

## Compassion Story of the Month

### Extending Compassion Across the Globe

By Robert A. Oeser

*With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a “compassion story of the month.” This is the eighth. Information on submissions from Brattleboro area residents is offered below.*

Brattleboro being a compassionate town means acting on behalf of those in need locally. But it also means extending this compassion to others in need wherever they might be. At present, those in the world most in need of assistance are likely to be refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, many now finding themselves in European refugee camps.

Most of us are familiar with the huge challenges involved in bringing such persons to Vermont. But creative groups and individuals have been finding ways to help these families and individuals wherever they might be.

Among the most energetic and creative of such groups is one located right here on Main Street in Brattleboro, in the basement of Centre Church. How many of us, walking or driving along Main Street have any idea that this is happening?

The group is called Carry Me Home, and it sends shipments of donated clothing, shoes, blankets, and sleeping bags to these refugees. Together with their counterparts on the other end, Carry Me Home also came up with the idea of “rescue bags” - a full change of clothing and other items needed by those refugees crossing the Mediterranean - one of the routes used by refugees - to get to Greek islands.

And the program provides “outfit packs” for children and adults which include both underwear and outerwear geared to those who are cold, wet, and possibly hypothermic. Footwear is packaged separately and includes a pair or two of socks.

Shipments to date, more than 10 metric tons of carefully sorted items, have been sent to Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and several locations in Greece. The shipments are carefully coordinated with field volunteers and camp coordinators on the other end, trusted partners of the arriving refugees, who supervise the distribution of the goods and regularly advise the Brattleboro team as needs and priorities shift.

Speaking with Inga Plisz Paluch, the current Carry Me Home director provides some sense of the enormous energy and creativity that goes into these efforts. They have recruited a deeply committed group of volunteers, like Carly Reitsma, who has been with Carry Me Home from day one, and seek valuable assistance from wherever it

might be available, even, at one point from a British Airways flight attendant who travels to Greece twice a month and visits the camps. To help publicize their efforts and raise funds they have organized films and special dinners.

Ms. Paluch told me that one of the camps located in Patras in Greece is serving as a temporary home to as many as 2,000 refugees at a given time. The most stressed among them are the pregnant women and the families with newborns sleeping in tents. Aware of the need, and regularly informed of numbers and even due dates, Carry Me Home has sent baby clothes and “welcome packages” for the infants and their new parents.

It’s hard to imagine a more compassionate undertaking, and it’s enormous satisfying to know that this life-saving effort is based in our town. Whatever we’re doing, let’s take a few moments to go through our closets, pull out items that might be useful to these refugees, and drop them off at the “In the Moment Records” store at 143 Main St. from which they are collected by Carry Me Home volunteers. Small and medium size adult clothing and shoes of all sizes are in particular need at present.

Volunteers are *always* needed for sorting and packing every Friday from 9 AM to noon in the basement of Centre Church. And financial contributions are vital to permit the shipping of this crucial assistance to the refugees. You can make a tax deductible contribution via Pay Pal at <https://www.carrymehome.org/> or mail checks to Carry Me Home, 193 Main St., Brattleboro, Vermont 05301.

Talk about compassion, it’s hard to do better than this.

*Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: [compassionstory@gmail.com](mailto:compassionstory@gmail.com) or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, c/o Robert Oeser, PO Box 6001, Brattleboro, VT 05302. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in subsequent months.*