

Welcome all

The Bridport group working to resettle a refugee family

With nearly 80 million forcibly displaced people in the world, community groups are doing their bit to help – including one right here in Bridport...

The Bridport Refugee Support Campaign (BRSC) has got off to an impressive start despite the difficulties everyone has faced during 2020.

The campaign was set up earlier this year and operates under the government's community sponsorship scheme, which helps local groups to welcome refugee families and resettle them in the community. As well as raising money, participating groups have to commit to fulfilling a number of other stipulations including finding suitable housing and arranging English lessons. Training and support are available for group organisers through Reset, the UK's community sponsorship learning hub.

The BRSC's formation was inspired by a similar group in Uplyme, which started in 2019 and has already raised more than £12,000 through a variety of events and appeals. The Uplyme group expects to be able to welcome a Syrian refugee family to the village in 2021 after a delay caused by the pandemic.

Barry Lovejoy is the BRSC's chair and was behind its inception. "I found out about the Uplyme group so I went along to their public meeting," he says. "It struck me that this was something Bridport could do really well. The town has a long history of commitment to this kind of action and I was confident that some great people with the necessary enthusiasm and drive would be keen



Pictured: BRSC chair Barry Lovejoy (left) with members of the group in Bucky Doo Square



to get involved."

Barry made

some enquiries

and got together

about 12 people who

were interested in starting a campaign.

"A representative from the Uplyme group came to speak at one of our first meetings," he says. "We realised then just what was involved – we'd need a constitution, for a start, we'd have to achieve charitable status and there would be all sorts of safeguarding and health and safety admin to look after. Some of this is still ahead of us, but Reset's resources have already proved incredibly valuable."

The 'official' fundraising target is £9,000, although Barry says: "It's more like £15,000 – enough to cover furnishings, transport, English lessons

from a qualified teacher, and a number of other expenses."

A Covid-safe launch

Starting its fundraising work during a global pandemic has presented a challenge for the BRSC, but members are determined to reach their goal. "The coronavirus restrictions meant we couldn't have a launch in the town hall, and we didn't want a 'virtual' launch, so we opted for a market stall in Bucky Doo Square in September," says Margie Barbour, one of the group's founder members. "We had some t-shirts and leaflets printed and took to the streets to introduce ourselves to the town and answer people's questions. Because Bridport is such a creative place, we'd decided not to use photos of people in refugee camps on the launch stall but instead to ask some local artists

The Bridport group working to reset

Right: Pamela Allsop's painting 'Seeking Refuge' which she has donated to the BRSC to help with their fundraising work

to depict their response to the refugee crisis. Their work attracted some much-wanted attention."

Ricky Romain, Hugh Dunford Wood, Angie Porter and Peter Loizou all donated pictures for the launch (Hugh's painting 'The Holy Family Exploring West Dorset' is on the cover of this magazine) while Pamela Allsop asked campaign members to choose one of the paintings from her show 'Awakening' – inspired by the trauma refugees face – which was running in Symondsburry at the time. They went for 'Seeking Refuge' (pictured right), which will be used in a future fundraising event.

"We haven't been able to have any other live events yet, although we did run a 'virtual' storytelling supper in late November," says Barry Lovejoy. "Covid has forced us to move our main fundraising activities into 2021, so this early work has been mostly about raising awareness. We already have a mailing list of about 100 people, and some of these have volunteered practical help,



either with fundraising or when the family is actually here. Considering the circumstances, it's a great start."

Looking ahead to more events

As long as Bridport Arts Centre is allowed to remain open, a new exhibition called 'Exile' will run there until 22 December in partnership with various groups including the BRSC. The exhibition features the work of Ricky Romain, Cedoux Kadima and Robert Golden, and explores the social and personal effects of alienation.

The group is also planning a musical event at the Arts Centre on 18 December, when a member of a Syrian refugee family who settled in Ottery St Mary in 2017 after a similar campaign by the town's support group, Abide, will speak about their experiences of coming to the UK.

"It's likely that 'our' family will be from Syria, too, although the government has been opening up the resettlement



Left: BRSC chair Barry Lovejoy, artist Ricky Romain and committee member Lucy Campbell at the group's stall in September

ttle a refugee family continued



scheme to people from other Middle Eastern countries,” says Barry. “We won’t know anything about the family until quite a late stage.” The Home Office will look at the group’s submission, and they’ll have to get clearance from Dorset Council and the police. Then UNHCR (the United Nations refugee agency), which interviews eligible refugees, will put forward a suitable family according to various criteria such as available school places and medical needs.

One important step towards the BRSC’s ultimate goal was achieved in early November when the group secured charity status. Barry was delighted and believes the registration will help them to attract larger donations.

“We’re very grateful to everyone who has already helped in any way,” he says.

“One very generous individual gave us £100 at our market-day launch, but donations don’t need to be that big to be meaningful – it all helps. We’re looking forward to continuing our work and, eventually, to welcoming a family to their new life in our town.”



Search ‘Bridport Refugee Support Campaign’ on Facebook for regular updates about their activities. The group is also on Twitter @BridportRSG and Instagram @bridportrefugee and their email address is BridportRSG@gmail.com.

The group has produced some lovely Christmas cards (pictured left) showing Hugh Dunford Wood’s painting ‘The Holy Family Exploring West Dorset’. They are £3 for five from Fruits of the Earth, Waste Not Want Not, Rise Bakery and Leakers, or from the committee at the email address above.

Christmas 2020 will be different!

Of course Christmas won’t be ‘cancelled’ this year, but it will be different.

Creative people up and down the land have already come up with all sorts of imaginative ways to celebrate Christ’s birth amid the very challenging circumstances of this year – and I have a few of my own to add.

Come to think of it, these would be nice things to do for Christmas in any year, global pandemic or no global pandemic!

- 1). Go outside our front doors at an agreed time on Christmas Eve and greet our neighbours – socially distanced, of course!
- 2). Give a small present to anyone you know who may be alone over Christmas, especially if they’re elderly.
- 3). Get children to create colourful artwork to display in their front windows.

- 4). Make homemade presents – how about fudge or toffee in a pretty hand-decorated box?
- 5). Sing some carols together in the open – well distanced, please.
- 6). Contribute to your town’s food bank or other charity that helps local people in need.
- 7). Send cards (preferably charity ones) to all your friends and relatives who you haven’t seen for ages, with hopes and wishes about meeting up next year.

8). Remember to use your local shops for food and presents – they have had a tough year!

9). And last but not least, go to a local church service (don’t forget your mask).

I hope you all have a very special and happy Christmas.

Carol Irvine

