

RRIS Students volunteer to help African refugees within Israel

RRIS students and graduates developed a humanitarian initiative program to help feed Sudanese refugees living in Israel.

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Last February two RRIS graduates Gilli Cherrin and Steven Fox, as well as their brothers Daniel and Jesse, developed a humanitarian initiative program to help feed Sudanese refugees living in Israel. After noticing the lack of integration programs instituted by the Israeli government, and the difficult situation that these refugees faced in a foreign land without support networks, they decided to do what they could to help.

Every Friday afternoon before Shabbat, merchants at the Shukh (Israel's outdoor market) are left with substantial amounts of unsold produce that would spoil over the weekend and are therefore normally thrown out. Rather than allow this food to go to waste, the young social entrepreneurs decided to collect whatever they could and bring it to those people who needed it. Thus the "Fugee Fridays" humanitarian and ecological initiative was born with the aim of addressing the issue of food waste by taking it to both the men's and the women and children's refugee shelters in Tel Aviv.

In recent years, thousands of African refugees have fled from persecution in their homelands to arrive in Israel, enduring great hardship and tribulations on their journey to freedom. After their release from detention camps, most find their way to Tel-Aviv's large refugee community, where they find a home in one of the run down shelters scattered

around the city's southern areas. It is there that these refugees begin to build new lives for themselves, receiving little to no municipal or government support. Fugee Fridays now delivers food to three such shelters, as well as to the needy local population that lives in their proximity.



Sudanese refugees in a shelter

At its onset, the project was comprised solely of the Fox and Cherrin brothers, who would collect the food themselves and ship it in a car borrowed from a friend. But soon enough, word had spread of their weekly sessions at the market, and more people came to help. Today, more than 100 students and adults have joined Fugee Fridays' volunteer base.

In the year since its creation, the program has not only developed a strong base of volunteers, but has also begun working with several established organizations such as the ARDC (African Refugee Development Center). On Friday's, after the food is delivered, several of the volunteers go



to play with the Sudanese children who live in ARDC supplied apartments in central Tel Aviv. Various programs have been developed to engage and integrate these children, including art, film, or athletic activities. As the number of helpers grows, the developing program has begun working on additional initiatives to help integrate the refugees and further incorporate them into Israel society. One of the programs creators, Jesse Fox, has recorded the developments and future aims of the program in a blog at www.sustainablecityblog.com/fugee-fridays

While helpers come from a wide variety of backgrounds, several of the volunteers and leading members within the program are students or graduates from the RRIS. Although many of these young adults are not native Israelis themselves, it is encouraging to see their passion and commitment to improving their new home country and helping those people in need. As the program grows, its members and creators hope to extend their volunteer network and to find new and creative ways to help the refugees and incorporate those people who aspire to make a difference in their society.