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Students abandon rail adventure to bring refugee relief

Two Northumbria University graduates have halted their European backpacking adventure and pitched up at a refugee camp in Budapest to help families who have fled war torn Syria.

Aidan Panagarry and Ridley Browell, who both graduated from Northumbria in July, have put their travel plans on hold after arriving in Budapest train station to absolute chaos. Distressed by what they saw in the refugee camp, which has been temporarily set up in the station, the boys decided to stay in Budapest and help crisis hit families.

Ridley, a 23 year old Fashion Design graduate, described the moment they arrived: “As we got into the station, there was a huge police presence and people were just everywhere you looked. As we went down into the metro it was shocking, with whole families penned into tiny areas using pizza boxes for beds, few blankets for the children and babies with hardly any food. Aiden and I were in absolute bits and as we travelled to our hostel, we both made the decision that we had to go back and help these people.”

Over the past few days, the Hungarian authorities have struggled to cope with the rising number of refugees travelling to Budapest, in an attempt to get to Austria. Hundreds have refused to leave the train stations, with many declining food and water and vowing to go on hunger strike if they are not taken to Germany.

After asking for donations from those back home, as well as using their own money, the graduates returned to the camp, handing out water, food and blankets to those in need. They were met with overwhelming gratitude.

Aiden, who graduated with a degree in History, said: “Honestly, the people we were helping could not have been nicer. On the first day we went back, we were really struggling to carry the packs of water we had bought and a Syrian man, Adnan helped us all day and completely broke down when we gave him a pizza for him and his family. People here couldn’t have been more appreciative.”

The boys, who were deeply shocked at the conditions of the temporary refugee camps, say they have only done what anyone else would, having seen the conditions and are deeply thankful to all those that have donated.

Ridley said: “The response has been absolutely amazing. We shared a status on Facebook and it just snowballed. Seeing so many people donate and write such kind messages was just so great to see and we cannot thank everyone enough. This is a humanitarian issue and we just felt like we had to help.

What makes it even better is that as we went back, each day the conditions were generally improved and the mood around Keleti really has been incredible. We both hope these people get to somewhere safe and can at some point, put this all behind them.”

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