

Suffolk Refugee Support

Annual Report 2015-16



Summary of the Year



It has been a challenging year at SRS, as the ripples of record worldwide displacement continue to reach us here in Suffolk. We continue to work tirelessly to support high numbers of vulnerable people, among them for the first time resettled Syrian families. Our profile has never been higher, with increased publicity of our work including national TV coverage, but the funding environment remains

highly uncertain. We have been deeply moved by the response of the wider community in Suffolk to the plight of refugees over the last year, from generous individual donors and people organising fundraising events, to an upsurge in volunteer numbers and offers of help. We are very grateful to all for enabling us to support so many people with complex needs.

“Suffolk Refugee Support is such a beacon example of the good help and will of people in our region and in our communities”

Richard Howitt, MEP for East of England, 2015

Suffolk Refugee Support aims to provide a warm welcome to those who have left their countries fearing for their safety. We help to rebuild shattered lives and support individuals to become fully functioning members of UK society.

Supported by:



LOTTERY FUNDED



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Drop-in Advice Service

Our Advice Service has had another busy year, delivering more than 6000 individual advice sessions to 535 refugees and asylum seekers from 40 countries between March 2015 and February 2016. The complexity and uncertainty of our clients' lives is reflected in the wide variety and unpredictability of the issues upon which we are asked to advise. Our experienced Support Workers, assisted by a team of volunteers, deliver good quality, independent advice, and no matter what issue we are presented with, we aim to resolve it. We have built relationships of trust over many years with our clients and their communities, and also with local external agencies, so that we can deliver a professional and cohesive service, signposting where necessary. With vulnerable, newly-arrived asylum seekers we provide a warm smile and sympathetic ear, and address their often complex needs quickly, while with our more settled clients we try to empower them to help themselves wherever possible. Our Advice Service is also the ideal opportunity for staff to address unemployment and skills shortages with our clients and to help them access the health services—both physical and mental—they so often need.

“SRS helped me fight to get my claim for asylum accepted. They helped me to have confidence in myself. They explained the process to apply for JSA when I first got refugee status. They helped me get a NI number.”

Legal Aid Asylum Advice

Suffolk continues to be a complete Legal Aid ‘desert’ in terms of immigration legal advice, creating real access to justice issues for asylum seekers whose cases, and therefore lives, can depend upon good quality advice. We are very grateful to the legal adviser from Solomon Solicitors in Luton, who continues to visit us for a monthly legal surgery. This has provided a vital lifeline for more than 50 clients over the last year, with the support of our staff in facilitating the appointments. We are also grateful to Essex-based legal firm Fisher Jones Greenwood for their ongoing help, in particular with unaccompanied minors. Other clients are forced to find solicitors in different parts of the country, with SRS often bearing the brunt of the travel costs, which are not covered under Legal Aid. We are thankful for the 30 minutes of free legal advice provided by the Suffolk Law Advice Centre, based at ISCRE in Ipswich, and we will continue to campaign for better provision of high quality legal advice in the county.

English for Speakers of Other Languages



The ability to speak English is a vital tool to empower refugees and help them integrate into UK life. It is particularly important in accessing health services, improving employment opportunities and preventing social isolation. We run six ESOL classes every week throughout the year, focusing on pre-entry, entry one and entry two levels, with 81 students attending, 57 on a regular basis. We also offer one-to-one English

lessons for those who need extra support. Our lessons are delivered by our ESOL tutor, along with a dedicated team of volunteer English teachers. In class tests and via self assessments, all 57 have shown “some” (25) or “significant” (32) improvement in their English skills with 30 passing exams .

“From going to ESOL classes my English is much better. I can now talk to the GP and he understands me.”

Improving Physical and Mental Health

Whether it be accessing health services, making healthy lifestyle choices or unlocking past trauma through counselling, improving the physical and mental wellbeing of our clients is integral to our work. It is built into our Advice Service, ESOL classes, and the groups we run. This year we helped 105 clients with health issues, and, through our various services and with external partners, delivered sessions on: English & medicine, relaxation & wellbeing, dental care, exercise & zumba, pilates & smoking cessation, cancer awareness & healthy eating. We have helped clients to pay for gym membership, swimming classes, bikes and sports clothing. The trust we build with our clients enables us to work closely with counsellors to ensure that help is available for issues arising from trauma and anxiety. We have run art groups to help clients express themselves and arranged farm trips for the therapeutic benefits of working with animals and reconnecting with the land.



“I love being able to run and exercise to music. Going to the gym helps me to sleep like a baby.”

