

Catholic parish leads way as government launches community sponsorship scheme for Syrian refugees

Bishops welcome launch and call on Catholic parishes to get involved

Bishops and Catholic parishes have given an enthusiastic welcome to the government's launch today of the community sponsorship scheme for Syrian refugees.

The scheme gives Catholic parishes the chance to get involved in personally welcoming and supporting Syrian refugees as they arrive in the UK and then helping them to take the responsibility for their own resettlement and integration in a community. The first families to arrive under the community sponsorship scheme will arrive later this Summer.

The Catholic Church, led by Caritas Salford, has been heavily involved in the putting together of this scheme and those involved have thanked Richard Harrington MP, and his team, for their hard work in bringing this scheme to fruition. Community sponsorship is the best way of channelling the outpouring of support, concern and generosity across the country for vulnerable Syrian refugees made homeless and destitute by conflict and war. All Catholics who are keen to help have been encouraged to get involved with this community sponsorship scheme by contacting their Diocesan refugee co-ordinator or Caritas Social Action Network (contact details below) for further details on what to do.

Cardinal Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, said:

“Last year, Pope Francis invited every parish, religious house and monastery in Europe to respond to the growing refugee crisis by offering a place of sanctuary to families fleeing from war and persecution in their home countries. The Pope called on our generosity and solidarity to recognise and act upon our common humanity. Now we are all able to take up that call with the launch of the community sponsorship scheme for Syrian refugees.

“Catholics have been keen to get involved in helping to resettle refugees in the UK, responding to the situation with kindness and compassion as we are called to when confronted by those in need. However, that generosity needs to be channelled and we are therefore delighted that community sponsorship is being launched in the UK by the government; Catholic charities have been involved with shaping the scheme and we already have groups keen to sign up and help. This innovative scheme will enable everyone to get involved with welcoming refugees, offering a very real and tangible way for people to help new arrivals settle into their communities.

“Caritas Salford is leading the way for the Catholic community, with St Monica's parish in Salford Diocese part of the pilot scheme. I encourage all those parishes and groups who are keen to help to contact their Diocesan Refugee Co-ordinator or Caritas Social Action Network (who are able to give full details on a national level) to

get further details on how they can assist in this sponsorship scheme, which is the best way of helping those Syrian refugees in need.”

Sean Ryan, the responsible officer for the community sponsor St Monica’s, said:

“The Catholic Church has been heavily involved in putting this together and after a huge amount of work, both the Home Office and the local authority are ready to give the go-ahead. We now look forward to receiving the first families later this Summer.

“There has been a lot of interest from other Catholic parishes and groups who want to get involved. They have been calling us and also Caritas Salford, where Mark Wiggin has been at the forefront of this project, so St Monica’s should be the first of many parishes take on the resettlement of Syrian families.

Bishop John Arnold, Bishop of Salford, said:

“I am delighted that St Monica’s parish in Flixton is now able to welcome a Syrian refugee family through the government’s community sponsorship as it launches this week. We are always called to respond to hatred with love, to be dedicated to justice and to respond to need with generosity.

“It is a source of pride that the parish of St Monica’s has worked so hard to get everything ready to be part of this pilot scheme. There is tremendous generosity throughout the parishes and St Monica’s, as host for the Syrian family, has shown how this generosity can be channelled into care for those people who have lost everything.

“Caritas Salford has also played a key part in sponsoring the parish and offering guidance throughout. Our hope is that through this pilot scheme other parishes and groups can be encouraged and inspired so that the terrible suffering of many Syrian families can be alleviated.”

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Contact for further information on how to get involved in the scheme: Host Sponsor – St. Monica’s RC Church, Flixton, Manchester, Sean Ryan

Communications and Community Development, Maranatha Community
www.maranathacommunity.org.uk

Lead Sponsor – Caritas Diocese of Salford, Mark Wiggin, Chief Executive, Caritas Diocese of Salford, m.wiggin@caritassalford.org.uk;
www.caritassalford.org.uk

Notes to editors

A ‘Help Refugees in the UK’ webpage has also been developed for the gov.uk website to make it easier for the public to support refugees in the UK and allow local authorities to identify the goods and services they require.

The sponsorship scheme and webpage have been launched as part of the Government's commitment to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees in the UK over the course of this Parliament.

Information on Community Sponsorship

Community sponsorship is starting small and within certain limits:

- It only applies to Syrians (not refugees of other nationalities)
- It only applies to Syrians currently living in the region of Syria (not those in other European countries or in Syria itself)
- Syrian refugees coming to the UK under community sponsorship will be included in the 20,000 resettlement quota up to 2020 that the government has already announced (so it will not increase the numbers resettled)
- Community sponsors will NOT be able to identify Syrians in the region that they wish to sponsor (so Syrians already in the UK will not be able to bring in family members)
- Community sponsorship will NOT be used to house and support unaccompanied children

The entitlements sponsored Syrian refugees will have

Refugees will be selected and screened for resettlement via community sponsorship by the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commission of Refugees) and the British government.

- Before they leave the region they will receive training on life in the UK and learn about their sponsoring group and the local area in which they will live
- Their flight to the UK will be paid for by the British government
- They will receive a 5-year humanitarian visa (and thereafter will be able to apply to stay in the UK and eventually become citizens)
- The adults will be entitled to work from Day 1 or to claim Job Seekers Allowance
- The children will be entitled to free schooling
- They will have free access to the NHS
- They will be able to claim Housing Benefit and other benefits

Who can become a sponsoring group?

The beauty of community sponsorship is that all sorts of different groups of people can be involved

- Faith communities
- Local community groups
- Businesses
- Universities

The role of the sponsoring group

The main responsibility and motivation of community sponsors is to provide a warm and personal welcome to the refugee family they are sponsoring. Other key tasks will include:

- Welcoming the refugee family at the airport and escorting them to their new home
- Providing a 'welcome pack' of food, other essentials and some cash to keep them going in the first few days
- Helping them to settle into their new home (how to work the appliances and sort out household bills)
- Helping them to register with the Job Centre, for benefits and with a GP
- Helping the children find their feet at their new school
- Helping the family to find their way around their new community (showing them public transport, leisure facilities and places of worship)
- Enrolling adults in official English classes (and helping them with English conversation)

July 2016