

On your marks...

Hi everyone and greetings to every member of the JRS team and their supporters. Actually, I spend most of my time in Liverpool, because that's where I study and work. My name is Jan and I am writing a few words today to tell you about my motivations and training for the London marathon.

You all are aware that the situations which

confront many migrants are extremely complex and challenging. Policies, practices and the public perceptions of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in many countries can be seen as unfair, complicated and confusing, to say the least. My interest in issues of migration began in the 1990s

when I had a chance to have a closer look at the experiences of Latino/American migrants in the Tijuana, B.C - San Diego area, the border between Mexico and the USA.

Later on, mainly but not exclusively, thanks to several Spanish and Catalan Jesuits, I learned that it was very useful to understand a number of social conditions which made displaced people vulnerable. The overall picture of a refugee or immigrant community does not have to be totally bleak. In other words, in spite of the harsh social reality - there is always a place for hope.

Now, as a postgraduate student of

Latin American Studies at the University of Liverpool (UK), I simply try to remember what I was fortunate to learn and try to apply it, at least from time to time. Being a member of the JRS-UK team this year, taking part in the London Marathon and raising funds for refugees is an expression of my gratitude. Firstly, for what I was taught by many Hispanic

(undocumented & documented) migrants in different countries, and secondly, by several inspiring Jesuits who knew how to combine faith and social justice.

I am now on a 3 times a week training in Liverpool in Sefton Park, Calderstones Park or even along the River Mersey.... So, I do my best

and keep fit wherever possible! Please dig deep and sponsor me now!

Those interested can sponsor Jan by sending cheque to our office payable to Jesuit Refugee Service (clearly marked for marathon sponsorship on the back) or can donate online through the following link: <http://www.justgiving.com/janforjrs>

Any funds raised in this way will be used directly for our refugee hardship fund. Last Year we raised over a £ 1000 in this way when Marianne ran the marathon for JRS.



BY Jan Janusz Janoska

A big thank you to everyone who has supported JRS over the last year. We are most grateful for all of your donations (money and toiletries) and the increasing number of people participating in the voucher exchange scheme. All this help really does make a difference in refugees' lives.

The more we receive, the more we are able to do and the more the need becomes apparent. **We have many more people now coming to us to exchange their vouchers.**

We exchange in excess of £5000 worth of vouchers every month! **We also have many new people who have no support and need our hardship funds.** We do all we can knowing that what we do is modest and not enough.

We have seen a rise in the number of speaking engagements we have been asked to do and we are finding that more and more people are becoming aware of asylum issues. It is our hope that this will mean not only more people supporting asylum seekers but also acting to change the perception of asylum seekers.

Healthcare

The majority of the asylum seekers who access our services have serious or chronic health problems. Often this is the result of torture or ill treatment in their country of origin; or indeed the result of the way they have been treated in the UK. Constant anxiety about their asylum claims, coupled with either the trauma of detention or the trauma of their journey to the UK can and does lead to ongoing mental health problems. Poor nutrition due to ongoing extreme poverty or destitution impacts on mental and physical health.

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VISITING ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DETENTION A PERSONAL VIEW—by Ruth Davies

of immediate concern to the detainee. I encourage detainees

After other volunteering work with refugees I joined JRS as a volunteer visitor to detainees in 2006. I knew that I would be supported by JRS in my visitor's role and have always benefited from JRS's help and advice. My entry into visiting was made as smooth as possible. Sadly, this is in stark contrast to the situation of many detainees who have no legal representative acting for them and may have neither family nor friends to support them. They have fled persecution, may have been imprisoned, tortured, lost family and then detained in removal centres here in the UK. They have sought sanctuary here but have met a cultural of disbelief within government policy to detain and remove them. In this context I am powerless. As a visitor I cannot change a detainee's situation. When a detainee I have visited is removed I experience sadness, anger and helplessness and I feel grief. The detainee may have survived on their return to the country from which they fled but we very rarely know.

Sometimes, it is impossible to get to know a detainee because they are removed before a relationship can be forged.

Asylum seekers can be detained indefinitely and I have visited a young man held in detention for 26 months. For visits to be beneficial for the detainee and their visitor a good

"I strongly believe that trust is the lynchpin of the relationship between detainee and visitor"

relationship needs to develop. I strongly believe that trust is the lynchpin of the relationship between detainee and visitor; but I realise I cannot assume every detainee will regard me as trustworthy. A detainee's life experience before and since their arrival in the UK may have been so damaging that it is difficult for them to trust anyone they meet. In order to gain each detainee's trust, I think the golden rule for visitors is to set a regular pattern and stick to it.

