

Children In Crisis

A [changing] view from the Dunkirk camp

Janet Harvell, 20 June 2017



*'Some things once seen can never be unseen'
(UNICEF 2016).*

Aim For The Session:

- To share our continuing journey ... and reflect on life in the camp, one year on
- It began in 2015 ...
- Followed by a first visit to the Dunkirk camp in June 2016
- A second, follow-up visit in October 2016

Putting it into context ...

Children make up a majority of the world's total refugee population

*'Around the world **31 million** children are living outside their country of birth, including 11 million child refugees and asylum-seekers; another 17 million children have been displaced within their own countries by violence and conflict'*

(UNICEF 2016; p22)

Nearly...

- 1: 200 children is a refugee
- 1:3 children living outside their country of birth is a refugee
- Twice as many refugee children in 2015 as in 2005 (UNICEF 2016)
- Three out of every five international child migrants live in Asia or Africa.
- Europe accommodates just over 10%

June 2016

- There was a degree of hope for the future
- Families had been moved from the squalid Calais 'jungle' camp to the first UN recognised camp in France – Grande Synthe, Dunkirk.
- Stark contrast between the two:



Followed by the construction of purpose-built school and children's centre

With approximately 150 children living on the site, the Children's Centre was key to providing a 'sense of normality'



First

and

Second

Impressions

- Well organised
 - Clean
 - Well resourced
 - 3 meals provided per day
 - Small numbers of children/families using the children'
- Disorganised
 - Dirty
 - Limited resources
 - Food running out
 - Many more children using/accessing the children's centre

A year on ... spot the difference ...

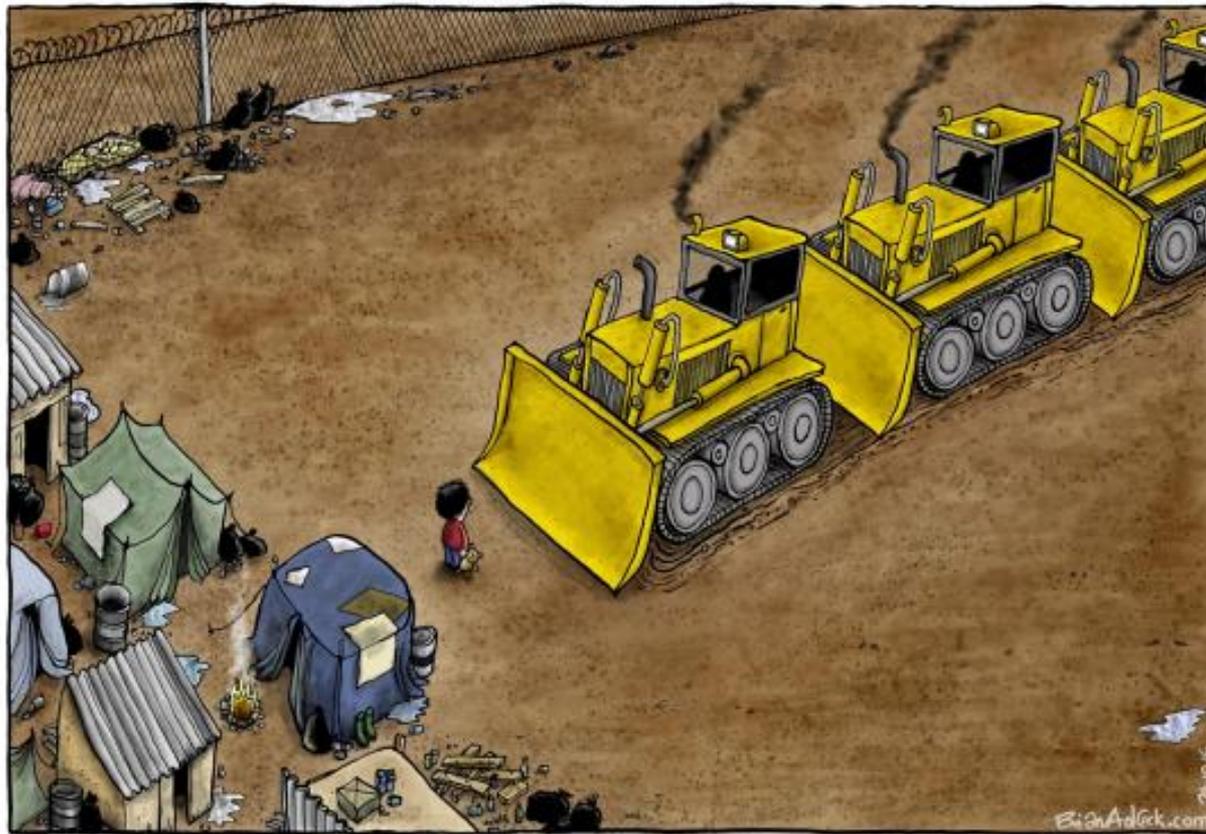




... what a difference 4 months can make



October visit coincided with the closure of Calais Camp



Challenges faced by refugee children

- Many children have experienced the terrors of war, loss of loved ones, dangerous journeys and brutality from those who should protect them
- Many children have been out of the education system for a long time
- Some have never had access to early years care
- Many end up living in the camp for months, and this will form their early memories
- There is a high turnover of children/families
- Long term/short term volunteers – [lack of] consistency



UNICEF (2016) identifies four key issues underlying the challenges faced by refugee children

- The general suspicion around refugees, exacerbated by the media
 - Loss and trust in the system and authority
 - EU member states refusing to accept responsibility
 - Slow/poor implementation of existing legislation and policy
- **The last two points being in direct contravention of the 1989 UNCRC, with Article 22 (Refugee children) stating that:**
- *Children have the right to special protection and help if they are refugees (if they have been forced to leave their home and live in another country), as well as all the rights in this Convention.*

The children's centre attempted to address this in some way by providing routine and opportunities for play.

Aims of the Centre: to promote

- Happiness and wellbeing – to be able to smile, laugh and relax
- Respect – for self and each other, no matter background
- Freedom of self-expression –to feel safe enough to be open and to develop self-esteem

A typical day in the camp for children might be ...

- The camp is quiet first thing ..sleep-in after escape attempts
- **10.00-13.00** Children's Centre open
Timetable includes free play, guided activities, singing and story time, outdoor play
- Children are given a snack and lunch is brought over from the kitchens
- **13.00-15.00** Children go home/play out in the camp
- **15.00 – 17.30** Children's Centre open
- Older children are collected and taken to French schools in the morning
- **17.30 onwards** Play in the camp, tea and prepare for nightly escape attempt

Art/Creative Play



Many visiting volunteers, individual and specialist skills





Lunch was especially important as we observed food shortages



Cultural Issues



Behaviour issues

THE KIDS WHO NEED
THE MOST LOVE WILL
ASK FOR IT IN THE MOST
UNLOVING OF WAYS.

-unknown

Lemon Lime Adventures



What Now?



Out of sight ... out of mind?

- Large numbers of Unaccompanied Minors sleep rough, without tents, wherever they can, often being forcibly moved on by police
- Ill Health – more than 55% have experienced ill health, 50% of these have been unable to access medical aid
- Scabies, gum infections and fungal infections at an all time high (shortage of suitable footwear, exacerbated by wet weather)
- Children's hopes raised and dashed with devastating effects
- Decline in donations mean aid organisations often run out of supplies
- Accommodation centres – small numbers
- Children have to be part of a 'family' to access these

... but there will always be hope

