



Suffolk Refugee Support Spring 2019 Newsletter

www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk

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In 1999, Suffolk Refugee Support Forum was set up by a group of concerned local people in order to provide advice, advocacy and practical support to the increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in Suffolk. The number of asylum claims in the UK that year rose sharply, fuelled by the violence in Kosovo that displaced 900,000 people. The UK government brought in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which created NASS (the National Asylum Support Service) and the 'dispersal' system for asylum seekers.

Over subsequent years, refugees from Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Iraq, Iran, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Syria and many other situations of conflict and human rights abuse around the world, whether passing through Ipswich or settled here, have come to our door for support. Often we have been the first friendly face and listening ear they have found. Twenty years later, that tiny organisation has gone on to support thousands of people. We have grown with the demand for our services and today run a wide range of projects supporting people to rebuild their lives.

So during 2019 we are planning celebrations and stories to mark our 20th anniversary. We will look back at some of the people we've worked with over the years, and how they have gone on, with our support, to make Suffolk their home and contribute to their new communities.

Ehsan arrived in the UK at almost exactly the same time that SRS was established—20 years later, this is his story

I come from a very politically active family, my dad held high positions in the Afghan government. Unfortunately, all our family including me had to flee Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. I completed studying medicine at Istanbul university and arrived in the UK at the port of Felixstowe with my wife as asylum seekers in October 1999.

We did not know any English, however we found people very friendly and supportive. I learned English quickly within 6 months of our arrival and started to work as an interpreter, but in order to practice medicine one needed to achieve a high score in an exam called IELTS. There was no preparation course in Ipswich and Suffolk Refugee Support helped me by securing funding to take a course in London. I was self-reliant from 6 months of arriving in the UK, providing interpreting and translation services to SRS, Refugee Council, Social Services and the NHS. I completed my exams by September 2003 and started working as a doctor by the end of 2003.

Today, I'm a GP partner at Barrack Lane Medical Centre in Ipswich and have several other hats including being a Medical Advisor and GP appraiser for NHS England, a GP trainer, and GP tutor and lecturer with the UEA. My daughter, Azita, is now in her first year of medical school at Imperial College London. Looking back, it was difficult for me to work and study at the same time. There were many refugee doctors that could not handle both together and gave up on their studies.



Supported by:



Refugee resettlement update

Earlier this year we welcomed the first family to Felixstowe under the UK's refugee resettlement programmes. We would like to thank the local community for their kind support and warm welcome. The family are settling in well and pleased to be close to the seaside—we have assured them that the beach will be warmer soon!

In other resettlement news, we're happy to report that one of our Syrian clients has started volunteering with the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (pictured right), who told us: "We're pleased to welcome Amer to our Community Fire Volunteer Team. He will be delivering fire safety advice to members of our Arabic speaking communities to ensure that our safety messages are clear and understood. His first activity in the role was to deliver a home fire safety presentation to a group in Ipswich which was very successful and well received."



We have also linked around 10 clients with Volunteering Matters (VM) in Ipswich for a special project focused on recruiting new volunteers who have English as a second language. VM is seeking flexible placements for them (around mobility, childcare etc) in cultural settings (e.g. museums, galleries) so that the volunteering also supports integration. One particularly isolated family has also been linked in with the ActivLives Community Garden with the aim of regular volunteering.

We're looking for a Dari or Farsi speaker to volunteer with us for two hours per week, preferably on a Friday, to help a resettled refugee family in Ipswich. Please get in touch if you can help!

Yacine from our resettlement team is supporting clients to attend a Community Interpreting Course with WEA (see page 5), while Rasha is leading on a fortnightly women's group to engage more isolated women who otherwise might not attend the office, and our new team member (see page 5) Lisa is working on move on housing and connecting with Ipswich Borough Council and other agencies.

Finally, we have arranged excursions to Ipswich Museum and Ipswich Station (to show clients how to use the train system in the UK!), we have completed a client feedback process and implemented responses to the ideas it generated, we attended a Regional Resettlement Forum and are working on setting up a computer course, a men's shed project and some financial skills training.

University of Suffolk scholarships for asylum seekers

We are delighted that for the 2019/20 academic year the University of Suffolk is [offering two Scholarships](#) (one undergraduate and one postgraduate) for students who are seeking asylum in the UK. Successful applicants will gain a 100% tuition fee waiver and a small bursary for support with study and travel costs. As we know through two people we worked with to gain a similar bursary at the UEA last year, this scheme is significant for breaking down one of the main access barriers to higher education for our clients.

