

Peaceful Borders Public Report August 2015 - April 2017



A. Truth-Seeking Beginnings August - Oct '15

In response to the increasingly dehumanising rhetoric of summer 2015 surrounding the refugees and migrants gathering in Calais, Juliet spontaneously visited the Calais 'jungle' with a small group of friends. They connected the immensely stretched local organisation L'Auberge Des Migrants, helped with their food distribution and were shown around the camp. Shocked by what she saw, Juliet returned a couple of weeks later with her husband. They visited the 'jungle' church for the morning service and then helped serve food at the Jules Ferry Centre.

Witnessing this rapidly expanding urban shanty town filling with people fleeing conflict from so many nations, Juliet was convinced she needed to return regularly to testify to the emerging reality and to serve those who were being neglected and criminalised in this liminal space. Juliet connected with Citizens UK who were beginning to explore how to challenge the political stalemate at the border and offered to help support this fledgling work. She also helped organise people to take a number of caravans to house the most vulnerable through the coming winter.



Juliet spoke about her experiences at the Urban Expression Community Week-end in October '15 and UE's London Regional Advisor Simon Jones asked to visit Calais with her. Simon accompanied Juliet and others on a Citizens UK delegation in November and was equally challenged about returning regularly. On their early visits Simon and Juliet met others who were pursuing active peacemaking, including volunteers Tom, Shizuka and 'jungle' resident Samer. Christian International Peace Service (CHIPS) were keen to support peacemaking and asked Juliet to develop a Listening Project in the camp in partnership with Samer.

B. The Listening Project: Nov '15 - Feb '16

Juliet and Simon took numerous people with them on their weekly visits to help expose people to the realities. Steve Cole and Tim Mungeam came and connected well with many of the young adults starting grassroots initiatives in response to the needs of residents. These were the beginnings of strong friendships that see Tim and Steve continuing to informally mentor others in many unregulated border spaces.

As winter descended, Simon and Juliet met Brother Johannes, a Belgian Benedictine monk and member of the Catholic Worker movement who was exploring the potential of opening a hospitality house to offer respite for refugees in Calais. The peacemaking intentions shared by Tom and Shizuka, Samer, Johannes, Simon and Juliet led to much partnership, including Simon becoming a trustee of the Maria Skobstova House that opened in Feb '16. This house has been a helpful centering point for many of our visits.



As the Listening Project was explored it became apparent that there were sometimes tensions in the camp and that a space for dialogue and conflict resolution might be very helpful. One of the caravans that the team sourced was taken and given for this purpose. Samer was a natural peacemaker and was the natural choice to ask to live in and host this space. And so the Listening Caravan was placed near the church and Jungle Books. As that half of the camp developed it became clear that the Listening Caravan was in the middle of the High Street!

It became another centering point where residents and volunteers new they could go for tea and conversation, letting off steam, resolving disagreements and making new connections. Reminiscing on this space on social media one year on, someone reflected that the caravan was like the jungle 'office'!

The team observed several key needs they felt able to respond to at this time:

- + The pastoral support of volunteers who were dealing with a humanitarian crisis but without the care of any supporting agency.
- + The nurturing and support of community leaders who were coming to the fore and were best suited to keep the peace of the burgeoning camp.
- + The gathering of data of unaccompanied minors who had a legal right to come to the UK but were being prevented by political bureaucracy, to pass onto Safe Passage, the initiative that was growing from the original efforts of Citizens UK.

Each day they visited the team connected with hundreds of people. Looking back, it was like community organising on speed!

The community leaders had started to meet weekly to consider the well-being of the camp and talk about what was needed. They often met in one of the cafes that entrepreneurs had built in the increasingly bustling high street of the camp. Simon and I were surprised to be regularly invited to sit at this table and listen to the conversation. We decided early on that it was not our place to give any input, but if invited, to reflect back what we had heard. We were often asked our thoughts at the end of such gatherings. We felt such a weight of privilege to witness this part of the story. It was like sitting with a group of disciples who were working out how to seek the wellbeing of this strange society they had been thrown into together. After the courts insisted the French authorities provide more basic utilities to the camp, an agency called ACTED were seconded with this task. Their staff began to very effectively dialogue with the community leaders

about the needs of the camp, and we were privileged to journey alongside these talented people and I hope we encouraged them in the important humanising work they were doing.

