



Suffolk Refugee Support Newsletter

Christmas 2016



www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk
38 St Matthew's Street, IPSWICH, Suffolk IP1 3EP



Refugees in Ipswich fear for families in Northern Iraq

The largest refugee community in Suffolk comprises Kurds from Northern Iraq. For many of them Ipswich has become a second home, a place of safety, but those originally from the Mosul area are increasingly concerned as the battle to retake the city from IS intensifies. Far-off conflicts can seem remote to us, but for our Kurdish clients, with families under siege, friends fighting in the Peshmerga forces and the areas they grew up in being destroyed, it is all too horribly real.

Refugee camps that didn't exist just weeks ago have sprung up among the ruined villages. The Hansham camp east of Mosul now shelters tens of thousands of people displaced by the fighting, including children nearly starved to death under the IS occupation. More and more horror stories are starting to emerge as people escape the city. One of our roles is to give a voice to our clients, so we arranged for three Kurdish refugees from the Mosul area to speak to BBC Radio Suffolk recently about their fears and concerns. This is what they said:

"The people living there at the moment, they have really hard lives. So many people they get killed, every single day."

"All the buildings are on the floor, there's all been explosion, people dying there, people lying there wounded; there's blood in the street, you can hear gunfire from everywhere, it's just madness."

"You stay inside, one place, in your room, all together, underground or wherever, because you are not safe. Any minute the banging on the door, you open the door and your life has gone."



© UNHCR/Ivor Prickett

"It's very, very hard to leave everything behind and then you haven't heard anything about your friends, about your family."

Did you know......that despite continued conflict, displacement and human rights abuses in Iraq, 90% (612 out of 682) of Iraqi asylum claims in the UK were refused in the second quarter of 2016?

"I want to go back so bad, to find out how they are, how they've been through, are they still alive? If I have a chance I would, but I don't have any chance to go back and ask about them, especially right now, because you know, of the situation now in Mosul, with ISIS and stuff, it's not safe to go back."

Suffolk Refugee Support continues to support those fleeing conflict around the world who are seeking to rebuild their lives in Suffolk.

New SRS Christmas Cards For Sale!

Designed by a refugee in Suffolk, all profits from the sale of these cards will go to Suffolk Refugee Support. Packs of 10 for £3 are available to order by post, from our office or on sale at events. For details of how to order, go to: suffolkrefugee.org.uk/new-srs-christmas-cards-sale-now



Supporting victims of modern day slavery in Suffolk



Slavery, in Suffolk...?

It's shocking to believe, but at Suffolk Refugee Support we are currently supporting 10 victims of modern day slavery. The victims are all women and all but one have been trafficked to the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

These women have all experienced issues with their immigration status so we have ensured that they are able to access professional immigration legal advice. Normally they would also be interviewed by the police having been put into the National Referral Mechanism. This process can be frightening for our clients and we are able to reassure them that they will be treated as the 'victim'. We have now agreed with the Metropolitan Police that they can use our office to meet any victims with a London connection, as this feels a 'safer space' than the police station in town.

Liz Wood (pictured right), Senior Support Worker at SRS, says: *"We are aware of how frightening it can be to have nowhere to turn for help after being coerced or deceived by unscrupulous traffickers. We provide a sympathetic, non-judgmental service to enable these individuals to access legal advice and be treated like human beings rather than commodities."*



SRS also has an International Women's Group, where women can support each other and begin their recovery. We work with other agencies providing counselling to try to deal with the emotional damage that the clients suffer. This also fits into a personally tailored programme of social and educational activities to try and improve victims' overall sense of wellbeing. If needed we refer the women to see a female solicitor to establish their immigration status.

SRS making a real difference in the lives of refugees

Good News Stories

SRS has been working hard to build trust between clients and local services. Len (not his real name) recently shared how SRS's involvement has challenged his perceptions of the police.

