

Refugee Ministry Update

Since 2015 Chelmsford Diocese, in partnership with the County Council and other local agencies, has provided resettlement support for 23 Syrian families across Essex. Three of those families are housed in diocesan premises not currently needed for ministerial purposes.

Our Diocesan support agency is Essex Integration (formerly Fresh Beginnings) in Colchester, who are now contracted by Essex to be the sole support agency for Syrian refugees. They, together with many local support groups from our parish churches are doing a fantastic job signposting and accompanying arriving families for English language tuition, medical care, schools, and fitness to work etc. In recent times they've assisted two Syrian men into full-time work and hope to do similarly for five more over the next few weeks. 12 men have also passed their UK driving tests since arriving in the country.

In addition to this, a group in East London led by Revd Dave Scott has been working with via the Home Office's Community Sponsorship Programme to welcome another Syrian family into Dagenham. Dave has ably and energetically coordinated our refugee response for the past year, since the departure of Martin Mitchell. Dave is moving on, but his role as Diocesan Refugee Co-ordinator is being taken on by Fr Gareth Jones of St Mary's Ilford, who will be assisted by Revd Alex Guest, curate at Waltham Abbey, both of whom are already well engaged in this key ministry.

Back in 2015 our appeal for Syrian families rapidly raised £108,000 due to the generosity of many individuals and parishes. Approximately half of those funds have now been spent in support of the needs for white goods, home refurbishment, mobile phones and other immediate essentials. Just over £56,000 remains in the fund.

We expect to receive and support more Syrian families going forward and it has been such a great encouragement to see so many Christians in our parishes come together to help and support these families who have been through so much and still need very particular and sensitive support in making a new start in a new country and new homes after the trauma of war and conflict.

Peter Hill
Bishop of Barking
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