

# SCOTTISH FAITHS ACTION FOR REFUGEES

Newsletter

Issue 3, Oct/Nov/Dec 2016

## EDITORIAL

The year is drawing to a close, the mornings are crisp and the evenings are dark – time for our last newsletter of the year.

In November, Scottish Faiths Actions for Refugees marked its first year of activity and it was moving to reflect on the past year and our vision for the next - in this issue David has shares a couple of thoughts about Welcome. We are also looking back at Mitzvah Day 2016, our new project, the Edinburgh Weekend Club and would like to introduce to you a new initiative called StopFundingHate.

If you would like to just get in touch and find out more about us, we would always love to hear from you. Until then,

**Season's Greetings and a very Happy New Year**

*from David and Sabine*



## You are welcome here.

We are glad you are living among us.

Thank you for your contribution to the life of the community.



Produced by St John's Scottish Episcopal Church, Princes Street, Perth PH 2 8LJ [www.episcopal-perth.org.uk](http://www.episcopal-perth.org.uk)

## You are welcome here

### 12 months of Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees

By David Bradwell, Refugee Coordinator

You are welcome here. This was the message – in many different languages – which members of St John's Episcopal Church in Perth wanted to share with those people who had moved to live and work in their city. Thousands of these postcards have been distributed in places of worship, businesses, libraries and anywhere where refugees and migrants might find them. A message of welcome, of appreciation and of thanksgiving.

St John's decided to do this following the EU referendum vote and the reported increase in hate crime. Associated with this are widely held fears and mistrust of strangers, with refugees who have fled from war and terror often facing racism and hostility in our country where they are seeking sanctuary. It is initiatives like this Welcome postcard which can both reach out in friendship and remind those who are longstanding members of the settled community that there are different ways of thinking and responding to the arrival of New Scots. Rather than meeting people with fear and hostility, to come with open hearts and open minds, and for those who belong to a religious tradition, to reflect on what it means to 'welcome the stranger' or to 'treat others as you would wish to be treated'.

After a year of this project I have had the privilege of learning about projects of welcome and support, small and large – but each significant and remarkable. If you have stories to share or want to discuss an idea, please contact us (details on back page).

## Mitzvah Day 2016

Jewish communities around the UK took part in Mitzvah Day on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. This year there was a special emphasis on interfaith relations and working with refugees. [Mitzvah Day](#) is a UK charity with a vision for Jews and non-Jews to come together to build more cohesive neighbourhoods and to strengthen civil society. A Mitzvah, literally, is a commandment in Jewish law. However, it is often used to mean a good deed or an act of kindness and that is the basis for Mitzvah Day. It is an integral part of Jewish life. On Mitzvah Day, people give their time, not money, to make a difference to the community around them. The movement introduces people to social action, to their neighbours and to local charities setting up projects which address real needs. Jewish led it brings together people of other faiths, and none, to volunteer side by side, with fun and laughter, with our community, to get to know each other.

Around the world 40,000 volunteers, including 25,000 in the UK were engaging in social action projects. In Glasgow the local Jewish Community teamed up with [Refuweegee](#); in Edinburgh volunteers helped to sort donations at the [Re-Act](#) warehouse.

Laura Marks, the Mitzvah Day founder, said: "Since the EU Referendum and US Presidential election campaigns, we've seen a rise in racism and hate crimes and a heightened fear of the outsider. The need to bring people together has never been greater. "While we are honoured to have high profile guests join us, it's the 40,000 people in our synagogues, churches, mosques and gurdwaras that really drive these amazing acts of kindness and make bonds that will last for years."

[View](#) the highlights of Mitzvah Day 2016 in the online photo gallery.



The Joint Public Issues Team (Church of Scotland, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain) has launched a new campaign video – [A Very British Nativity](#).

Although the cast is talented and endearing, the intention is that this film strikes a deeper chord; one which reminds us of the realities that those seeking asylum in the UK face.

The film sheds light on the experiences of British asylum seekers who encounter the 'hostile environment' the Government has created in the hope of reducing net migration to the UK. It's a humorous re-imagining; three wise men rock up on Micro-Scooters and get taken in by immigration enforcement, but it is ultimately intended to highlight the degrading and harsh treatment experienced by the UK's asylum population.

