

"Home is a feeling not a Place. Though made with bricks and mortar, they are mortars of the mind."

- by David, refugee friend of JRS



## Together with refugees

This month JRS UK is proud to join *Together With Refugees*, a new coalition campaign of more than 100 national, refugee-led and grassroots groups. The coalition was founded by Asylum Matters, British Red Cross, Freedom from Torture, Refugee Action, Refugee Council and Scottish Refugee Council. Together with these groups we are calling for a better approach to supporting refugees that is kinder, fairer and more effective.

Together With Refugees aims to build on the power of our active movement to set the agenda together, inspire hope, and win deep change in the UK's approach to refugees.

The campaign carries a simple message: to show compassion to people fleeing war, persecution or violence. The campaign logo of a large orange heart, is inspired by the refugee nation flag, and the colours of a lifebelt; symbolising hope and compassion. With the campaign slogan #WhoWeAre, the heart is intended to be adopted widely to show support for refugees while

underpinning a sense of unity. They represent that together, as a movement, we are larger than the sum of our parts.

If you too believe in a kinder, more humane approach to supporting refugees please join the campaign by searching for #TogetherWithRefugees on social media. There will also be more ways to join us and take part in the coming weeks and months, so watch this space!

We're calling for a kinder, fairer approach to supporting refugees



Find out more: www.jrsuk.net/news/join-us-and-stand-togetherwithrefugees/



For details contact: uk@jrs.net



## Message from the Director



As society begins to re-open, the JRS UK team are again shifting how we support refugee friends. In the last year we have had to pivot repeatedly to respond to the shifts in the public health situation and restrictions. It still seems to early to imagine a new normal, but we know clearly that small face-to-face gatherings of refugees is a priority to find ways of doing safely. We can't yet reopen our bustling day centre, and how I miss the buzz and atmosphere of that! But we are finding ways to bring together small groups of refugee friends for human contact and connection. We have all found the past year lonely and isolating, but for our refugee friends it's been felt acutely. In this newsletter, Miriam shares more about how refugee friends have coped and how JRS volunteers and staff have been making things a little easier.

As the vaccine roll-out began in earnest in the New Year, our teams focus shifted to ensuring that refugee friends – some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society – weren't forgotten in the vaccine roll-out. Access to healthcare is fraught with challenges. We worked hard: volunteers and staff had one-to-one conversations with refugee friends ensuring they were registered with a GP, and advocating alongside them to get them registered; we also ran a series of workshops to counter misinformation. In the newsletter Rhiannon shares in more detail how we then partnered with Barts NHS Trust to run a pop-

up vaccine clinic at JRS, providing a vaccine alongside legal and housing advice from our centre.

Our work over the past six-months has been unfolding against the backdrop of the government's New Plan for Immigration, a plan of ever increasing hostility and degradation. As Sophie shares in her article, we're alarmed about what these proposals mean for refugee friends and people needing sanctuary in the future. We need to do more than just counter these proposals: we need also to present a positive alternative vision. Our recent report, Being Human in the Asylum System, lays our a vision for what a human-centred asylum system could look like. We've included a brief summary of the report and a guide quick guide to contacting your MP with this newsletter – I hope you find it helpful.

There is much more to read inside. I hope you enjoy this edition of *Together* and it gives you a glimpse of our work accompanying refugee friends. I am forever grateful to the support and generosity of our supporters who make all of our work possible, ensuring refugees are not forgotten.

With grateful thanks,



Sarah Teather, Director



### **Sharing Good News**

We are delighted to share the news the three of our refugee friends have welcomed three new babies since January – a baby girl in February, a baby boy in March, and another baby boy in May. All are healthy and keeping well.

"One of my favourite tasks is to sort through donations and compile a baby bundle for new mums!"

Jasmine, Advice & Support Assistant



When the news broke in December that the Pfizer-BioTech vaccine had been proved effective in protecting people from COVID-19, it felt as if the whole world breathed a sigh relief. Finally, it seemed that there was a light at the end of the tunnel and a hope of returning to some form of normality.

We were so excited at the thought of being able to return to face-to-face services, but worried about the type of barriers that refugee friends would face in accessing the vaccine. Back in January, we started to speak with our older refugee friends who were most vulnerable to check that they were registered with a GP locally and felt happy about getting the vaccine.