Sam La Roche visited with Juliet during this time and became a regular part of the team until the summer of '16. We did not develop a course for new team members, but used the first couple of accompanied visits to discern if they had what it took to be part of the team and do some induction. Team members were linked together through an online app so we could keep in touch and we ensure everyone debriefed with another member of the team after each visit.



After months of seriously hard graft, in Jan '16 Citizens UK/Safe Passage won the right to bring the first 4 boys to the UK legally. Juliet was at the arrival to celebrate a truly momentous breakthrough. It felt like such a tiny first step, but over the following year almost 100 children were reunited with family in the UK because of this work. The Peaceful Borders team have routinely felt that this is one of the most significant pieces of work in the current 'refugee crisis' which we endeavor to support as much as we can with pastoral care and encouragement.

The funding from CHIPS for the Listening Project stopped at the end of February. At this stage the small team did not feel the work had finished, more like it had just begun. Juliet attended the European Convergence of the Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hamburg in Feb '16 and together with a CPT Calais volunteer Benjamin Krauss, explored potential links with CPT in Europe. A formal partnership did not emerge, but the team of peacemakers in Calais was growing and so they collectively decided to continue as a collaboration of peacemakers. It was felt that a name would help people understand what we were seeking to be and do, (and grant us passage past the French riot police, CRS) and the name Peaceful Borders was adopted. We summarised our work as follows:

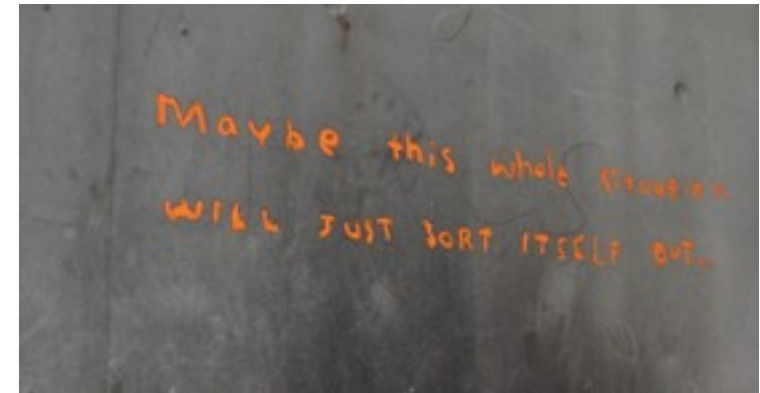
Peaceful Borders: "Seeking peace in the spaces in between".

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



At a later stage we built a simple web presence at www.peacefulborders.org

C. Demolitions Feb-March '16

At the end of February '16 the southern part of the camp was earmarked for demolition by the French authorities. The team were able to accompany volunteers who were angry and help them consider how not to enflame further violence, and accompany residents to prepare for the consequences of a changed shape of camp. We helped organise a multi-faith gathering in the dome. We made witness to the authorities as they gave eviction notices. We sat in shelters to prevent demolition while residents visited the toilets. Many refugees moved on elsewhere, 265 unaccompanied minors went missing and many inhabitants of the south part of the camp simply moved into the inadequately prepared north part. Shelters were rapidly rescued and moved, new compounds sprung up, community buildings such as mosques, schools and churches sheltered those who had lost everything. Fires burnt, anger fermented, injustice and disregard for human rights were witnessed on a scale most Brits had never seen. Trauma was felt by everyone. We witnessed some Iranian Christian residents sew their lips together and go on hunger strike in protest at the lack of human rights. As the weeks passed we took liquid food



supplements for them and had the opportunity to pray with them - a profoundly moving experience. We had the privilege of accompanying community leaders on the way to visit them to persuade them to stop, and responded to questions from Muslim community leaders about what Christian themes they might be able to draw on to persuade these men to stop their strike.

D. Developing Peaceful Borders: March - Oct '16

After the trauma of the south evictions, the north area rapidly grew into a full-scale shanty town. Every weekly visit witnessed changes in paths, roads, shops, shelters and community provisions. The community leaders became more like a town council, with ACTED even building them an office. Their role was vital, especially with constantly changing physical and power dynamics. Occasional accidental fires and regular unprovoked and arbitrary tear gas attacks kept the adrenalin up in the camp. The mixed motives and methods of the growing volunteer organisations regularly caused conflict and tension and a surprisingly small undercurrent of smuggler violence was always present. Celebrations of those who made it to England were tainted with stories of the unlucky ones who died trying. The deaths of children who did not trust in the laborious legal process Safe Passage was trying to speed up were the worst. As community leaders eventually arrived in the UK, their absence left gaps in the camp and the identification and accompaniment of new leaders became important, as did assisting arrivals to readjust to life in the UK and navigate an asylum system that is set up to fail.

