

Calais Update – 3rd visit – The Jules Ferry Day Centre.

We went out to Calais over the weekend of 11th & 12th April. This time it was without staff and companions so that we could evaluate the changing situation due to the new start-up of the local government run 'Jules Ferry' day centre. Over recent weeks the police have cleared all the camps and moved everyone to an area of land around the Jules Ferry centre. This has some positives and negatives as follows:

- The Jules Ferry centre will house 100 women and children in sheltered accommodation with most facilities available. Unfortunately other charities that had previously provided sheltered accommodation for women have been closed down.
- The immediate area around Jules Ferry Centre is guarded, gated and fenced. The women can exit the area but the centre is not accepting any donations.
- The centre will also provide water, toilets and showers for 1,500 predominately male migrants living in the areas around the centre. Unfortunately these facilities are only available for 3 hours each day.
- One hot meal is provided at 5pm every day.
- The land area around the centre is vast so there is now a lot more space for the migrants to camp although most of the land is covered by sand dunes which is not good for pitching tents.
- The useable solid ground is the site of the former chemical plant waste land.
- The area is open to the elements and therefore exposed to the winds and gets the smells from the chemical plant that is 2 miles away and operates 24/7.
- The camp is made up of migrants mostly Syrian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Afghanistan. There have been some tensions between the different cultures and this is of concern as the camp increases in numbers?
- There is quite a lot of local help in people bringing food and clothes to the camp. This is always very much appreciated but the average boot load is consumed within 10 minutes and lost within the needs of estimated 1,500 migrants.
- There are many that have no socks and outdoor shoes and no change of all the basics like tops, pants, trousers etc. The charity 'secours Catolique' that has a warehouse in the town centre is open on one Saturday every 3 weeks and on a Monday every 2 weeks for shoes which is also inadequate.
- Employees of a local building company are helping to build shelters in their spare time using any timber, pallets and tarpaulins they can get hold of. Emmaus may be able to provide materials?
- The Eritreans are a very religious people (catholic) and have re-erected their church (photo below) which is an amazing construction and is also open to all denominations.

It is clear that there is still a lot more we can do in providing the basic humanitarian aid to make life a little more tolerable for the migrants. The most effective way is for us to deliver direct due to the lack of any other consistent source. There are however problems in ensuring fair distribution which makes delivering from the back of a van impractical. The optimum method is to prepare, split and size items before distribution, link up with the separate factions and get them to help. They are prepared to work with us to avoid 'first come, first served' as they suffer from this too. Most speak

good English are very friendly, grateful and very appreciative of what we are doing. Some have small community areas where we were invited to share coffee and their stories.

Generally there seems to be a slowing of new migrants with the most recent influx from Afghanistan? It is still early in the season yet due to the Mediterranean Sea conditions but there is also talk of enforcement of the registration systems in Italy restricting travel coupled with many more migrants seeking asylum in France rather than England? We met up with 6 young Eritreans a few months ago and this time were reacquainted with 2; the others are in Leeds and have registered as asylum seekers.

Our next trip is being planned for 3rd May with fully loaded vans.

Tony



Eritrean church built on the chemical waste ground.



Inside the church entrance with materials donated by the locals.



A sunny day in Calais. Lots more space but the chemical factory in the background working 24/7.



Orthodox Easter celebrations (April 12th). 300 meals cooked on site by the Chiswick church group. Music and merriment for one day!