#### **Easing doubts & countering misinformation**

From many conversations with refugee friends over several weeks, it became clear people were anxious about accepting the vaccine because they felt that they didn't know enough about how it had been made and were worried it could be dangerous for them. With a great deal of misinformation being spread, we knew we needed to offer our refugee friends a safe space where they could ask questions about the vaccine and COVID-19 in general. We began a number of Q & A workshops with medical professionals - over zoom, of course!

We are incredibly lucky to be supported by three volunteer doctors who gave up their time to meet with JRS friends and staff to discuss the vaccine and answer any questions people had – Fr Dr Paul, Dr Sara, and Dr Dominique. It was a very fruitful process with some friends attending several sessions, each time learning more about the vaccine and about COVID-19. Their doubts were eased, and they were able to make an informed choice to be vaccinated.

#### A new partnership

The next barrier was ensuring friends were able to access the vaccination – many refugee friends find it a challenge to register with a GP and accessing healthcare can be tricky. We partnered with the outreach team at Barts Health Trust and the Excel vaccination centre to host a vaccination clinic at our centre in Wapping. The partnership offered an opportunity for refugee friends to have the vaccine in a place they felt safe, alongside people they knew. Alongside having their vaccination, friends came to JRS for a face-to-face casework or legal advice appointment and were able to take home some toiletries and hot food.



During March and April we were able to vaccinate 61 refugee friends at the JRS vaccination clinic. It was so good to see people in person again and support them in getting this vital protection against COVID-19. One refugee friend said;

"I would like to thank JRS for my vaccination. No side effects yet. You have treated us all the best way."

We are continuing to work on supporting people to access the vaccine through running more clinics, inviting people back for their second doses, and sharing positive stories about vaccination. We are hoping to continue working in partnership with Barts Health Trust to remove barriers to health care for our refugee friends and reduce health inequalities.

Rhiannon, COVID-19 Emergency Response Coordinator

## The impact of a listening ear and a functioning bike

Miriam joined the JRS UK team in early 2021, leading our advice and support team. Miriam shares her reflections of her first few months with JRS UK, and the impact of your donations to the refugee friends' hardship fund.

Joining JRS has been a joy, in particular getting to know refugee friends, understand their needs, and offering as much support as we can. It's been inspiring (if a little intimidating!) to join a team of such skilled volunteers and staff, who have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to provide information, advice and support to refugee friends – all remotely, from their dining room tables and bedrooms. I've spent my first few months listening to refugee friends share their lives, their challenges, and their hopes with me.

3,826
£15
hardship grants
between
1 January – 31 May

Refugee friends' lives are by nature highly transitory: prohibited from working or having a bank account, days and lives are shaped by seeking out assistance where and when they can. You are wholly reliant on others, with little agency over your own life. It takes its toll on both physical and mental health.

One refugee friend, Joseph, explained to me that, before the pandemic hit, he didn't have a stable place to live. He'd spend the night on a friend of a friend's sofa, or sometimes in a night shelter, or in a park. During the day, he'd be on the move – seeking out a drop-in that served food, finding somewhere to charge his phone, and look for a place to sleep that night. Life got even harder when the pandemic hit, as night shelters closed and people became increasingly anxious about hosting people in their homes.

JRS helped Joseph to secure Home Office accommodation in a hotel, on COVID-19 grounds. When I think of hotels I think of a place of rest, a place of respite and of treating myself. Almost 12 months on, being in the same hotel room, with limited light, and nowhere to go during the day, with security guards at the door to the hotel, and no choice of what to eat – it doesn't feel quite as restful.

Joseph explained that what keeps him sane and keeps him moving is his bike – it enables him to get to the shops easily, to attend essential appointments, to meet friends who stay further away. But mostly, it was great for his physical and mental well-being – being able to get out and moving in the fresh air, sometimes not actually going anywhere, just for a ride.



When Joseph phoned me to say his bike was broken and needed repairing – he was distraught. He was clearly agitated and distressed at the prospect of being without his bike for any length of time, he described to me that it was like 'losing a limb'.