Our visits continued to consist of hospital visits, time with volunteers at their warehouses and offices and copious amounts and types of tea in people's shelters, tents, caravans, around open fires, in pallet-cafes and on lake-view verandas. Plus time at Brother Johannes' house, always full of some of the most vulnerable, always prayer-full. The comparative and often contrasting spiritualities of the camp were all enticing and meaningful. In a place of suffering which assumes faith will be lost, faith was in fact rekindled and found by so many, the serendipitous coincidences and God-centred strength expressed by so many residents of the camp inspiring many. Numerous hours spent sharing stories, parables and proverbs in natural, non-confrontational ways opened eyes up to the other who had previously been mythologised or even demonised. Despite some obvious differences in power, the jungle was a very leveling place.



Our work had begun with a concern for unattached volunteers lacking support from established organisations. There were very few international NGO's visibly there, although some under-the-radar work was carried out. Volunteers exhibited symptoms of serious trauma, destructive coping mechanisms, unconsidered boundaries and exhaustion. Building on earlier conversations initiated with CHIPS, we helped a network of British psychologists launch themselves as the Solidarity and Support Network (SSUN), offering a free peer buddying support structure. SSUN is now widely known and signposted amongst volunteer organisations in Calais and Dunkirk. We are still working on getting organisations to adopt and 'opt out' rather than an 'opt in' approach to encourage more take up.



After speaking at the Baptist Assembly in May 2016, Simon had a list of people keen to help in Calais. This resulted in us organising a successful block week in August 2016. A team of 10 joined Simon, Sam and I and, based in one of the restaurants that had, with all other shops in that stretch of camp, just been closed down, offered sewing workshops, knitting, games and music. All these were conduits to conversations which hopefully offered solidarity, value, pastoral care and exploration of peaceful responses in the midst of conflict. It also enabled us to train a cohort of volunteers in reflective practices and peacemaking skills. Several of this team have continued to volunteer in the camps with Mark Hurst and Jenny Baldwin becoming regular members of the Peaceful Borders team. Tonbridge Baptist Church, who donated some of the first caravans and raised some money off the back of a talk Juliet gave in Autumn 2015, agreed to underwrite this summer block week, but in the end the week was pretty much self-financing through the team members who paid for their accommodation etc.

At Urban Expression's May trustees meeting it became apparent that Juliet had been using much of her UE time to develop PB. UE had also taken on a number of new regional coordinators and was exploring a more intentionally 'flat' structure. Juliet felt she had less to offer UE at the time and was committed to PB. UE trustees decided that although they could not see the whole picture, PB felt like an important strategic and experimental development on the urban margins and were happy to release Juliet one day per week to continue to focus on this, to be reviewed in May 2017. The Schowalter Trust, who regularly donate to UE, also gave a grant of £8000 in support of PB which funded an extra day of Juliet's time. It also covered travel expenses for Juliet and for Simon during his sabbatical when not supported financially by Bromley Baptist Church who had released him a day a week to represent them in Calais.



In May 2016 community leaders who had arrived in the UK set up a monthly gathering to connect with each other and UK-based volunteers, called Hope Towns. This was for mutual support but also to organise support for destitute asylum seekers in the UK and those still stranded in Calais. The 'jungle' spirit was strong enough to transcend the border and the solidarity and shared experiences created solid friendships and a sense of shared purpose. Simon and Juliet tried to attend these regularly and encourage ideas to find fruition.

E. Demolitions Oct - Nov '16

As anticipated by those with eyes to see, in August the 'jungle' had reached approximately 10,000 people. It was the size of a small town and pretty much functioned like one. In September rumours were rife about a further demolition, but no-one anticipated the speed with which it would take place at the end of October. The PB team were able to accompany residents as they made decisions about whether

to leave in advance of the demolitions or stay and see what provision would be made by the authorities, whose information was sketchy to say the least. Once again we supported volunteers and encouraged non-aggressive responses to their frustrations. We also did as much as time would allow to support the increasingly urgent reunification work of Safe Passage, helping to communicate with and register children.

