**East Hoathly Village of Sanctuary**

**2018 Round-up**

Our work has 3 aims: to make refugees welcome in this area; to raise awareness of issues concerning refugees among the public and decision-makers; to garner and pass on resources and funds to those in need.

The refugee crisis sometimes drifts off the media radar but it has in no way gone away nor even diminished. Millions of people whose communities and livelihoods have been destroyed by war, famine or brutality are living in desperate conditions. Only a few years ago, these very same people were living lives not so very different to our own, in communities, with professions, families, homes, schools. Nothing they have done has caused their desperation. It may seem that a small community in leafy East Sussex can do nothing about such an overwhelming and distant issue. We do not see it that way. If we can do anything to make the life of even one individual in these straits better, it is worthwhile – and we can do more than that.

During 2018, Village of Sanctuary:

* Presented a public showing in Uckfield of Sue Clayton’s moving film about unaccompanied young refugees, “Calais Children: A Case to Answer”;
* Collaborated in “Raise the Roof”, a highly successful fund-raising concert in the parish church;
* Ran a third party for resettled families, attended by almost 70 Syrians of all ages, plus helpers;
* Hosted a women’s morning for Syrian mothers to have some social time away from family responsibilities;
* Ran a fund-raising jumble sale in the village hall;
* Held a second “Debate in the Pub” looking at on-the-ground needs, with guest speaker Joel Gage of Aegean Solidarity Network and contributions from two of our team who have been teaching and befriending a resettled Syrian family.
* Gave further “Family Days Out” vouchers to local resettled families, to enable them to see something of other places and enjoy some leisure venues.
* Washed scores of sleeping bags recovered from festivals, to be passed on to refugees living “rough”.
* Donated funds to charities working at the “coal-face” in Greece, France and Syria.

Financially, we continued to benefit from the 2017 grant from City of Sanctuary relating to engaging refugees with the community. Our operating costs have been met this year thanks to a grant from East Sussex CC’s “Building Stronger Communities” such that every penny donated by the public or raised from the events above, some £3000, has been passed on to chosen charities, inc: Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, Reach for Humanity, Hand-in-Hand for Syria, Aegean Solidarity Network, Mobile Refugee Support and SOS Children’s Village Qodsaya.

I sign off with: thanks to our splendid committee; grateful farewell to Diane Knill; welcome to Barbara Sutherland and Carole Ridout; and appreciation to all who have supported us so generously during the year. We could not achieve anything without you. Our work continues, so we are keen to hear from anyone who may want to contribute in any way. From January, it will be possible to donate funds online on a new website: villageofsanctuary.net

Tom Serpell, Chair

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