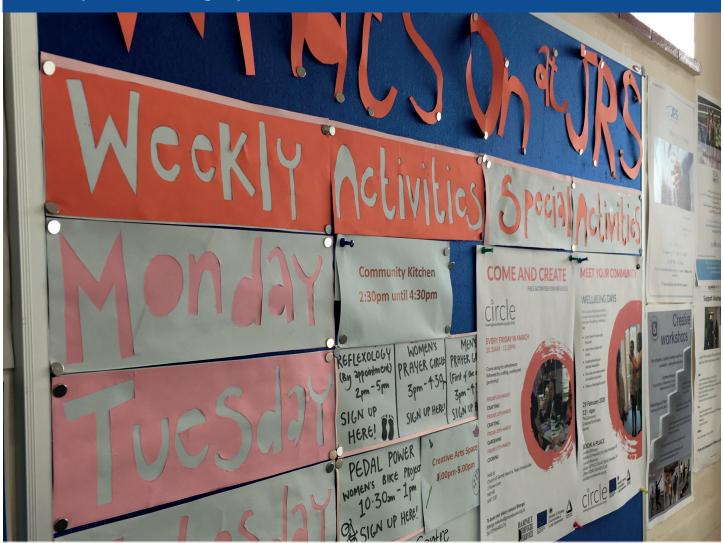
Thanks to your generous donations to the refugee friend's hardship fund, Joseph was able to get his bike repaired quickly. Thanks to the hardship grant loaded on Joseph's JRS prepaid MasterCard, he was able to shop around for where to get the bike repaired. He wasn't confined to a particular repair shop because of a specific voucher. This unexpected – but crucial – expenditure and repair would have been crippling for Joseph, but thanks to your generosity, he was able to use some of the hardship grant to get the bike repaired.

When I next spoke to Joseph – he was elated, and so much calmer. You could hear in his voice the difference knowing his bike was repaired had made – something that we see as so small, actually made an enormous impact on his day-to-day life. **Thank you for your continued support and generosity** – it makes such a difference!

To donate to the hardship fund visit www.jrsuk.net/hardshipfund or call 020 7488 7310

### We Cannot Walk Alone

This Refugee Week, Joanna invites you to connect with the creative work of refugee friends who have taken part in the JRS Open Writing Space



Refugee-led activities have always been important at JRS, as you can tell from this overflowing poster board in the JRS Centre. Whilst we can't gather in-person, all these activities have continued online – and new activities have started up too!

"Home is a feeling not a Place.

Though made with bricks and mortar, they are mortars of the mind...

There are endless possibilities of what I could make of my home. 11

These words are written by David one of the refugee friends of JRS, reflecting on what home means to him, as somebody seeking sanctuary in the UK. For many refugee friends of JRS, the UK is the only place they can call home – yet they are routinely banned from participating in society, and even from earning a living to support themselves and their families. Their unique skills and talents are pushed aside by UK authorities, left to be wasted; buried in a complex system that prioritises hostility over humanity.

The JRS Open Writing Space is a particularly uplifting activity group guided and supported by poet and author Laila Sumpton. Reflections on 'home' were just some of the creative exercises led by Laila last year, as the group met online to write and share their work.

This year, to the joy of many refugee friends, the group is running once again, this time with a focus on more practical writing. The new sessions are a space in which refugee friends can practice writing functional pieces of work that they can use to progress their lives, express their thoughts, and take part in their local communities. From film reviews to CVs, letters, and essays, Laila expertly encourages refugee friends to understand the basics of a good written structure, and have some fun making it their own! Volunteer Sean is on hand to provide examples of his own work, and inspire those who may feel out of their comfort zone. It's a collaborative space that feels informal and welcoming, open, creative and encouraging. By creating such a space for all to listen, to exchange and connect, the Open Writing Space perfectly embodies this year's theme for Refugee Week; 'We Cannot Walk Alone'.

Bold, hopeful and optimistic, this theme encapsulates the aims of the upcoming Refugee Week which takes place from 14th – 20th June. Refugee Week is a UK-wide festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

Through a programme of arts, cultural, and educational events alongside media and creative campaigns, Refugee Week enables people from different backgrounds to connect beyond labels, as well as encouraging understanding of why people are forcibly displaced, and the challenges they face when seeking safety.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proved challenging for us all, especially refugee friends. Yet it has also shown us how interconnected we all are – that the wellbeing of each of us depends on the welfare, safety and contribution of others. We are all part of a shared 'us', and, in the words of Pope Francis, we can come together to form an ever wider 'we'.

In our special Refugee Week event, which will take place online on Wednesday 16th June, we will showcase some of the writing and creativity of refugee friends who have taken part in these sessions. It will offer a platform for those who have sought safety in the UK to share their experiences, perspectives and creative work with you, on their own terms.

