

Asylum seekers update for PPC on 9 January 2024

Cooked meal – Jackie Tominey helped the asylum seekers to cook a meal in the hall on 30 November, which was very successful.

Christmas gifts – The South St Albans churches (St Barts, St Stephens, St Julians and Greenwood URC) as well as the Cathedral all gave gifts for the asylum seekers at the Noke hotel. We gave out over 100.

Temporary accommodation in the parish – There is a need for temporary accommodation locally for asylum seekers who have been granted Leave to Remain. If any parishioners have a spare room they can provide that will be really helpful. There are safe procedures for offering accommodation through Refugees at Home <https://refugeesathome.org/about-us/> and Room for Refugees <https://www.roomforrefugees.com/> Asylum seekers need an address before they can apply for jobs, universal credit, bank accounts etc.

Home Office decisions – Some decisions come through very quickly (within a few months), but some people that we know have been waiting 2 years or more, and often have mental health issues due to the uncertainty

Volunteering – We encourage all of the AS who we see regularly to apply for volunteering opportunities to improve their English and to mix in the community. We have good links with various organisations that can help, but are always open to new contacts if you know any.

Bikes – We are still collecting bikes in good condition, as well as helmets, locks and lights, for the new arrivals at the Noke and Ardmere House Hotel. We are working with parishioners from SS Alban and Stephen who are supporting asylum seekers at Ardmere.

Asylum seekers stories:

1. One asylum seeker was told he would be moved to the Bibby Stockholm, the barge moored in Dorset. He was so scared that he absconded to a friend in Sheffield. (An asylum seeker committed suicide recently aboard the barge.)
2. One asylum seeker has been moved to a barracks in Kent, where the conditions are worse than the Noke.
3. One asylum seeker given Leave to Remain has moved to Camden Town and is working as a pharmacist. His family are arriving from Kazakhstan soon. He owned 4 pharmacies there.
4. Fernando, given Leave to Remain, is now working in the Cathedral café, and hopes to rent a flat soon.
5. Khan, given Leave to Remain, is running the 2024 London Marathon backwards! and has asked for sponsorship. He is supporting Meningitis Research.
6. One asylum seeker is re-taking accountancy exams in the spring, having failed them in December.