

The Graih Gazette

Voices for Peace and Justice

Edition 2

September 2018

Numbers to ponder

£2,389. Fee for Indefinite Leave to Remain as a Worker Migrant on the Isle of Man. The same fee is needed in addition for any child or adult dependant.

83,314. Population of the Isle of Man at the 2016 census.

24. Syrian refugee families settled on the Isle of Bute (pop. 6,498).

119,000 refugees in the UK (pop. 66 million) at the end of 2016.

0. Refugees welcomed in the Isle of Man.
Sources: Isle of Man government; The Buteman; Wikipedia; UN; ONS

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Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of *The Graih Gazette*! It's been great to hear that our first edition was welcomed by many of you. My favourite comment thus far has been from one of the guys in the drop-in, who cast his eye over it and pronounced that I must have 'an agenda'! What he thought that might be was unclear... I'll have to leave such judgements to the readers.

This edition is broadly themed around immigration, which we've widened out to include some thoughts about refugees. Immigration and refugees are of course separate issues but they both have to do with the movement of people.

If this seems an odd theme for a newsletter from a tiny homeless charity in the Isle of Man then cast your eye over Q's story below. Many of the people Graih has contact with are immigrants to the island, some of whose journeys have been harder than others.

Fundamentally the local perspective helps us glimpse the global dimension. We live in a world increasingly demarcated by borders and obstacles of all sorts. Whether it's the lack of an address that means you can't access a service or the fact that you're born into the 'wrong' country or religion we seem to enjoy dividing people into groups.

This doesn't make much sense to us at the *Gazette*. We think that people are people, whoever they are and wherever they come from. We think that people are precious and

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are far more often blessings than threats. We think that fear keeps us separate but that actually when we sit round a table together we find that we're much the same: just people. That is very much the witness of the dining table at the drop-in, where we welcome all sorts of people from all sorts of places and backgrounds...and share food and laughter together.

We have enough problems in the world without spending vast amounts of time, money and energy on keeping some people out and some people in. Wouldn't it be good to value each person as a person rather than trying to weigh up whether their presence benefits 'us' or not?

At Graih we have spent our lives with people often deemed worthless and unproductive by the economic and social status quo. We've discovered the wonderful secret that they're not discards on society's rejection pile. They are lovely, life-enhancing gifts to us all. People are precious, just as they are, just as people. Whoever you are and wherever you come from.

Please do let us know what you think, of this edition or anything else! We welcome submissions, ideas, memories, praise, blame and everything in between!

Grace and peace,

Michael Manning

Quotes

“Increasing our economically active population is one of six strategic objectives in the Programme for Government.” - Chris Thomas MHK, 'Meeting our Population Challenges'.

“Immigration controls are not a natural feature of life.” – No One is Illegal (a campaign group).

“Our problems stem from our acceptance of this filthy rotten system.” – Dorothy Day (co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement).

An Immigrant's Tale

The experience of immigrants is often a hidden one. At Graih we've had the pleasure of knowing Q for a number of years. The story below is his own, told in his own words. Make of it what you will.

Q first came to the island in 2008, arriving from Blackburn. He was born and lived for many years outside the EU and left his family to come to the UK to seek work and provide for his loved ones. He had a friend working in the UK in a restaurant and Q came over and began to work illegally on a tourist visa. There were links to a restaurant in Douglas and so he came over here. He lights up when he speaks of his first experience of the island: 'the future is bright; I liked the Isle of Man when I got here.' He was very positive.

However, his boss, whom he consistently refers to throughout as his 'owner', soon began to cheat him. The boss knew that Q was working illegally as a visitor and took advantage of him. 'He caught me,' Q said. Q would work from 2pm to 12 midnight every day with no day off. He received no extra money and holidays. He was paid £100 per week.

'I was forced to work,' said Q. 'He was my owner, any time he needed me. I thought it was a prisoner's life. I did it for money for my family. It was hard work all the time.'

