



Suffolk Refugee Support Autumn 2020 Newsletter

www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk

38 St Matthew's Street, IPSWICH, Suffolk IP1 3EP
Registered Charity Number: 1078794



Giving voice to refugees—Tekle's story

Tekle is from Eritrea, one of the world's most repressive nations, where military service is indefinite and detention without trial is common. He came to the UK aged 15 in 2018, with only basic English, following a journey he describes as "arduous, difficult to tell, and beyond everyone's imagination". He has worked incredibly hard since then, including at our Homework Club, and has just started a scholarship at Ipswich School to study A-Levels in Maths, Physics and Chemistry. Tekle has been sharing his story with the local media and at our recent AGM (see page 2). You can hear him on the Belongings show on BBC Radio Suffolk [here](#) (13:55 in, available until 8th November), and read more in the [Ipswich Star here](#).



Suffolk Refugee Support Covid-19 update

With Covid-19 continuing to cause widespread hardship, our number one priority remains supporting our vulnerable clients through the current crisis in a safe way. We have made our office Covid-secure, complete with QR code, and reopened for limited appointments with those most in need. We continue to offer emergency support, welfare checks, schools liaison and translated information on the latest guidelines, how to stay safe and protect others, alongside our full range of services, from employment to youth work and small, socially distanced group activities with our International Women's Group and Sports Group.



“SRS, a beacon of good practice and humanity, civilised behaviour and sanity, providing a wide range of specialised and much needed services consistently and calmly and kindly” (The Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Jan Parry)

Supported by:



SRS Annual Report

We published our 2019/20 Annual Report recently, with updates, quotes and case studies from all our areas of work, covering the period right up until the beginning of lockdown. It demonstrates that demand for our services remains very high, with an increase in people coming to us for support for the first time. We think the report captures the scale and impact of our work at a time of record global displacement, with in-depth case studies showing the human stories and complex need behind the numbers. You can read the report in full [here](#).

Suffolk Refugee Support Annual Report 2019-2020



- 5693** individual advice sessions given in 2019-20
- 1500+** people supported directly or indirectly by our services
- 174** people came to us for support for the first time
- 42** different countries of origin (with Iraq, Iran and Syria the top 3)
- 46** SRS students passed ESOL exams
- 21** clients secured paid employment with our support
- 13** victims of domestic violence and **7** victims of modern slavery supported

Our 21st AGM—and first via Zoom!

We held our 21st Annual General Meeting earlier this month, and our very first virtual one! Much to our relief there were no major technical hitches and guests were able to hear about the work we have done over the last year, often in challenging circumstances, and from people who have achieved remarkable things with our support. Thank you to everyone who attended—it was lovely to see such a good turnout and to feel your warmth and support. If you were not able to join us on the evening, a full recording of the AGM is available for you to [watch here](#) (until 7th November).



“Thank you for inviting me to your AGM, keep up the vital work you are doing, it is truly inspirational!”

“Thank you for a wonderful meeting, and for sharing such inspiring and insightful stories”

“We were immensely up-lifted, as usual, by the AGM last night...the warmth of your wonderful team shone through”

“Another very interesting AGM. It’s so heartening to hear about people who have endured such appalling circumstances being able to find help to develop their abilities and make satisfying futures, some achieving some really remarkable goals.”

Good news, achievements and challenges

Among all the uncertainty around school exam results this summer, many of the talented and hard-working young people we support from Syria, Sudan, Eritrea and elsewhere achieved fantastic grades. It has been a privilege for us to see these students flourish academically, and a special thank you goes to our amazing volunteers who have done so much work to support them, especially during lockdown.

However, many of our clients still face the uncertainty and stress of a difficult asylum process, being forced to relive past trauma and stuck in a limbo made worse as processes are stalled by Covid-19. For instance, one client has had to go to London five times for a tribunal hearing, which was postponed each time. So we were delighted when our doorbell rang recently and a young Sri Lankan man we first met in 2014 showed us his refugee status. We had supported him to visit Freedom From Torture, where the torture he had received was documented by a specialist doctor. In spite of this, his asylum claim was initially rejected and it is only six years later that he can start to rebuild his life with our support. The messages above, from clients who have recently been granted leave to remain in the UK and British citizenship, show how much it means to be able to look to the future again at last.