“When I stayed in hospital recently, I had a greater understanding of what was happening and was more confident to ask for help and I was not frightened.”

“Through SRS I have been introduced to counselling that can help me. I had given up hope and was not taking any of my medications.”

Employment Work

Of our clients who have leave to remain in the UK and are allowed to work, the vast majority are keen to do so. However, many face barriers to employment or find themselves stuck in low-paid jobs with few prospects. The work led by our Employment and Training Coordinator and delivered through our Advice Service aims to increase our clients' employability skills. Our support staff are trained in CV writing and using job search sites such as Universal Jobmatch.

Over the last year we helped 108 clients with employment issues such as CV writing and searching/applying for jobs. We completed 655 job applications with our clients. All of the 50 clients whom we interviewed after receiving a service reported increased confidence to apply for a job on their own. Thirty clients interviewed had found a job and four had started or improved their own businesses.

We also helped ten clients to secure voluntary work, including one client who completed 200 hours volunteering with Suffolk Constabulary as an administrative assistant. We also have around 12 volunteers working with us who are refugee clients.



"A support worker helped me apply for a driving job and gave me the confidence that I could get it. I got the job. I am really happy."

"At Suffolk Refugee Support I found help applying for the job. They gave me training for interview, supporting me all the time, they encourage me...Life is different because now my time is busy."

"Life is better with a job. Every Friday there is money in my bank."

"I attended the interview preparation course. It was helpful as I learnt how to speak and what questions I might get. It helped me at my interview for a temporary job which I got."

We delivered two training sessions on job applications and interview skills for eleven clients who reported they had been helpful for understanding the process of securing a job. We worked with eight clients on a one to one basis to help with studies, English, maths, taxi exams and other areas of skills improvement. We helped 16 clients to access external courses ranging from several degree level courses to Plastering and Food Hygiene. One of our previous Trainee Support Workers has completed the second year of his IT degree with a Distinction and is applying to do a Masters. Six clients were helped by us to access bursaries to make their studies possible.

Education and Training Courses

International Women's Group

Our International Women's Group continues to go from strength to strength. Meeting every Wednesday during school term, we have had a total of 52 women attending over the last year, with each session split between ESOL teaching and activities and partnership working. With the English teaching, the focus is on promoting confident oral skills and practical application of language.

The second half of each session is devoted to talks and activities, made as interactive as possible. We have worked with outside agencies such as Suffolk Fire Prevention Service, Terrence Higgins Trust, Chantry Dental Clinic, Cancer Awareness Suffolk, Suffolk Wellbeing Service and PCSOs to deliver sessions including dental health, sexual health, cancer awareness, fire safety, personal safety, wellbeing, healthy eating and dance fitness, with feedback suggesting that sexual health education and the exercise for mental wellbeing are particularly valuable. We have also organised trips to the Mayor's Parlour, Holywells Park and the Suffolk Punch Trust.



"I like dancing, it is fun and I have made friends.."

"I like exercise to stretch, it is fun and I laugh"

Family Support

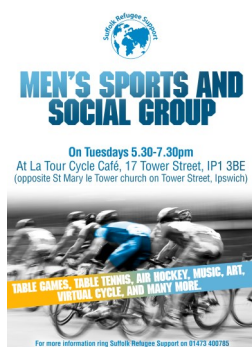
"They have made new friends and are learning a lot. They are getting more confident and learning lots of words."

"For me I have made new friends dropping off and collecting my son from nursery and am very happy because my son is happy."

With babies being born to those who are feeling more settled and able to look forwards with a sense of future, we continue to support these clients with negotiating health services, family support and education provision for the children. Within our refugee communities there is a great emphasis on these children doing well and making the most of the vastly improved opportunities that their parents missed out on due to wars, political instability and racial discrimination in their home countries.

This year we have supported 25 families with access to early years' provision, namely children's centres and nurseries. Feedback from clients has been very positive highlighting the benefits for the children in attending these sessions.

Men's Sports and Social Group



The group continued this year with similar attendance to last year (around 8 a session). Three of the boys were selected to play at Ramsomes Sports football club and were very pleased.

"The group helps me to be more sociable. I used to be very shy but not now."

In October 2015 the group changed venue to the La Tour Cycle Café. The café staff and owners have been absolutely brilliant with the lads; they have made them all feel very much at home. They have provided a range of activities including virtual cycling, table tennis, air hockey, arts & craft materials as well as various board games and music. Their cappuccino has also been a big hit!

"What they have gone through is unimaginable to us. Seeing them so keen to be involved, progressing each week, gaining confidence is very rewarding... They are very special to us."

