

MINUTES OF OPEN MEETING OF ST ALBANS FOR REFUGEES (StAR)
HELD ON 7TH MARCH 2016 AT THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, ST ALBANS

Present:

Liz Needham – Founder & Trustee of StAR and chair of meeting

Debbie Playford – Trustee of StAR and minute taker

Farhat Zia – Trustee of StAR

Alison Hill; Steve Roderick, Liz Roderick, Bruno Brandas, Fabiola Brandas, Liz Lincoln, Mandy West, Shareef Khodadin, Neetesh Iyapah, Jacqui Freeman, Carolyn Westlake, Suzy Johnson Ensor.

1) Welcome

Liz Needham (LN) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2) Accounts

Copies of the accounts for the first 6 months of StAR up to 29/02/2016 were made available to everyone present.

Income	£4992.53
Expenditure	£2797.27
Balance	<u>£2195.26</u>

It was noted that the Paypal fees were a considerable proportion of the expenses and it was asked whether it is possible to find a cheaper alternative. LN explained that the general public are familiar with Paypal and trust it so it wouldn't be easy to find an alternative that people would be happy to use instead. People can now make direct bank transfers into our Metro bank account if they are willing.

3) What we have been doing

- We have acquired 4 storage facilities – 1 in Letchworth which we do not have to pay for while it is not needed and 3 garages in Thirlestane off Lemsford Road in St Albans – 1 the council is letting us use free of charge and the other two we are being given for half the rental cost. All four still contain donations which need sorting.
- We have become registered as a not-for-profit company as a precursor to registering as a charity and have opened a bank account as well as a Paypal account; we have a website, facebook page, twitter account, and logo.
- Local people have been fantastically generous in donations of clothes and money. We keep in close contact with the warehouse in Calais run by L'Auberge des Migrants who let us know what supplies are needed. The needs are constantly changing. Currently we understand that children's clothes are not needed in Calais but are in Greece and other countries. The warehouse in Calais had recently only been asking for food, tents and blankets but is now needing men and women's clothes again. The situation in Calais is fluid and we need to be responsive to the quickly changing needs.
- 5 trips have been made so far taking supplies out to Calais – a combination of food, clothes, shoes, tents, sleeping bags, blankets and hygiene packs. One trip took £1500 worth of food supplies which fed the residents of The Jungle for 3 days.

- Supplies have also been donated for the 4 Syrian refugee families due to arrive imminently in Stevenage including 4 new microwave ovens.
- We have been nominated for a Mayor's Pride Award.

4) What we want to do next

- Become a registered charity (process has been started) with more Trustees
- Help refugee families who are settled in St Albans and the surrounding areas, in conjunction with the local council and Herts Welcomes Syrian Families (HWSF). The biggest problem holding this up is locating suitable properties via private landlords. Anyone who can help with identifying suitable properties for rent should contact HWSF.
- Continue to do what we have been doing – getting supplies out to Calais in line with what is needed. Our next planned trip is 2nd April but we may do another unscheduled trip before then.
- Look into the costs and practicalities of getting a shipping container of supplies out to Lesbos perhaps in conjunction with another charity.

5) Fundraising

- A gig last autumn raised £800
- Christmas appeal for money for food parcels raised £1500 via individual donations
- Stall at HWSF open meeting raised £400

Suggestions were given for future fundraising:

- Approach local mosques (NI and FZ)
- Approach Trade Unions
- Twinning with a school
- Linking with other charities who may fund raise on our behalf (SJE)
- Sponsored events e.g. climbing Snowdon, fun run, dog walk
- Fund raising evenings organised by restaurants e.g. Abbey Spice (FZ)

How can people help?

- Sorting at our garages. So far we have tended to do this at the weekends because of the Trustees' work and other commitments, but if people can organise a small team of volunteers LN is able to open up one of the garages during the week and explain what needs to be done.
- Coming with us over to Calais and helping in the warehouse there for a day (or liaising direct with L'auberge des Migrants if you want to go independently and for longer periods of time).
- Helping with keeping our website, Facebook page and Twitter account up to date.
- Lobbying MPs about getting unaccompanied minors brought over **quickly** and processing asylum claims for people with a legitimate claim for asylum in the UK from Calais. Currently the government is only taking refugee families from camps on the immediate borders of Syria.
- Lobbying the French government to get The Jungle declared an official refugee camp and inviting the UN to get involved. This in turn would mean that some of the big charities such as the Red Cross would get involved. Currently only small scale organisations such as ourselves are doing anything on the ground.
- Organising events to raise funds for us. One more trip taking food supplies will clear out our existing funds.

Actions:

It was agreed to set up a Facebook group so that interested people can communicate more easily with us and each other to share ideas etc. **(LN)**

Offers of help:

NAME	HELP OFFERED	EMAIL ADDRESS
Shareef Khodadin	Driving to Calais	s.khodadin@hotmail.com
Neetesh Iyapah	Driving to Calais	Neetesh_lyapah@hotmail.com
Rashid Khodadin	Driving to Calais?	rashidk@tiscali.co.uk
Liz Lincoln	Sorting at garages & possible trip to Calais	alandliz@ntlworld.com
Alison Hill	French, sorting at garages, shopping, Calais	Alisonhill346@btinternet.com
Bruno & Fabiola Brandas	Coming to Calais to help over there. Avail until July.	pastorbruno@gmail.com fabiolagbrandas@gmail.com
Jacqui Freeman	Sorting donations here, Calais	Jacqui74freeman@hotmail.com
Carolyn Westlake	Liaising with donations from Hertford area	
Suzy Johnson Ensor	Managing Communications via social media	

Date of next meeting: to be announced on our website and Facebook page.