"I think the golden rule for visitors is to set a regular pattern and stick to it."

Each visitor must set their own priorities but I am clear that I have made a regular commitment to each person I visit and will always be faithful to that commitment. This way, each detainee can be confident that they will have a weekly visit. One former detainee told me visits were so appreciated because visiting is a normal activity in an abnormal environment. It is a valuable contact with the world outside the removal centre. It is important too for visitors to become aware of the effects of detention and the rollercoaster emotional turmoil detainees will experience. This may range from overwhelming despair and fear if they receive a removal order announcing their imminent departure from the UK to hope of release from detention at a forthcoming bail hearing.

Each detainee's situation can change very quickly. As a visitor I can contact the JRS office, solicitors and other support organisations when necessary. At each visit I observe the detainee closely, I may question gently about overall health and listen attentively without rushing into speech. We may talk through issues

I visit to take decisions themselves affording them the dignity and respect they deserve in an environment they find humiliating. I do not approach each weekly visit with specific expectations but ready to deal with whatever the situation is that day, and having made a contact between visits by phone or post. The visit is not long but should always be a positive event in each detainee's week. Sometimes laughter is possible –humour has a healing quality. When each detainee greets and leaves me with a smile I think our time together has been good and I am assured they look forward to our meeting the following week.

I have found visiting asylum seekers in detention heartbreakingly sad at times, often frustrating but truly beneficial and strangely uplifting for me the visitor. I am constantly challenged to be more empathetic, and more imaginative – for example it is forbidden to hand over any gift in person so I sang and danced happy birthday for a detainee. I have witnessed the amazing strength

"I have witnessed the amazing strength and resilience of the human spirit"

and resilience of the human spirit in adversity which has helped me to grow as a human being. I think I now recognise trivial matters for what they are and have re-aligned my priorities.

I salute JRS for promoting this work and it should continue to be part of its mission.

If you want to volunteer with JRS-UK please contact Claire Lawrence via the JRS-Office.



Healthcare (cont from page 1)

It was against this background that in 2004, JRS UK made two submissions on the issue of healthcare for asylum seekers – one about access to hospitals (secondary care) and the other regarding access to primary healthcare (GPs, dentists, pharmacists and midwives).

In 2004 Department of Health Statutory Instrument 614 came into force. It made groups not “lawfully resident” in the UK liable for NHS hospital charges. This has had a huge impact on care of asylum seekers who have had their cases finally refused. There is no evidence that asylum seekers claim asylum in the UK in order to access healthcare here.

Soon after SI614 (2004) came into force a wider consultation took place about extending the charging regime to primary care, including access to GPs. There has never been a published response to the consultation. Nor were the rules changed officially. However, soon after this it started to become difficult for some asylum seekers to get treatment from some GPs. They are often unable to get registered with a local GP practice. Because of these difficulties, Project London was started. Project London is run by Medecins du Monde three afternoons a week at Praxis (a refugee community centre in the East End of London). Drop in healthcare consultations are offered. Project London also aims to find refused asylum seekers and other undocumented migrants a GP which will register them and offer them ongoing healthcare.

The Document *Enforcing the Rules*, suggests again that primary health care be brought into line with existing secondary healthcare regulations. But the language used is much more restrictive and hard-line than suggested in 2004: **To ensure that living illegally becomes ever more uncomfortable and constrained until they leave or are removed** (“*Enforcing the Rules*”, a Government Enforcement Strategy Document, 2007)

Further information including a very full briefing and case studies is available from Medact (www.medact.org). Copies of the briefing can also be had from the JRS office. Medact is encouraging as many people as possible to write to their MPs to ask them to sign the Early Day Motion 220, Access to Healthcare. The text of this EDM is as follows:

“That this House notes the commitment by the Home Office and the Department of Health to a joint review of overseas visitor access to the National Health Service, now due for publication in December 2007; recalls the findings of the Joint Committee on Human Rights' Tenth Report of Session 2006-07 that the current arrangements for overseas visitor access deny healthcare to vulnerable individuals, including asylum seekers and their children, resulting in various breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights; applauds the Trade Union Congress's NHS Together campaign to defend the achievements of the free NHS; and supports the charity coalition campaign co-ordinated by the charity Medact against any measures that would compel general practitioners, and other primary care staff, to be forced to charge refused asylum seekers or other vulnerable foreign nationals for NHS care “

Currently there are 88 signatories to this EDM. To find out if your MP has already signed the EDM, either call the JRS office or go to <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=34322&SESSION=891> (With thanks to Medact for some of the information contained in this briefing)

Louise Zanre

Historic step forward for treaty to ban cluster bombs

On 22 February, after a week of tough diplomatic talks, the voice of survivors and committed states prevailed and a draft treaty to ban cluster munitions was endorsed for formal negotiation. The so called “Wellington Declaration” provides the draft treaty text to be negotiated and agreed in Dublin in May 2008 to ban cluster munitions, assist survivors and ensure clearance of their land.