Letter from chairman of Ramsomes Sports Football Club

Friends Group

Friends has continued to welcome and support asylum-seeking families in Ipswich. They find it a very helpful place to discuss with each other the asylum process and what happens after a positive decision. In 2015, two families received positive decisions and three new families joined the group. Two members started university courses and have continued to support the group. A highlight of the year was our stall at the Big Garden Party, run by ActivLives, for which members of the group made traditional home-cooked food from Iran and Sri Lanka.

"The group is like my family. As I know the people in the group I relax and do not feel so alone."

"I am an asylum seeker and not allowed to work and there are no opportunities to study. I have little to do. I look forward to coming to the group to share thoughts and problems. When I am at the group I forget my situation, I laugh, joke and am relaxed. When I get home my troubles come back to me and I find it difficult to sleep."

Volunteering

We are very lucky to have 55 dedicated volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life—without them we would not be able to deliver our services. They help with our Advice Service, with reception and job searches with clients. They assist with ESOL classes and clients with extra needs. Our Women's & Friends Groups are largely run by volunteers—teaching English, running the crèche and delivering workshops. We have volunteers with our Men's Group and FGM Project, and volunteer befrienders, drivers and interpreters with our Syrian Resettlement Scheme. Volunteers also give talks to the public and in schools, and a refugee volunteer often comes with us too. We particularly encourage our refugee clients to become volunteers and currently have around 12 working with us. Our volunteers donate approximately 155 hours per week to the activities we provide, totalling a staggering 8000 hours per year.

Syrian Resettlement Scheme



As part of the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme, political leaders across Suffolk's public sector agreed to take up to 200 Syrian refugees over the next five years. They will be among the most vulnerable families selected from refugee camps in the region by the UNHCR and we have been commissioned to provide specialist casework to support them. We welcomed the first two families in mid-March and several more since, preparing their housing using generous public donations of furniture and household items. We have taken on additional staff hours and are working with other stakeholders including Suffolk County Council, Anglia Care Trust, education, health and social care, and local church groups. The families have numerous health, social, educational and

integration needs to be assessed and addressed by our staff but are settling into their new lives well with our support.

"In March I came to England. Things are different, the weather and food! Life changed, there is no war...All people in Ipswich are friendly...Suffolk Refugee Support are lovely and they have helped me. I now go running, to the gym, to English class – Suffolk Refugee Support helped me with this." Goran, Syrian refugee

FGM Project

In March 2015 we began a programme to tackle Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) with funding from Suffolk Constabulary, Public Health Suffolk and the Rosa Fund for Women and Girls in the UK. We took on two staff members whose task was to raise awareness and share good preventative practice among both professionals and women/girls at risk. The intention was to try to eradicate FGM from Suffolk. In 2015 there were eight disclosures from FGM survivors among our clients and a support group for them was established by our team. We have delivered awareness-raising training to 173 practitioners up to March 2016 and secured positive local media coverage. It is important to point out that FGM is not an issue specific to refugees—the practice just happens to be prevalent in a number of refugee-producing countries.

Talks Team

With refugee issues in the spotlight so much over the last year, it has been especially important for us to inform the debate by reaching as many people as possible through our talks and presentations. Our Talks Team, comprised of staff, volunteers and refugees to bring personal testimony, have visited schools, churches, community groups and healthcare professionals. We have explained who refugees and asylum seekers are, why people are forced to leave their countries, given up-to-date facts and figures and both global and local perspectives. In total, we have reached approximately 2500 people.

The International Situation



The work we do and the demand for our services in Suffolk is set against an international context of record displacement levels. The conflict in Syria shows no sign of ending, increasing numbers of people in Iraq have been forced multiple times from their homes, and conflicts and human rights abuses continue around the world, many of them largely unreported. A tiny fraction of the world's refugees make it to Britain. In 2015 the UK received 32,414 claims for asylum, excluding dependants, out of more than 1.2 million asylum seekers newly registered across EU states, meaning the UK received less than 3% of asylum claims within the EU. The top countries of origin for asylum applicants in the UK in 2015 were Eritrea, Iran, Sudan, Syria and Pakistan.

