



Suffolk Refugee Support Spring 2020 Newsletter

www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk

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Registered Charity Number: 1078794



Suffolk Refugee Support coronavirus update

We made the difficult decision on 17 March to close our office and [suspend face-to-face services](#) in light of the worsening coronavirus situation, and since then we have made the rapid transition as a team to delivering our services remotely, with a focus on making sure our most vulnerable service users are safe and well. We have become experts at video conferencing (see right!) and are using new and innovative ways to get help to those who need it. We have been moved by the messages of solidarity we've received, but most of all we are humbled by the way the refugees and asylum seekers we work with have responded to the crisis: supporting each other, sharing vital information, being proactive and positive despite difficult circumstances, and doing the right thing to help tackle the spread of the virus. Thank you to all of them and to our volunteers, supporters and funders for all your practical, emotional and financial support. Together we will protect vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers through these difficult times. See pages 2 and 3 of this newsletter for full details of what we are doing and how you can help.



A refugee's personal message

It is very difficult days for the whole world. In this disaster all of us has his responsibility to fight this virus. All hospitals and the medical staff take their lives in the front rows to help thousands infected with the epidemic.

The workers in the social and charitable institutions are also in the front rows to help the vulnerable people and stand with them in psychological and material needs, and here I can, through my own experience, I praise Suffolk Refugee Support that they are an amazing support for me, they give me a hand of assistance in terms of psychological support in communication everyday, and assure me that I am not alone, that I can spend time positively and not to drown in more depression.

My message to all people that are keen on the safety of the country I say to them please:
" STAY HOME _ PROTECT THE NHS _ SAVE LIVES "

Supported by:



Coronavirus & refugee support—what we are doing

This is a difficult time for so many people, and as an organisation our thoughts are with all those affected by Covid-19 or working to combat the virus and continue delivering vital services. We also know that our clients can be particularly vulnerable and isolated, dealing with uncertainty, stress and worry for loved ones here and elsewhere. Our face-to-face services can be a lifeline, so we have been working tirelessly to provide as much remote support as possible. We are:

- continuing to offer advice and support via telephone, email, Facebook and WhatsApp

- speaking regularly to all those identified as being vulnerable and isolated to check on their wellbeing

- resolving financial and accommodation support issues and giving emergency help to destitute clients

- delivering English language tuition via a new 'Talk and Text' project

- contacting all the young people we support to check on their educational and emotional needs and producing [videos](#) to help them keep active and healthy

- launching our new Skills Exchange project with [this video guide](#) to making hummus!

- translating and distributing coronavirus [guidance and info](#) to our clients in key languages

- liaising with schools around coursework, resources and free school meals

- developing remote working policies to make sure everyone is safe, secure and following best practice



A client keeping busy in the garden

More messages from our clients, volunteers & partners

I miss you all, be safe and stay at home, we need you and we all love you—SRS client

A huge well done to all of you for work helping people who in many cases would otherwise be helpless. SRS's work is a story that will need to be told in the aftermath of this trying time.—SRS volunteer

Keep up the good work you and your team are doing. It is great to hear how you have been able to adapt to the situation and still provide the service with innovative ideas.—Public Health Suffolk

I am scared for my children and I try to protect them without making them feel bored. So we now have a new routine; every day we try to do exercise at home like playing football in the garden and try to continue their education at home. We will survive this ordeal God willing and everyone will go back to their jobs and their normal lives like before, we must just be steadfast and patient.—A resettled refugee in Suffolk

Urgent computer appeal fund—can you help?

With schools and colleges closing, many of the children and young people we support have suddenly found themselves having to continue their education through remote learning, without the additional face-to-face tuition and homework groups that we usually provide. We are sending resources and setting up remote tuition with our staff and wonderful volunteers, and most of the schools we are speaking to have been brilliant, but some of the students we support are really disadvantaged by not having a computer at home. This is particularly true of asylum-seeking families and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who live on very low levels of financial support and for whom even the most basic laptop is an unaffordable dream. Therefore we are appealing for donations towards a computer fund, so that we can provide laptops for those who need them most. If you can help, please make a donation through our [Virgin Money Giving page here](#), or set up a standing order or make a one-off donation through our [website form here](#) (with a note to say that you would like your donation to go towards our computer fund). Every little will help children, many of whom have already had their studies interrupted by war or violence, to keep up with their education and improve their life chances. We know these are hard times all round, so would be enormously grateful for anything you can give. Thank you! We'd also like to say a huge thank you to [Friends of Refugees Suffolk](#) for already providing a laptop for one of our most vulnerable clients.

