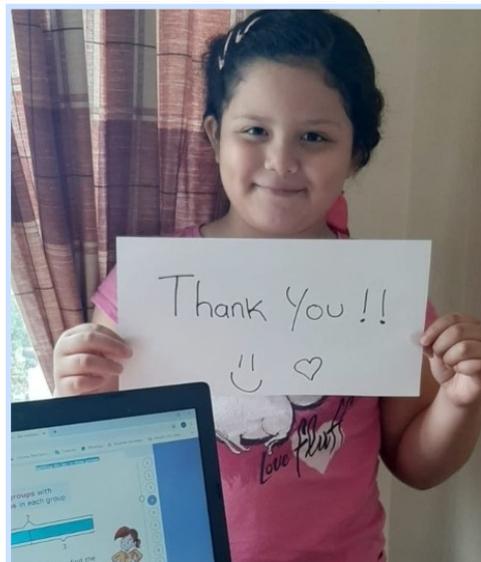


Suffolk Refugee Support Annual Report 2020-21



The period covered by this report coincides with the first year of Covid-19, with its multiple lockdowns and serious impacts on so many. In other words, a year like no other, which has caused so much suffering, disproportionately affected our clients, and challenged our ability to deliver vital services. Throughout it all, we have been amazed by the resilience and adaptability of our staff and volunteers, who have gone the extra mile to make sure vulnerable people are looked after, and above all by the strength, perseverance and good humour of the refugees and asylum seekers we work with. Separated from loved ones and facing great uncertainty, they have provided us with inspiration, especially those refugees working in [frontline services](#). We hope this report captures the successful results they have helped us to achieve over the last year.



During the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns periods we:

- ⇒ operated our advice service fully via telephone, email, remote video tools and apps, with office appointments where restrictions allowed
- ⇒ made regular welfare checks to ensure no one was isolated and no issues went unseen
- ⇒ liaised with schools around coursework, educational resources and free school meals for the families we support
- ⇒ provided resources, [including laptops](#), for the most deprived families to ensure children could keep up with studies and not be further disadvantaged
- ⇒ supported clients with basic IT skills and resources to ensure they could access services and classes online, e.g. through Zoom group sessions
- ⇒ provided regular [translated guidance](#) and information in our main client languages, focusing particularly on health advice
- ⇒ put more than 30 volunteers in regular contact with clients to deliver 1-1 English language tuition, support and guidance, and implemented policies to ensure this was done safely
- ⇒ contacted all the young people we support to check on their educational and emotional needs and [produced videos](#) to help them keep active, safe and healthy

“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 2019-21, Cllr Jan Parry)

Supported by:



Charity Manager's Report



As I wrote last year, it was the start of what became a long period of disruption to our usual services which we are still not fully over. A challenging time for everyone. I am very proud of the team and the way they have pulled together to maintain really good support to those in need.

Over the pandemic's darkest days in 2020, our staff, volunteers and trustees found new ways to work (thank goodness for Zoom and WhatsApp). We connected with asylum seekers and refugees who were isolated and alone. We provided online yoga classes, delivered books, toys, bikes and art equipment to them and telephoned the most vulnerable once a week to check on their well being and to remind them that they were not alone.

Many of our clients were afraid to go out even when allowed – rumours and misinformation were widespread. They were very anxious about the health and welfare of family members abroad. In some cases, our clients lost dear loved ones overseas and were not able to be there during their last days. Life in the UK was hard, but in already troubled countries, it was awful and the knock-on effect on our clients in the UK was tangible.

Asylum seekers still arrived in the UK (albeit in smaller numbers) – risking their lives to find safety. Decisions on claims were halted during the pandemic leaving families in asylum accommodation in limbo. The ensuing chaos in initial accommodation centres elsewhere in the UK (rising numbers and nowhere for them to be housed) led to errors being made by the Home Office. We supported families with no means to pay for food who had been housed in Ipswich with no support payments. We also paid for emergency accommodation when systems failed, to avoid street homelessness of already vulnerable individuals. Without the assistance of SRS, many asylum seekers would have faced destitution and suffering during this time and with other services being even more remote than previously, accessing help would have been impossible.

Suffolk Refugee Support became a “Message Cascader” for information about the rules and recommendations to avoid the virus. We used our WhatsApp group messaging to broadcast information to our clients as it was published, to enable them to receive accurate information about what they could and couldn't do. Some of this was translated to enable them to understand it fully. We promoted vaccination against Covid-19 and countered the misinformation about this.

We continued to provide a telephone advice service, one-to-one volunteer-led academic support groups, Zoom sessions for ESOL, small group sports/health activities (when allowed), cookery, writing and IT courses, and supported many refugees with employment issues – many lost their jobs or were furloughed. Others risked their health to continue to go to work (for instance, in food processing and as health workers or taxi drivers). The Kurdish supermarket next to our office provided free delivery out of hours to people who were shielding.

