



Suffolk Refugee Support Newsletter

Spring 2018



www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk
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Registered Charity Number: 1078794



A Syrian Family Reunited

Many of the people we support face the uncertainty and distress of being separated from family members. Our resettlement team works hard on family link applications in an effort to bring people back together. But occasionally something so joyful happens that we just have to share it with you!

When war started in Syria seven years ago, two related families were separated. One fled the country while the other survived under siege for two years in Syria. Eventually they met again by chance in Lebanon, but when one family was resettled to Suffolk it was feared they might not see each other again. Then we received the amazing news that the families had been linked and were to be reunited in Ipswich! We arranged for them to talk to each other in our office on speaker phone to break the news—when they found out, there were tears of joy and disbelief! The second family arrived recently (in the snow!) and here are a few words from Z, describing what the reunion means to him:



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“January 2018 is a month that I will never forget. I literally heard one of the best news in my entire life after the unbelievable happened. I was reunited with my best mate and his family who miraculously came from Lebanon to Ipswich under the Syrian scheme. By joking we still say to each other ‘are we really together again?’. Mum says: ‘it’s god who brought them here only because of my prayers..!’. I believe that it’s one of the life rewards for your hard work—work hard and definitely something joyful will happen. Their arrival to Ipswich has literally meant the world to me! I have known him since I was ten. I left to Lebanon when the war first started in Syria. We met there by an absolute coincidence after six years of separation and now we are reunited in Ipswich for the third time—it must be fate. I honestly can’t describe my feelings on that day when we sat close to the chimney after that delicious dinner; out of the windows we could see it snowing and we talked about memories from seven years ago.” [see page 3 for more resettlement news]

Don't miss out! Keeping in touch with SRS

New [data protection regulations](#) are coming in soon, meaning that we can only continue to send you our newsletters if you opt in to [our new mailing list](#) (even if you have done so before). So if you don't want to miss out on the good news stories, event invitations and refugee updates in Suffolk, please consider giving us your [consent here](#) and encourage anyone else who might be interested to do so too. Thank you!

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EVENTS

At SRS we know how important it is for us to get out and about, attending events and speaking to groups across the county about refugee issues. Below are some of the places we've been and people we've seen over the last few months!

Art Exhibition on now! Two local artists are currently exhibiting their work at Kerseys Solicitors in Ipswich, including the beautiful image below, inspired by the [Giles Duley photo](#) 'Arriving at Lesbos' (which we exhibited at the University last year). This picture is being auctioned to raise funds for SRS—huge thanks to the artist Anthony Wooding for this generous gesture. Find out more and [how to bid here](#).



Holocaust Memorial Day We were honoured to take part again in this important event at the University of Suffolk. Given this year's theme—The Power of Words—we spoke of



the link between the language used to describe Jewish refugees in the 1930s and some of that used around modern day refugees.

'The Transports' play A big thank you to Matthew Crampton and all involved in The Transports, a famous folk production retold with today's refugee experiences in mind, at The Apex Theatre in Bury St Edmunds. We'll be teaming up again with Matthew on Human Cargo for Refugee Week this June (see page 3).



International Women's Day 2018 Our event had extra urgency this year, as we celebrated the strength and diversity of women in Suffolk with food, fashion and music under the hashtag #PressForProgress. Huge thanks to our co-organiser Lara of Karibu (left) and Samia Malik (right) for the wonderful music. Our International Women's Group also [featured](#)



[recently](#) in the East Anglian Daily Times.



History of Refugees lecture We were excited to speak recently to the [Ipswich Arts Association](#) on 'A History of Refugees in Ipswich'. An impressive turnout of 140 people heard us cover four centuries of refugees—from Huguenots and Jewish refugees to the present day—and the mark they have left on the town.



Basque Refugee commemoration We were pleased to be present recently at the Old Workhouse in Wickham Market to witness the unveiling of a plaque (below) and hear talks commemorating the Basque refugee children who stayed there from 1938-1939.



