

Volunteer asylum aid – a task that enriches

We have daughters, sons and grandchildren.

We, that means the 74 years old Providence Sister Brunhilde and the 70 years old retired vocational school teacher Brigitta.

For four years now we work on a voluntary basis in the refugee assistance. With some of the families that we serve, we are so closely connected that one looks at us as mothers or grandmothers and such they call us. If occasionally we are not present in Gladbeck, we get calls or SMS's with the statement: "We miss you!"

Why do they miss us? What do we do?

We are refugee commissioners of Caritas and of the Parish of St. Lamberti in Gladbeck.

Different to the authorities, who are purely bureaucratic, we try to give to the people a new home here in Germany. We listen to their needs and help in finding solutions. When there are language problems, it often helps to use English.

In order to get the refugees to speak German, we give them occasionally additional German lessons, free of charge. These offers are gratefully and eagerly accepted; and due to the regular German lessons in official courses, which we often help financing, "*our people*" do already quite well in everyday life. However our help is still needed, especially at the authorities and also when going to the doctor and when they need the use of a lawyer. We are trying to get a nursery place for the little ones, and to find appropriate schools or a college/university for the older ones.

To favour integration, Refugees ought to be able to take part also in cultural life.

To enable this, concerts and dances are suitable events. Some "refugee-talents" were already discovered in the field of music, and their performances enjoy already a wide audience. One singer from Albania e.g. was asked already to sing in several churches and at cultural events in Gladbeck.

Impressed by the togetherness of Christians, 20 refugees have asked already to be baptized, 8 received the sacrament of confirmation and one couple found the way to get married in the Church. It made us really proud that several asked us to stand godmother to them which we accepted very happily. We are also welcomed guests on joyous occasions. Birthdays are celebrated with us together and friends and relatives, who do not live in Gladbeck are visited with our car.

Our commitment seems to impress also our own people, because it is not rarely that we get offered a larger sum of cash-donation and other help.

The furniture warehouse that we built up some time ago, we could hand over to the hands of younger men. Non-the-less, we are still often addressed personally by people, who want

to give a piece of furniture away but want to know that it is given into good hands. Our refugees are - as they say - day and night ready for us to assist when we need them to transport things or with some other help. The men among them readily and spontaneously give a helping hand for other refugees, even if they don't know them. Often these helping forces consist of people with different nationalities and religious communities.

Not so long ago, at the urging of the social services, we had to vacate a fully furnished apartment of an Albanian family, and to move everything into a new apartment without the family even being present, because they were held back in Albania since the German Embassy was too slow to get the entrance papers for them ready in time. Friends had looked for a new apartment and had found a very nice landlord, so they could rent that dwelling place for the family. Not to lose this opportunity, Sister Brunhilde then drove herself the furniture truck and the four-member Albanian family found their new apartment almost fully functionally ready, when they finally could return to Germany.

Now, despite many obstacles, which had to be overcome, the 18 year old daughter can study with a perfect knowledge of German, the younger sister visits the 7th class of a gymnasium and is almost the best in class. The parents have both now a work permit and can finally earn their living themselves.

The second-hand garment storeroom that we have launched continues now without us, has fixed opening hours thanks to the help of committed women and men.

In the four past years, over 200 refugees have experienced help from us. Unfortunately, some families that have become very dear to us had to go back to the Balkans, because, for them the Government here did no longer grant asylum as the refugee 'onslaught' from e.g. Africa and Syria was so great.

Now-a-days there come mainly Christians from Albania, Egypt and Iran, Muslim refugees from Syria and the Lebanon, as well as Yazidis from Iraq.

Often, we accompany our refugees to present their case before the Federal Office for migration and refugees in Bielefeld, Dortmund and Bochum, and we're very glad if asylum is granted to them.

Of course there are also sometimes setbacks – sometimes, we face problems at the offices or with home owners, who expressly do not want to rent to foreigners – but our motto non-the-less is:

"Together we are strong!"

With our German Chancellor Angela Merkel, we are convinced:

We can make it!!!