We are grateful for the additional funds we received from key funders to provide perspex screens in the office, PPE equipment and a new door entry phone system to keep everyone safe. These measures have been vital for us to continue our office-based services when restrictions lifted.

As we start to come out of this difficult period in all of our lives, we are seeing clients with poor health (as a result of not accessing medical help when it was needed); children who have missed education and forgotten how to speak English after months not at school; and clients who have stayed silent about their domestic and financial problems throughout the pandemic.

We are as busy as ever. The world is still full of turmoil, upheaval and immense human suffering. Suffolk Refugee Support is grateful to everyone who has contributed in some way to make a difference for those who find their way by whatever means to Suffolk. I am personally humbled by the amazing way people pull together in times of adversity – this year has been one of them. Thank you.

Rebecca Crerar, Charity Manager

Advice Service

462 refugees or asylum seekers received an advice service from us

107 clients received key messages on issues including Covid, health guidance, scam prevention and hate crimes via WhatsApp broadcasts

54 people were supported to receive immigration legal advice

42 different countries of origin for people we supported (with the top 5 being Iraq, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan)

39 people, including many vulnerable clients, attended a bespoke vaccination clinic with our support

33 victims of crime were supported, including victims of modern slavery, domestic violence, hate crime, online crime and scams

We saw a slight reduction in numbers of people accessing our Advice Service this year, largely due to no asylum-seeking or resettlement families being moved to the area, and fewer people relocating generally due to Covid-19. Our advice staff made great efforts throughout the year to reach out and maintain communication with vulnerable individuals and communities, carrying out complex casework via telephone, email or WhatsApp. One happy side effect has been many clients improving their technical and written communication skills.



“I wanted to share my happiness with all of you that I got my leave to remain. I wanted to thank each and everyone in Suffolk Refugee Support who helping me in each and every problems we went through.”

“Thank you for all your support with my son, you have always listened to me and I can trust you.”

Case study

D was given refugee status at the beginning of the first lockdown. He hadn't seen his wife and 7-year-old son for five years, and the application for them to join him in the UK was delayed due to Covid-19. Eventually they arrived in October, but the family needed to isolate under quarantine rules and had no resource to do so. Fortunately we were able to provide financial support to ensure isolation could be done correctly. Through our partnership with the Health Outreach Team, health checks showed that the parents were suffering from low mood. The father had been the victim of torture in his home country and still suffered from mental health issues. It can be stressful for a family to be reunited, particularly when facing the challenges of settling into a new country, so we were aware the family would need a great deal of support emotionally and practically. Realising the son had no toys, we were able to collect some donated items and also helped to apply for a school place. The school were exceptionally helpful and acted on our request that the son start school quickly due to the family living in one room. They were keen to understand the family's background and to think of ways to support the son. A few weeks after their son started, the parents proudly showed us a report from the school detailing how well he had settled in but also highlighting his kindness to other children.

Improving Physical & Mental Health

Covid-19 has exposed the health inequalities faced by our clients—through deprivation, isolation and lack of access to services—and highlighted the importance of our work in tackling this. Throughout the last year we have focused on keeping our clients up-to-date with health information and providing the extra support needed throughout the pandemic, particularly around mental health and wellbeing, as illustrated by an increase in clients receiving health support through our services. Alongside this we have continued our broader health work in areas including diet and nutrition, dental health and risky behaviours among young people. We have held workshops via Zoom with local GPs, OneLife Suffolk and Suffolk Wellbeing, liaised with Public Health, the Police, CCGs, the Health Outreach Team and local schools on health issues, and hosted popular weekly online yoga sessions for women.

201 clients received health support through our services

107 clients received a dental health video podcast in Arabic made by an ex-client who is a former dentist

45 women received information on health topics such as exercise, vitamin D and healthy eating

42 parents supported with the health and wellbeing of their preschool children

16 women attended a weekly online yoga class



Face masks made by one of our clients and given away to NHS workers

“SRS yoga sessions changed my life. I was going through depression and even went to the doctor to get sleeping pills. When I joined this yoga it really helped me, it made me feel really good. It helps how I feel.”

“You were there for me and I will never forget it.” [M, case study below]

Case study

M has struggled with low mood and last year admitted to a member of staff that he was a heavy user of cannabis. We urged him to seek help as he accepted that it had affected his life. He is single and seemed to be isolated and lonely. During lockdown we kept in regular phone contact with M. He needed help accessing his universal credit but also seemed lonely and wanted a chat. On one occasion he phoned and seemed in distress, explaining that he was in great pain. We helped him access his GP but unfortunately his situation worsened and he had to go to Accident and Emergency. He was diagnosed with a pilonidal sinus which needed immediate treatment as it had become so badly infected. The next time M contacted SRS he was in a hospital bed. We phoned him each day to check how he was, and when he was discharged we continued to maintain contact as he was struggling to understand the support that he was meant to get from health services to dress his wound. SRS staff liaised with the GP and were able to provide M with reassurance and guidance.

