



Proud to be a place of safety for refugees and asylum seekers

Thanks Kirsty and thank you to Oxfam Cymru for organising this Stand As One rally today.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share some words from Amber Esther, the Co-Chair of Swansea City of Sanctuary. She sends her apologies as she cannot make it here today but is herself, an asylum seeker, and she has a message for those seeking sanctuary in the crowd:

It's my great privilege on behalf of Swansea city of sanctuary and people of Wales to welcome you to your new home here.

Each one of you arrives here from different places with different experiences. I can imagine the horrors you have experienced and the personal sacrifices you have made in order to make the journey to the UK. Many of you will have left behind family members as well as jobs, friends and a way of life.

But now you have in common this place, this new land and the opportunity to leave that trauma behind you; to go forward establishing a new and better existence.

You've travelled a very long way to start a new life in a country you know very little about, and it is understandably a daunting prospect. I'm sure you will find Wales is full of warm, friendly and welcoming people.

So now to my part: I'm Eleri and I'm the development worker for Swansea City of Sanctuary, hopefully my face and my name isn't new to many of you. City of Sanctuary is a grassroots movement, developing a culture of welcome and hospitality for those seeking sanctuary across the whole of the UK and Ireland. Wherever people seeking sanctuary go, we want them to feel safe and find people who will welcome them as well as understand some of the reasons they are here. I'm aware that I'm speaking on behalf of a growing movement, both in the UK and in Wales. In the last 12 months the City of Sanctuary movement has doubled in size across the UK and in Wales we now have at least 8 City of Sanctuary groups spanning the nation. I know some of those supporters are in the crowd today.

At a political level, although immigration is not a devolved issue, there are areas where the Welsh government can and has made a difference to those seeking sanctuary who have been dispersed to Wales. Asylum seekers in Wales are entitled to free ESOL classes, and have access to primary and secondary healthcare. These are policies which differ to those in England. It is brilliant to see more sympathetic and human-centred policies coming from the Welsh Government, but we recognise there are other areas and opportunities to improve the welcome offered to those dispersed to Wales, transport and a dedicated destitution fund are prime examples.

Whilst I think most of us are aware of huge rises in reported cases of hate crime in the aftermath of the EU referendum, I would like to point out that there has been a similar rise in offers of support- from both organisations and individuals. Locally, in Swansea, we try to involve as many people and organisations as possible, when developing our culture of welcome. We talk about City of Sanctuary being what our supporters do, and I cannot emphasise that enough. In Swansea we are lucky to have a fabulous network of supporters- around 145 organisations and as of yesterday 138 excellent volunteers, many of

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whom are experts by experience of the asylum system. Without these hours of commitment, dedication, as well as skills and energy we would not be able to carry out a fraction of what we achieve. If you're not already involved in some way, please come and find me later today, or google city of sanctuary- all our contact details are there.

I'll say it again, City of Sanctuary is what our supporters do- this includes you. Yes there are challenges but there are also huge opportunities. With your help, together we can make welcome the reality for people seeking sanctuary in Wales.
Diolch, Thank you.

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