Could you send a message of solidarity to refugees at this time? Message us through [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) and we will share them.

Suffolk High Sheriff's Awards success!

We're super proud of our fab volunteer Rifaii for winning the Volunteer of the Year Award (Under 30) at the Suffolk High Sheriff's Awards, which were held (virtually) recently! Since coming to the UK three years ago as a refugee from Syria, Rif has done so much to support other refugee families arriving in Suffolk, as well as giving valuable help in our office, finding employment, studying hard and caring for his Mum. Well done Rif and all the other thoroughly deserving award winners and nominees. You can read more about the awards in the [East Anglian Daily Times here](#), and listen to the full awards ceremony on [BBC Radio Suffolk here](#) [from 1:03:40 in, available until 25 April].

HIGH SHERIFF'S AWARDS



Volunteer of the Year Award (Under 30)



WINNER

Rifaii Al Nayef

Suffolk Refugee Support



SUFFOLK
Community
Foundation



CELEBRATING
suffolk
CHARITIES

More good news!

Good news has been in short supply recently, so we were delighted and relieved when the family of a Rwandan genocide survivor we have worked with for some years finally received their British citizenship recently. They told us: **"You cannot imagine what this means to us. We knew we have a family, we knew we belong but we didn't feel that we have a country we can call our home without fearing for the future."** Many thanks to St Francis Church in Ipswich and all who have supported this wonderful family through the long process towards a secure future.

Thanks Nick!

We were very sad to say goodbye recently to Nick, who has been such a great friend to all at SRS as well as trustee, vice-chair and advice service volunteer. Nick is moving to pastures new and we shall miss his empathy, intelligence and good humour. Below are his parting thoughts. Thank you Nick for all you have done to support refugees in Suffolk!



"I have learned so much during my six years at the sharp end in SRS. I can manipulate a database. I can be patient at number 35 in the queue at Migrant Help. I am just beginning to understand Universal Credit. Above all, coming from a comfortable background, where I've never had to worry about coping in the world, I have seen how difficult life can be for so many who don't have that advantage, can admire the resilience of so many of them, and hope that I have been able to help some of them in my small way. I count myself very lucky to have been involved in such an exceptional organisation and to have met some lovely people - clients, staff and volunteers. I wish you all the best, and thank you again for your kindness and companionship. I shall of course remain a member and shall watch your progress and think of you."

A young refugee poet on film

Yagavi is a young refugee poet and highly thoughtful and articulate 12-year-old from Sri Lanka, whose family we have worked with since their arrival in Ipswich. She wrote poems about her life in a secret diary, and those poems have now been published! You can see and hear her reading some of them in this lovely [short film](#) from the BBC.

UK 2019 asylum statistics—our response

The [UK immigration statistics for 2019](#) were published recently, and they show that more than 50% of initial decisions on asylum claims resulted in grants of asylum or other protection. Many more were successful on appeal, meaning that most people claiming asylum in this country last year were able to prove they had a very real reason to flee their homes and a genuine need for protection. There was also an increase in the number of asylum claims in the UK, unsurprising considering the record numbers of people displaced worldwide. The key statistics include:

- 35,566 people claimed asylum in the UK in 2019, an increase of 21% on 2018
- 52% of initial decisions resulted in grants of asylum or other form of leave to remain
- 44% of appeal decisions were successful (up from 40% in 2018), suggesting many initial asylum decisions are still not correct
- 79% of decisions on applications from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASCs) resulted in some form of protection
- 52% of those awaiting an initial decision have had to wait for more than six months
- 19,353 refugees have now been resettled in the UK under the government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) – we are proud that Suffolk has played a part in this

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!