Employment & Training Work

As this report covers the first year of the pandemic and three lockdown periods, we saw a reduction in applications for jobs and work placements—due to home schooling needs and a reduction in opportunities—and a shift in our employment and training service towards supporting clients to access education and academic progression. While we continued to support with CV writing, understanding application processes, developing employability skills and confidence, we found our clients became more focused on improving career prospects and long term qualification goals. This included support with access to higher education pathways including university applications. We also helped clients to access courses specific to their sector of interest, but found that many were facing challenges enrolling in education due to new online systems put in place during the pandemic, requiring us to spend time advocating for clients and communicating with education providers. We helped clients develop job-search skills via Zoom, supported them with online courses, including through FutureLearn, and formed new external partnerships for future work placement opportunities.

1295 employment or adult education/training advice contacts given

96 clients given one-to-one employment support

33 people entered training with our support

17 clients achieved increased basic skills, in particular IT and online learning

16 clients gained employment or work experience/volunteer placements with our support

14 clients supported to develop knowledge in specific career areas

"I had applied for many jobs before and now I realise I wasn't applying properly. I didn't understand about the personal specification or how they look at your application."

Case study

TB is an asylum seeker we have supported over the past year. Although she is not currently allowed to take paid work, we assisted with writing her CV, identifying existing skills and areas of development. To prepare her for employment we advised taking some online courses, and she completed English for Healthcare and Basic English through FutureLearn, awarded by King's College London. TB completed these studies during lockdown on her phone. When we secured funding for some laptops, TB was chosen to receive one. With this resource, she was able to significantly improve her IT skills, update her CV, attend online courses (including completing beginners IT through WEA) and to participate in SRS group Zoom sessions. We supported TB to enrol in ESOL and Maths classes at Realise Futures, and helped her apply to volunteer at BBC Suffolk. She started this role in January 2021 and is enjoying developing her media skills, which has really helped her self-confidence.

Case study

T has a part-time job as a care assistant but has received limited in-house training in her job. Therefore we have worked with her remotely over the last year to complete online Dementia Awareness Training to give her increased skills in her role. Through one-to-one sessions, working in a time frame that suits her, we have been able to work through an online accredited course, providing grammar and language support to ensure she gains a full understanding of the information presented to her throughout each module. T also attended our IT course so that she is more independent with online work training requirements.

Youth Work



- 106 young refugees and asylum seekers supported
- 65 young people received weekly welfare checks during lockdown
- 48 young people from 14 countries given meaningful summer activities
- 40 young people attended our Homework Club
- 17 young people supported with online 1-to-1 educational support
- 1 young person gained a scholarship to Ipswich School to study A-Levels

We continue to see increasing numbers of young people needing our support, mainly Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs). Throughout the pandemic, we have adapted our services to support this vulnerable group, who can be at heightened risk of isolation. We have made weekly welfare calls to check on their wellbeing and educational needs, provided games and books to help with studies and to alleviate boredom, and made videos for young people to help keep them safe, healthy and active. This has highlighted cases where individuals were suffering from depression or confused or frightened by the rules. We have ensured that the young people have been kept informed about important health information and changes in government guidance, and wherever possible sent them translated information in their native language.

“I came here to apply for asylum. I used to live a difficult life, and now things have improved, even though I have no mother here, no father, no brothers. I always thought of my father and mother so that I cannot sleep at night and I hope that my life will be better. I have wonderful people here in this country. I am very happy with you at Suffolk Refugee Support. I love you a lot. Thank you.”

English Teaching

Over the last year, we supported 55 people through our ESOL classes, from Pre-Entry to Entry Level 3. During the first lockdown we moved to a ‘text and talk’ project and arranged for volunteers to call students for welfare checks and one-to-one tuition. In September we hired a larger venue to resume face-to-face classes while social distancing. Through this time we taught clients how to use Zoom, and when classes were forced to go back online attendances remained high. We also used the classes to give students guidance on Covid-19 (staying safe, rules and restrictions, testing and vaccines), crime prevention (including online scams) and health. We are conscious that some families might not speak much English at home, so to avoid deterioration in English levels during lockdown, in January 2021 we decided to set up additional classes to catch up on course content for those who were struggling.