#### A creative anthology

As well as this special event, this Refugee Week we will be releasing the work of the Open Writing Space, which has been collated in to an imaginative and inspiring anthology book, 'Home is a feeling not a place'. At our Refugee Week event, Laila will introduce more about this book, and you will find out how you can buy it, with proceeds going directly towards the work of JRS UK. Our refugee friends' poems and prose reflections explore a wealth of philosophical, daily and spiritual topics; from identity, and peace, to desires for the future of humanity, and, of course, their experiences of leaving home behind, in search of safety.

#### Home is

The strong smell of fish- deeply fried in coconut oil causing the neighbors cat to demand his share.
The fresh scent of jasmine flowers fill the air

The cuckoo peeping out every hour to alert us to the tasks for the day. The moaning of our dog "Bruno" for attention.

Lanes of coconut trees swaying to the tune of the wind, full of lush green around.

The doors and windows of our house are made from trees my mum nurtured.

They echo her childhood and she made our home with it, Refreshing us and promising space. The tree that used to give her shade is giving safety to our kids.

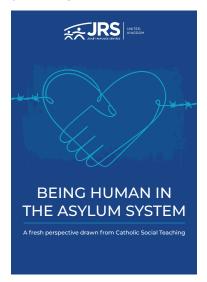
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Register to attend the Open Writing Space's showcase, or purchase their book, on the JRS UK website: www.jrsuk.net

A huge thanks to the Cardinals Appeal and to the Sisters of Charity of St Louis for their support of the refugee-led activities at JRS UK.

## Time for a fresh perspective

Our new report, Being Human in the Asylum System, builds on three and a half years of research with refugee friends and draws their experiences and voices into conversation with Catholic Social Teaching and asylum policy. Our Senior Policy Officer, Sophie, highlights the reports key findings.



We hear repeatedly from refugee friends that the asylum system is deeply damaging to them. They can struggle for years in destitution, and spend long periods in detention, while they try to get justice and chance to rebuild their lives. We also hear a call for an asylum system that protects them. Being Human tries to envisage such a system. It lays out core principles for an asylum system that is just and puts human persons at its centre.

#### We are calling for:

- Borders open to those in need of protection.
  Remembering that the earth's resources are
  for everyone, we need to move away from a
  defensive approach to migrants and refugees,
  which pits 'our' good against 'theirs'. Instead,
  we should think about common humanity and
  human need.
- Protection and transparency at the heart of the asylum determination process, and a culture in which asylum claimants are really seen and heard. For decades, asylum determination has been warped by a culture of disbelief, where decision-makers are trying to refuse people, and the asylum system is complex and hard to navigate. Asylum is supposed to about protecting people, and that should be decision-makers' focus.

- Support asylum claimants and refugees to live in dignity, and participate fully in wider social, economic, and political life. Refugees tell us that community, participation and contribution are fundamentally important to them, and this finds close parallels in the importance of these things within Catholic Social Teaching.
- A society that welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates those seeking sanctuary as our neighbours. This is a call that Pope Francis has made repeatedly, including in Fratelli Tutti.

We released Being Human at roughly the same time that the government published plans to overhaul the asylum system with their 'New Plan for Immigration', and we talk about these in the report. The government's plans are in stark contrast to the principles we suggest in Being Human. Under government plans, how worthy of protection someone is will depend on how they got to the UK – but most refugees have no choice in how they travel. The plans build lots of additional barriers to protection. They build walls where what is needed are bridges, and they start from a position of disbelief. For everyone who cares about human dignity and wants a society that protects refugees, this is troubling. In Being Human, we wanted to confront that. We also wanted to offer an alternative.

We have a choice to make about how we respond to those in need, and we should not give up hope for a better society.

### What you can do

**Read** the full report - download or request a printed copy

**Watch** Sophie & Sarah discuss the report findings, and hear from three refugee friends share their views on the government's *New Plan for Immigration* 

**Speak up** for a kinder and person-centred approach to asylum asylum reform

www.jrsuk.net/being-human



Around 2 years ago, when approached for comment on stories about immigration or asylum the Home Office would frequently remind us that: Britain and the UK government have a proud tradition of offering welcome and protection to those in need. The irony of this statement being given in response to recent scandal or failing of the UK Home Office always seemed to evade their spokesperson.