After six months Q's tourist visa was up. The boss wanted Q to come back for further work. 'He was greedy for money. He was a blood-sucker. I was an obedient servant,' Q said. The boss wanted Q to re-apply for another six month tourist visa and

that he would then think about getting Q a work permit for the island. Q returned to his country and family before coming back to the Isle of Man into the same situation.

'I worked like a donkey,' Q said. After one or two months Q asked his boss about the work permit and was told that he was still thinking and that there was no hurry. Q was sleeping on the floor in a big hall with only a duvet. There were a few others around the restaurant but they had legal status and therefore got more money and a day off. Q would work multiple jobs when other staff were off. 'I had a legal visa but illegal work,' he said. 'I spent my whole time in the restaurant.'

Once Q hurt his back from carrying heavy loads and sleeping on the floor. He was unable to work but the boss told him to work slowly and that he could have no day off or rest. Q was in pain for a month. He couldn't straighten his back and was hobbling. 'I knew no-one,' Q said. 'No doctor. What could I do? It was the worst time of my life.' He continued to sleep on the floor and took rest when he could. The boss and the chef used to laugh at him and told him, 'You're a brave person with willpower.'

A waiter at the restaurant realised that Q was in pain. He took some hot towels to put on Q's back and then ironed them. The heat helped. 'It helped many times,' Q said. When the waiter went to the pub Q would try this ironing technique himself. Eventually he asked his boss for a private doctor. The boss took him to Ramsey where he saw someone who Q described as using 'sticks' placed over his back to heal it. He began to feel better but was forced to pay for this 'treatment'. He said, 'I got better, thanks to God.'

The boss began to withdraw even what little he had been paying Q. Q went for four months without any pay and his tourist visa was ceasing once again. 'I had two hopes', said Q. 'First, that he'd pay me the lump sum of what he owed me at the end of the four months. Second, that I'd get a work permit. I'd survive anything for a future for my family. But I was doubtful about ever getting paid.'

The day before Q was due to leave the country the boss told him that he had no money but that he promised to send it to Q when he had it. 'My situation was very bad,' said Q. 'I had no money to take to my family. I survived. I suffered. I had no choice. All doors were closed. I couldn't complain. He promised to get me a work permit and I could return. I didn't know what to believe.'

It was 2009. 'A work permit was £100. It was easy to get,' Q said. He returned to his country embarrassed at having no money to bring back to his family. He borrowed money from relatives and called his boss every day. His boss refused to talk with him but sent a message through a friend: pay £2,500 and he would get Q a work permit.

Q was shocked. He'd lost his job in his country after being so long in the UK and the Isle of Man. He was suspicious of his boss, knowing him to be a gambler and a playboy. Q thought that he would just get cheated again and that there would be further delays. The boss didn't like to work and didn't pay the bills. Q thought he was a failure as a business man. But the boss said that he'd apply for a work permit for Q. Q was torn. He knew he couldn't trust the boss. But he also knew that his best hope for his family, for a good education for his children, for a good life, was found on the island. In the end

Q waived all the pay owed to him and agreed to pay the £2,500.

It took two months to receive word that the work permit had been granted. It was even longer to get another visa for travelling back to the UK. Q was refused at first because his boss hadn't provided the correct paperwork. Eventually, after a wait of eight months, he got his visa. It was a good day!

In 2010 Q was back in the Isle of Man with the same owner at the same restaurant. 'This time I was a legal prisoner!' Q said. He now had to try and get his five years' work before he could apply for residency. The boss said that any complaint and he would go straight to Immigration and the work permit would be revoked. 'It was a different sort of struggle,' Q said. 'All the time I was a prisoner.'

Q received £230 per week and had a day off, which he was very happy with. However, he was thrown into further uncertainty when the boss sold the restaurant and moved to different premises, downsizing the business to fund his gambling. Q met a good guy at Immigration, an officer there, who helped transfer his work permit. 'He understood the situation,' Q said. 'He told me that I was a prisoner but recognised that I was a decent person. He was a good angel!' Throughout his story this Immigration Officer was the only government employee that Q praised and said was helpful.