“It is a privilege to be able to work with him; in our weekly call he is always positive, polite, appreciative and above all hardworking.” (SRS volunteer on student supported with online tuition during lockdown)

Women & Families Support Work



67 parents supported to access early years' education or engage with schools

36 parents supported with issues with their preschool children

19 children with special needs supported

15 mothers supported with pregnancy

Our women and families work has been particularly vital this year, with many of those we support concerned about the health of their families during the pandemic and having to take on home schooling responsibilities with very little resource. It can be challenging for schools to communicate with parents who have limited English and our bilingual staff have liaised closely with teachers to support families with coursework, IT resources and free school meals. Our Women and Families Advice Worker has provided intensive casework to vulnerable families placed under extreme pressure by the effects of Covid-19, we have provided guidance on staying safe and encouraged families to exercise, eat healthily and maintain their children's exposure to the English language at home. We also organised activities and trips, both online and in person where possible, including a remote scavenger hunt and a Halloween outing to Holywells Park (pictured).

"Thank you so much for your help... Now our children can find friends on Zoom too."

"Thank you for ringing the school with an interpreter with me, I would have had no idea what was going on."

Case study

L had become distrustful of authorities following an incident which resulted in protracted interaction with statutory services. She cares for her husband and this has put a lot of pressure on her. L was reluctant to take up a nursery place for her young daughter. The family live in overcrowded housing and during lockdown in particular this has created added tensions. The volunteer who supports them was able to persuade mum to allow the daughter to go to nursery. This gave L the opportunity to attend some of our group sessions and think about her needs. She relished the social interaction even when the group meetings had to go online. Meanwhile her daughter became more independent and enjoyed playing with the other children at nursery. L even agreed to participate in some online activities with her daughter and it was lovely to see them enjoying the experience together.

Case study

Our Women & Families Advice Worker has worked intensively to support a family from Iraq who have a child born with a rare, life-threatening metabolic condition. The treatment is managed by a hospital in London and the family have to travel there frequently.

Both parents have limited English and did not understand the support provided so were very stressed. We supported the family at CiN (Child in Need) meetings with other professionals, and to get extra support with benefits, extra funds from Activities Unlimited and a Blue Badge. With both parents now unable to work this has helped them with travel costs. Dad told us: "Thank you very much for help with the Disability Blue Badge as it helps when taking my daughter to hospital appointments and parking nearby."

International Women's Group

The pandemic has strengthened the importance of our International Women's Group for those we support. Often the women speak of SRS as their 'family' and many might otherwise have been isolated. During the first lockdown we made weekly welfare calls which highlighted any women who were frightened or struggling with the rules. We provided additional support and the women appreciated the calls, both to practise their English and, for some, as their only interaction with the outside world. By September we organised for small groups to meet, hiring additional rooms to meet social distancing requirements, but in November the group went back online. Through our efforts to ensure the women had the necessary IT skills and resources this has been such a success, and created such a positive, safe space, that some have asked for the group to stay on Zoom indefinitely! We have run online exercise classes, including belly dancing (run by a client) and yoga, and encouraged the women to write journals, but for some it is simply important to speak to other women who are going through similar experiences.



51 women supported—all report reduced isolation and improved mental wellbeing as a result

45 women have better knowledge of health issues and health vocabulary

32 women received weekly welfare calls during lockdown

28 women attended online group sessions via Zoom with our support

"I'm very pleased with woman's group because it helped me learn and improve my English. This group is very good for socialising, it's very important for well-being and I have more friends. I learn everything here about UK cultures and women rights."

"Using Zoom has given me different learning opportunities and the chance to interact with other women"

Case study

K is married and has four children. She was denied a formal education and has limited literacy, but is highly able and speaks four languages. K has a sunny exterior but is haunted by events back home, both by experiences from her own past and those still happening to family members now. This impacts her health and causes feelings of loneliness and isolation. IWG supports K to:

1. Build friendships—K uses the group to share personal experiences of atrocities back home. The women make good listeners and can empathise from their own experiences.
2. Improve English skills—K is in our top English group and is always first to hand in her homework
3. Increase confidence—K often helps to translate and interpret information for other women
4. Develop initiatives—K has made face masks that are sold to other members of the group and given away to NHS workers. She has appreciated being able to contribute to her family's income at a time when her husband's income has decreased due to Covid-19.
5. Explore career opportunities—we have linked K into the SRS employment team where she is being supported with her CV and also to pass her driving theory test
6. Improve parenting practice—K and her youngest child have been active attendees of the online play and music sessions we have run

Sports Activities Group

40 young people engaged in sports, 60% aged 16-18 years

48 young people engaged in **35** different summer activities

7 young people linked up with external sports teams/groups



Our Sports Activities Group has played a vital role in supporting young people, many of them in the UK without family or support network, over the last year. We have constantly adapted delivery in line with Covid-19 guidance, from group sports such as 5-a-side football or basketball, to tennis, running in pairs and 1-1 conversation, to online exercises and interactive WhatsApp group challenges. Our Sports Activities Coordinator has kept in regular contact with the young people to help keep them fit mentally and physically, and to reduce isolation and loneliness. We also created an app to allow flexible activity bookings, which proved to be a successful way of interacting with the young people.

