



Suffolk Refugee Support Christmas Newsletter

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Suffolk Refugee Support Crowdfunding Success!

We recently launched an [urgent crowdfunding appeal](#) to protect our advice service from cuts in 2020, and we are thrilled to report that we have just hit our initial target of £10,000! More than 150 people have shown their compassion for refugees in Suffolk by donating, and we have been moved and humbled by the goodwill, support and kind messages we have received. These vital funds will protect our core advice service at a



time of unprecedented demand and considerable funding uncertainty. From all at SRS, a huge thank you to everyone who gave so generously! If you, or anyone you know, would still like to make a donation, the appeal is open until the 3rd January, and we would love to raise additional funds to protect further services and ensure our client fund, which we use to meet immediate and urgent need, for instance to prevent destitution, will be there when people need it most. You can visit our crowdfunding page and watch a [new film about our work here](#), read more about [our appeal here](#), and learn about the vital work of our advice service on page 2 of this newsletter.

Christmas hampers bring cheer to refugee families!

Each year we are amazed by the creativity and generosity shown by students at Farlingaye High School in the Christmas hampers they donate to refugee and asylum-seeking families, and this year they really have surpassed themselves! This time of year can be particularly difficult for some of the people we support, separated from loved ones and dealing with uncertainty and the effects of trauma and displacement, and these beautiful hampers, delivered with the kind support of Ipswich School, will help to put smiles on the faces of families in and around Ipswich this Christmas. Thank you also to St Felix Church in Felixstowe for their lovely 'giving tree' gifts.



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Our advice service—making a difference in people's lives

Our advice service has been at the core of our work for 20 years. It is where we deal with often urgent and complex needs. Last year, we gave over 6000 advice contacts, supporting more than 1000 people from 35 countries. Below are examples of how our specialist work provides a service not available elsewhere and helps people when they need it most.

H and his children were moved to Ipswich a few months ago. H had claimed asylum and needed support whilst waiting for his claim to be decided by the Home Office. Unfortunately H was caught up in a bureaucratic nightmare as the company providing asylum support accommodation in Ipswich had recently changed and the new system of reporting issues had also altered.

H was left with two small children and no financial support for five weeks. Fortunately H had met people from a local church who brought him to the SRS office. We lent him money whilst he waited for his financial support to be resolved, arranged an appointment with an immigration solicitor and helped him get his children into school. H felt that the system was against him but with support from SRS staff and the friendly welcome he received, he could feel more positive about the future. SRS was able to work with partners to put into practice a process to ensure that this would not happen again.

H's case reminds us that it is often the most vulnerable who can fall through the cracks.



T is an asylum seeker who was diagnosed with cancer while temporarily separated from her partner. T was isolated and very scared about undergoing treatment. SRS paid for an interpreter to attend key appointments with her so that she could have a clear understanding of what medical procedures were needed, and also contributed to the cost of taxis whilst she underwent exhausting treatment.

T is now in remission, feeling much more positive and grateful for the support that SRS gave at such a difficult point in her life.

Building awareness through interactive Hidden Harms game

Through our Community Engagement Worker, we have partnered with students from the University of Suffolk to design and produce an [interactive game](#) in different languages as an accessible way for our clients and their community to be aware of hidden harms, including FGM (female genital mutilation), forced marriage, modern slavery and online dangers. We hope to use this game to research and raise awareness of hidden crimes, and to provide support where needed.



Helping refugees access university

We continue to work with the University of Suffolk to encourage access for our clients to higher education and explore the opportunities available at the university. In November we took a group of clients for a tour of the university with student ambassadors and a talk from the University Outreach Officer. The event helped attendees learn more about what the university has to offer and about application processes.



Since this event we have been helping one person with her Masters application to the university, and are working with numerous others to acquire relevant qualifications with a view to progressing on to university in the next few years. We hope next year there will be suitable candidates to utilise the university's bursary (available for asylum seekers and those with limited leave who are unable to access standard student finance). Many thanks you to the University of Suffolk for organising this event and for their continued support.

Refugee student work experience

We were very pleased recently to provide a week's work experience in our office for Anangan, a young man from Sri Lanka. Anangan told us: "Doing work experience at Suffolk Refugee Support was amazing. The staff were so nice. I got to meet different types of people. It has been an amazing week." We thoroughly enjoyed having Anangan in the office and you can read more about the experiences of his family during and after the Sri Lankan civil war in the 20th anniversary edition of our [Refugee Stories booklet here](#).



SRS wins Charity of the Year award!

We are very proud that in our 20th anniversary year, our work has been recognised with the [Charity of the Year award](#) at the recent Suffolk BME Business Awards, organised by the Bangladeshi Support Centre. This was a very welcome surprise and we received it, along with [other awards](#), on behalf of all the refugees we have worked with, whose resilience continues to inspire us.



Resettlement programme update

It has been another busy year for our resettlement team, as they continue to help vulnerable families displaced by conflict and persecution in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East and north Africa selected for resettlement by the UNHCR (the UN's refugee agency). We provide intensive casework from the point of arrival, helping to orientate people to their new surroundings and providing support around language-learning, employment, housing and volunteering. We recently welcomed a young Syrian family to Suffolk who had experienced some challenging circumstances and are slowly settling in with our support.

Elsewhere on the programme, five resettlement clients are taking part in the EU Voice project in partnership with Volunteering Matters, through which they are volunteering in cultural institutions across Suffolk. A number of resettled refugees also recently completed a modified driving theory course delivered by the WEA (Workers' Educational Association), and our resettlement manager, Susannah, participated in a Home Office project to provide feedback on the resettlement programme. We have also been very sorry to say goodbye to Lisa and Rasha, who were highly valued members of our resettlement team.

Thank you to the 'knit and natter' group

We would like to say a big thank you to the knit & natter group, whose committed members, from Hollesley, Sutton Heath, Bawdsey and Alderton, have knitted beautiful items for refugee and asylum-seeking children and babies for the past two years. Founder member Liz first heard about the needs of refugees in Suffolk at a talk in Woodbridge given by us. The group knit items for those in need, and refugee families have benefitted from baby bonnets and bright patchwork blankets, hats and scarves, jumpers and cardigans for young children and even some knitted girls dresses – the office is often visited by babies and young children wearing the colourful items donated, especially in this cold weather. So thank you from all at SRS and we hope you have many happy knit and natter meetings in 2020!



Thank you for all your support in 2019—Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

Thank you to all our volunteers, friends, supporters and, most importantly, the refugees and asylum seekers we work with every day, for your generosity and inspiration over the last year—we wish you all a happy and peaceful festive period. 2020 will be a challenging year, with funding uncertainty and sustained high demand for our services, but with your support we will continue to help those forced to leave everything behind to rebuild their lives in safety in Suffolk.

[Pictured right is our Christmas tree, decorated by our International Women's Group, at the 10th St-Mary-le-tower Grand Christmas Tree Festival]



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!