In the new premises the work was hard. The days off stopped. 'I had nine months without a day off,' Q said. He worked from 2pm to 2.30am, 5am at weekends. He had a room in a boarding house that cost him £60 per week. 'I survived by my own effort and willpower.'

God helped me always,' Q said. 'My family were praying for me.'

After two years Q's visa came up for renewal again and the owner wanted to sell the business. Q began to get worried about his work permit. Without letting Q know the owner sold the business and the new boss began to frequent the premises. Whenever Q questioned it nothing was said. People were lying to him and he didn't know what to believe. Q was taken out of the kitchen work and put to cleaning. He was threatened with Immigration if he complained. His old boss began withholding his wages again. Then the new boss told him one night that he was fired with immediate effect.

'It was the worst night of my life,' Q said. 'I was crying.' He told the bosses that he was a human, not an animal. How was he going to pay for food? For rent? They had put him in dirty drain water. He wondered that as a human, as a colleague, as a worker, where was his right? 'I thought my life was over,' Q said. It was 2am and he got no sleep. He had lost everything.

A friend of Q's who was a delivery driver bumped into him on the Prom. He invited Q home for food and Q told him everything. His wife had a good idea: her sister worked at the Palace Casino and perhaps she could get Q a job there. When Q went to see her he filled in some forms and she said she'd try and find a job for him. She gave him £20 and said, 'I know you have no food or money.' Back at the boarding house Q's landlady came to see him and asked for the rent. Q asked for more time and the landlady understood the situation. 'She was a good lady,' Q said.

Q's old boss had returned to the UK, withholding 3 weeks' salary from Q. 'He

couldn't face me as a human,' Q said. On the telephone the boss promised to pay Q but didn't like to talk to him. Q thought that his dreams for his children were broken. His delivery driver friend took him home again and tried to feed him. Q wasn't eating due to stress. His friend's wife went with him round all the takeaways asking for a job: 'This is your brother, please help him.' Most people made excuses about money and staff but the wife knew someone in the final place they visited and they asked Q to come back in a week.

Q began to spend lots of time at the Sea Terminal. It was quiet and he could use the internet and charge his phone for free. It passed the time and it was better than sitting alone in his room. It was there that he met Y. Y was there for the same reason and they began to talk, a lot. Q explained his situation and asked for help. Y recognised that Q was a good guy and decided to assist him. They went looking for a job. Y did the talking. Q was casually employed to clean cars at £25 a day. In the evening Y, who lived in a camper van, would park on the Prom and Q would make tea in his boarding house for Y and his friends and deliver it to them. They also repaired a few bicycles. Between cups of black tea, washing cars and a few repairs Q managed to pay his rent arrears. 'Y was such a great help,' Q said. When he returned to the restaurant who had asked him to wait a week he was given a job and his work permit was transferred. The crisis was over.

Q was happy at the new restaurant and worked hard. By 2013 he began to think about bringing his family over to live here. He had been living at the same boarding house and maintained a close friendship with Y. The immigration procedures for his family were complex but he couldn't get

professional help; one advocate quoted him £2,000 to look at the application. 'Every year the government makes it harder for immigrants,' Q said. 'The fees go up. There are more procedures. It's harder to apply. They don't want any immigrants in the Isle of Man.'

Q needed to get his children over before they turned eighteen. If they were adults too it would be an even more complicated process. The first visa application was for his wife and oldest daughter. Y helped navigate the technicalities and rights. The same helpful officer was there at Immigration and again he proved invaluable, advising Q to put a quick application in before it was too late.

It was around this time that Q came to Graih's drop-in with Y. Y helped establish him there. 'The drop-in was very helpful,' Q said. He came for food and provisions. 'I respect the drop-in because they helped me at a very difficult time,' Q said. He recalled one episode of bad toothache and he saw a health visitor at the drop-in who helped him get it sorted. 'The drop-in is a good help for everyone. I saw many people there getting their food,' Q said. He enjoyed it and made friends with some of the staff and volunteers. 'I wasn't trying to cheat anyone,' he said.

