

**Minutes of the 21st Annual General Meeting of
Suffolk Refugee Support
Thursday 8th October 2020 at 5.30pm
Zoom online**

Attendees

Attendees – 48

Of which 22 members (M) present – therefore Quorate

Alan	Blackshaw	Trustee - Honorary	M
Alan & Barbara	Lamberton	St Felix Church, Felixstowe	M/M
Allison	Coleman	Suffolk County Council, Lead for Equalities and Inclusion	
Andrea	Pittock	Suffolk Community Foundation, Head of Grant Programmes	
Beverley	Levy		M
Bridget	McIntyre MBE	High Sheriff of Suffolk	
Cad	Taylor	BBC Suffolk	
Cathy	Gonzalez	Staff	
Danielle	Waller	Trustee	M
Cllr David	Ellesmere	Ipswich Borough Council, Leader of the Council	
Ellie	Roberts	Staff	
Eric	Maule		M
Geoffrey & Nella	Probert	Former High Sheriff of Suffolk	
George	Vestey	Former High Sheriff of Suffolk	
Gerry	Toplis	Chair of SRS Board of Trustees	M
Gill	Jones	Healthwatch Suffolk, Community Development Manager	
Greg	Dodds	Trustee	M
Izzy	Lane		M
Jaeyoung	Caffrey Lee	Volunteer	
Mayor Cllr Jan	Parry	Mayor of Ipswich	
Jodi	Peck	Staff	
Joy	Walton	Volunteer	
Joy	Bounds		M
Karen	Hopkinson	Volunteer	
Karen	Lawson	Ex-staff	
Kate	Billingham	Volunteer	M
Keith	Faull	Vice Chair of SRS Board of Trustees	M
Supt Kerry	Cutler	Suffolk Constabulary	
Kevin	Clements	Trustee - co-opted	M
Libby	Ruffle	Volunteer	M
Liz	Wood	Staff	
Malcolm	Mitchell		M
Marian	Lanyon	Trustee until AGM	M
Marianne	Walker	Staff	

Martin	Jones		M
Martin	Simmonds	Staff	
Michael	Lumb		M
Cllr Nadia	Cenci	Ipswich Borough Council	
Nick	Feldman	Ex-Trustee and volunteer	M
Phaniel	Mutumburi	ISCRE, Business and Operations Director	
Rachel	Turner	WEA	M
Rebecca	Crerar	Staff	
Shona	Hardie		M
Cllr Sophie	Meudec	Ipswich Borough Council	
Sue	Young		M
Tim	Passmore	Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner	
Yvonne	Chishaya	Staff	

Apologies

Apologies – 25

Andrew	Hope	Suffolk Coordination Service	
Ash	El Husseiny	Volunteer	
Beteja	Dovao	Trustee - Honorary	
Dr Dan	Poulter	MP for Central Suffolk & North Ipswich	
Desiree	Jones	Trustee - co-opted	M
Cllr Elizabeth	Harsant	Ipswich Borough Council	
Geoffrey & Rita	Drake		M/M
Prof. Helen	Langton	University of Suffolk, Vice Chancellor	
Hugh	Jolly	LD Rope Charitable Trust	M
Ian	Stewart	Trustee	M
Jennifer	Morcom	Trustee - Honorary	
Karen	Poulson	Trustee - co-opted	
Louise	Lidstone		M
Maggie	Barradell	Trustee - Secretary	M
Mary	Hope	Lovel Foundation	
Dr Melanie	Selfe		M
Melissa	Cutting	Volunteer	
Peter	Aldous	MP for Waveney	
Inspector Rebecca	Kidd-Stanton	Suffolk Constabulary	
Seija	Tattersall		M
Stephen	Atkinson		M
Revd Stephen	Earl	Lavenham Church	
Sue	Liddell		M
Suneer	Fida	Tudor Trust, Grants Manager	

1) Gerry Toplis – Chair

Welcome and apologies

The Chair Gerry Toplis (GT) introduced himself, the Charity Manager Rebecca Crerar (RC) and the Vice Chair and Treasurer Keith Faull (KF). He welcomed and thanked people for attending including the Mayor Cllr Jan Parry, Bridget McIntyre MBE, Tim Passmore, Cllr David Ellesmere, Mr and Mrs Geoffrey and Nella Probert, Mr George Vestey, IBC councillors and SCC councillors. He also thanked Members, Trustees, Volunteers and Staff.

GT reminded the attendees that the meeting was being recorded and would be made public and also ran through some Zoom housekeeping.

