

## Background to Friends without Borders (Portsmouth) October 2017

Jesus said: ‘...Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me.’ [Matt 25v45 The Poverty and Justice Bible]



Friends without Borders exists to support some of the poorest and most neglected people. It is not always widely known that asylum seekers and refugees face a very difficult, not to say hostile environment in this country. Once a claim for asylum has been recognised, very basic accommodation at the bottom of the private rented sector is provided by the state together with and a very small financial allowance. A claim can take years to be heard, during which time the applicant may not work and has to be available to travel regularly to a sign-on point often at some distance (eg all claimants in Portsmouth must sign-on in Fareham) and to travel to Liverpool which is the only place formal asylum interviews are held. The state does not provide any assistance with the cost of travel. However, these are the lucky ones. A very large number of applicants have their initial claim for asylum rejected and are told they must leave the UK. For some this is possible but for many it is simply not possible for them to return “home” because no such place exists any more, or the country of origin will not accept them back or because they face detention, torture or execution on their return. These people have no right to remain here, could be detained at any moment (at vast expense to the state) have no access to public funds and have no accommodation. They are simply destitute. For many this state of limbo lasts for many years.

Friends Without Borders provides two crucial projects to refugees and asylum seekers in the Portsmouth area: the **All Saints Drop-in** that provides advice and advocacy on everyday matters and the **Access to Justice** project that offers free specialist legal advice, the only such service available in this part of the country.

**The All Saints Drop-in** provides a space for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to meet each other, have a drink and a snack and come out of the cold in winter for a short time. They can also access both professional and peer support in times of need. We help with the following issues:

- Destitution support
- Travel
- Education
- Finding legal representatives
- Accessing local health services
- Housing problems
- Benefit applications/ entitlements
- Form-filling and responding to official letters

Volunteers work with members of the local asylum seeking and refugee community to resolve problems and utilise coping strategies when times are hard. Friends Without Borders maintains links with other refugee support services, local solicitors and food banks that can provide assistance. The Drop-in takes place between 10 am and 1 pm on Mondays and Thursdays and is run in collaboration with the Portsmouth branch of the British Red Cross at All Saints Church in Commercial Road, Portsmouth PO1 4BT .

The **Access to Justice** project offers legal advice to our clients.

We deal with complex and difficult cases on behalf of people who are often unable to gain support elsewhere. Since launching quietly in March 2014 we have worked with over 150 cases with 75 in 2016 alone.

This work is carried out by trained and qualified volunteers who between them have many years of experience in the field. We take on, and give advice about a range of immigration cases. Successes over the years include asylum claims, indefinite leave to remain applications, family reunions and citizenship application.