

A call to help some of the most vulnerable members of our local community

On 20th June 2021, World Refugee Day, Pope Francis tweeted “Let us open our hearts to refugees, making our own their sorrows and joys; may we learn from their courageous resilience! In this way, together we can help create a more humane community, one big family.”

You may have noticed the changing diversity of the population of Halton – the following may help to explain some of the reasons. We currently have approximately 500 asylum seekers plus between 20 and 40 refugees who were previously asylum seekers (they do not have to tell us if they stay in Halton or move on) and approximately 150 Syrian refugees. An ever-changing number have also been housed in a local hotel as an overflow during Covid while move-ons have been halted.

An Asylum Seeker is someone, present in the UK, who has applied to become a refugee under the 1951 UN Convention, and who is waiting for the Home Office (or the Court) to determine their application, which can take months or even years. An asylum seeker-

- Escapes from their home country because of severe danger, often by torturous routes and sometimes being trafficked
- Has made an asylum claim (i.e. asked the Government for permission to stay in the UK as a refugee)
- Is waiting for the Home Office to make a decision on their asylum claim
- If they do not have enough money to support themselves, they will be provided with financial support through an ASPEN card giving them **£5.66** per day per person
- If they have nowhere to live, they will be housed by Serco (in our area) with rent and utilities paid for
- **Cannot** work or claim benefits
- Can access free healthcare
- Their children are entitled to a school place and get free school meals generally
- Is allowed to stay in the UK until a decision is made on their asylum case
- Becomes a refugee if their claim for asylum is successful. Usually is given permission to stay in the UK for 5 years after which they have to apply and pay for indefinite leave to remain, which may or may not be granted
- Can appeal against a negative decision until all appeals are exhausted

A refugee – the 1951 UN Convention says must have a “well-founded fear of being persecuted”

- Home Office accepts that the 1951 convention test is satisfied, and has granted refugee status
- May have claimed asylum in the UK, or come via a resettlement scheme eg the Syrian Resettlement Scheme
- **Can** work
- Are taught English as part of their resettlement programme
- Can be in any type of housing, and this includes access to social housing
- Pays tax
- Can access benefits
- Can access free healthcare
- Can access Higher Education
- Children are entitled to a school place

A failed or refused asylum seeker has applied for asylum, but his/her claim has not been granted

- Has no right to remain in the UK
- Is expected to return to their home country even if it is dangerous to do so
- **Cannot** work or claim benefits
- Has no right to housing/homelessness services

- Can register with a GP and receive emergency health care
- Children are entitled to a school place
- In some cases, may receive limited support from the Home Office (housing and money)
- May be entitled to local authority support under the Care Act 2014 or the Children Act 1989
- May become destitute as he/she has no recourse to public funds

“Illegal Immigrants” - no one knows how many there are in Britain at any one time – estimates say 150,000 enter each year without permission or fail to depart. There was a sharp decline in removals during the Covid pandemic.

They do not have the right to remain in the UK. They may have entered legally but failed to leave or may have entered illegally. They incur costs on health, education and welfare.

They can be exploited or have been brought here to be exploited – through modern slavery and/or trafficking.

Some enter clandestinely eg in lorries, some come in for a short visit legally then fail to leave. Others do not leave after their asylum claim or appeal has been rejected. A child has no right to remain if both parents are illegal immigrants.

Economic Migrants - an economic migrant is a person who travels from one country or area to another in order to improve their standard of living (and is not a refugee or asylum seeker).

What can we, as a Catholic community do to help those in Halton who need support?

- Donate money to the Trinity Safe Space Charity, a multi-faith organisation, which operates from the two Trinity Methodist churches in Widnes and Runcorn, practically and emotionally supporting those who are most vulnerable, with food, clothes, household items, sanitary products, trainers etc, via our email address tsshalthon@gmail.com where you will be given bank details
- Volunteer to be a welcomer, taking welcome boxes to newly arrived immigrants and helping them to settle in – we are looking to set up a St Wilfrid’s Welcome Box project. Training will be given
- Volunteer with Trinity Safe Space – we need people to join the rotas when we open our drop-ins again. Training will be given. We also need Treasurer and Secretary Trustees
- We need adult bicycles, mainly men’s, with lights, in good condition – these would be picked up from you

For more information about any of the above please contact Pauline Ruth on safeguarding246@rcaol.org.uk or via the St Wilfrid Parish safeguarding phone number 0151 422 1779

Pauline Ruth

St Wilfrid’s Parish Widnes’ Safeguarding Representative and Chair of Trinity Safe Space Charity’s Board of Trustees

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