2) A few words from the Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Jan Parry

The Mayor spoke about being very proud that Suffolk, and Ipswich in particular, continue to play their part in providing a warm welcome to the refugees who arrive here. The Mayor spoke about how heartening it was to see the progress refugees are able to make with support, in particular in learning English, enabling them to go forward with their lives, furthering education and wellbeing. The Mayor noted how SRS exercised compassion in recognising individual stories and the insight, empathy and understanding refugees can bring to the community. The Mayor said that during her time as Mayor she had been especially concerned about young refugees, and that she was very interested to find out about SRS's homework club and conversation club opportunities, and recognised SRS's all-embracing approach to support (e.g. our appeal for bicycles). The Mayor also highlighted the important role SRS plays in disseminating information and positive stories (in the news, via Facebook) and that SRS was a beacon of good practice and humanity, civilised behaviour and sanity amid the challenges of a divided Europe and increasing hostility to immigration.

3) Minutes of 2019 AGM

The minutes of the last AGM were proposed by Nick Feldman, seconded by Malcolm Mitchell and agreed as a correct record by members.

GT stepped through the online voting process and thanked Martin Simmonds, Marianne Walker and Ellie Roberts for all their background work on the online Zoom procedures.

Annual Report 2019-2020

- **Chair's Report (GT)** can be found on p.13 of the Annual Report.

2019/20 was a challenging year and continued to be so during 2020. Nevertheless it was a successful year for SRS, with innovative responses allowing us to continue to deliver quality services.

GT explained that SRS's focus continues to be to ensure our clients have access to decent accommodation, adequate food, security, safety, guidance, advice and kindness.

GT explained that in the last year and up to the present SRS had four main areas to address:

1. The loss of funding in 2020 therefore 2019/20 was the year we prepared for this. It was a difficult time for the organisation. GT thanked the staff for their

continued hard work and professionalism during this difficult time and the management team for steering SRS through it.

2. Covid 19: staff, volunteers and trustees have risen to the challenge to continue to provide good quality services.
3. Significant changes to the Board of Trustees: Ian Stewart stepped down as Chair in June 2020, after 13 years of holding that responsibility and leading SRS to the successful position it is in today. GT said that SRS were hugely grateful to Ian for his contributions, hard work and commitment over those 13 years and during the many more years that he was a Trustee. In recognition of this, and so as not to lose his experience and knowledge, the Board is in discussions with Ian as to how he can become an Honorary Trustee of SRS. SRS also said farewell to our treasurer Nick Feldman and GT thanked him for having devoted much time and energy to SRS both as a Trustee and a volunteer. SRS is indebted to him.

Lucy Kerry also stepped down as a Trustee in November having been Secretary to the Board, and Marian Lanyon and Pauline Lane have both stepped down very recently having taken on a number of different roles. GT thanked all of them for their great contributions to SRS.

GT became chair in July as a result of these changes and said he is honoured to do so, Keith Faull is now the Treasurer and Maggie Barradell is now Secretary and has done a great job at recruiting new Trustees.

4. The Board and Staff undertook a strategic review with the support of the Lloyds Foundation, one of our funders: it called for a degree of heart-searching and a degree of honesty and SRS now have a 3-year strategy up to 2023.

GT thanked staff, volunteers, Rebecca and her management team and the trustees for getting us through these challenging times and into the coming year.

- **Charity Manager's report (RC)** can be found on p.2 of the Annual Report.

RC welcomed people from far and wide (including Oxford, Herefordshire, Felixstowe) and lots of people – faces old and new.

RC said that in the pre lockdown year up to March we saw 602 clients, and gave over 5500 individual client advice services. RC said she was hugely proud of the staff and volunteers for all the work they do and the standard of service we give.

RC welcomed and gave a massive thank you to Karen Lawson – former Fundraising Manager (up until the beginning of lockdown) who did an incredible job in finding funding to replace the loss of the National Lottery Fund.

RC spoke about the changes that were made since March to adapt to lockdown and how everyone (staff, volunteers, trustees) mobilised and adapted well. RC gave special thanks to Ellie Roberts, Liz Wood and Martin Simmonds for pulling this together and to Marianne Walker who was instrumental too. RC also spoke about the pro-active work we did to keep people connected whether emotionally or technically (providing laptops, regular phone calls, online zoom sessions etc.). RC also spoke about the re-opening of the office since July in a Covid Secure manner.

RC thanked all the trustees past and present and gave a big thank you to Gerry for taking on the role of Chair and to Keith and Maggie who stepped into other positions that were left vacant.

Tim Passmore (Police and Crime Commissioner) took the opportunity to thank everyone for making a difference in Suffolk and well done. RC thanked him and said that it was team work as it could not be done without the funding such as that received from the PCC.

4) A word from our clients - personal stories and achievements

Martin Simmonds (Fundraising and Communications Officer) introduced the next section: client stories in their own words.

