

Document name: The refugee crisis requires collaboration between big and small charities.
Document date: 2015
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<http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/stephen-morley-refugee-crisis-requires-collaboration-big-small-charities/article/1363673>

The refugee crisis requires collaboration between big and small charities

11 September 2015

Stephen Morley

The refugee crisis has been brewing for the past year and has suddenly come into sharp focus after pictures were published last week showing the body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi washed up on a Turkish beach. The public mood has shifted dramatically, and now many people want to help. The key question is how they can do this.

The response from professionals in this field, the international charities, has been the usual one: "We are best placed to support refugees; please donate your money to support us."

For many people, especially here in Stroud, Gloucestershire, this is not enough. Emotionally moved by the plight of millions, people don't want to simply click a button and then move on to something else; they want to show solidarity, support and simple human warmth. Using the power of social media, Stroud Supporting Calais Refugees has sprung up overnight and already has 1,500 supporters on *Facebook* and a van-load of clothes, tents and other donated items ready to be delivered to Calais.

This simple idea – that people are in need, we want to help, we will find them and support them – has been at the heart of human society for thousands of years. It is the basic tenet of most religions. Indeed, this spirit was the founding stone of many of today's aid organisations. For example, Oxfam was formed by a group of Quakers, social activists and Oxford academics responding to the great famine in Greece in 1942. Now, though, with the professionalisation of emergency response, the "enthusiastic amateur" is deterred from contributing aside from detached donating.

This clash between big and small charity is being highlighted now for a number of reasons. Social media now enables people to coordinate very quickly, and big organisations are behind the curve on this. People have grown tired of the old ways, of leaving it to the government and organisations to solve these crises. And this refugee crisis is more tangible than others in recent times, as people returning from summer holidays witness scenes of dire need and share these stories with their neighbours.

Yes, the situation is more complex than it seems at first glance. Yes, it is difficult for charities to coordinate a messy response from many who are desperate to deliver support in person.

The real question is this: why does big charity need to control this basic human response? When the zeitgeist changes so dramatically, catching and taming the energy and emotion into an ordered response is hard work and loses impact in the process. The real challenge is how all the responses, big

and small, can be welcomed and coordinated in a spirit of chaotic collaboration.

On a local level, this means long-standing local activists (councillors, politicians, charity workers) welcoming the sudden wave of support and helping to channel the energy in the best direction for the greatest good, avoiding the all-too-human temptation to shape responses in their image.

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