During the registrations which started just days prior to the actual demolitions, we were asked by Safe Passage to provide peacemakers to help accompany their clients to the registration centre. The situation and the process was executed so poorly by the French and British authorities and was immensely confusing for the children whose faith in the system had collapsed. We walked them to the line, waited with them, keeping them together and calm, gently responding to last minute enquiries from other desperate young people. This was a frustrating process and several times we failed to register them. On a happier note, we were privileged to be able to inform some SP clients that they were able to go to the UK the following day, and helped ensure they got on the coach at the right time the next morning.

When the first physical demolitions began we were able to be observers and witnesses to the actions of the gendarmes and CRS, in particular intervening when the caravan of some Sudanese boys was surrounded by gendarmes for destruction. The boys had not been given notice that their caravan would be destroyed and all their belongings were inside. As they returned from another failed attempt to register, we were able to calmly but firmly demand that they be allowed to enter their caravan to collect their possessions and papers.



Fires began to burn around the camp and we were able to assist others with removal of gas canisters and advise people which areas of the camp to avoid. We were constantly asked by residents what they should do. It was very hard to not have any useful answers. We were all powerless. We continued to walk through the camp trying to locate some of the Safe Passage clients who had registered and been moved into the container accommodation. Visiting them whilst everything around the containers burned was very disturbing. The

notion that this demolition and relocation was for their safety was a complete farce. Juliet was grateful to be able to utilise the security guards of Safe Passage as she visited their clients, giving her relatively safe access to the camp in an otherwise dangerous time.



A later visit that evening with partners from Secours Catholique and the Catholic Worker House enabled us to witness the 60 unaccompanied minors who had been abandoned with no accommodation in the containers, but with the camp now burning down. We accompanied and supported other volunteers as they grappled with the consequences. There was little we could do after this awful week, but we returned to support other volunteers and to witness the very final departures - the women and babies, left till last - and witness the demolition of the church and first mosque, the very last structures to be taken down.



F. Taking Stock Nov '16 - Feb '17

Immediately prior and during the demolitions a number of people with legal right to join family in the UK were rushed through the immigration process. Much of this was to be celebrated, but it was also carried out with inadequate structure and support. We were able

to support some who we had got to know very well who arrived in the UK during this chaotic process, sometimes meeting them on arrival, being a responsible adult and accompanying them through their Home Office appointment, or connecting them with others, often Urban Expression people around the country. Sometimes the families they were joining were ill-prepared and Simon invested significant time with one family to help find a constructive way forward.

With the higher number of unaccompanied minors being fast-tracked into the UK during the demolitions and from the accommodation centres they were dispersed to around France, the Home Office called on several agencies to open safe houses. PB team member Tim Mungeam was urgently called upon to manage one that Oasis Trust was asked to open in London. His firsthand experiences in the 'jungle' and connections with Refugee Youth Service prepared him well for this role, and with less to do in Calais post-evictions, Juliet was able to cover a few shifts and be on hand to offer advice and support. The safe house was only open until Christmas when the Home Office stopped transferring children.

During this time more Syrians were arriving in the UK through the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme and Peaceful Borders team members were often approached by churches and organisations with questions about this. Lieutenant Nick Coke had previously visited Calais with PB and had been very active in encouraging The Salvation Army to welcome refugees before being appointed as the Army's Refugee Response Coordinator.

Through conversations and connections at Hope Towns it became evident that the agencies supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the UK are immensely stretched and that new agencies are still finding their organisational feet. It is also clear that the system is designed to fail with many refugees falling through the gaps during the 28 days they have after receiving leave to remain to register at the job centre, open a bank account, get their NI number and get somewhere new to live. Some of those who were effective peacemakers in the camp have continued to support others since their arrival, with many of their hours taken up with filling forms, accompanying to appointments, translating and helping agencies fundraise. PB received a grant from The Mennonite Trust and because there was no need to travel so much to Calais post-evictions, we decided to allocate some of this as grants to 3 people we felt were working as peacemakers amongst the refugee community in London. This was also a necessary step to ensure PB did not become another agency staffed only by white British people who have never been refugees. During this time Simon and Juliet met with the 3 peacemakers to learn from their experiences, and to try and make connections to enable ideas to find fruition.

'Peaceful Borders were a great support system for all the Safe Passage field staff, our many volunteers and the numerous refugees we were working with. They were kind, compassionate and helped provide a balance and reassurance in a crisis situation'. Laura Griffiths, Senior Field Manager Consultant, Safe Passage