Jodi Peck (Employment and Training Advice Worker) spoke about the Employment and Training service, which tailors its approach to help people to achieve their goals. Covid has added to the challenges (working from home online, reduced job opportunities etc), but what has been nice this year has been the number of clients continuing onto higher levels of education. Jodi recognised the key work of the fantastic one-to-one volunteers who have adapted to working with clients over Zoom. Jodi introduced Maria, a self-taught seamstress, and explained that SRS got her onto courses and helped her access grants, pop-up shop organisations and marketing.

A video clip of Maria was shared over Zoom.

See website <https://www.mariacallisto.com/>

Martin Simmonds also spoke about the face masks made by Maria and recognised all the important work that many of SRS's clients have done during the pandemic in key worker roles and how some of the unsung heroes of the pandemic have been some of our clients.

Yvonne Chishaya (Employment Advice Worker and Skills Exchange Facilitator) spoke about the Skills Exchange project, which aims to boost confidence and help integration, as well as teaching new skills (e.g. languages, budgeting and IT skills during lockdown). During lockdown the project adapted and was done over Zoom until the rules changed and the group was able to meet socially distant in the park, a new experience for some of them who had never been. Yvonne introduced Selma and her video was shared. Selma explained the key role that SRS played for her by guiding her to achieve her goals and how they had helped reduce her depression and isolation (supporting her with her children's needs, providing her with a laptop & data package during lockdown, involving her in Zoom meetings, reducing isolation through the Skills Exchange project, signing her up to courses etc.).

Cathy Gonzalez introduced herself (Youth Coordinator/Advice Worker) and spoke about the conversation group for young asylum-seeking children (once a week, to discuss relevant topics that they request, e.g. internet safety, relationships, access to work) and the homework club (started 3 years ago for 11-18 year olds for a couple of hours a week with a volunteer, covering mainly Maths and English but sometimes other topics, with the support of Ipswich School). Cathy spoke about the young people's enthusiasm and desire to learn, and how inspiring it was to see their progress. Cathy then introduced Tekle, who is a very good example of this commitment and who has been given a scholarship at Ipswich School. A video of Tekle was then shared where he spoke about his journey to the UK, why people have to leave their countries, Ipswich School and his aspirations to go to university. He thanked SRS for all their help and finished off by saying 'our differences make us beautiful'.

Martin thanked Cad Taylor for putting together the video of Tekle and also thanked another staff member Kyler Jackson (Youth Activities Coordinator) for the work he does with young refugees in his role.

Liz Wood (Advice Service Manager) spoke about SRS being a 'giant family' watching the children of some of our clients grow up and achieve in ways that their parents didn't have the opportunity to do. She then spoke about the difficult asylum process (despite what the media sometimes portray) and the trauma of having to re-live things that have happened to them. She explained how the whole process is now taking even longer because of Covid and how it can be very frustrating and upsetting; Liz gave the example of a client with a heart condition who has had to attend a tribunal 5 times, each time postponed due to issues such as a missing translator. Liz then also spoke about a Sri Lankan client who arrived in 2014, had been a victim of torture and had all the evidence but has only now in 2020 been given status and how he can only now start to rebuild his life.

5) Treasurer's Report can be found on p.14 of the Annual Report

SRS Treasurer Keith Faull (KF) explained that it had been a year of changing demands on the organisation and on the board of trustees and thus has required some financial management. Earlier in the year, Nick Feldman retired as Treasurer, and his role was then taken on by Gerry Toplis. Subsequently, Ian Stewart also retired from his long term role as Chair of the Trustee Board. This left vacancies on the Board that needed to be filled, through which KF took on the role of Treasurer.

KF thanked several people including:

- Nick Feldman for the huge efforts in the role of Treasurer noting that he was a difficult act to follow
- Ed Day for his invaluable support in maintaining SRS's accounts and preparing the annual accounts.
- Foreshore Accountancy for acting as Independent Examiners for SRS's accounts.

KF explained that the changes to the Board, in addition to the challenges posed by Covid 19 and the necessary associated precautions, have placed additional demands on the Trustees, but that they had also presented new possibilities that he hopes SRS and its management can make the most of.

KF explained that the key financial challenge that SRS faced in 2019/20 was raising funds to cover the non-renewal of our longstanding National Lottery funding. The Lottery were clear that this was not because of any shortfall in our application. This news required us to redouble our fundraising efforts whilst also making preparations for a possible reduction in our budget.

KF was pleased to tell the meeting that, although we had a small reduction in our budget, we had been able to maintain our level of services in the current financial year through some reorganisation and efficiency savings. Therefore, KF was able to report that in spite of the challenges it has been a successful year for SRS financially. We had raised enough funds to continue the important work of the service and we had operated within our budgets. We also have some healthy reserves that can help us through bumpy financial periods.

