

## Update from Friends without Borders (Portsmouth) October 2017

**Portsmouth Anglican Cathedral held a Vigil for Refugees** in March this year. There were reflections and prayers each hour between Morning Prayer to Evensong. These were led by people from a range of faith backgrounds, including Quakers, Muslims as well as Anglicans.

Members of the **Muslim community** have continued to increase their involvement and support. The Al Mahdi Centre at Funtley has held collections of food on two occasions in the past year, the most recent being during Ramadan. The Iman at Al Mahdi has joined the group of volunteers when his busy schedule allows. This growing interfaith cooperation is a source of great joy.



**Portsmouth's two MPs** have given welcome support both to FwB as an organisation and also to individual constituents over the years. Flick Drummond who had been very supportive lost her seat in Portsmouth South in June but her successor, Stephen Morgan MP has already shown immense compassion and care. He has joined the drop in a few times since his election spending time chatting with clients and one whole session working alongside one of the volunteers (me!)

FwB and **Access to Justice** in particular suffered a real blow recently with the death of John Bingham, a retired naval Commander, founder member of FwB's predecessor, Haslar Visitors Group, and the most highly qualified and experienced of our legal advisers

**Accommodation:** As a 'failed asylum seeker' it is very difficult to find anywhere to live apart from sofa-surfing or on the street. Even if they had enough money it would be illegal for them or for a landlord to enter into a tenancy agreement. FwB is currently looking at ways of finding accommodation and is in negotiation with Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight which might have some space and also with the charity Refugee at Home which pairs asylum seekers and refugees with families able to offer some short-term accommodation at no cost (max 2 months)

**Bicycles:** volunteers at the Red Cross (FwB's partner at the drop-in) have started to refurbish unwanted bikes so that our clients can get around more easily. So any offers of bikes would be gratefully received

**Goods needed:** In addition to bikes mentioned above, good quality bike locks are needed as these can be very expensive and once a bike has been refurbished it becomes quite attractive to thieves and joyriders. Donations of nappies and toiletries are always needed but FwB no longer handles clothes as there is insufficient storage space available (food also goes in and out very quickly and is pretty well provided at the moment by local stores)

**Syria** is sadly still much in the news but very few refugees from Syria arrive in the Portsmouth area and so do not feature in the work of FwB. The reason for this is that HM Government has a separate project to house and support a strictly limited number of Syrian refugees taken directly from camps in the Middle East. Landlords in local authority areas which participate in the scheme receive the locally going rate in rent for a 5 year period.

**Financial donations** are always welcome. As a small charity FwB lives very much 'hand-to-mouth' and can only support destitute refugees or provide other services to the extent of the donations received each month.

**Volunteers** are always needed to perform a range of tasks. For more information please chat to me, contact the Chair of the charity at [chairman@friendswithoutborders.org.uk](mailto:chairman@friendswithoutborders.org.uk) or look on the Friends without Borders website: [www.friendswithoutborders.org.uk](http://www.friendswithoutborders.org.uk)



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