Karen Hinton, Head of Student Recruitment and Market Development at UoS, told us: "The University of Suffolk was very keen to introduce support for Asylum Seekers in Suffolk as we recognise that many would be completely unable to access Higher Education without this support. We will continue to offer advice and guidance to Asylum Seekers as they consider their options and routes into Higher Education, but are very pleased to be able to offer two Scholarships each year to Asylum Seekers based in Suffolk."

UoS has also offered to work with us further to help our clients to make more informed choices and life plans relating to further education. On 10th May they will be providing a drop-in event at our office for our clients to gain advice from UoS staff about getting into university, including course entry requirements, assessment of previous qualifications, student finance and clearing procedures.

EVENTS

SRS Awards Success!

Our manager, Rebecca, has led Suffolk Refugee Support for more than 12 years. As demand for our services has increased, she has overseen our expansion, successfully negotiated a challenging funding landscape and inspired all who have worked with her while never losing her passion for helping people and treating each individual with dignity. So in our 20th anniversary year, we were thrilled when Rebecca (pictured right, with Tim Holder of Suffolk Community Foundation) was firstly shortlisted and then [announced as joint winner](#) of the Inspiring Leader Award at the recent Suffolk High Sheriff's Awards. We are very proud of Rebecca, and honoured to find ourselves in the company of other such inspirational people!



INSPIRING LEADER AWARD
WINNERS

★

REBECCA CRERAR	MAUREEN REYNEL
FIONA ELLIS	TARA SOMERS
ANN OSBORN	EMMA RATZER

CELEBRATING



We're very grateful to the Royal Hospital School, Holbrook, for choosing us as one of their charities to support this year. Not only have they raised valuable funds for our work, a group of our clients, including a resettled refugee family and unaccompanied asylum seeking children, were able to enjoy their recent Charity Gala Concert.



Our International Women's Day event this year was, once again, an inspiring celebration of the strength and diversity of women in Suffolk. Jointly organised through our [International Women's Group](#) and Karibu African Women's Support Group, women from around 20 countries, from Albania to Sri Lanka, contributed to a fashion show and some truly global flavours.

Virgin Money Giving—our new online donation platform

Until recently we have used the BT MyDonate service for online donations, but BT have announced that this will be closing in June. After researching alternative options, we have chosen to make Virgin Money Giving our new online giving platform—its low fees ensuring that as much as possible of your generous donations will go towards our work. You can find [our page here](#), where you can make one-off or monthly donations or set up your own fundraising page, for instance, for a sponsored event or in memory giving. If you would like to set up a standing order with us, you can do so [using this form](#), or if you would like our support for a fundraising event, please do get in touch!

Legacies and obituaries

In recent months we have said goodbye to several people special to Suffolk Refugee Support—people who have been an important part of our story, who have supported and inspired us, and who have provided a lasting legacy for our work.

Jennifer Morcom 1934-2019



Jennifer was born in Ipswich in 1934 and spent most of her life in the town. She attended Ipswich Art School and developed a real talent for art. Her professional career was in nursing and she worked at Anglesea Rd hospital and then in mental health nursing at St Clements Hospital.

Jennifer always had an interest in helping refugees. In 1956 she and her partner (himself a refugee from Franco's Spain) travelled to Austria to work with the 200,000 Hungarian refugees who had fled after the failed uprising against Soviet rule. They were able to use their fluency in Spanish to help many of them settle in Latin America.

After the establishment of SRS – where her daughter played a key role as one of the founders – Jennifer became a Trustee and helped the charity through some difficult times. Her other great interest was Ipswich Town FC where she attended most home games from 1946 till health problems forced her to give up her season ticket. She had fond memories of attending the

1978 FA Cup final and the 1981 UEFA Cup final in Amsterdam and still followed all the games via Radio Suffolk. She leaves a daughter, two grandchildren and a great granddaughter.

Tom Gondris 1929-2019

Tom arrived in the UK in 1939 as a child refugee aged 9 on one of the last Kindertransport trains to escape Czechoslovakia before the outbreak of World War II. Having waved goodbye to his parents at Prague railway station, he never saw them again. He went on to spend the last 50 years of his life in Ipswich, where he served as a Borough Councillor and received an MBE for services to heritage and conservation. Tom was an inspiration to us, and we are very grateful that some years ago he allowed us to sit down with him and record his remarkable story for use in our [Refugee Stories booklet](#).

