

Suffolk Refugee Support

Annual Report 2014-15



Summary of the Year



Photo taken in Iraqi Kurdistan by a refugee now settled in Ipswich

Against a global backdrop of unprecedented numbers of people forcibly displaced from their homes, at Suffolk Refugee Support we have had another busy but successful year delivering a wide range of services to both newly-arrived asylum seekers and those more settled in the UK. Our clients experience many barriers in accessing other support services and often present to us with multiple and complex needs.

We work through these issues, explaining how to make good life choices, ensuring that our clients have the best chance to rebuild their lives and thrive in our local communities. Most importantly, at a time when compassion can seem in short supply, we treat every person who walks through our doors with dignity and humanity.

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

In 2014 our Advice Service delivered just under 7000 individual advice contacts to 450 refugees and asylum seekers from 40 countries. Refugees' lives are complex and unpredictable, so no two days are the same for us. Our volunteers work alongside Support Workers helping clients to resolve problems or signposting them to support where necessary. By establishing a trusting relationship with our clients we have become their first point of contact in difficult or emergency situations. Our success rate in dealing with these issues has brought other vulnerable clients to us through word of mouth. At the same time, clients who are well established will come to us for help when a situation new to them arises—we try to empower our more settled clients to help themselves, but we never turn them away. Our holistic approach has proved successful and we have seen an increase in attendance at all our services.

This year has seen a particular emphasis on working face to face with clients to ensure they have better access to primary and secondary health services, thus improving their mental and physical wellbeing.

'This place has changed my life because I know where to go when I have a problem'
From a thank you letter written by a Zimbabwean client

Client Fund and Donations

Our client fund has also been in demand this year. Designed to help clients in difficult financial circumstances, we often give payments for food or emergency travel to Home Office or solicitors appointments.

We are grateful to Maureen Reynel and her team at FIND who have helped clients with food hampers. Also a big thank you to Farlingaye High School for the generous and wonderfully decorated hampers given to asylum seekers last Christmas.

Legal Aid Asylum Advice

We continue to have significant difficulties sourcing Legal Aid immigration advice for our clients due to severe lack of provision in the region. We are grateful to Cartwright King who attended our offices on a monthly basis and saw more than 40 clients. Recently Solomon Solicitors took over the monthly legal surgeries and as the legal advisor was previously with Cartwright King the clients have benefited from a continuity of service. Others travelled to Colchester or found advice in Ipswich with Immigration Legal Services. Many other clients have been forced to find solicitors in different parts of the country with our Client Fund bearing the brunt of their travel costs, as this is not covered by Legal Aid.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

We have delivered six ESOL classes every week to 49 regular students and 30 others who come and go. Last year 27 students passed exams and more will be taking exams this year.

To cater to our clients' needs, we have extended the range of classes to include a very low level (pre-entry) class as well as a higher level E3 class. Term tests suggest that great improvements are being made. We paid for crèche places at local nurseries and children's centres to enable more mothers to attend classes. As a result some mothers are now engaging further with these childcare services.



Student feedback: *"I can read English better", "I can make phone calls independently to other organisations like the council.", "I can attend parents' evening now for my children and understand teachers and they understand me."*

Working Towards Improving Health

Our services are focused on improving the physical and mental health of our clients. We build this into all aspects of our work. We have invited external organisations to give health advice during our Men's Group and International Women's Group sessions, with topics covered including sexual health and contraception, dental health, relaxation techniques and wellbeing. Feedback from a sample of 43 clients showed that 36 had a better understanding of how to look after their health and contact the health services, 9 were using early years support and 7 demonstrated improved health due to improved life circumstances. We have also helped with gym membership for a number of asylum seekers and participated in women-only swimming sessions at Fore Street pool.

'I have various issues, my eczema has improved. I used to go to the GP with my husband so that he could translate for me then one day I decided to go by myself as my English was much better. I was so proud of myself. I now go on my own.'

