
Update on JRS services

16 April 2020

Dear friends,

Easter blessings to you. I hope and pray that you are well and safe.

It has been a month now since we were forced to suspend the Day Centre because of the virus, and we miss your company very much. We have been grateful to be able to see a few of you (from the required 2 metre safe distance!) when delivering food parcels. But we know that this situation must be especially difficult for you to endure, and it looks likely that it will go on for months.

I want to give you an update on what we are doing to continue to support you during this period. I am hugely grateful to the JRS staff and volunteers who are working very hard, though all are now working from home and not our Wapping Centre.

Phone advice and support

The Day Centre team (Cristina, Liliane, Naomi and Jasmine) and our legal team (Michael and Jess) are available to speak by phone, to give advice, provide support or even just to catch up, if that is helpful. Father Harry, and a number of our other volunteers, are also available to provide spiritual support by telephone. If you want to talk to any of the JRS team, phone 020 7488 7310 and leave a message – one of the team will call you back as soon as they can.

Mobile phone top-ups, food parcels and toiletry packs

In the last few weeks we have begun topping up your mobile phones and delivering food parcels and toiletry packs to you. You may not recognise all the faces of those who deliver your parcels. We have had to recruit new volunteers to help us with this task. You can be confident that they are from JRS because they will all be wearing a JRS T-shirt and a JRS ID badge. Providing mobile top-ups and parcels to everyone is a big job. We have to call each of you personally to find out your mobile network and where you are staying so we can deliver to you. If you haven't yet had your top-up and parcel, we promise that we will get to you soon and you haven't been forgotten. Richard, Jasmine, Beatrice, Sara, Sou, and Aidan from our team have been leading this new work.

New JRS prepaid card

We cannot pay travel allowance at the moment because there are government restrictions on travel. We want to make some hardship funds available to you though, because we know that you are struggling. We have been working to find a safe way of doing this and we are delighted to tell you that we are now in the process of buying a **new JRS prepaid card for each of you for special hardship funds**. It is a Mastercard so you will be able to use it in shops and to take cash out of a cash machine.

Before we can issue these cards to you, we will need confirmation of some personal information. This will **only be used for the pre-paid cards**. The card company needs these details to provide you with a card you can access. We promise, as always, to keep your personal data safe and secure. We will not share your information with the Home Office or any other government department.

Jesuit Refugee Service UK

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One of our staff or volunteers will contact you by text or phone to ask for this information. Please respond straight away. We also ask you to be patient with us, as it is going to take our small team a while to speak to all 350 of you and then deliver your card. But I promise, we will be working as quickly as we possibly can. We know that this is urgent and we care very much about getting help to you.

Activities programme

Dallya has been working with volunteers to get some of our usual weekly activities going online or via WhatsApp groups. The women's and men's prayer groups met on zoom this week. The Community Kitchen are exchanging recipe ideas and the Creative Arts group have been making art at home. If you have ideas on what else we could do together, do please let Dallya know, either by leaving a message via 020 7488 7310 or by sending a text message to her mobile on 07809 754123. She would be pleased to hear from you.

Advocacy

We are working closely with other refugee organisations during this period to push the government into supporting you better. Together we argued for a suspension of reporting and we were very relieved when the Home Office eventually agreed to this. We also pushed for accommodation for homeless people who could not self-isolate if unwell with the virus. There has been some progress there, but many are still not in safe accommodation and we continue to raise this. We are also working with other organisations to try and persuade the government to grant asylum seekers temporary leave to remain and permission to work. We suspect that the government won't agree to our request but we are going to push Ministers to consider it. Do look at our website for updates on all that Sophie and others are doing here: <https://www.jrsuk.net/advocate/>

Fundraising

We are working particularly hard at this point to raise funds for the support we are providing for you and to make sure we can continue to support you after the virus is over. We are having to work extra hard to keep the money coming in during this period of uncertainty, to pay for mobile phone top-ups for you, food and toiletry packs and the new JRS prepaid cards. We thank God though for the generosity of our donors who have responded to our appeal. If you would like to help with this by explaining to supporters why the help makes a difference to you, you can leave a message for Megan or Jess on 020 7488 7310 or contact Jo on her mobile on 07395 416045.

In the meantime, we all pray that this infection will pass quickly and we pray for healing for all those affected. We trust in God, and look out for one another.

With all our love and prayers,



Sarah Teather

Director, Jesuit Refugee Service UK