In September 2013 Q's wife and daughter arrived on the island. They all stayed in a new room in the same boarding house. Q went to the drop-in a lot, relying on it for food and tea bags! It was hard to support his family. Y was there by his side throughout, helping with everything. The drop-in also helped provide clothes and bedding.

In 2014 the boarding house where they all lived was closed for renovation. Q's

wife also wanted to return to see their two younger children. Q and his oldest daughter moved into a new boarding house for a year. Visas needed renewing again and Q started the process for moving his entire family to the island.

In 2015 Q and his whole family – wife and three children – were finally able to live together. At first they occupied two rooms in a boarding house but soon moved to a flat. The drop-in helped towards the cost of the deposit and rent. It was cheap but the conditions were awful. The landlord told Q that he had renovated the property but really he had just masked the problems. There were bad problems with damp, rain running down the walls and black fungus growing. There was no heat and the water didn't work. Q was grateful that some people he knew through the drop-in offered their home as a place to wash and get water. The family were in the flat for six months. 'It was a horrible time,' Q said.

Q began to withhold the rent on the flat and sought to move to another property, a house this time. The landlord of the flat took Q to the Small Claims' Court. The process took eighteen months. Despite calling in people from the drop-in and Y as witnesses the judgement went against Q and he was ordered to pay £5,000 in instalments.

Slowly, however, Q and his family were becoming more established. Eventually the whole family gained Permanent Residency status: the goal that Q had been aiming at for so long. They had to pay £800 per adult and £600 per child for this new status. Q estimated that he had paid in the region of £6,000 during the whole immigration process in visas, fees etc. 'Maybe £10,000. It was too much struggle,' he said. He remains hugely grateful to Y and

to the help he received from the drop-in and those he met there.

'This is a true story,' Q said. 'Many people would like to come to the island to work and support the island but the government doesn't want immigrants. It doesn't like them. It's getting harder for everyone. Politicians only pretend and put statements on their websites but there's no opportunity for people to help or participate.'

When asked what might help immigrants Q is clear. 'If the government were more flexible it would help. If the visa fees were stable for five years. If the visa and work permit requirements were more flexible, that would help. Then this country would go up. It's a very beautiful, quiet country. It has strong police. Good schools. Low crime. It is only the politicians' policies that will make this worse. It was my struggle. All I heard from the government was "do more, do more". The government only want the "high" categories of worker. Then they think they can show off to other countries.'

Q is now working full-time, as he has done since arriving on the island. All of his children are in education. He says he still knows plenty of people facing situations like he has come through. He thinks that people are still treated like prisoners and that it is hard for bosses to get work permits. He sees this as a ridiculous policy that is no good for anyone.

'I love the Isle of Man,' Q says. 'I love my country. I had ten years of struggle but now I have no worries. Hopefully the government will think about immigration and relax the restrictions.'

Q has been remarkably cheerful and

generous throughout the time Graih has known him. When Q worked in restaurants he used to bring surplus food to the drop-in to share with everyone. He and Y once helped us with a fund-raising dinner. As he has struggled through so many harsh situations and overcome many obstacles he has always shown great determination, patience and optimism. As a worker he has contributed to the island's economy and continues to do so, keen to support and participate in his adopted country.



Our lovely drop-in table: home to many strange and transforming conversations!

