



Suffolk Refugee Support Newsletter

Christmas 2018

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www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk

38 St Matthew's Street, IPSWICH, Suffolk IP1 3EP

Registered Charity Number: 1078794



More than half the world's refugees are children, and at Suffolk Refugee Support we are helping increasing numbers of families and young people. Half of the refugees who have come to Suffolk under the resettlement schemes are children, and we see many newly-arrived, vulnerable asylum-seeking families 'dispersed' to Ipswich. So this winter, we're appealing for donations to help a family who have very little or bring some cheer to a refugee child by giving towards essential items or Christmas gifts. £5 could buy a family day bus ticket to help get to English classes and vital appointments, £15 could go towards basic toiletry items for a newly-arrived family, and £25 an emergency food parcel for a family facing destitution. We will be delivering presents, parcels and Christmas hampers to families around Ipswich on 20th December (with huge thanks to Ipswich School for the use of their minibus). If you would like to contribute, you can choose your amount and [donate securely here](#). Thank you!

Season's Greetings to all our friends and supporters!

Welcome to our Christmas Newsletter. Inside you'll find the story of an asylum seeker in Ipswich in his own words, the latest on refugee resettlement in Suffolk (including wedding news!), football matches, farms and cello concerts, our Hidden Harms work and much more. Thank you for all your incredible support over the last year. We really couldn't do our work without you!



The story of my life—an asylum seeker in Ipswich

This is the story of Osama Gaweesh, an asylum seeker living in Ipswich, in his own words:

Once upon a time in a small governorate on the Mediterranean Sea in Egypt a teacher asked his young students about their dreams. One student raised his hand and started to describe his dream. It was to work and live in the UK after his graduation from university. This conversation happened in 1996 when he was 11 years old. But why the dream of a young student in Egypt to live and work in the UK? That year England hosted the Euro 96 Football Championships and he admired the country, saw the incredible stadiums on TV and dreamed to live there one day.

Today in December 2018 I will tell you about his story, the story of the young student who became a dentist, the dentist who became a fugitive, the fugitive who became a well known TV host and journalist and the TV host who became an asylum seeker in Ipswich – a long, dramatic story with many struggles and challenges. It is the story of my life.

My name is Osama Gaweesh and I am Egyptian. I was born in 1985 in Damietta Governorate and I graduated from the faculty of dentistry in 2007 to start working as a dentist in the Egyptian hospitals and in my private dental clinic.

In 2011 I participated with thousands of Egyptian people in the revolution. The Egyptian people had suffered for decades from injustice, repression, poverty and systemic corruption so we demonstrated in Cairo demanding the departure of the Mubarak regime. During the demonstration a lot of my friends were killed by Egyptian authorities and after 18 days of demonstrations we forced Mubarak to depart.

We had a dream for a new Egypt, we asked for human dignity and social justice, we called for a democratic state and freedom of expression. In 2012 we elected the first elected president in Egyptian history, but after one year the army staged a military coup, arrested the president of Egypt and started to chase all of his and the revolution's supporters.

I participated in the demonstration in Rabaa Al-Adawiya square until the Egyptian army accompanied with security forces killed more than 800 persons in one day on 14 August 2013. The security forces stormed my house and tried to arrest me so I fled and went to Turkey on 20 August 2013. From November 2013 I started to work as a journalist and TV host on an opposition satellite TV channel called Mekammellen until 2015 when I moved to another channel called Al Hiwar. I presented more than 1500 live episodes and become one of the most prominent and well known journalists and TV hosts in the Middle East.

Due to my political opinions on my daily show, the Egyptian military regime started to chase me. They sentenced me to five years in absentia, made false accusations against me, put my name with 1500 others in a fabricated terrorist list, prevented me from renewing my passport and asked Interpol to order the Turkish authorities to hand me over.

My life was in real danger and when I was coming to visit the UK at the beginning of this year with my family I faced a critical situation inside Ataturk airport in Istanbul. They informed me that they will let me go to the UK but that if I returned I would be arrested. I had no choice – I found myself forced to claim asylum and to leave my wife and my little children behind.

Now the Home Office have moved me to this lovely, quiet Ipswich to start from the beginning again – no work, no family, no friends. The only thing I have now is an ugly thing called waiting. A lot of waiting – waiting for my decision, waiting for the postman every morning, waiting for the reunion with my lovely wife, waiting for my children to call me Dad again and waiting for my life as a TV host and a journalist.

Now I am here in Ipswich and 22 years after the conversation with my teacher I can say that part of my childhood dream has happened. I am living in the UK, but the other part of my dream to work in the UK is still processing. The good point in my life now is my relation with the brilliant staff at Suffolk Refugee Support who have given me the opportunity to write this piece and to tell my story. Thank you to SRS and everyone in Ipswich for their support.

From being a high profile TV presenter, Osama now lives in Home Office accommodation on £37 per week. SRS have supported him with a range of issues since his arrival in Ipswich and organised various media opportunities for him, including on BBC Radio Suffolk and Ipswich Community Radio (pictured right).



Resettlement update

We continue to welcome vulnerable refugees to Ipswich under the UK government's resettlement programmes, including our first Afghan family. We are now supporting a total of 108 resettlement clients, the majority of whom are Syrian—104 arrivals to Suffolk and 4 babies [born here](#).

We're delighted that two of our Syrian clients who have extensive emergency response experience in their home country are in the process of joining Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service as Community Fire Volunteers (pictured right with Green Watch firefighters).

STOP PRESS Job vacancy! We are recruiting a part-time Housing Advice Worker to support resettled refugees to transition into independent accommodation—[full details here](#)



We're also very excited to announce our first Syrian wedding! Both the gentleman we support in Ipswich and his wife-to-be arrived on the resettlement programme and are very much looking forward to their wedding and to their new life together in the UK.

