

Ballakermeen students launch #iomyouth4syria campaign

Ballakermeen High School's student politics club, the Voltaire Society, met after school on Wednesday to look again at the issue of Syrian refugees. The session was led by Laura Cretney, Director of Al Ishara Consulting, an island-based consultancy specialising in Middle Eastern affairs. She was joined by Clare Bader from the One World Centre. As well as giving an in-depth analysis of the current humanitarian crisis, both speakers shared their experiences of visiting refugee camps in the region and the dire need for resettlement opportunities. The session included a wide-ranging and fascinating discussion about the challenges any island-based programme would entail and considered ways in which these could be overcome, citing examples such as the Isle of Bute and the Shetlands.

Shanne Gutierrez, President of the Society, thanked the guests for their contribution and called upon the assembled students to support the campaign **#iomyouth4syria**, which was launched by Ballakermeen sixth formers in the wake of the failed Tynwald motion to investigate the possible resettlement of refugees here. "We were very disappointed with the outcome of the debate", said Shanne. "We do not understand why the government did not conduct an open investigation into the feasibility of resettling Syrian refugees on the island."

Ciara Sowerby, co-founder of the group, agreed, adding "a lot of young people at Ballakermeen are interested in this issue and we are calling on like-minded students in other secondary schools to join our campaign." Ben Tarpey, leader of the student Amnesty group at Ballakermeen, added, "With moral leadership and good planning, I truly believe we could successfully integrate refugees here. The Isle of Man could be an example to the rest of the world."

The meeting included a video message of thanks and support from UK-based Syrian activist, Baraa Kouja, founder of the charity 'From Syria With Love'. Baraa, a refugee himself, visited the island in 2017 and spoke to students at different schools around the island, including Ballakermeen.