The Government released its quarterly migration statistics, which show that in September 2016, 37,958 asylum seekers in the UK were receiving support from the Government's National Asylum Support Service – and were entitled to accommodation and/or financial support of less than £6 per day.

The report also reveals that so far in 2016, 45% of appeals made by asylum seekers were allowed, indicating that the system currently in place is struggling to adequately assess the needs of asylum seekers. For more information see

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/refugees/averybritishnativity/>

## Edinburgh Weekend Club

Much has happened since our last newsletter and it is a great pleasure to say that we have started an Edinburgh Weekend Club project. It seeks to contribute to the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and new migrants (New Scots) in Edinburgh through responding to social isolation experienced specifically over the weekend. Our vision is to see New Scots become active members of society in Scotland, with strong social relationships.

With most activities and programmes taking place during the week, the weekend can become a particularly isolating and lonely time. Simultaneously, many Scottish forms of socialising are culturally or religiously inappropriate for New Scots and they are therefore excluded from connecting with their local community. Through arranging monthly events on Saturdays and Sundays and creating a relaxing and fun environment the Edinburgh Weekend Club enables its participants to build friendships, improve their English and learn more about Scottish culture and history. Additionally, these events should break down barriers of fear and prejudice as people of different cultures and religions connect, share with each other and learn from each other.

A big thank you is to be extended to [Interfaith Glasgow](#) whose input has been invaluable in setting up this project in Edinburgh.

We have recruited and trained a marvellous team of volunteers from all faith backgrounds and none, who will help plan and facilitate these monthly gatherings. Our first event will be a typical Burns Night Supper and Ceilidh with St. Columba's by the Castle hosting us in their beautiful hall.

If you are a local community or faith group who would like to play a role in hosting, offering event spaces or fundraising please do get in touch. This project can only be successful with your support.

## Cup of Tea with a Refugee



Refugees are often just seen as statistics or news stories. The Scottish Refugee Council want to change the conversation and show that they're real people, just like us. The Cup of Tea with a Refugee campaign uses one of Scotland's favourite pastimes to bring people together. Everybody loves a cup of tea.

The SRC encourages us to host our own "cup of tea with a refugee" events. To find out more or join the campaign click [here](#).



## UK Interfaith Refugee Statement

In September, Scottish faith leaders joined with voices from across the United Kingdom in an open letter from faith leaders to the Prime Minister calling for more action to help refugees.

At an event in the West London Synagogue this Interfaith Refugee Initiative was published. The text of the letter includes a asks that:

1. *The UK should take a fair and proportionate share of refugees, both those already within Europe and those still outside it.*
2. *Safe and legal routes to the UK, as well as to the rest of Europe, need to be established.*
3. *Safe and legal routes within Europe, including the UK, should be established.*
4. *There should be access to fair and thorough procedures to determine eligibility for international protection wherever it is sought.*

Read the full letter [here](#)



by **Linda Harwood**

[StopFundingHate](#) are a moderate, non-political consumer pressure group campaigning for ethical advertising. We formed in response to the worrying rise in hate crime in Britain recently, and after a paper published by the UN calling the UK media “extremist” and “uniquely aggressive”.

Our aim is to make media hate campaigns unprofitable. We do this by shifting the balance of incentives so that running headlines which demonise minority groups costs newspapers more money through lost advertising than it makes them in sales. We hope that this will lead to a long-term improvement in the quality and tone of the Sun, Mail and Express coverage about vulnerable groups. We believe people have the right to make choices based on the values of companies they may purchase from - and to speak out when something does not sit right. - This approach is working. Recently Lego stopped their association with the Daily Mail, and the Co-op have agreed to a review of their advertising placement strategy.

Please join our polite and friendly revolution - check us out on [Facebook](#) or twitter or sign up to our mailing list [signup@stopfundinghate.org.uk](mailto:signup@stopfundinghate.org.uk). We need your support for only together can we make a difference.

## Upcoming events

The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network is organising a course looking at “Forced Migration: how can Quakers Respond?” from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of February. Find more information [here](#).

The dates for Refugee Festival Scotland have been released – it will run from 20 June –2 July 2017.

The Scottish Refugee Council offers high quality training on asylum and refugee matters throughout the year – find more details [here](#).

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us any time with questions, comments or other items you would like to pass on. You are welcome to reproduce and share this newsletter.

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