Of course, many of the resettled refugees we see face the serious long-term challenge of processing trauma. The mental health pilot scheme we are running with the Refugee Council has been a positive development, offering confidential wellbeing sessions from our offices, making the support as accessible as possible.

We have also been working on gathering feedback from our resettlement clients to allow them to help shape our services, which has proven very useful. Finally, a big thank you to all our volunteers for their incredible support over the past year, and to Ionea for her work with us on the resettlement programme.



A resettled refugee helps us decorate our Christmas tree

Easton Farm Park visit

We understand how important it can be for our clients to have the chance to access fresh air and nature, so on a sunny day in October we took 10 refugee and asylum-seeking families with children to Easton Farm Park. They enjoyed taking part in many of the activities, including train rides, hug a bunny, a meet the animals session, and barrel and pony rides throughout the day. The parents and children explored nature and learnt the names of the various animals in the park. The opportunity was really appreciated by all the families involved and we have received some very positive feedback.

"We really enjoyed our day and it made me and my daughter very happy as it was the first time we saw animals in real life [in the UK] and we would like to say thank you to SRS"



Events & Thank You's

Thanks to one of our fantastic volunteers and the generosity of Ipswich Town Football Club and their fans, we were one of the charities to receive free tickets for the recent Ipswich Town vs West Bromwich Albion match. Although the result went against Ipswich, around 30 of the people we support who have never had the chance to attend a match at Portman Rd before had a night to remember. A big thank you to everyone involved for this wonderful gesture!

A huge thank you also to everyone involved with CelloAid and to all who supported their fantastic concert in aid of SRS recently at Darsham Church (below right) for your kindness and generosity. The event raised an incredible £544 for our work, which will make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable refugees in Suffolk this winter.

Thanks too to Ringsfield Hall Eco Centre near Beccles for hosting our International Women's Group recently for a day of outdoor cooking, to Mid Suffolk and Woodbridge Labour Groups and the Waldringfield Village Hall Trust for their generous donations following recent talks given by us, and to Farlingaye High School for the wonderful Christmas hampers donated for refugee families.



Suffolk Refugee Support AGM

University of Suffolk Scholarships

A big thank you to everyone who attended our AGM recently and helped make it such a positive event. We heard compassionate speeches from Sandy Martin MP and Cllr Sarah Barber, Deputy Mayor, and celebrated some of the amazing education successes of the people we support. In particular, we heard from Lindah, an asylum seeker we helped to secure a place at university studying law. We also heard some fabulous Syrian singing from Ammar, which you can [watch here!](#)

We have been working with the University of Suffolk recently on possible support for asylum-seeking students, and we're delighted that the university have announced that for the academic year 2019/20 they will be offering two Scholarships for students seeking asylum in the UK. The scholarships will include a 100% tuition fee waiver and a bursary. This is fantastic news and we're very grateful to the university for their work on this. You can read about the [Scholarships in full here](#).

Kindertransport 80th anniversary



The first Kindertransport delivering German Jewish children from Nazi persecution arrived in Harwich on 2nd December 1938. In total, 10,000 mainly Jewish children were rescued by the Kindertransport. Most never saw their parents again. 80 years after that first arrival, we were honoured to take part in a moving event at Harwich, organised by the [Harwich Haven Surrender & Sanctuary Project](#), to mark the anniversary. Alongside speakers from the Wiener Library and Holocaust Educational Trust, we gave a talk putting both the Kindertransport and the current refugee situation in Suffolk into historical context.

Hidden Harms work

As part of our [Hidden Harms](#) work, we recently held two online safety events. The first was a parent and child session discussing issues such as not giving out personal information or meeting up with people befriended online, how to report concerns or tell a trusted adult about online activity.

The second session was a wonderful puppetry workshop with our International Women's Group and a couple of puppeteers, at which the women made their own puppets. We discussed online safety, specifically how to keep their children safe online, and finished with a powerful piece of shadow puppetry that illustrated the issues. The women responded incredibly well to this and were able to take their puppets home, along with handouts detailing how to report concerns and stickers to cover their children's webcams to protect against spying.



Volunteer News

We were sad recently to say goodbye to Bobby, our longest serving volunteer, who has given her time to our International Women's Group for more than 13 years. Bobby told us "I have loved my time being involved with this organisation. I have met the most wonderful women, and have always felt humble in hearing some of their terrible ordeals. They are amazing, courageous and affectionate women who deserve every kindness and understanding that we can give them. I am so lucky that I have had the opportunity of knowing them. I am sure Suffolk Refugee Support will continue well into the future. It is a fantastic organisation, made up of so many dedicated and kind people."

Thank you Bobby!

Office news

Having had the same cramped offices since 1999, we were delighted to be able to extend our space recently to cope with demand for our services. We wouldn't have been able to do this without Suffolk ProHelp and Community Action Suffolk, along with the fantastic local companies who helped us with all the practicalities, whose generosity will help us to give better support to more people. Thanks also to Ipswich Borough Council for the continued office support and to Charity Hub East for [highlighting this good work](#).



Thank you for all your support in 2018—Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!



Thank you to all our clients, friends and supporters for your generosity and inspiration over the last year—we wish you all a happy and peaceful festive period. Next year is our 20th anniversary, so look out for events and stories of some of those we have helped over that time.

Our Christmas tree (left), decorated with hand-painted mandalas by our International Women's Group, at St Mary-le-Tower church.

Last chance to buy our Christmas cards (right), designed by a young Syrian refugee, priced at £3 for a pack of ten—[full details here](#).



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!