A Sudanese client

International Women's Group

Our International Women's Group meets every Wednesday morning during school term times and provides an opportunity for women to learn English, find out more about health issues and living in the UK, and to chat and meet friends. On average 25 women attend, a third of whom are asylum seekers, from 14 different countries. Six children regularly attend the crèche so their mothers can concentrate on the group learning. Seven women from refugee backgrounds volunteer with the group, either by helping in the crèche or with ESOL lessons. Over the year we have focused on subjects including nutrition, sexual health, forced marriage and FGM, and the women enjoyed trying out yoga, relaxation and exercise.



Employment Work

We are currently putting a lot of focus on improving the employment prospects of our clients, which are often limited by factors such as confidence, language skills and lack of interview experience. We changed our staffing structure to include an Employment and Training Coordinator to lead on this work.

The help is being delivered through the Advice Service and involves intensive work with clients to increase their employability skills as well as helping with job searches, CV writing and filling in application forms. In the past year we completed 185 job searches and helped fill in 1258 job application forms. Of 50 clients surveyed for feedback, 48 said they were more confident to apply for a job or voluntary work by themselves.



We have helped 62 clients write CV's and 100 individual clients to search and apply for jobs. Twenty clients had assistance with interview preparation. Fifteen clients are volunteering within organisations to increase their experience, skills and knowledge of the UK work environment. Seventeen clients have secured employment in posts including: security officers, factory operatives, care assistants, delivery drivers and cleaners. After passing a course with our help, one is now working as a teaching assistant.

"Now that I have a job I am independent. I have somewhere to live on my own and my English is better."

"I feel more comfortable now that I am working. It is a good way to meet other people"

"Volunteering improved my confidence. I learnt lots of things through the work"

Education and Training Courses

With our assistance 40 clients have taken external training courses including IT skills, maths, higher level ESOL, customer services, safe learning in the workplace, jump start into work, and for the CSCS (construction workers card).

Following support from us to apply for courses and financial assistance where applicable, four clients have started degree courses this year.

We are very pleased that our previous Trainee Support Worker passed GCSE's in English and Maths and has completed his first year studying IT Engineering at University Campus Suffolk.

Men's Sports and Social Club



Our Men's Sports and Social Group has continued this year despite low attendance at times threatening its future. We have recently seen an increase in numbers to an average of 9 a week, while a total of 26 men have attended this year.

"I cannot always come on Tuesday but I do like it when I can get here, nice group of guys"

The often transient nature of asylum seekers means that many have moved on to attend college or received a decision on their asylum claim and started work or moved away from Ipswich.

Touching the Tide

In September 2014, 42 clients (including 18 children) visited Minsmere Nature Reserve organised by Touching the Tide. They really enjoyed being out of urban Ipswich and seeing the coastline and exploring. Some had never been to the sea before. They felt energised and relaxed by the experience.

The group play football, pool or visit local points of interest. Some now use the YMCA gym on a regular basis.

"The gym is good which I never had before"

"I have made new friends which has built my confidence and self esteem. The sports course was fun"

Many of the group took part in the Sports Leadership course which they reported to have found interesting and inspiring.



Friends Group

"I come because I meet with different people and like to make new friends. I share my problems with others and they tell me the solutions. It makes me happy."

The Friends group meets each week at The Key to share information and offer one another support through the stressful process of claiming asylum in the UK. There are about twenty members, most of whom are asylum seekers. Two of the volunteers helping to run the group are refugees themselves (from Rwanda and Iraq). As well as trips to the park, the community garden and local museums, they have welcomed Nick Hulme, CEO of Ipswich hospital, for a feedback session about hospital services, and the local PCSO to learn about personal safety.