UNHCR Global Trends Report

- A record 65 million people are displaced from their homes globally – more than 21 million of whom are refugees
- Developing countries currently host 86% of the world's refugees
- More than half of all refugees come from just three countries – Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia
- More than 3,700 people died crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe in 2015
- Top 4 nationalities crossing the Med in 2015 accounted for 84% of arrivals: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea
- More than half the population of Syria – over 11 million people – are displaced

SRS in the Media

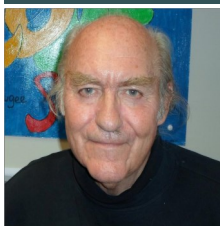


As the only specialist refugee charity in the region, our knowledge and views have been much in demand with the heightened media interest in refugee issues. We have featured frequently on BBC Radio Suffolk, in the East Anglian Daily Times and Ipswich Star, alongside several appearances on regional TV, discussing a range of issues from the 'refugee crisis' to Syrian resettlement, FGM and Refugee Week. We were on BBC Look East when Richard Howitt MEP visited our

offices, and ITV Anglia as part of a series on Refugees in East Anglia. We even made our first national TV appearance on BBC Countryfile, who reported on our trip to Clinks Care Farm near Beccles with a group of refugees who enjoyed the therapeutic benefits of being in the fresh air and working on the land. In total, we made 33 media appearances over the year, 18 in the local press, 11 on radio and 4 on TV. We also continued to build our social media presence, launched a new website and made a short film about our work (www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Nvrmvg2HZA).



Chair's Report



2015-16 was another successful year for SRS, with all of our long term projects – the 3-day-per-week drop-in Advice Service, the International Women's Group, Men's Group, Friends, our ESOL classes, employment advice and support and outreach work across Suffolk – continuing to run successfully.

We began two new projects in 2015-16. In helping our female clients we discovered some had suffered Female Genital Mutilation in their home countries. To investigate how widespread FGM is in Suffolk and whether girls living here are at risk, we were able to link in with national training and local funding to establish this project. So far we have identified over 30 victims in Suffolk. We are helping these victims, providing training for various agencies and working to help end this horrific practice. Thanks to the Rosa Trust, Suffolk Police Commissioner and Suffolk Public Health for funding this project.

The second new area of work concerned the arrival of Syrian refugees in Suffolk. We welcome the decision of Suffolk public sector leaders to accept up to 200 Syrian refugees over 5 years as part of the government's national programme. SRS has a contract with Suffolk County Council, the lead authority, for us to advise and support the refugees, from welcoming them at Gatwick Airport, taking them to their new homes and helping them orientate to life in Suffolk. The first refugees arrived in March 2016 and further families have followed.

Looking ahead, we expect Suffolk to continue as a dispersal area for asylum seekers arriving elsewhere in the UK, alongside the Syrian refugees coming directly to Ipswich. Recent legislation has also committed the UK to accepting a quota of unaccompanied child refugees from Europe, who will be dispersed among social services authorities. Suffolk already has a team of social workers who look after unaccompanied children arriving in Suffolk and with whom we work – we did a summer project for those youngsters in 2015. So we face an increase in demand for our services at the same time as other agencies who were based in Suffolk, such as the Refugee Council and the Red Cross, have withdrawn their services due to financial shortfall. For the period 2014-17 the SRS finances have been reasonably healthy with a three year Big Lottery Reaching Communities programme providing the majority of our funding, plus other generous funders (see details in Annual Accounts and Treasurer's Report) and a good inflow of public donations. The Big Lottery funding ceases on 28.2.17. We are applying for a further three years funding, have applications in with a number of other funders and are pursuing other avenues. In the event of any shortfall, we will plan to continue our services in whatever way possible. We do have some financial reserves but, as most grants we receive are restricted to specific objectives, there are limitations as to how far they may stretch.

Finally, may I thank all those who have contributed to the success of our work with asylum seekers and refugees over the past year: our committed staff under Rebecca Crerar's inspiring leadership, our many volunteers who provide their service gratis in all our projects, the Trustees who are responsible for SRS as a Charity and a Company, and all of our funders and donors.

Team Manager's Report



I am very happy to be reporting another busy but successful year for SRS, as we continue to grow to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers who find themselves far from home, in an alien culture and surrounded by uncertainty and confusion. I am proud that in July 2015, I celebrated my 10 year anniversary of joining SRS (with a trip to the pub!!).

The staff team is now 17 strong (9.4 FTE) – with this year's addition of Jodi Peck as our Syrian Programme Coordinator and new staff members Meg White-Thomson, Jemma Lynch and Vivienne Dubois, as our International Women's Group, FGM Programme and Employment & Training Coordinators respectively.

We continue to work with a huge number of clients covering a wide range of subjects throughout all the services we offer. This year, as mentioned in our chairman's report, we have commenced work on preventing FGM in Suffolk and with welcoming Syrian refugees from camps in the Middle East to Ipswich.