“Sports Group helped me a lot during the hard time from being stuck in my tiny scary home. It has improved my physical and mental health during the pandemic.”
(AF—see case study below)

“I don’t really know how to rate these sessions (with Sports Group Coordinator). I always say no one else would do what he does. Trying his hardest to get everyone fit and healthy, with the corona rules. No one else would be as passion as him to repeat the sentence 10 time to get it to everyone’s head. Thanks to everyone supporting him.”

Case study

AO is a Kuwaiti national referred to us in October 2020 by his accommodation support worker, who was worried AO was isolated and keen to find support around his social and emotional development. Since then, AO has attended six different activities with us including running, bowling and pool. He was initially quiet and reserved but grew in confidence, chatting with others who attended. AO admitted he had been a regular runner but hadn’t run since arriving in the UK. Our Sports Activities Coordinator showed him some quiet and safe running routes, which he continues to run by himself. In addition, AO attended SRS conversation group sessions which helped to improve his very limited English. In December, AO attended our SRS football league team. He also expressed a desire to find a local football team, which we helped to arrange.

Case study

AF is an 18-year-old from Eritrea who frequently attended our Sports Group prior to the pandemic. During lockdown, a WhatsApp group was created to suggest exercises and give advice regarding physical and mental health. The group took part in challenges like push-ups, sit-ups or keep-ups. AF regularly uploaded his efforts, and enjoyed the engagement with others. Our Sports Activities Coordinator made weekly phone calls, and AF told him he had rarely left the house. Our coordinator reassured him he could go out and exercise once a day, but he was reluctant to do this without additional support. We tried to think of other ways to support AF during these challenging times. Knowing that he loved drawing, we bought him some artist pencils to help keep him engaged and resilient to the situation around him. AF was one of the first names we called when we could start holding fitness activities again. It seemed that organised sessions gave him the confidence to leave his house and bring back a bit of normality. We also helped AF join an art group where he has worked with others to produce a fabulous [community mural](#).

Refugee Resettlement Work

New arrivals under the UK's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) were put on hold during the pandemic, meaning those selected by the UN for resettlement were left in limbo. It has also been a particularly challenging year for the two families who arrived in Suffolk shortly before the first lockdown. However, it has been so positive to see the number of resettlement clients now conversing in English and able to live more independently. During the pandemic our partners at Ipswich Community Media have run basic English classes online and Realise Futures continued to work with those adults with more advanced English. We have also seen an increasing number of parents accessing our courses and International Women's Group. We are still in contact with two young people who went to university and despite the difficult conditions are pleased to report they are enjoying their courses. Three clients have started work during the last six months and are enjoying a new found sense of independence and pride and many of the young people are also flourishing in the face of schooling challenges during the pandemic. Despite losing months or years of education when fleeing their homelands and having to adjust to a different school system here, they have shown great resilience and willingness to succeed. At least four have weekend jobs, two are volunteering and one has been made Deputy Head boy at his school. In March 2021 we marked five years since the first Syrian resettlement families arrived in Ipswich (see page 12).

Case study

R came to the UK under the resettlement programme four years ago. She was a widow with two teenage sons who had experienced a challenging life. She quickly showed a willingness to learn and applied herself to learning English. Despite being naturally shy and lacking much formal education, she progressed to college where she particularly enjoyed catering. With the support of her tutor at Suffolk New College, she progressed through the different levels of qualifications culminating in attaining Level 2 in Hospitality Services. R now works in a busy café where she is a popular member of the team, and this has improved her confidence greatly.

Skills Exchange Work

Our Skills Exchange project was launched in late 2019 as a new, reciprocal approach helping clients with integration and English language skills. Our original plans have had to be adapted due to Covid-19 restrictions, with the programme moving largely online and focusing on particular areas, such as IT skills and tips or a volunteer who is a keen cook providing one-to-one English lessons to a family in exchange for traditional food recipes from Afghanistan. This cookery strand proved so popular that we held two live, online cookalongs led by a talented refugee chef, with plans to expand this further.

Case study

SC, his wife and two children came to Ipswich in February 2020 as asylum seekers. They knew no one here and felt isolated. Initially they seemed quite low and were very frustrated. SC joined Skills Exchange just before lockdown and has been a regular attendee ever since. He started listening in the background to his wife, but as the weeks progressed he participated more and more and is now an active member of the group. He has shared his Zoom and IT skills, which he picked up very quickly with support from SRS. He has recently shared email tips with the groups and this was very well received—so much so that the group have asked him to deliver another session. All of this has seen him grow enormously in confidence and has given him the courage to successfully complete some online IT courses he had found and was interested in.