New This Year

Talks

An important part of our role is talking to school students and community groups about refugee issues. While there is no shortage of media coverage around this topic, much of it is highly misleading and inaccurate. We try to counteract this by explaining who is who in immigration terms, giving facts and figures and, most importantly, the first-hand testimony of a refugee. Recently we have been to Kesgrave High School, Ipswich Academy, Ipswich High School for Girls and Stowmarket Middle School. In total we reached over 650 students this year and have more talks planned.



Most didn't know what an asylum seeker or refugee was beforehand and had never heard a refugee's personal story. The impact can be striking, with some students writing letters of support to the refugee afterwards with their thanks and best wishes for the future. Among other presentations we have delivered, we spoke to student nurses and midwives at UCS, including information about FGM and trafficking.

International Women's Day

In March we organised an International Women's Day celebration with Karibu, a local women's group. We welcomed representatives from the WI and The Soroptomists.



After much dancing and music we settled down to make origami models—some more successful than others—before enjoying a feast of food from across the world.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Project

This year, FGM and the pain and suffering this deep-rooted tradition causes to women and girls from practising societies has come to the fore. As an organisation with female clients from some of these societies, and disclosures from ten women who are already survivors, we are taking up the challenge to lead on a programme to educate and eradicate FGM in Suffolk. Suffolk Public Health, The Rosa Fund and the Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner are supporting our project. We have recruited two staff who will assess the prevalence of the practise in Suffolk and ensure that safeguarding processes are developed and followed among professionals at all levels, including teachers, social workers, police and health care professionals. This is an exciting piece of work and we are looking forward to reporting our progress as the project develops.

Refugee Week

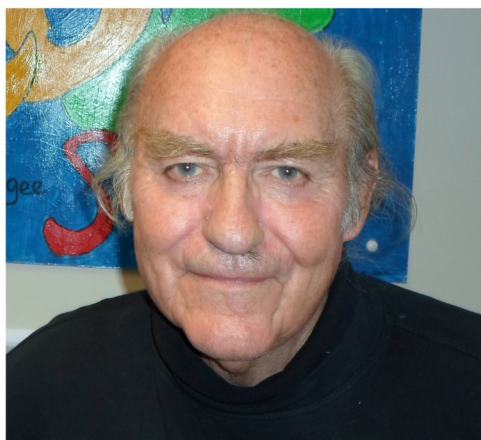
The theme of Refugee Week this year was 'celebrate' and we did so with an exhibition of eye-catching local refugee artwork at Endeavour House. The opening was attended by the Mayor of Ipswich Glen Chisholm and the High Sheriff of Suffolk, Judith Shallow. The exhibition was a great success and received much positive feedback.

Elsewhere, *Leave to Remain*, a film depicting the lives of young asylum seekers in the UK, was screened at Ipswich Film Theatre; we had an installation conveying the refugee experience at Landguard Fort in Felixstowe, and the weather was just right for the Women's Picnic in Christchurch Park.

'Opened a door to a world only known through news headlines, not through the extraordinary talents of our refugees'

From our art exhibition comments book

Chair's Report



In March 2014 we began our third period of Big Lottery funding, giving us three years of financial stability (2014-2017) by providing the majority of our funding for that period. The Big Lottery have been our financial mainstay since 2008, for which many thanks.

All of our main activities continue to thrive: our 3-day-a-week Drop-In Advice Service, the Women's and Men's groups, the ESOL classes and the Friends Group.

As I reported last year we still have problems with the lack of legal aid in East Anglia for asylum seekers. This has become even more of a problem with Home Office efforts to clear the backlog of asylum cases meaning an increase in the need for legal support. We have been dealing with this by getting solicitors from firms outside East Anglia to use our office to assist our clients. However, we faced a recent crisis when one of our mainstay legal advisers moved firms and we had to suspend this service, although I am glad to report that her new firm has agreed she can resume her work with us. We are still fighting the issue of lack of legal aid provision which makes no sense when Ipswich and other parts of East Anglia continue to be dispersal areas for asylum seekers. There is also a considerable cost to our funds in assisting clients to make visits either to lawyers or immigration related interviews in various parts of the country because they cannot afford travel costs from their £36 per week subsistence payments.