I am very grateful to all the staff, volunteers and trustees for their positive and helpful attitude towards achieving our goals to improve refugees' lives. Ian Stewart, Chair of the Board of Trustees, continues to provide advice and daily support to the team and we are very grateful for all the time he gives us. Alongside him, Nick Feldman, our Vice Chair and now Treasurer, is a real support too, both in his capacity as a trustee and also as a volunteer in the drop-in Advice service.

Without our team of 55 volunteers, we would not be able to provide all the services you are reading about in this report. They are an incredibly generous and helpful group with some marvellous skills and knowledge upon which we rely. We thank you all.

We are also extremely grateful to our funders and supporters, both large and small, without whom SRS would cease to exist. We especially wish to thank our supporters who have given us personal donations this year in order to help us to help others.

It is very sad to see people continuing to risk (and often lose) their lives in an attempt to reach safer shores. We are very disheartened by governments near and far who fail to protect or respect human beings. We realise that what we do is a fraction of what is needed, but we are determined to continue to work and support each individual we meet, one by one, family by family, in the hope that one day our work will not be needed. Sadly, looking at the current state of the world, I fear that this maybe a long time in coming.

We remember Alan Kurdi, the three year old Syrian boy whose body was washed up on the shore in Turkey in September 2015 and many more nameless individuals like him, and will continue to do what we can to help those who are victims of a cruel and unequal world.

Rebecca Crerar

August 2016

Treasurer's Report



It has been most gratifying for us all in SRS to have seen an enormous increase in the number of people in Suffolk who gave us financial support in the year. There was a swell of sympathy in the country as a whole following the press reports of so many tragic drownings, and it was reflected in donations to enable us to continue to help asylum seekers and refugees in Suffolk.

A large part of our annual funding comes from big grant makers, so we are very vulnerable to any withdrawal. Support from the Suffolk community helps us ensure that we can survive a drop in funds. We have now reached the position of being able to last for six months while we seek alternatives. The current year is the last of our three-year cycle of funding from The Big Lottery, and the reserves will give us more confidence as we apply for a renewal.

We received grants in 2015-2016 from the following, to all of whom we express our thanks:

- Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund
- Connected Sharegift
- Esmee Fairbairn Suffolk Fund
- Healthwatch Suffolk
- Henry Smith Charity
- Ipswich Borough Council
- Ipswich Locality Advice Partnership
- JP Getty Jnr Charitable Trust
- Mrs LD Rope Second Charitable Settlement
- North West Ipswich Big Local Trust
- Public Health Suffolk
- Realise Futures
- Suffolk Police Victims' Services Fund
- The Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust
- The ARM Trust
- The Ganzoni Charitable Trust
- The Mary Catherine Ford Smith Charity
- The Rosa Trust
- The Safer Suffolk Fund
- The Scarfe Charitable Trust

We are grateful too to Ed Day, for managing our accounting systems and reporting, and to Clive Mees for reviewing the accounts. The trustees are, as ever, grateful to all the staff for their diligent pursuit of fund-raising opportunities and the husbanding of our resources. This year we record our thanks also to Dilly Ridge, our outgoing treasurer.

Nick Feldman—Treasurer

Staff Team (as of September 2016)

Team Manager	Rebecca Crerar
Volunteer Coordinator	Lucinda Rogers
Support Worker	Liz Wood
Support Worker	Tim Heath
Trainee Support Worker	Verni Robinson
Syrian Resettlement Programme Coordinator	Jodi Peck
Syrian Resettlement Support Worker	Lee Turner
ESOL Support Worker	Fatima Khan
ESOL Tutor	Michaela Freeman
FGM Project Coordinator	Jemma Lynch
International Women's Group Coordinator	Meg White-Thomson
Men's Sports & Social Group Coordinator	Clem Turner
Services Development Officer	Catherine Costello
Business Development Officer	Karen Lawson
Administrative Officer	Marianne Walker
Communications Officer	Martin Simmonds
Employment & Training Coordinator	Vacant

Board of Trustees (as of September 2016)

Chairman	Ian Stewart
Vice Chairman /Treasurer	Nick Feldman
Secretary	Kate O'Driscoll
Trustee	Alan Blackshaw
Trustee	Marian Carter
Trustee	Miranda Griffiths
Trustee	Jenny Morcom
Trustee	Jo Schofield
Trustee (co-opted)	Marian Lanyon
Trustee (co-opted)	Danielle Waller
Trustee (co-opted)	Pauline Lane
Honorary Trustee	Beteja Grajqevci Dovao



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