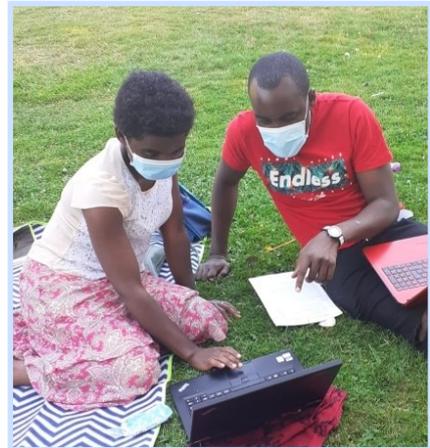


"Haha, I never thought it was possible to learn belly dancing by Zoom. That's amazing!"

"We talked with joy it was really great I enjoy so much. Thank you to give me this chance."

Volunteering

We have been overwhelmed by the support from our volunteers over the last year. When our groups and activities stopped due to lockdown we stayed in touch with clients by phone initially, with 29 volunteers assisting staff in carrying out welfare checks, encouraging clients to practice their English and supporting them to continue their learning. Our volunteers amazed us with their flexibility and commitment, often dealing with weekly changes due to restrictions and always adapting to the situation, helping to lead Zoom sessions, meeting one-to-one in open spaces and attending larger, Covid-secure sessions. In total 53 volunteers supported us during this period. Thank you to each and every one—we could not have delivered the same level of vital support without you. We are also grateful for the patience of all those volunteers whose activities or applications had to be put on hold.



Partnership and Co-production Work

Early in the pandemic it was recognised that key messages needed to reach all communities and that SRS had a vital role to play with our client group. We became a 'Message Cascader', disseminating health messages and translated infographics to our clients, and communicating with Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Police, Public Health Suffolk and local CCGs and GPs on this. We have taken part in the Engaged Communities and What Are We Missing groups, engaged with frontline services operating during lockdown, such as the Chapman Centre and Health Outreach Team, liaised closely with schools and Suffolk County Council's UASC and Leaving Care Team, and continued to chair the Healthwatch Suffolk BME & Diversity Group. By supporting our clients' IT skills we have been able to hold Zoom workshops with GPs, OneLife Suffolk and Suffolk Wellbeing. We are also stepping up our co-production efforts in order to involve our clients more closely in our work, with a dedicated group looking at this. We realise our clients need to play a bigger role in designing and delivering our services, and in telling their own stories, such as the [1000 Dreams](#) storytelling project, on which we worked with our ex-client Osama (pictured above).



Hidden Harms Work

Awareness of hidden harms is embedded in our services, but there was a heightened need for our clients to be alert to this during the pandemic. We have carried out intensive casework with families of concern, worked with domestic violence charities to support victims, worked with the police to raise understanding of honour-based violence, given presentations to social work students and mental health professionals to raise awareness, produced videos highlighting the dangers of exploitation, grooming and online scams for young people, discussed women's rights and different kinds of relationships in our group work, and used our Employment & Training Service to steer young people away from poor choices.

28 women discussed rights for women and laws around children

17 young people discussed different kinds of relationships, e.g. homosexual and multi-ethnic

5 women supported who were victims of domestic violence

2 videos produced around dangers of exploitation and online scams

Community Activities

Despite Covid restrictions, where possible and safe to do so we have arranged outings including a Halloween trip to Holywells Park, and more recently a visit to Ipswich Museum (pictured), with whom we are also working on [this exhibition](#). We have delivered a number of talks and presentations online, including to social work students at the University of Suffolk and to the 'Cake & Revolution' WI group, and we were delighted that two young people we work with were chosen as [virtual mascots](#) for Ipswich Town FC as part of Amnesty International's Football Welcomes initiative.



Media Work

We continue to work to give voice to our clients' experiences in the media. In the last year we have [highlighted refugees](#) working on the frontline of the pandemic, the achievements of [one young man](#) who gained a scholarship to Ipswich School, and marked the 10th anniversary of the Syrian conflict with [these moving stories](#) of Syrian refugees resettled in Suffolk. We have also made regular appearances on BBC Suffolk, including the Belongings show and a ['Window Into Her World'](#) with one of our clients.



The International Context

The UNHCR's annual Global Trends report made for shocking reading again this year. One percent of humanity is now forcibly displaced, and twice as many people have been forced from their homes compared to 10 years ago. Meanwhile, asylum applications in the UK fell 18% in 2020, despite the highly publicised increase in asylum seekers crossing the Channel.