Last December in Harwich we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the first Kindertransport train, and Tom was very much in our thoughts then. We know his life story and achievements touched many people and we will continue to remember him as a wonderful person and fine example of what those arriving in the UK as refugees can go on to accomplish. You can read the Ipswich Star obituary to Tom [here](#).



Mandy Summers 1944-2019

Mandy put on three CelloAid concerts in Darsham Church. The first, in 2015, was for refugees on a Greek island. Having volunteered with SRS, working with mainly Afghan refugees in Ipswich, she arranged a second concert in 2017 to raise funds for us. The bond was strengthened when 5 of the cellists played, by invitation, at our AGM in 2017, and a further concert last November also raised funds for us. We are also very grateful to Mandy's family for collecting donations for SRS in her memory following her recent death. You can watch the [CelloAid group here](#), including Mandy (second from right), playing a piece called Rendezvous, specially written for one of the concerts by her son Michael.

Cliff Matthews 1956-2019

Cliff and Anna Matthews set up La Tour Cycle Café in Ipswich, first in Tower Street and more recently on the Waterfront. They have been extremely generous towards us and supportive of our work, giving work experience to refugees and hosting events and exhibitions, including our successful Tapestry show with Photo East last year. You can read a fittingly warm and fulsome [tribute to Cliff here](#).

WEA courses

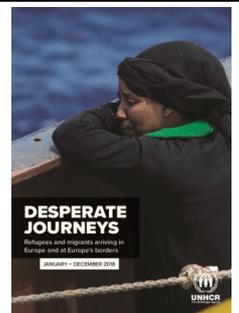
The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) are the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education. As part of our ongoing work to give our clients improved confidence and skills to gain employment we are currently running two courses in partnership with them: a **Level 1 Award in Community Interpreting**, helping attendees to develop knowledge of how to be a successful interpreter, and **An Introduction to Mentoring** course designed for those who want to work in guidance/advice or community support roles. We'd like to thank the WEA tutors for tailoring these courses so that different levels of learners are able to participate.

Welcome to new SRS staff

A very warm SRS welcome to Lisa Gilbert, who has joined our Refugee Resettlement Team as Housing Advice Worker, Yvonne Chishaya, who has taken on the role of Trainee Advice Worker, Jemima Oyelahan, our new Volunteer Recruitment Officer, and Kyler Jackson, our new Sports Activities Coordinator. Congratulations also to Ellie Roberts, already a much-valued part of the team as Volunteer Recruitment Officer, but who has recently moved to Operations Manager.

Refugee issues in the news

The UNHCR's [Desperate Journeys report](#) shows that the number of people attempting to cross the Mediterranean fell again in 2018, but the death rate rose to one for every 14 arrivals. Meanwhile, the [government's asylum stats](#) show the UK received nearly 30,000 asylum applications in 2018 (excluding dependents), just 6% of all claims made in the EU. Finally, following much coverage earlier this year of small numbers of people attempting to cross the English Channel to claim asylum in the UK, this [excellent blog piece](#) gives important context and explains why asylum seekers are not obliged to claim asylum in the first safe country they reach.



Rwandan Genocide 25th Anniversary

Between April and July 1994, an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed in the space of just 100 days in a campaign of slaughter against the country's Tutsi minority. More than two million people were displaced from their homes. As the world marks the 25th anniversary of the genocide, we know from survivors we continue to work with that the scars of this unimaginable horror live on. Over the next few months, we hope to play our part in remembering these events by including the powerful story of one genocide survivor in our revamped Refugee Stories booklet, and through working with Snape Maltings and the Aldeburgh Festival on [this exhibition](#), which coincides with Refugee Week.

SRS in the media

We were pleased recently to get a positive mention in The Guardian, as part of a [profile of Osama](#), an Egyptian asylum seeker we're supporting (whose story we included in our last newsletter). Osama also featured recently in the [EADT's excellent series](#) on multiculturalism in Ipswich, alongside Zinah, a resettled Iraqi refugee we work with. In this article, we also talk about the different groups of refugees we have supported over the last 20 years, the conflicts and human rights abuses they have fled, and how Suffolk has welcomed them. Finally, back in January we took over BBC Radio Suffolk for an evening on the Tuesday Takeover show. Look out for more refugee involvement on Radio Suffolk soon.



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!