

MOBILE REFUGEE SUPPORT



I recently went to see Charlie (on the right) who runs Mobile Refugee Support in Calais. Charlie is a very intelligent and driven young man who is extremely dedicated to the plight of the refugees. He used to work in the Jungle for Care4Calais and also was one of their Managers in the Jungle and eventually was dealing with caravan allocation also, so had a lot of dealings with Jungle Canopy.

Charlie lives in an end-terraced house with 2 full-time volunteers (one of them, Ged, is on the left) and others who come and go on an ad hoc basis. There are 3 bedrooms and they have 2 bed settees in the open plan living area/kitchen. The integral garage is used for storage and they also rent a storage container at a cost of £160 per month. They spend their days and early evenings driving around the Dunkirk woodlands in the old Land Rover distributing food packs, toilet rolls, sugar, tea and coffee and other necessities. They have 2 generators that they run from the Land Rover. One is used to power the plug board they have made up for the refugees to use to charge phones. The other they use to power urns for hot water for washes and hot drinks.



One of the main problems they have is the sheer demand for blankets, sleeping bags and tents. They have around 20 brand new sleeping bags in the garage that are left over from a drop over 200 they did a few weeks ago. They just cannot go with any number under 100 as they have at least that amount of people looking for tents, blankets and sleeping bags on a daily basis. To hand out to just a few causes problems between the groups living in the area. The Police take or wreck tents at least twice a week. *Since we saw Charlie, on Tuesday morning, hundreds of Police went to the camps and cleared them out, taking people away and dispersing others. We actually saw the Police lined up along the motorway at Grande Synthe for at least a mile stretch and all the vans parked up just off the road. I have heard from Charlie that they are still trying to find out what has happened to the people removed but that people have already started to return to the area as they have nowhere else to go and know nothing else either.



They are basically working every day but a Sunday afternoon and evening, which they usually take off as lots of volunteers come in from Belgium and Holland. A lot of evenings they bring families back to their house for a hot meal and a shower and a bed for the night. They are also charging around 20 of the mobile power packs every night ready for re-distribution the next day.



Charlie did say that the area is extremely right-wing and very anti-refugee. The volunteers are therefore not hugely welcomed in the area. It took him a long time to find a sympathetic Landlord that would even rent him the house they are in. They desperately need new premises nearer to Dunkirk itself and also with storage. A small farm steading with outbuildings would be perfect. They also desperately need a new vehicle that is more reliable and economical. They do need the same type of vehicle as they drive off road through the woods in all weathers fully loaded every day. They have a crowdfunding appeal on the go at present.

They are also desperate for volunteers and can help with accommodation either with them or friends. This may be a way for people who would really like to go and help but are nervous about where to stay or who to get in touch with. They have been there so long now, they are the perfect group to help.

Lynn Anderson

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