

## Peaceful Borders Public Report April 2017 - October 2017



### A. Introduction

Our first report written in April 2017 covered an extensive period of rapid response and development culminating in the demolition of the 'jungle' and the consequences that followed. This report covers a 6 month period during which we have adapted to the current needs and the more fluid and unpredictable situation which stems from the absence of a space such as 'the jungle' from which to build connections.

Our identity continues to be as follows...

Peaceful Borders: "Seeking peace in the spaces in between".

In response to the largest movement of displaced people across Europe since World War II, and the increase in unregulated spaces at our borders, we are a grass-roots collaboration of peacemakers accompanying those who seek peace at the borders of our lives and the borders of our nations.

Focussing initially on Calais our objectives are to:

1. Offer and enhance peaceful spaces
2. Accompany peacemakers
3. Facilitate healing relationships
4. Train and coordinate reflective and responsive volunteers
5. Provide relief and transition assistance
6. Listen to and elevate voices of displaced people in border communities
7. Support volunteers

[www.peacefulborders.org](http://www.peacefulborders.org)



## B. Reviewing Hopes

After writing the previous report we noted our hopes for March '17 onwards and list some of the developments below:

- We had hoped to initiate some peacemaking initiatives as invited in Dunkirk but this became impossible due to the demolishing of camp.
- We sought to support former residents who were going back to volunteer in Calais, or other informal camps across Europe and inviting them to become more fully members of the PB team if desired, assisting them to get their travel documents if necessary.
- We investigated ways of making some asylum processes in UK more effective eg opening bank accounts. Baraa began to facilitate some dialogue with the CEO of Metro Bank regarding faster opening of bank accounts for refugees and asylum seekers
- We continued to explore ways to encourage newer organisations to care for their staff and volunteers more effectively and were invited to talk with the welfare coordinator of one organisation about this. More effective mechanisms seem to be in place now.
- We continued to informally mentor founders of newer organisations. We also encouraged dialogue and adaptation between organisations working in northern France. There is now a regular gathering for collaboration initiated by Solidarity With Refugees.
- We continue to support the Calais Catholic Worker House. Simon continues as a trustee and several PB members have volunteered in the house for block periods of time.
- We have continued to recruit volunteers to assist in Calais as numbers of refugees continue to rise. One of our team members volunteered with Refugee Community Kitchen for 3 months.
- We wanted to explore supportive and collaborative partnerships with other peacemakers at other refugee hot-spots but lack of finances prevented this.
- We continue to speak at relevant events as invited. Particularly successful were opportunities for Simon, Baraa, Samer and Juliet to speak at Greenbelt in August 2017. Juliet also spoke at the Scottish Baptist Assembly in October 2017.
- We are keen to exploring stronger partnerships with inter-faith groups such as Mahabba.
- We want to explore ways to communicate shared learning from inter-faith dialogue and a reflection event is scheduled.
- We try to accompany people who are now exploring faith as a result of their time in the 'jungle' or who are still processing or writing up their reflections and learning.
- We facilitated a learning trips for Franconia Mennonite Conference in May 2017 and are open to further such opportunities.



### C. Additional Developments

- We raised and gave practical support for the reunification of 2 Syrian families who arrived in the UK in May 2017
- We supported one Syrian man into a training course to renew his qualifications
- We continue to support the ongoing development of SSUN (Solidarity and Support Network)
- A fourth refugee community leader with Leave to Remain has been given a grant to honour his work supporting others and the four who have received grants continue to provide much needed support to new arrivals
- Juliet and Simon continue with a minimum of monthly day visits to Calais
- PB team members have visited some people who have settled in the UK
- Some PB members attended a Calais reunion which Samer organised in Hyde Park, London
- Juliet helped Safe Passage host a research visit of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery to Calais in July and also assisted Brother Johannes in receiving a visit from Lord Dubs to the house in August
- In September Juliet became co-chair of a new Safe Passage Campaigns Team looking to mobilise for political action around the anniversary of the demolition of the Calais 'jungle'. This team organised a successful lobbying action outside and within parliament in October on the anniversary of the demolition of the 'jungle'.
- Simon became vice-principal at Spurgeon's College with a commitment to taking students to Calais to learn and participate.
- We continue to support the work and development of refugee-initiated Hope Towns
- We responded to an invitation made to several peace organisations to create and deliver a bespoke training package to volunteers in Calais on Responding to Aggression and Violence, covering de-escalation and active bystander techniques and debriefing tools. Juliet delivered this to 24 volunteers in October.

- Simon and Juliet continue to look for opportunities to write about their experiences and reflections. In particular Simon had an article accepted for Baptistic Theologies (the IBTS journal), has written reflections for BMS catalyst magazine and Ethics Daily and delivered a post-graduate seminar at Spurgeon's College on 25 October.
- We have been invited to apply for a grant that might hopefully enable community leaders from the 'jungle' to organise a reunion and reflect on their learning



#### D. Hurdles

**+ Fluidity** - Since the demolition of the 'jungle' in October 2016, the situation in Calais has become very changeable and more dangerous for vulnerable refugees. There is now no place to register for asylum in Calais. The nearest place is Lille, one hour away, but it is impossible to make an appointment, so the journey there is frequently a waste of time. This does not build incentive to access the legal process. Until recently there were no toilets or washing facilities and food distributions were regularly prohibited by the authorities. The French CRS routinely confiscate sleeping bags and belongings of refugees and use pepper spray liberally. There are currently approximately 1000 asylum seekers and refugees in Calais including 200 unaccompanied minors. The average age of those arriving in Calais is getting lower. Most are currently coming from Eritrea and Ethiopia, plus Afghanistan. The safe house we support currently sleeps 22 young boys in a 3 bed town house. Unaccompanied minors with a right to come to family in the UK are currently pushed and pulled in a live pin-ball machine in which they are repelled by legal systems but welcomed by smugglers and traffickers who care little for their safety and wellbeing.

**+ Finances** - Peaceful Borders has so far been a small collaboration of peacemakers, and has been held under the charitable auspices of Urban Expression, and partnered by The Mennonite Trust. Both charities have held small sums of grants given for Peaceful Borders. In addition Urban Expression has released one day per week of Juliet's paid time for Peaceful Borders work. Due to unforeseen financial

pressure, Urban Expression is unable to support Peaceful Borders financially from January 2018. Yet Peaceful Borders is at a time of strategic development and wanting to expand. It feels like UE has incubated PB at the early stages of its life, but a natural way forward might be for Peaceful Borders to explore coming under another of its partners the Mennonite Trust.

## **E. Team**

The team is fluid with people getting involved as much as their capacity permits. At least 14 people have given time over the last 6 months or remain actively involved in discussions about the developments of Peaceful Borders and UK responses to refugees.

We continue to work closely with Br Johannes Maerten's and his team.

Throughout 2017 we have been grateful to Urban Expression for releasing one day a week of Juliet's time to develop Peaceful Borders and administering a grant that we gratefully received from Schowalter Trust in October 2016. In addition we are grateful to The Mennonite Trust for a grant that has supported the work and some team members and a small gift from the Anabaptist Network that funded 2 days training we were able to deliver to volunteers in Calais on Responding to Aggression and Violence.

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