More than 500 representatives from 122 governments as well as campaigners and survivors of cluster bombs from 38 countries gathered in New Zealand for the penultimate

meeting of the Oslo Process. After intense discussion, there was broad agreement on the text of articles about victim assistance, clearance of cluster bomb contaminated areas and the destruction of stockpiles. Earlier proposals by certain countries to dilute and insert exceptions to the draft treaty were unsuccessful, but will be considered again during negotiations in Dublin. At the end of the week, the strong text of the treaty remains unchanged. (...)

During the course of the week, countries of the south put up a strong stand in favour of a compre-

hensive ban. States such as Laos, Lebanon, Indonesia and Nigeria called for the strongest possible treaty with no exception or exemptions for 'technical fixes' which they claim they will never be able to afford. (...)

The Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) is a global network of 200 civil society organisations working in over 70 countries to end the harm caused by cluster munitions. Founding members include Human Rights Watch and JRS Cambodia Campaigner, Tun Channareth

Full article on

What does JRS do?

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic non-governmental organisation, at work in over 60 countries, with a mission to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced persons. In the UK JRS works mainly with detainees and destitute asylum seekers.

Accompanying: being with the individual, befriending him or her but also in some way enhancing that person's dignity and personal growth.

Serving: offering some practical assistance while being with the person.

Defending the rights of refugees: working towards changing qualitatively the person's life for the better by influencing public opinion lobbying and raising awareness about the real hardships that asylum seekers and refugees face in the UK today.

Values

JRS is grounded in Catholic social teaching and draws on the principles of Ignatian spirituality in discerning with whom we work. All members share a common set of values and principles concerned with justice, the dignity of the person and a responsibility to carry out the social mission of the Church.

13 of April : SUPPORTERS WANTED!

Come and cheer-up Jan and the Jesuit Mission team at the London Marathon on the 13th of April 2008. We will be outside The Most Holy Trinity Church on Jamaica Road (junction with Dockhead) in Bermondsey. We are just 100 metres from the 13 mile marker. We will have a banner, so you will see us! You can also call Marine, if you are lost, on 07703 326 474.

Update from the office

- Around 150 refugees a week come to the JRS office for help.
- We have 5 volunteer detention visitors, visiting at two detention centres.
- Michael Conti has left the Jesuits and returned to Malta. We will have two St Mary of Namur sisters starting with us on 7th April, Margaret Baxter and Anne Elisabeth de Vuyst, to take over the coordination of the detention visiting work and advocacy and to help set up our new drop in centre in Forest Gate.

DIARY 2008

17th May: Churches Refugee Network Conference, Birmingham. Theme: Walking with strangers towards the healing of Nations. 11.00 am - 4.15pm at Carrs Lane Church Centre.

Further Information: Wendy Cooper: 020 7916 8632

14th June : JRS Refugee Party at Stamford Hill Parish

Come along, RSVP to the office for catering purposes!

JRS will be running a stall on:

5th May—Westminster Cathedral Migrant Mass at 11am with special emphasis on Migrant workers. The bishops of the London dioceses are concelebrating and Bishop Tom from Brentwood is the preacher

17th May : in Birmingham for the Churches Refugee Network conference

Did you like this newsletter? Spread the word and pass it on to someone who does not know JRS. You can also email us at uk@jrs.net to receive more copies. When you have finished reading it, recycle it!

EDITOR: Claire Lawrence.



Support our work



What should you do?

If you want to send a donation:

by cheque (payable to Jesuit Refugee Service) or cash: Fill the information in the box on the right and send it back by Post to: JRS, 6 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP

Or make a secure payment on: <http://www.justgiving.com/jesuitrefugeeservice/supportus>

If you want more information please contact us on 020 7357 0974

Please add me to your mailing list

Donation enclosed Amount: £ _____

I am a UK taxpayer and would like to gift aid my donation to JRS (*Gift aid increases the value of your donation to us by 28p in every pound*)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____