To all member of staff in Suffolk Refugee Support,
I wanted to share my happiness with all of you that I got my leave to remain in the country.

I wanted to thanks each and everyone in Suffolk Refugee Support who helping me in each and every problems we went through.

I really appreciate everyone in Suffolk Refugee Support for all the support and help



"To finally have a British passport it is a weight off my shoulders. It feels now that I have somewhere to call home.

It feels bad when my children are asked about their nationality and they don't know what to say. But now they can proudly say that they are British.

This is a happy ending for a long and sometimes scary journey."

Some facts about asylum in the UK

In recent months there has been much media coverage of asylum seekers attempting to reach the UK in small boats. The issue has become highly politicised and emotive, but facts can be in short supply. We believe the debate should be informed by compassion, respect for human rights, and an accurate understanding of the situation, so here are a few important points to remember:

- ⇒ the UK is home to just 1% of the world's refugees—[85%](#) are hosted by developing countries
- ⇒ the UK received 35,000 asylum applications last year—[France received 120,000](#)
- ⇒ there are virtually [no legal routes](#) to enter the UK to claim asylum
- ⇒ [over 50%](#) of asylum claimants in the UK last year received protection, meaning they were able to prove a genuine threat to their life or freedom, or risk of serious harm if removed from the UK
- ⇒ asylum seekers are under [no legal obligation](#) to stay in the first safe country they reach

Did you know...

despite the increase in Channel crossings, Home Office statistics show that asylum applications in the UK from March-June 2020 [nearly halved](#) compared to last year?

from 2016-2019, the UK ranked [20th in the EU](#) per capita in numbers of refugees granted protection, behind every Western European country except Portugal?

[250,000 Belgian refugees](#) came to the UK in 1914, mostly by boat, including many who arrived on the Suffolk coast?



Thank you for all your support for refugees!

We know these are very difficult times for many people and businesses, so we are deeply grateful to everyone who has shown such support for refugees in Suffolk in recent months. We would like to thank the [Suffolk Coronavirus Community Fund](#) and all who donated to it, the Arcade Tavern and Duke of Marlborough pubs for their amazing fundraising through the World Beer Awards, and the [Palmer & Partners 500 Club](#) for their unexpected and generous donation (pictured right). A huge thank you too to all our supporters and Facebook followers for your kind donations of bikes, sewing equipment and study guides, and to all those who have shown their solidarity with refugees by sending us messages of support, setting up [standing orders](#) or joining our mailing list. Together we will make sure some of the most vulnerable in our society are supported through the current crisis and beyond.



Refugee Wellbeing & Work Project

We are acutely aware of the barriers that many refugees face in finding secure employment, so we're delighted to be taking part in the Wellbeing & Work for Refugee Integration Project through EELGA (the East of England Local Government Association) and funded by AMIF and the EU. The project aims to support refugees in overcoming these barriers such as addressing language skills, understanding workplace culture, job identification/application and volunteer/paid experience. Initially there are four courses available—IT, Study Skills, Job Search and Driving Theory—with further sector specific courses in the New Year. All have both ESOL and skills elements, and on completion clients will be supported in securing voluntary or paid work. The project also provides the opportunity, for those interested, to secure a CSCS card for work in the construction industry and one-to-one business set up/self-employment support through MENTA. It has been a busy first month and things have started well, with seven beneficiaries already registered and many more in the pipeline! You can find out more about the project [here](#), sign up for the launch event on 21 October [here](#), or if you have potential referrals or would like further information please contact Sarah at SRS on 01473 400781 or sowens@suffolkrefugee.org.uk.

Introducing Ipswich MP to local refugees

Over our 21 years of supporting refugees, we have established good working relationships with local MPs from both main parties, in the best interests of our clients (and their constituents!). So we were pleased to welcome Tom Hunt MP to our office recently to talk about our work and the contribution refugees have made to Ipswich. We also introduced him to some local refugee-owned businesses, including Your Local (pictured right), where he was able to hear first-hand about some of the issues they face, and received a very warm welcome (and a generous gift of baklava!).



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!