"Back home sometime is not easy to differentiate between the policeman and the soldier, because they all carry guns at all time. The police in my country are feared, because sometimes they arrest people in their homes, in the road and even in town in the daylight and these people will never be seen again. If somebody resist to be arrested he will be shot and the police will say the person was a thief and nobody will question that. Also, sometimes you need money to buy yourself free.

This is the image of the police I came with when I came to this country. My first year in Britain was the hardest year of my life. After claiming asylum, I was ordered to report to the police every week [a requirement for all asylum seekers], and that was worst thing that could happen to me. I was scared of the police. Every time I went to sign at the police station I was scared that I might be arrested and disappear, or may be put in prison. The worst fear I had, was that my country might pay money to the police to get me sent back home.

Through being able to see the police and talk to them over time, I have started to feel more confident that nothing bad will happen to me, and now see them as people who are there to help. So it is good thing for the police to come and talk to people like me, because it helps us understand how the system works here in the UK, removes fear one may have of the police and gives confidence to report to them when there is a problem."

Much of the work we do is helping clients negotiate complex financial and bureaucratic issues and advocating on their behalf. One recent example is a gentleman who was suffering from stress as a result of threatened court action due to apparent rent arrears. We were able to help him write a clear letter setting out his financial situation and arguing that he had not received any overpayments of housing benefit. As a result of this the arrears were cleared and our client was very happy and relieved at the outcome.

Ipswich life is 'beautiful' for young Syrian refugee Humam

[From an article in the East Anglian Daily Times, 11/11/16, by Gemma Mitchell]

A refugee who has escaped a war-torn province in Syria and resettled in Suffolk is urging people to reassess their views on victims of the crisis. Six weeks ago, Humam Muhrat, 20, moved to Ipswich with his mother, brother, 18, and 10-year-old sister to start a new life away from “machine guns” and “bombs”.



He said: “It’s a beautiful feeling here because you have a lot of chances for studying or working. The future is here. It is good and safe.”

In 2012 Humam’s family home in the Syrian city of Homs was destroyed by a missile. When men reach the age of 18 it is compulsory for them to join the Syrian Army. But Humam did not want to fight in the war: “Because first you shouldn’t kill innocent people, and second you may die.” Instead, Humam and his family fled to Lebanon, where they stayed for two years. Crowded among other refugees searching for safety, Humam was unable to study and was made to work for no money. This was a “miserable life”, Humam said, and “worse than Syria”. Hu-

mam said the Syrian Civil War had started out as a “peaceful protest” in 2011, but soon turned dangerous and now involved four or five armies.

Addressing public apprehension over refugees resettling in the UK, Humam said: “Don’t take the wrong idea on us, because we are smart people and kind people. Not a barbarian like they say in the news. They don’t know us until now to take a judgement on us. We just need the government and the people here to take a best photo of us, the Syrian people and families, not what they say on the TV.” Since being in Ipswich, Humam said he had experienced discrimination once while playing football. He said: “It’s an awful feeling, but you don’t need to answer, just ignore it.”

Today, Humam is looking towards his future in Suffolk, hoping to take classes to improve his English in order to go to university. He wants to work as a pharmacist, as his father did before he died in 2007 – of natural causes. One day he would like to return to Syria when the war ends and rebuild the life he left behind.

Helping Humam settle in Ipswich is Saleem Thabit, who is working for Suffolk Refugee Support. Saleem, 24, moved to Ipswich from Syria six years ago to study. He is now in his final year of a mechanical engineering degree at University of Suffolk.

He said: “When I first heard about Syrian families arriving in the UK I didn’t hesitate to go and help because I thought I would have liked someone to help me out when I first arrived here.” Describing Syria before the conflict started, Saleem said: “It was just beautiful. Words fail to describe how life was like there. Everyone I see I just tell them it’s unfortunate they didn’t go to Syria in 2010 or 2009.”



