

Get Involved: Pray



EMBRACE Prayer Group October 2014

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" Matthew 25: 35-36

As I write it is a beautiful autumn day and I am thankful for the Indian summer which should make for a shorter winter.

Winter is the busiest time for the EMBRACE Emergency Fund which provides small amounts of financial support to cover one-off emergency needs of migrants with no recourse to public funds. Such needs include a few nights' hostel accommodation or food for people who are seeking asylum while other organisations help them sort out their entitlements to benefits. For some migrants who lose their jobs and are finding it impossible to get re-employed it may be a flight back to their own country so they can access the support they are entitled to there but not here.

2014 has seen a substantial number of changes to the residence requirements for entitlement to certain benefits. January marked the end of restrictions on the rights of residence for Romanian and Bulgarian nationals and in response, the government introduced a series of amendments designed to more closely regulate access to the social security system.

We are only beginning to see the effects of this and it is anticipated that this will lead to many more migrants becoming destitute in the months to come. EMBRACE working alongside several Belfast churches and community organisations who work with homeless people, set up the **On the Street** project. This initiative raises awareness of migrant destitution and offers a positive response through the donation and distribution of clothing, bedding, toiletries and foodstuffs to those on the street and in hostels, both local and migrant people.

This winter may well be the most difficult that agencies have yet faced. Working with front line staff dealing with people in such difficult circumstances I know the stress that they as individuals have to cope with on a daily basis. There is simply not enough provision and the EMBRACE Emergency Fund meets only a fraction of the need. An emergency fund through the Minority Ethnic Development Fund at OFMDFM which has been anticipated since March 2013 has not materialised and agencies at times, in spite of their best efforts, have to turn away people in serious need.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Matthew 25:40

Contributed by Denise Wright, Race Relations Coordinator, South Belfast Roundtable

Let us pray for:

- People who find themselves in an unfamiliar country with no job or means of supporting themselves. Pray that they find people and places offering support and a way out of their difficulties.
- All who work with migrants in need, that they may find ways to cope with the stress that comes with facing those in need and not always being able to offer adequate support.
- The Church that we might take up our gospel mandate to welcome and care for the stranger as if they are Christ himself.