82.4 million people forcibly displaced globally (up 3 million on 2019)

11.2 million people newly displaced in 2020

86% of refugees hosted by neighbouring or low income countries

1 million children born as refugees between 2018 and 2020

34,400 refugees resettled to third countries in 2020 (down 69% on 2019)

Chair's Report



The Covid-19 pandemic has been the dominant feature of 2020/21 for SRS, as it has been for the whole country. We have had to respond and adapt by implementing new ways of working; being flexible and innovative in delivering support to our clients; and ensuring that the Board of Trustees is able to continue fulfilling its governance responsibilities.

In her Manager's report, Becks gives an overview of how SRS has responded to the pandemic, with some specific examples forming the backbone of this annual report. I would like to thank Becks, her Management Team, all the staff and our volunteers for their hard work, flexibility and responsiveness over the last year. The leadership shown by Becks and her Management Team has been pivotal in ensuring that we have successfully continued to deliver services which meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers during a period of great uncertainty and upheaval.

The Board of Trustees has also had to be flexible and innovative, moving all its meetings and various approval processes (including the AGM) online. I would like to thank all the Trustees, both current and those who served during the last year, for their flexibility and commitment during such uncertain times. We have successfully maintained our momentum in implementing our strategic plan for 2020-23. The Board has agreed a number of new or updated policies, including a financial reserves policy; a new risk register; an annual service and budget planning cycle; terms of reference for our sub-committees; and embarked on a revision of our constitution and fund-raising strategy.

The Board itself has undergone significant change over the last year. Ian Stewart, our chair for 13 years, stepped down from that role in May 2020 and as a Trustee in October. Ian has provided extremely valuable service and leadership to SRS over his 18 years as a Trustee, seeing SRS through difficult times to its current position as a trusted, valued charity in Suffolk. We are indebted to Ian for his contributions to SRS. Marian Lanyon and Pauline Lane also stepped down as Trustees, having made important contributions and provided wise counsel to the Board.

We have been successful over the year in recruiting new Trustees with a range of skills and experience. I would particularly like to thank Maggie Barradell for her leadership and hard work as Secretary in enabling us to achieve this.

As well as keeping ourselves on track in terms of strategy and governance, it is important to acknowledge that SRS's success also depends on looking outwards and on our culture. Partnerships with other local agencies, statutory bodies and our funders are essential. Our operating principles, as set out in our 2020-23 strategic plan, are absolutely key, with kindness, respect and self-determination core to our work and what we wish for our clients. Refugees and asylum seekers continue to seek refuge in the UK due to the dangers they face at home. Their strength and fortitude in the face of the risks they overcome on their journey to this country, and the challenges having arrived here, are often an inspiration to us and, at times, humbling. The achievements that we have described in this annual report are often theirs, demonstrating the talents and aspirations that they bring with them to Suffolk.

Gerry Toplis

July 2021

Treasurer's Report

My image of a 'treasurer' is one of a medieval figure crouching over a treasure chest, with jewels and gold brimming over its edges. In this image the treasurer is usually responsible for all the money, taking charge of what comes in and what goes out. Being treasurer for SRS is not like this at all. SRS's money is looked after by a team of people who advise and support me in the role of treasurer. It is very much a team effort.

For this I thank: Ed Day, who advises on the best way of accounting for sometimes complex finances; Becks Crerar, who reports to the Finance Subcommittee on how the finances are shaping up; our Finance Officer, Vanessa Ransby, who brings clarity to the budgets and the accounts; and Gerry Toplis for his astute understanding of the way SRS works. My thanks also to our independent examiners who ensure our accounts fulfil the legal requirements and are a full and fair picture of SRS's financial position.

As is elsewhere reported, in 2020/21 SRS has continued, in spite of the challenges of Covid-19, to provide a broad range of services to the refugee community of Suffolk. These services have been provided in line with grants and donations received during the year and costs have been in line with the planned budget.

The impact of Covid-19 and the measures required to address the safety of our staff and needs of our clients have had a major impact on our work. We are grateful to funders who have continued to support us and indeed at times offered us specific funding to address these impacts.

SRS's fundraising efforts are ongoing throughout the year and we try to ensure that our applications for funding are broadly spread to support the wide range of needs of our clients. Many organisations have provided grants for our work for which we offer our thanks: BBC Children in Need; National Lottery Community Fund COVID Support Fund; Garfield Weston; Building Better Opportunities Fund; Health Inequalities Fund Public Health Suffolk; Tudor Trust; Lloyds Bank Foundation; Nationwide Community Grant (via Essex Community Foundation); Barrow Cadbury; AMIF; AB Charitable Trust; Ipswich Borough Council; Mrs LD Rope's Charitable Settlement; Lovel Foundation; Limbourne Trust; 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust; Swan Mountain Trust; St James's Place Charitable Foundation; Oak Trust, Leigh Trust; Ganzoni Charitable Trust.

