

SPONSOR REFUGEES

Citizens UK Foundation for Community Sponsorship of Refugees

WRAP and the ride to Aleppo

In a small town just 30 minutes outside of West London, about a mile from the local train station, past the co-op and Shoulder of Mutton pub, change was underway. Whether it was the devastating images of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi specifically or the tragic plight of millions of Syrian refugees generally that led to the congregation of action-driven citizens in Wendover is hard to answer. But what was certain was the unwavering commitment to change the lives of a refugee family forever.

The sponsorship journey is not straightforward. The trail twists and turns through local councils, housing, benefits, and fundraising requiring hard work and focus. However, Wendover Refugees Assistance Project (WRAP) transformed problems into challenges and on February 8th and 9th 2020, the group had somehow managed to involve the community at large to ride the miles from Aleppo in Syria to Wendover in the UK - on a bicycle!



In setting the scene for this ambitious bike ride, the WRAP group cracked the code on something key to community sponsorship, namely to engage the entire community. Ownership and participation systematically breaks down barriers and challenges stereotypes and discrimination. On a lighter note, it elevates curiosity and offers a safe space to satisfy it.

To raise the £9,000 required by the Home Office, the WRAP group set the scene for traversing the +2,500 miles from Aleppo to Wendover. Ten exercise bikes neatly arranged on the Manor Waste outside Budgens became that weekend's most attended event.

By the end, 350 riders biked 3,321 miles. 22 teams from the local community - sports and fitness clubs, school, youth and U3A groups, businesses and charities - and lots of groups of families and friends took part and cheered on. By Sunday evening, the dozen or so volunteers from WRAP were no longer faring alone in sponsorship.

In the group's effort to get a vulnerable refugee family from conflict to community (the title of the ride), WRAP managed to raise a staggering £9,443 over the course of the weekend. The amount alone is testimony to the importance of placing the local community at the heart of sponsorship. After all, it is the community that ultimately decides how welcome and successful the integrational efforts of the family and the group will be. In more practical terms, employment opportunities, schools, friendships, clubs, public transport etc. are all facilitated by a local community with an open heart.