In terms of new needs and demands on our service in the past year a number can be identified. Clients sometimes want to confide very personal details of their problems to our staff and recently some women have talked to female staff about the trauma of suffering Female Genital Mutilation. At the same time FGM has become a national issue due to a campaign by teenagers from the Somali community. The government finally decided to take the issue seriously, 20 years after making the mutilation illegal but having failed to deliver a single successful prosecution in that time. At SRS we decided that we needed to take this issue further and had discussions with various agencies, which led to us getting funding from the Rosa Fund, Suffolk Police Commissioner and Suffolk Public Health to employ two part time staff for 12 months to research the incidence of FGM locally, liaise with all relevant agencies, provide training for their appropriate staff, investigate support for the victims, safeguarding for family members and others at risk, and work with vulnerable communities to reduce and end the practice. This work has so far identified 10 cases of FGM among our clients and 15 elsewhere in Suffolk, but there are bound to be more as the NHS only started recording cases in Sept 2014 and since then midwives in the county have been identifying one new case per month.

As I reported last year, most asylum seekers being dispersed to Suffolk are families rather than individuals and that continues to involve staff in difficult and time-consuming family work. There has been an increase in young asylum seekers (13-18) arriving on their own and coming into the care of Suffolk Social Services. We have involved some of them in our Men's Group in their sporting activities as well as ESOL classes and are running a summer project for them during the school holidays. Work to liaise with other agencies continues, including our involvement with joint working via the Ipswich Locality Advice Project.

We also go into the local community to give talks and run events – as in Refugee Week – to inform Suffolk people about our 2000-strong local refugee community, where they come from, why they fled their homes and how they now contribute to the county and are integrating themselves into its life. We hardly need to inform people about the global refugee situation, with 60 million people displaced by conflict and persecution, crossing deserts, being packed into refugee camps, facing drowning at sea, being run down in the Channel Tunnel – all these horrors in the media day after day as whole regions of the globe collapse into civil or cross-border conflict. We have worked to emphasise the effects on local refugees whose relatives back home have faced atrocities and possible sudden death at the hands of groups like ISIS.

Finally, I would like to thank everybody who has contributed to the ongoing success of SRS – our staff, volunteers and trustees – some of whom (including 3 trustees) have been with the organisation since it started in 2000. Other long service recently marked includes our manager, Rebecca Crerar, who celebrated 10 years of service to the organisation, including 9 years first as acting and then as permanent manager. All of our funders (for full list see Treasurer's report and Annual Accounts) also deserve full thanks for their continuing support and confidence in our efforts.

Ian Stewart - Chair



Mayor of Ipswich Glen Chisholm and the High Sheriff of Suffolk, Judith Shallow, talking to artist Bahareh Talashi and her mother at the Refugee Week exhibition.

Team Manager's Report

Another year has flown by and the organisation has continued to grow. As detailed in Ian Stewart's full report, we have continued to expand our existing services whilst starting a few new and exciting ones. The staff team is now 14 strong– nearly all part-time posts. We also have a strong and energetic volunteer team who support all our activities and provide skills from a wide range of backgrounds.

I am very grateful to everyone who plays a part, no matter how small, in making SRS a great place to come to for help. Our friendly, helpful team really make a difference in the lives of people who are going through the toughest, darkest days of their lives. We aim to look at the whole person, not just the problem they are currently facing and in doing so help them to grow in skills and experience to enable them to face a brighter future.

A letter received this month from a client who had attended our advice service stated: "on my arrival at the stairs as I was about to reach the reception I met Liz (Support Worker). She started smiling and from that moment I felt welcomed.....that was when I noticed that this place is far different than other places I have been. The staff are kind, helpful and hard workers in a professional way." It was very heart-warming to receive her letter and gave us all a sense that we are doing the right thing for our clients.