A Manx Perspective

Background

The Syrian civil war has been ongoing since the Spring of 2011 and has created the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. By the end of 2016 the conflict had resulted in the deaths of half a million civilians, with 13.5 million needing assistance in Syria, and a further 6.3 million internally displaced. Almost 5 million had fled the country, with the vast majority ending up in huge refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq & Egypt - where most remain to this day. The conditions in many of these camps are desperate and, despite huge amounts of foreign aid, they cannot cope with the magnitude of the crisis, particularly as these camps are in relatively poor countries with severe needs for their own populations. Many European states have closed their borders, especially in eastern Europe, although others such as Sweden and Germany have been more welcoming, especially Germany which accepted over one million Syrian refugees in 2015 alone. The crisis has not gone away despite a 2016 agreement between the EU and Turkey which has stemmed the flow across the Aegean Sea to Greece. However many refugees from both Syria and sub-Saharan Africa continue to brave the dangers of a Mediterranean crossing, only to be stranded in Italy and Greece, with other European states reluctant to share the burden.

The U.N. Refugee Agency had advocated that 10% of the 5 million in the Middle Eastern camps should be resettled in a third country, particularly the most vulnerable. Countries around the world pledged to

resettle nearly 250,000, half of the estimated target. In 2015, David Cameron committed the UK Government to accept 20,000 over 5 years from the Middle Eastern camps, and by the end of 2017 some 8,000 had arrived.

Manx response

Many Isle of Man residents reacted to the distressing images of Syrian refugees fleeing the horrors of war and looking to Europe for help. Individuals and groups supported and organised aid projects to help those in refugee camps, and some volunteered their services there, returning to the Island with first-hand accounts of how desperate the situation really was.

From 2012-16 the IoM Government had given over half a million pounds to large charities which were active in camps housing Syrian refugees, but some Manx citizens felt it should also be possible to help with the resettlement scheme and welcome a very small, but fair, number here on the island to be given an opportunity to start a new life in a safe place. Over the final half of 2016 four Manx organisations - the One World Centre, Amnesty International IOM, Refugees Welcome IOM, and Manx Support Refugees - organised a campaign and petition requesting that the island accept 25 Syrian refugees, this being our proportionate share of the UK's commitment of 20,000, according to population.

On 30 January 2017 representatives from the four organisations met with the Chief Minister, Howard Quayle, and the Minister for Policy & Reform, Chris Thomas. We presented a petition of over 1,000 signatures which requested that the Government take in 25 Syrian refugees who had fled war and persecution, as part of the UK's 20,000 commitment. Funding could come through

the Government's international aid budget. We stressed that civil society would also play their part in welcoming them to our shores, having received over 50 offers of such support from individuals, charities, church groups, businesses and other organisations which had committed to help either in a practical or a financial way. These included many people who offered professional support or practical assistance, including English language tutors, psychologists, counsellors, financial advisors, and help with transport, clothing and food. Some people even had experience of working with refugees.

The Government responded promptly following a discussion in the Council of Ministers. They would not accept any Syrian refugees here on two grounds. Firstly, there would be legal and administrative difficulties in becoming part of the UK scheme. (In our meeting they had cited, for example, differences in benefit rates between UK and IoM as being problematic). Secondly, they believed that the Island did not have the necessary trauma counselling and treatment services which would be required. (This too had been raised during our meeting. Although many refugees had undoubtedly suffered severe trauma, we felt that our share could be selected to exclude these. We pointed out that even the Scottish isle of Bute had accepted 50 under the scheme). The Government simultaneously announced a grant of £975,000 from the international aid budget to the UN refugee agency for Syrian refugees in camps in the Middle East, believing that was a more appropriate way to help.

Although welcoming the large grant, we felt

the objections raised could have been overcome if there had been the political will to do so. An opportunity had been missed, for government and citizens together, to offer a real Manx welcome to a small number of desperate people.

The One World Centre

The One World Centre is a registered Manx Charity. As a Development Education Centre it's our mission to encourage understanding and respect for the lives and cultures of all people – so that we can help to share a fair society that celebrates our global differences and interdependence. This sees us highlighting the links between our lives in the Island and those of people in developing countries; raising awareness of global economic, social, political and environmental issues; challenging stereotypes; fostering a positive attitude that embraces human rights and responsibilities and creating opportunities for people to become active global citizens.

Listings (let us know more!)

