead Hughes has been working with her carpenter on the renewal of the parish information/communications area at the back of the church. This also includes a tidier (:D!) and more practical arrangement for the Food Pantry. Sinead, herself, has just got back off holiday and will be chasing the project. There is a desire/intention for no use of parish funds for this project. Christine and Nick might be able to provide more information on this
- In the meantime, I have discussed and agreed with Father Francis, the temporary storage of surplus food items in the committee room as we go into the new term
- The volunteers have been invited to a new group meeting in September as the Food Pantry is poised to extend its reach

- Father Francis, Dawn, Claudine, other parishioners and PPC members, have provided an invaluable source of information and support throughout all of this for which, gratitude is in abundance!!!

Going Forward:

I've been in communications regularly with, amongst others, a North London parish I know, regarding ideas for the Food Pantry and will report back at our next meeting.