We continue to work with our funders to ensure we make a difference in the lives of those we serve, particularly in the areas of health and employment. We are grateful to the list of trusts and funds who see the benefit of our work and continue to fund us.

The future is always uncertain. We are still short of funding for 2016-17 and after February 2017, we have no secured funds other than a small reserve. The pressure is therefore on to secure finances for the future so that we can continue to help rebuild lives. Our Business Development Officer and I are busy exploring new funding streams including European Funding and are making bids whenever we can. Much of the future work requires partnerships which come with their benefits and drawbacks so we have been meeting many local organisations to talk about future joint work.

The board of trustees continues to support me and the team with advice and decision making about our direction and goals. They bring a wealth of experience and knowledge that certainly strengthens our organisation. We are grateful for their time and energy (with no pay!) – especially to the stalwarts – Ian Stewart, Alan Blackshaw and Marian Carter.

With migrants and refugees very much in the news currently and not likely to disappear soon, we are ever aware that the world is an unequal and unfair place. People throughout history have suffered and fled, but none in such numbers as we are seeing presently. Although we do not claim to have all the answers, treating people with humanity and dignity is a must and we are proud to be doing this.

Thank you on behalf of the thousands of individuals we help in Suffolk.

Rebecca Crerar

August 2015

The International Situation

Refugee issues have rarely been far from the news headlines this year, with the crisis in the Mediterranean and the situation in Calais. At SRS, where every day we see people forced to take extreme measures to escape desperate situations, we call for the response to be guided by humanitarian principles. We believe the priority in the Mediterranean must be saving lives, as well as providing safe, legal routes for those most in need. With Calais, it is worth remembering that France receives far more asylum applications per capita than the UK, and that refugees trying to reach our shores do so largely because of language and family reasons, not because we are any more generous than France towards asylum seekers. Ultimately, neither situation will be resolved by building higher fences, destroying boats or pretending the problem belongs to someone else. The only solution is to take joint responsibility for these issues and do everything in our power to tackle the conflict and oppression that causes people to flee in the first place.

UNHCR Global Trends Report

The UNHCR Global Trends Report 2014 makes for shocking reading. Its key findings include:

- Wars, conflict and persecution have displaced more people than at any time since records began
- The number of people forcibly displaced at the end of 2014 rose to 59.5 million from 51.2 million a year earlier – the biggest rise ever in a single year
- In 2014 alone 13.9 million people became newly displaced – four times the total of the previous year
- Refugee-producing crises are not being resolved – the number of refugees able to return to their home countries in 2014 was the lowest for 31 years
- Children now make up more than half of the world's refugee population
- Syria is the world's biggest producer of both internally displaced people (7.6m) and refugees (3.9m)



Media Coverage

As the only refugee charity in the region, we think it is important to get our voice, and that of our clients, across in the media. This year we have worked hard on gaining a higher profile. Before Christmas, ITV Anglia visited our offices to film a piece with our Kurdish clients on their concerns and fears for the situation back home. We have appeared on BBC Radio Suffolk numerous times, discussing issues such as the Mediterranean crisis and the language used in the immigration debate. During Refugee Week an Eritrean client gave her story on Radio Suffolk and the Ipswich Star and EADT covered our art exhibition, which led to a longer profile piece on one of the young refugee artists featured. We have also continued to build our social media presence.

Treasurer's Report

We have completed our first year of the three-year funding from the Big Lottery which was granted in February 2014. The Board continues to aim to have three months operating costs in reserve.

We thank the Big Lottery fund (Reaching Communities) for their grant and we must also thank our other funders who are helping to provide the balance.