Since the end of last year, the Home Office has been housing hundreds of men in dilapidated MoD sites, including Napier Barracks in Folkestone, that have been repurposed as asylum accommodation. These areas have been out of use and abandoned for many years but then suddenly deemed appropriate and suitable to house individuals who have claimed asylum, many of whom arrived to the UK with lasting trauma. Shared dormitories and facilities make social distancing practically impossible and sheets hanging from the ceiling to separate beds fail to offer any privacy. The constant presence of security, being surrounded by high fences and barbed wired, and removed from the surrounding community may remind some individuals of the very environment and circumstances that forced them to flee. A truly undignified place to be accommodating those seeking asylum which not only fails to consider the health risks in the middle of a pandemic but also the direct impact to the wellbeing of those accommodated at the site.

### So where is this proud tradition of welcome?

For those currently living at Napier Barracks this welcome exists in the local community and people of Folkestone, those who have been moved by the hostility carried out on their doorsteps and have reacted with kindness with offers of support and time. Welcome exists in those who protest the use of these sites of accommodation, calling for their closure and for asylum seekers to be treated with dignity and respect.

Since Napier Barracks first opened JRS UK have been supporting some of the men accommodated there, offering accompaniment and assistance with issues they faced. Following a COVID-19 outbreak at the camp earlier in the year it seemed that the use of the barracks may come to an end but since April the Home Office have been moving a second group of men into the camp and aiming again to house over 300 men at the site. With the continued use of the barracks, JRS UK has been working alongside a number of other NGOs to offer a collaborative welcome every Wednesday at a Day Centre run out of a nearby Church Hall. This Day Centre offers a space away from the camp where individuals can come if they need support or assistance with any difficulties or if they are just looking for a welcome space of respite where they can relax. Many of those arriving at Napier do not have legal representation and with asylum interviews taking place at the camp trying to ensure everyone has a solicitor has been a priority. However, the Day Centre also offers time for relaxation and expression through an art therapy group or a place to get help with practical issues such as clothing. For JRS UK we hold onto our mission of accompaniment and journey with the men at Napier as they traverse the asylum system, offering emotional support and assistance as well as facilitating and leading information sessions with the men on how the asylum system works and what they should expect.

It is hard to foresee what may happen next in the UK's immigration system and it is possible that the experience of Napier Barracks may be the groundwork for Reception Centres proposed in the government's New Plan for Immigration. However, providing that NGOs, communities and individuals continue to take up the mantle of holding true to a tradition of welcome there will always be hope in the face of hostility.

## Phone Befriending: "they know we're there"



St Patience preparing herself for an afternoon chatting on the phone to refugee friends.

Jennifer and Sr Patience have been accompanying refugee friends over the phone throughout lockdown – offering a listening ear and someone to chat to. Jennifer started volunteering with JRS during lockdown, and Sr Patience has volunteered with us since April 2019. Here, they share with you their reflections of accompanying refugees over the phone, the challenges and differences, and what they've learnt about themselves.

#### **Jennifer**

"At the start, the conversations were quite practical; but as soon as I started calling refugee friends again the week after, and the week after that, there was a little bit more conversation in terms of how they were going about their day and what's happening with them. So that was nice because I was getting to know them.

"Since everything has been opening up, there has been a lot more conversation going on about what refugee friends are up to in their day-to-day lives. During lockdown we were all just staying at home and refugee friends felt quite isolated, but since we've been able go out a little bit more, some people have started to go back to college learning English for example. They've been going about slowly doing their day-to-day activities. So there's been more to talk about.

"Overall I think sometimes even if refugee friends don't want to say anything or even if they don't need anything, they know that you were going to be calling them next week, they know that, they've got that phone call to rely on so that they know that they're not alone. So even if they don't need

anything, at least there's someone there. Even if it's just a five-minute phone call or a half hour phone call. They know that we're there and I think this has been important for friends, especially during the lockdown when they've felt quite isolated."

#### **Sr Patience**

"I think my experience was pretty much like Jennifer's in the beginning, more about the practical support, speaking about phone top-ups or a food parcel delivery, and things like that. In the beginning, building a conversation further than that was a bit difficult. Initially, I think one of my other struggles was, having experienced the Day Centre and people coming in, you were serving a good number of people. You'd sometimes be helping out in the kitchen and there was no in-depth interaction or conversation. Now, you have somebody you are really talking to and you have to build that trust.