Support service helping families settle in Suffolk

Suffolk Refugee Support (SRS) has been commissioned to deliver specialist case work for those arriving from Syria. Jodi Peck, who is coordinating the programme for SRS, said the first families who arrived in March were settling in well. “They are integrating into the community, but I think it is still challenging for them sometimes,” she added. “The situation is still happening there, it still affects them even though they are far away from it.” The Syrian people in Ipswich meet up regularly and help each other adapt to their new community. Mrs Peck added: “I want to say ‘thank you’ to the public for support and donations, because we have had a nice response from people wanting to help.”

Syrian Resettlement Scheme Update

Since March, we have welcomed seven Syrian families to Ipswich, with two more due to arrive before Christmas. As well as putting on extra English classes, recently we took the families to Jimmy’s Farm, where some saw pigs for the first time! Our volunteers are also organising a Christmas party to teach them about traditional festive activities. Thanks to all who donated bikes and to La Tour Cycle Café and Lucy in particular for fixing the bikes to help people get around. Many thanks for all the other donations—we have all the furniture we can store at the moment. If you would like to volunteer as a befriender, one-to-one ESOL tutor or put together toiletry welcome packs, please contact Abbie, our new Resettlement Coordinator: agrace@suffolkrefugee.org.uk



Spotlight on SRS Volunteers & Staff

Staff News

A very warm welcome to Abbie, our new Syrian Resettlement Programme Coordinator. She is taking over from Jodi, who has done a brilliant job setting up and running our support services for Syrian families since March, and is moving back to her original role as Employment and Training Support Worker. Abbie will be working alongside Lee and Saleem on the Syrian project.

Social Work Student

We are delighted to welcome Hlambase, who is joining us for her social work training placement until March 2017 and is already proving to be a valuable addition to the team.

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

We are currently looking for volunteers for our Men's Sports & Social Group, Syrian Resettlement project and also a fundraising volunteer for half a day per week. If you are interested in any of these roles, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator: volunteer@suffolkrefugee.org.uk or visit our website for more details: suffolkrefugee.org.uk/what-you-can-do/volunteer

Events



We're delighted that Suffolk Refugee Support will once again have a tree at the Grand Christmas Tree Festival at St Mary-le-Tower church this year. There will be more than 80 trees on display, as well as a festival café and children's activities, and the festival runs from 1st-7th December. Our tree has once again been decorated by members of our International Women's Group. Pop along and take a look—we hope you like it!

We're very honoured that the wonderful Gippeswyk Singers have chosen us as one of the two local charities they will be supporting with their New Year celebration concert at St Michael's Church, Martlesham, on Sunday 8th January at 7.30pm. Tickets are available now!

Gippeswyk Singers
Conducted by Geoff Lavery
present a
New Year Celebration

Sunday 8th January 2017 7.30pm

St Michael's Church
The Drift
Martlesham Heath
IP5 3PL

Tickets £6 on the door

Or by sending a cheque to
Phil Speirs: 2 Treetops, Felixstowe IP11 9ER
(Cheque payable to "Gippeswyk Singers")

Profits this season go to local charities:

- Parkinson's UK (Felixstowe Support Group) - working for better care, treatments and quality of life.
- Suffolk Refugee Support (Ipswich) - providing advice and support for Asylum seekers and refugees in Suffolk.

www.gippeswyksingers.co.uk

Christmas Appeal



It's good to remember that the traditional Christmas story is about a Middle Eastern family who have to flee an evil regime and become refugees for a time. This season, please consider supporting refugees and asylum seekers who are rebuilding their lives here in Suffolk. Suffolk Refugee Support is a local charity, and we rely on grants and donations to provide vital services. You can make donations through BT's free MyDonate website, directly through our website www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk, or by cheque via the post.

We hope you've enjoyed our latest newsletter—we'd love to hear from you with your feedback or if you'd like to find out further information. If you received this newsletter indirectly, and would like to join our mailing list, please email our administrator: mwalker@suffolkrefugee.org.uk

Thank you again for all your support, donations and volunteering - we really couldn't manage without you!