

THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF GUILDFORD

PROJECT FRANCIS

AIMING TO FIND A HOME IN GUILDFORD

FOR A SYRIAN REFUGEE FAMILY

1. UK GOVERNMENT

In January 2014 the UK Government launched the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. In 2015 the Government made a commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 and in February 2018 it reported that it was more than half way towards meeting its commitment as over 10,500 refugees had been resettled under the Scheme.

2. SUPPORTING RESETTLEMENT OF FAMILIES

3. Families seeking resettlement are assessed by UNHCR under vulnerability criteria and a medical assessment is also made. Planning for the arrival of a family and meeting their needs in the UK is coordinated by the Local Authority. All families should have a family support plan. Certain crucial elements of support can be provided by volunteers. Refugees have a variety of needs; some may have suffered significant trauma or loss. They may have long and short term health needs, including mental health concerns. Some exhibit a fear of authority figures.
4. They need support with orientation and cultural awareness to help them settle into their new area. Children will need to be enrolled in schools. Adults may need ESOL classes to improve English language skills. A supporting group may be called upon to fund extra childcare, or driving lessons or other items not covered by the Government funding. Families may need assistance with budgeting and finances.

5. THE LOCAL AUTHORITY SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

6. There are two principal avenues for participation in this scheme.
7. An organisation may sponsor the resettlement of a family in association with the Local Authority. This requires identification of a private landlord with a suitable property that could be committed for rent for 3-5 years who would be directed to the Local Authority. A team of volunteers and befrienders would need to be established for a range of support purposes.
8. An organisation may equip itself to provide support in resettlement of a family in the future. This would involve the establishment of a team of volunteers with appropriate skills and experience who would be ready to contribute to a support network that the Local Authority may initiate in the future if they become aware, by another route, of a property that would be suitable for a refugee family.

9. LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT IN GUILDFORD

10. Families meeting the UNHCR criteria are matched with local authorities for resettlement by the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership. Most Surrey councils have a commitment to support a number of families by participating in the Local Authority Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme. Some 44 properties are currently in this Programme in Surrey. In general, local authorities take a low-key approach with no publicity for reasons of safety.
11. Guildford Borough Council ("GBC") participates in the programme and five refugee families are currently supported by GBC. Syrian refugees accepted by GBC have been fully assessed by UNHCR as wishing to come to the UK. GBC supports Syrian refugee families through its Family Support Team. Much support is provided by volunteers, drawn from church communities and elsewhere, who are recruited and managed professionally.

12. ACCOMMODATION FOR A FAMILY

13. Appropriate accommodation has to be available before a refugee family can be resettled in an area and identification of suitable property is the essential first step. Private rented accommodation is needed because Local Authority social housing is not available. Landlords must be willing to let the premises for a minimum of three but ideally five years and be willing to accept a family on benefits. Landlords must be willing to consider letting at a rental which is equivalent or very close to the Local Housing Allowance. Landlords are required to permit certain adaptations to accommodation that the family may need, e.g. ramps, handrails, etc., the cost of which may be funded by the Local Authority. Potential landlords have emerged through church groups or volunteers. They are always directed to the Local Authority who negotiate the tenancy agreements. Properties need to be fully furnished and prepared in advance of the family arriving. This will be arranged and funded by the Local Authority.

14. FINANCIAL MATTERS

15. The Local Authority receives a grant for each person resettled, highest in year 1 and tapering to year 5. Ideally refugee families will become financially independent over time but reducing dependence on benefits needs careful planning and an understanding of the system. Subject to certain exemptions, the benefit cap of £20k a year max applies. The UK resettlement programme does not require refugees to have specific skills. Although many refugees have skills that can be utilised in the resettlement area, they may lack sufficient language proficiency, which places a high priority on improving their command of English.
16. In Guildford the rental of a three bedroom property is likely to amount to between £12k-£15k a year, leaving little for living expenses.
17. The Local Authority helps families set up bank accounts and gives advice on budgeting for the family. The Local Authority or the Government will deal with all legal issues.
18. Personal finances can be complex and will vary considerably from one family to another. Where families have costs that they are unable to cover donations will be required to help meet the need.

19. VOLUNTEERS AND BEFRIENDERS

20. Much of the support for families is provided by volunteers. The Local Authority provides or procures training for volunteers and ensures that there is a clear understanding of the role and boundaries of the position, in order to reduce risk, misunderstanding and vulnerabilities for both parties. The role is fairly formal with a specific job description.
21. Volunteers may, for example, be involved in any of the following: preparing the property for occupation; orientation of a family into an area, managing basic shopping needs; childcare – e.g. when parents are in classes; helping out at a drop-in café; English tuition; transport; one off activities, e.g. collection at airport.
22. The role of befrienders is more low-key than that of volunteers. It includes “good neighbour” activities, e.g. driving to the supermarket, helping with the school run. Befrienders also need training and cultural awareness.

23. THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESE OF ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON

24. In his pastoral message for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time in September 2015 Bishop Richard Moth drew attention to the need to provide a warm welcome to refugees newly arrived in the parishes and communities of the diocese and to take action to fulfil their needs in obtaining accommodation, learning English, receiving assistance in legal matters, schooling and knowledge of the local community and available facilities, as well as providing much needed financial support.
25. In the Spring 2016 Refugee Crisis Newsletter, the Bishop announced the appointment of Voices in Exile as the principal partner of the diocese in its endeavour to make an effective response to the refugee and asylum situation. The Newsletter set out the ways in which Voices in Exile planned to develop its activity programme and its liaison with other organisations committed to the objective.

26. The Autumn 2016 Refugee Crisis Newsletter portrayed the continuing achievements of the actions to alleviate the plight of refugees and contained a number of accounts of experiences of individual refugees and *inter alia* a chart showing how the Migrant Fund resources were being spent. The Bishop said “It is important that the diocese continues to develop innovative ways of working, to ensure that we can engage all our parish communities in effective action.”
27. A further Refugee Crisis Newsletter was issued in the Summer of 2017 and contained encouraging information concerning the advances made in supporting refugees on a number of fronts as well as the progress made in engaging landlords to make available properties to accommodate refugee families.
28. Once parishes are engaged in a Refugee Project they can bid for the diocesan funds collected for this purpose.
29. The documents referred to above can be viewed on the diocese website at <https://www.dabnet.org/>.

30. THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESE OF GUILDFORD

31. The work of GBC in achieving the resettlement of refugees in Guildford has been accomplished with substantial support and collaboration by the Anglican Diocese of Guildford which currently has 7 properties in the Programme, of which 5 are in the Guildford area. In particular the diocesan Refugee Support Adviser, Diane Peters, has extensive experience in undertaking resettlement projects and the guidance and training of volunteers. Their volunteer network numbers about 100 people, not all of whom are drawn from church communities.
32. The experience of the Diocese of Guildford is that amounts required from fundraising to provide support have not been substantial.
33. Their properties have become available in a number of ways, mostly by word of mouth but two came as a result of a national appeal.
34. Please visit <https://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/resources/refugee-help> for further information on the activities of the Diocese of Guildford in responding to the refugee crisis

35. ACTIONS OF THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF GUILDFORD

36. In response to the call from the Bishop to examine the direction which the diocese should take in circumstances, in particular, where the number of available priests is declining, in January 2018 two meetings were held in CPG to gain an understanding of what people feel are the priorities for establishing a Vision for Mission for the Diocese. Among many other matters of importance, the document recording the proposed CPG Priorities for Mission issued after the January meetings states “*We also need to look outwards, to people who are poor, and refugees..... putting solidarity with the poor at the centre of everything we do*”. In the context of this expression of intent, it would be appropriate for positive action aimed at bringing into being a concrete action to support refugees within the locality of CPG to be explored.

37. NEXT STEPS

38. The first step will be the appointment of an appropriate small focused Project Team with a variety of relevant skills and experience to pursue and be accountable for the undertaking of the Project.
39. The next essential step is to identify a suitable property for rental by a family.
40. The Project Team would in particular be tasked with ensuring the availability of (a) any necessary financial support and (b) the establishment of the requisite volunteer and befriender support services.
41. Pending the identification of a property and the family for resettlement, volunteers and befrienders may be found who could work with the Diocese of Guildford teams and gain pertinent experience from assisting with existing projects.

42. CAN YOU HELP?

43. Do you know of a property available for rental that would be suitable to be let to a Syrian refugee family?

44. Would you be willing to be considered for training as a part time volunteer working locally with refugee families?
45. Would you be willing to act as a befriender to help a refugee family with the ordinary things of life during a familiarisation process in the locality where the family will be housed?
46. Current assessments suggest that the financial resource needed for housing a family would not be unduly large and may be funded in whole or in part from funds available in the Bishop's Migrant Fund to which CPG has previously contributed. However, should funds be needed there would be no direct call on the general funds available for CPG and discrete fundraising would be undertaken. Would you consider being counted as a possible donor?
47. If you would like to respond to any of the above, please submit the Notification Form on this web page and your information will be treated in confidence by the Project Team. Alternatively, please email Alan Hughes at projectfrancis@cpg.church or telephone him on 01483 826124.
48. **UPDATES**
49. From time to time progress made on this Project will be reported to the parishioners through this website and otherwise as appropriate.
50. **DATE FOR THE DIARY**
51. Catherine Hughes will be holding a fundraising dinner at St Pius Church Hall after mass on **Saturday 20 October**. Further details will be published in due course.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO GET INVOLVED IN PROJECT FRANCIS PLEASE COMPLETE AND SUBMIT THE FORM BELOW

Please use the Comment box to indicate whether your involvement would be likely to be as provider of a property for rental, as a donor or as a volunteer or befriender