KF then thanked all of our funders, especially the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund for giving us grants for over 12 years which have had an enormous impact on the running of SRS's services and have been vital to make us who we are today.

KF also thanked the Suffolk Community Foundation, who have helped us to link with many of our grants. We are very grateful for their continued support and encouragement.

Finally, KF also thanked all of the individual donors to SRS. Their giving is important to SRS and it provides us with important unrestricted funds to use at our discretion.

KF highlighted that it was important to note that there were some underspends in some 2019/20 budgets. This was as a result of cautious spending and a slightly reduced workforce as we faced the budget uncertainties of 2020/21. KF explained that this has boosted our reserves which are key as we face further bumpy and uncertain times through the pandemic and that the Board are looking at how we can use some of this underspend to further develop our services through our 2020/23 Strategic Plan. KF concluded that we finished 2019-20 in a healthy position and met all our financial liabilities.

KF then asked for votes which resulted in the following outcomes:

- Appointment of Independent Examiner Foreshore Accounting proposed by Nick Feldman and seconded by Malcolm Mitchell. This was agreed unanimously.
- Presentation of Annual Accounts 2019-20, proposed by Danielle Waller and seconded by Malcolm Mitchell and agreed on unanimously.

6) Election of Trustees to the Committee

3 co-opted trustees were up for election:

Desiree Jones

Kevin Clements

Meg Day

All trustees were elected unanimously.

7) Questions from the floor and Any Other Business

Mayor Cllr Jan Parry asked about access to legal advice and family reunification: RC explained that in the case of the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children that Cathy supports, it is a difficult decision for them to leave without families. RC explained that it was difficult for us as we are not a campaigning organisation and that we do not want to be party political and must remain neutral. However, we can see the human impact of the separation of families whilst also understanding that there are national and economic and even worldwide impacts.

Martin then explained that we want to advocate on our clients' behalf even though it can be difficult as we have to remain neutral. He explained that the family reunion rules are restrictive and can be cruel: for example, there are cases where one part of a family has been resettled in UK but their over-18 child is not allowed to join them and is maybe sent elsewhere in Europe, or even in some cases the other side of the world.

Liz responded to the legal query and explained that the Sri Lankan client she mentioned above had followed the correct family reunion process and is still waiting. It is lengthy and this after already not being able to see his son for 6 years. Liz told of another story where the father and mother and 3 of their children had been resettled in the UK but that they had left 2 other sons behind because they had fled to Lebanon due to being young men at risk of being pulled into armed struggle. One of the sons had since died in an accident on a building site and the

remaining son is stranded in Beirut, in his early 20s, vulnerable and alone. His parents are obviously struggling with the fact that there is no legal answer to their family's separation.

Liz then thanked:

- ISCRE's free legal aid clinic (through Suffolk Law Centre), in particular Angela Cole and Sally
- Fisher Jones Greenwood and Ashley in particular who covers Suffolk and Essex
- Solomon Solicitors in Luton for their fantastic collaborative support; they provided onsite legal clinics before lockdown and have since been providing advice over the phone.

Martin then explained that SRS, with EELGA and other organisations, had been advocating for years for legal advice to be made available in Suffolk.

There being no further business, Gerry closed the meeting at 7:15pm

8) Virtual mingling: positive feedback highlights

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. (Shona, SRS member)

[We] were immensely up-lifted, as usual, by the AGM last night – for too many reasons to be able to write. What a shame it had to be a Zoom but the warmth of you and your wonderful team shone through nevertheless. (Michael, SRS member)

What an excellent virtual AGM! (Marian, trustee)

Generally so moved to hear all your fantastic work, especially at this time; I am humbled by your work - and continue to be inspired (Cad, BBC)

These stories are so inspiring, well done to everyone (Andrea, SCF)

I think the second half of Tekle's video about his journey says everything about the SRS. Well done the team!) (Geoffrey, ex-High Sheriff)

You all do such amazingly inspiring work! (Beverley, member)

Fascinating and illuminating presentations. Many thanks to all involved. (Tim, SPCC)

It is fantastic to hear stories of those who have benefitted from Suffolk Refugee Centre (Bridget, High Sheriff)

SO lovely to join you this evening and hear such inspiring stories about how you are still supporting people in the current conditions. (Karen, ex-staff)

Thank you for inviting me to your AGM, keep up the vital work you are doing, it is truly inspirational (George, ex-High Sheriff)

Thank you for all the marvellous work you are doing. (Izzy, member)

Thank you for a wonderful meeting, and for sharing such inspiring and insightful stories. (Danielle, trustee).