Stauros (Christian addiction agency):
Gordon Buist, 453731

Quing (wellbeing and recovery): Graham
Clucas, 246713

Motiv8 (addiction counselling): 627656

Salvation Army: 627742

Office of Fair Trading: 686510

Broadway Baptist Church: 614932

Housing Matters: 675507

ASAT (Adult Services Access Team):
686179

Health Visitor for Vulnerable Adults:
665941

Environmental Health: 685894

The One World Centre: 800464

Events (let us know more!)

Sunday 9th September, 19.30 at 11 Hilary
Road. Prayer evening for Graih and
Stauros. All are welcome!

Sunday 21st October, 19.30 at 11 Hilary
Road. Volunteer evening for Graih's
volunteer team. It would be lovely to see all
our volunteers there!

Did you know?

...that the net fiscal impact of immigration
(how immigration affects the public
finances) is notoriously hard to ascertain?
Most studies suggest that the impact
(positive or negative) is very small,
amounting to less than 1% of GDP.

...that more people die at Europe's borders
than any other border worldwide?

...that many people argue that open borders
are a matter of social, political and economic
justice?

...that smugglers made an estimated \$17.5
billion profit on routes to Europe 2000-15?

...that \$238 million of EU taxpayers' money
was given to arms and technology companies
for research and development around border
security 2002-13?

...that \$12 billion was spent by Europe on
deportation 2000-14?

Sources: Fullfact.org; Global Justice Now; New
Internationalist

Memories



Cliff Richards was, by his own humble admission, ‘the nicest guy you’d ever meet’. I suspect that there were at least a few who might dispute that statement! Cliff had a fierce temper and would get wound up easily, especially when he’d been drinking.

Yet Cliff was also generous and tender. He truly loved another alcoholic he had a relationship with until she died. He used to buy presents for my small son. His trust was hard to win but when he knew you were on his side you could tell him anything. He formed excellent relationships with the Health Visitor for Vulnerable Adults and another man at the church that helped him with many of his struggles.

Periods of sobriety and stability came and went. In too many ways his life was a long battle. He loved to sing and play the guitar and cackle wildly.

I remember sleeping (or trying to) overnight at the drop-in in our early days.

We just had sofas laid out in a room then so everyone attempted to sleep in there. One guy was snoring loudly and when he woke up would always ask what the time was. At one point in the middle of the night Cliff, clearly tired of the disturbance, leapt off his sofa, marched to the main light, switched it on and shouted ‘time to ***ing sleep!’ – thus ensuring that we were all fully awake and just ready for a peaceful few hours’ repose...

He died at the age of fifty-three.

Michael Manning

What we need

Volunteers (speak to Erica Irwin, details below)

Money (bank details below)

Kitchen roll

Large, strong bin bags

Fresh fruit

Tins of beans and other tinned ingredients

Peanut butter

Ham, cheese, sandwich stuff

Graih's bank details:

Lloyds, Prospect Hill, Douglas

A/c no. 00509505

Sort code: 301280

Thank you so much for your generosity. It allows us to continue to open and provide a generous welcome for those we serve.

Contact

Editor: Michael Manning, michael@graih.org.im, 324767. Any ideas, letters, questions, news, listings, pictures or submissions for the *Gazette*, send them here!

Graih's drop-in and volunteering: Erica Irwin, erica@graih.org.im, 224807.

Drop-in opening hours:

Sunday: 12.30 – 14.00

Monday: 10.00 – 14.00

Tuesday: 12.30 – 14.00

Wednesday: 10.00 – 14.00

Thursday: Closed during the day

Friday: 10.00 – 14.00

Saturday: Closed

We're open every evening apart from Saturday from 21.00 – 22.00.

Office mobile, manned only when we're open: 304381.

Much more information about Graih can be found on our website: www.graih.org.im

Graih's address: The Alpha Centre, Broadway, Douglas IM2 4EN

Graih is a Manx-registered charity, number 1012.

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