Refugee Resettlement Update

Earlier this year, the UK government announced that it is halfway to resettling 20,000 vulnerable refugees by 2020. We are proud to be part of this, but we also know there is so much more that could be done, and so many Syrian families who are being denied the chance to live in safety. As we welcome new families (see page 1), we need your help to ensure the scheme continues to transform lives here in Suffolk.

Urgent—landlords needed to help Suffolk meet its refugee commitments

We are looking for private landlords with a social conscience who would consider providing move-on properties to lovely refugee families (mainly Syrian) who are established after 18 months-2 years in the UK and are looking for a new home as part of the next chapter in their resettlement—a very important psychological step! This would also enable programme properties to be freed up for new arrivals, as we currently have a bottleneck situation!

Landlords would need to be willing to accept tenants on Housing Benefit and with no guarantor (it is very difficult for recently resettled families to provide a guarantor who fits the criteria) as these are the two main barriers to the families sourcing private rental housing. The families would have a (good) reference from Anglia Care Trust on their programme tenancy, and would continue to be supported by Suffolk Refugee Support. Most importantly, you would be giving a huge helping hand to families who are trying to rebuild their lives and for whom a [safe, secure place to live means everything](#), plus you would be freeing space for more families and enabling Suffolk to meet its [resettlement commitments](#).

Ideally the properties would be in Ipswich, close to the town centre or on fairly direct public transport routes into town to give people access to support services, English classes etc. If you, or someone you know, might be able to help, please contact our Resettlement Programme Coordinator, Susannah: skennedy@suffolkrefugee.org.uk

A big thank you to Suffolk Police for the recent info session for newly-arrived families. Through their warm, approachable manner, young children who had initially indicated they were scared of the police were soon trying on police hats, playing with police radios and engaging in it all really well! Other clients present said they very much enjoyed the session and were grateful for the chance to meet directly with the police. A big thank you also to Rasha, our Resettlement Programme Support Worker, who did an incredible translation and facilitation job as always!

Refugee Week Exhibition—save the date!

The 20th anniversary of Refugee Week (18-24 June) is only a couple of months away, and we have some exciting plans to celebrate in Suffolk. We've been supporting a group of refugees and asylum seekers, including resettled Syrians and members of our International Women's Group, to work with [award-winning photographer Gillian Allard](#), who is originally from Ipswich, on a project called '[Tapestry](#)' for the PhotoEast 2018 Festival. Their creative endeavours will culminate in an exhibition on the Waterfront in Ipswich from 24 May—24 June, combining the PhotoEast Festival with Refugee Week. We'll be holding a reception evening at the exhibition venue on Wednesday 20 June—so save the date and [sign up to our mailing list](#) to make sure you are invited!



We're also excited to be partnering again with Folk East and Matthew Crampton on his new story and song show '[Human Cargo](#)' at The Cut in Halesworth on June 14th. Look out too for news of refugee-related films at Ipswich Film Theatre, as well as talks, schools work and much more!

Immigration Legal Aid update

We were pleased to be present recently at the [launch of Suffolk Law Centre](#), opened by Sandy Martin MP. A lot of hard work and fundraising effort has gone into this, so congratulations to our friends at ISCRE and



all involved. This will help to tackle some of the problems created by the 'legal aid desert' in Suffolk, but there is still no legal aid provision for asylum applications in the county, meaning we will continue to rely on solicitors from elsewhere, with all the issues of cost, delay and access to justice this entails.

Meanwhile, we have collaborated with the Strategic Migration Partnership to ask Sandy Martin MP to put written questions to the Home Office and Ministry of Justice asking what their plans are for legal aid contracts in Suffolk given the increasing numbers of asylum seekers in the county. We'll keep you posted on their replies!

SRS annual figures

With Suffolk playing host to increased numbers of asylum seekers and resettled refugee families, demand for our services remains very high. From March 2017—Feb 2018 we gave direct services to around 600 individual clients, including 150 people new to us. With family members taken into account, our services supported around double this number of people. We continue to see increased numbers of families and female clients accessing our services. In total, we supported people from 37 different countries. The top 5 countries of origin—Iraq, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka—really reflect the major conflict zones and human rights abuses of the last couple of decades.

Office news + job vacancy!