These are:-

The Henry Smith Charity (via Suffolk Community Foundation)

Mrs L D Rope's Second Charitable Settlement

Ipswich Borough Council

The Suffolk Fund (via Suffolk Community Foundation)

The Rosa Fund (via Suffolk Community Foundation)

Realise Futures

JP Getty Jnr Charitable Trust

Ipswich Locality Advice Partnership

The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (via Suffolk Community Foundation)

Rosa – the UK Fund for Women and Girls

Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner Victims' Fund

Our accounts show positive balances but we must not be complacent for the future. Although we are now in a position to provide a large part of the services we have undertaken until February 2017, thanks to the Big Lottery, we still need to raise more funds to meet the remainder. Working with our existing supporters and engaging with new ones is a key task.

We give our grateful thanks to Ed Day for his support in providing these Accounts and to Clive Mees who continues to be our Independent Examiner.

Finally, our thanks to Rebecca Crerar for her enthusiasm in managing and updating our finances and her diligence, and that of her team, in pursuing the continuing funding so necessary for Suffolk Refugee Support, also to the Board members on the Finance Sub-Committee for their monthly reports with their time and support given to the Board.

Dilly Ridge - Treasurer

Volunteer Coordinator's Report

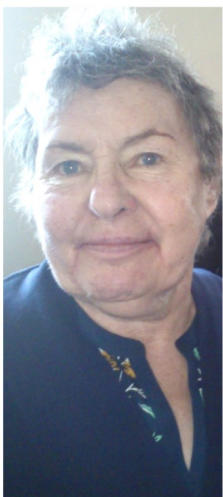
I am very proud of our large group of over 45 volunteers who support Suffolk Refugee Support, providing an invaluable contribution to the work of the charity. These include the Trustees as well as regular and occasional volunteers who have helped across the full range of our activities. We have a core group who have been with us for many years but as with all voluntary organisations, there is continuous movement in this area with regulars moving on for a variety of reasons and new people coming to join us.



Our volunteers come from all sorts of places and backgrounds. They have a diversity of experiences and ages, bringing their talents and enthusiasm to contribute to our services. Many of our volunteers are motivated to work with our clients and they focus on the positive side of it to expand their horizons, using it as a learning opportunity and simply helping people. Often they have deliberately chosen to volunteer with us as they strongly want to help asylum seekers and refugees, making a difference to their lives in the UK. They are an essential part of our team and without them we couldn't possibly function. We encourage the involvement of people from the local community who can give us a few hours of their time each week. Some

volunteers will be experienced; some will have no experience at all. The most important quality that volunteers must have is the ability to work in a team and to get on with other people. I know the team would like to extend their thanks to all of our volunteers for all the help, encouragement and assistance you bring each time we see you.

Lucinda Rogers - Volunteer Coordinator



Doreen Hawkins 1942 – 2014

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Doreen Hawkins in early December. Doreen had taught English to many asylum seekers and refugees in Ipswich over the years, initially for the Refugee Council and then for SRS at our International Women's Group. She believed passionately in the power of education to change people's lives, and put that belief into action with typical enthusiasm, commitment and good humour. Doreen will be greatly missed by her students and all at Suffolk Refugee Support .

Staff Team (as of September 2015)

Team Manager
 Volunteer Coordinator
 Support Worker
 Support Worker
 Employment & Training Coordinator
 International Women's Group Coordinator
 ESOL Support Worker
 Employment Support Worker
 Trainee Support Worker
 Services Development Officer
 Men's Sports & Social Group Coordinator
 Administrative Officer
 ESOL Tutor
 Communications Officer
 Business Development Officer
 FGM Project Coordinator
 FGM Project Assistant

Rebecca Crerar
 Lucinda Rogers
 Liz Wood
 Tim Heath
 Jodi Turner
 Jodi Turner
 Fatima Khan
 Lee Turner
 Khalid Mohamad
 Catherine Costello
 Clem Turner
 Marianne Walker
 Michaela Freeman
 Martin Simmonds
 Karen Lawson
 Jemma Lynch
 Nadine Lusher



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Treasurer
Secretary
Trustee
Trustee
Trustee
Trustee
Trustee
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 Jenny Morcom
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