"I feel it's given me a chance to really see the struggle beyond the written. To actually accompany somebody and hear how much things can be difficult. Before I knew of the destitution that refugee friends experience, but to actually hear somebody saying, 'I don't know where to sleep right now' and 'I've been sleeping in the park'. I feel this

experience has given me an in-depth experience and helped me connect more to their plight.

"Overall, I think both my experiences of the Centre being open and the over the phone support have been fulfilling. Whilst there have been changes in the way that we are actually accompanying refugees, being a volunteer befriender has been very fulfilling. It has opened my eyes to so much. Now I don't just hear about the challenges faced by refugees but I actually know



PHONE CALLS

CAN MAKE A

A beautiful picture drawn by Jennifer's daughter, celebrating the difference her mum's volunteering makes to refugee friends.

friends. somebody who I speak to and support and hear directly what they are going through. It has been difficult but at the same time a privilege to have people open up themselves and talk about their journey, their struggles, their needs, their hopes, and their beliefs."

## Accompaniment in Action: taking awareness raising online



Whilst on placement with JRS, Jesuit Novice Mikhael was busy delivering food parcels across Greater London.

The early days of the pandemic taking hold last spring was a remarkable time. The blur of activity as all at JRS chipped in to play their part in a huge adaptation to our services feels like an age ago given how much has changed, but also like only yesterday. As the dust settled and we adjusted to the so called "new normal", I began to think what this pandemic would mean for my particular role in the JRS team.

As Community Outreach Officer, I would spend lots of my time out and about, visiting parishes, schools and community groups, sharing the experiences of refugee friends and JRS UK mission to accompany, serve and advocate for their rights. Lockdown of course meant all of this outreach was put on hold, at least in the physical sense. How could we keep people up to date with all that was going on at JRS? How would we adapt to outreach online? Could we engage people in the same way? Would people show up to the fifth zoom event of the day? All these questions ran through my head. I hope we found an answer to these questions in our Accompaniment in Action series, designed to create a space of learning, solidarity and expression.

Our 'Asylum Explained' event saw the JRS legal team share an introduction to the asylum system our friends have to navigate. The sessions that looked at two of our recent reports, 'Detained and Dehumanised' and 'Being Human in the Asylum System', brought to light the injustices of that system and the ways refugee friends are not treated with dignity and respect. Our 'Access to Healthcare' event showed how the hostile environment extends to creating barriers that prevent refugee friends accessing vital healthcare services and how JRS has worked to help our friends overcome these during the pandemic. We also featured a behind the scenes look at the work of Emergency Response Team who have spearheaded our COVID response in the 'A Year on the Road' event.

Perhaps the highlight so far was an Activities Showcase allowing our refugee friends who take part in the activity groups that JRS facilitates. One of the big successes of the past year is the way these have continued to thrive after being moved online, providing a source of community which can combat isolation. We shared some of the images from our Spoken Pictures photography workshops, as well as a very engaging and funny performance by the JRS Drama Group. We are very excited to mark Refugee Week with another showcase from our activities, this time the Open Writing Space will perform their work during an interactive event we hope you will join us for.



The joy of hosting many of these events has been being able to share the varied ways our mission to accompany is lived out at JRS with you who play such a big part in allowing all this to happen. We hope you can join us in the months ahead as we continue to show how we put Accompaniment in Action.

Nick, Community Outreach Officer

To catch-up on the previous Accompaniment in Action events Nick talks about, and to register for future events, visit: www.jrsuk.net/accompaniment-in-action/

# Join JRS in prayer on World Refugee Day



## The Jesuit Refugee Service works in more than 50 countries around the world.

JRS UK is made up of staff and many volunteers who work to accompany, serve and advocate for destitute refugees in the UK, of all faiths and none.

If you can, please consider donating to JRS UK. With your support JRS UK can continue to accompany destitute and detained refugees in a spirit of hospitality, welcome and love.

## **Donate today**

Call 020 7488 7310

Email uk@jrs.net Visit www.jrsuk.net/donate

Mail your cheque/postal order made payable to Jesuit Refugee Service to the address on the right.



Telephone: 020 7488 7310 Fax: 020 7488 7329 E-mail: uk@jrs.net web: www.jrsuk.net

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