We're delighted to welcome Yaser Hamed to our team as Resettlement Support Worker. Yaser, who is originally from Aleppo in Syria and has a background in education, will bring valuable skills and experience to the role.

We're also very pleased to announce that Ellie Roberts will be starting soon as our new Volunteer Recruitment Officer, so if you've been waiting to hear back on a volunteer application, please bear with us!

Finally, we'd like to welcome warmly Gerry Toplis and Maggie Barradell to our [board of trustees](#).

P.S. Work on extending our office

space has been delayed by the snow but will be starting soon!



Job vacancy! We are recruiting an Advice Worker to join our team—[full details here](#)

Employment & training work

We continue to work to provide bespoke courses and tailored support to give clients increased skills for employment. Following on from the highly successful Food Hygiene course (100% pass rate!) we ran at the end of last year, we teamed up again with Realise Futures (adult education providers) to set up an Enterprise Sewing Course to give people new skills for work. Eight people attended this six week course from January to March this year, after which they will progress onto the next sewing course (a Level 1 accredited programme) for eight weeks starting in April. The attendees have made a range of items from bags and aprons to cushions and oven gloves. Some have sewn before, while some are developing new skills. One client who hadn't sewn before said "***I learnt lots of things from the teacher and I didn't have much experience. I learnt sewing, rules and safety, how to prepare and use the machine. I have learnt lots; I would like to do more of my own sewing work in the future***"



Asylum news

The [asylum statistics for 2017](#) show the UK received 26,350 applications, a drop of 14% compared to 2016, despite record numbers of people displaced globally. In fact, the UK received fewer than 3% of all asylum claims made in the EU in 2017. This is because there are almost no safe or legal routes to reach the UK (other than resettlement schemes). You can read the Refugee Council's top 20 facts in response to the statistics [here](#). 68% of initial decisions were refusals, the highest for some years, but 35% of appeals were successful. This suggests there are issues with the quality of decision-making—perhaps unsurprising given the [revelations from former Home Office caseworkers](#) of a culture of disrespect towards asylum seekers, staff taking pride in never granting asylum, and jokes about torture photos.

Those asylum seekers who do make it to the UK have had their support payments frozen since 2011. Often we have to help them with emergency food or other essential items—last year we provided a total of £15000 in individual support where none other was available, in order to prevent destitution. Now the Home Office, having been forced by the high court to review this, have announced they will increase the payments...by 80p per week. Could you live on [£37.75 per week](#)? It's surely no coincidence that [new figures from the Red Cross](#) show a sharp increase in food poverty among refugees and asylum seekers.

The Big Toy Giveaway!

We took a Syrian refugee to speak to Year 6 at Whitton Primary School recently—the students really enjoyed meeting him but we had no idea their response would be so generous! They collected children's toys for refugee families, and when we picked them up we were amazed to find two car loads of presents! Pictured right is Rebecca, our manager, in her office engulfed in gifts! We've arranged a Big Toy Giveaway for all our resettled and asylum-seeking families. Huge thanks to all at the school for their overwhelming support and classroom work on refugee issues—this will make all the difference to children who have been through a lot and have very little.



Host families needed for young refugees

Suffolk County Council are looking for host families with a spare room to let that could be used for an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) who has turned 18. These young people arrive in the UK without parental or family support, and SCC supports increasing numbers with accommodation providers such as YMCA Trinity. However, such arrangements cannot continue post-18. Hosts get regular support from the Leaving Care Team and enjoy helping the young people move towards independent living. If you might be able to help, please email Tash: Tash.Wightman@YMCA Suffolk.org.uk

New counselling service

We've seen first hand how specialist mental health treatment for refugees and asylum seekers can start to unlock deep-seated trauma and transform damaged lives. So we're very pleased to be involved in NHS Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group's 12-week pilot scheme, led by the Refugee Council, providing a counselling and therapy service for refugees in Suffolk. Read more about it and our response [here](#).

We hope you've enjoyed our newsletter—we'd love to hear from you with 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, you can do so here: suffolkrefugee.org.uk/join-our-mailing-list/ or email us: office@suffolkrefugee.org.uk

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