We are enormously grateful to Suffolk Community Foundation and their funders, through whom we secured the following funds: Ipswich & East Suffolk CCG Realising Ambitions Fund; Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner's Fund; New Anglia LEP Community Challenge Fund; Suffolk Coronavirus Community Fund; Youth Intervention Fund; Frank Jackson Fund; Tampon Tax Fund; Suffolk Giving Fund—Martineau Fund; Royal Hospital School; Hopkins Charitable Fund; Dolphin Franklin Fund; Hewlett Fund; Maurken Fund; RJB Fund; Suffolk Hardship Fund.

We are sincerely grateful to the numerous supporters who give regularly or make one-off donations to our work. These unrestricted funds are of particular use to us in achieving our aims as an organisation. We continue to deliver the Vulnerable Persons/Children's Resettlement Programme on behalf of Suffolk County Council and we are grateful to them for their continued financial support.

As a result of this unprecedented year, our reserves at the end of 2020/21 have increased above the 50% level as set out in our reserves policy, agreed in line with Charity Commission guidance. This was not unexpected and will be taken into account when planning our work as restrictions are lifted and in line with our strategic and fundraising plans. The Trustees will continue to monitor the position closely and regularly to ensure that SRS makes best and most effective use of the available funds in the coming year(s) to support our clients and tackle the stored up problems the pandemic has created.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of our volunteers who provide much invisible enrichment of our service. Their freely given time and energy make an enormous contribution to our service, and without which we would be greatly impoverished.

Keith Faull, Treasurer

SRS Strategic Plan 2020-2023

SRS's Purpose (Mission)

Suffolk Refugee Support exists to ensure that all asylum seekers and refugees in Suffolk are enabled to live integrated, fulfilled and contributing lives in their new communities.

SRS Operating Principles: To guide Trustees, paid staff and volunteers

- ⇒ We are driven by a recognition that each person is unique, that every individual has intrinsic value and has a constructive role to play in UK society
- ⇒ We are always open, friendly and welcoming
- ⇒ We are respectful, reliable, honest and transparent in all our dealings with one another and with others
- ⇒ We direct all of our efforts towards self-determination and ultimate independence for our clients
- ⇒ Our work is always led by the needs and interests of our clients
- ⇒ At all times we work in ways that ensure the all-round safety and security of our clients and everyone who works for SRS
- ⇒ We always work to the highest standards; keeping ourselves fully informed and knowledgeable about every sphere of our work

SRS Strategic Aims: 2020 – 2023

The following six aims have equal priority:

- 1) To ensure that refugees' and asylum seekers' basic needs for immigration status, housing, literacy, education, physical and mental health, employment and personal safety are met
- 2) To work in ways that lead to SRS' service users moving into independence from SRS' services
- 3) Through advocacy, lobbying and other means, ensure that statutory and other bodies meet their obligations to asylum seekers and refugees
- 4) To continue to mobilise volunteers' involvement in supporting the work of SRS, and further develop the volunteering contribution to the organisation
- 5) To continue to raise awareness and promote understanding of the refugee experience in the community
- 6) To ensure that Suffolk Refugee Support is effectively governed, led, managed and funded in order to maximise its impact, and that its work is informed by 'voices of lived experience'

HR Sub Committee Report

The HR Sub Committee monitors SRS's policies on equality, diversity and protected characteristics in terms of employment, trusteeship and volunteering. The Board are satisfied that SRS continues to be an equal opportunities employer and have committed to an action plan to progress in certain areas. We have continued to progress towards more fully reflecting the people with whom we work. This year the Board set up the Client Partnership Sub Committee to better involve people with lived experience when strategy and services are being developed and reviewed. We continue to be very proud of the work SRS has achieved throughout the pandemic having adapted its policies, procedures and working practices to continue providing individualised, flexible support to refugees and asylum seekers.

Staff Team (as of September 2021)

Charity Manager	Rebecca Crerar
Operations Manager	Ellie Roberts
Advice Service/Resettlement Programme Manager	Liz Wood
Employment & Training Coordinator	Jodi Peck
Employment Skills Assessor (AMIF)	Sarah Owens
Women & Families Advice Worker	Fatima Khan
Bilingual Advice Worker	Faizaa Ali
Housing & General Advice Worker	Becky Osler
Resettlement Coordinator/Advice Worker	Ashraf El Husseiny
Youth Coordinator/Advice Worker	Cathy Gonzalez
Youth Activities Coordinator	Kyler Jackson
International Women's Group ESOL Coordinator and ESOL Tutor	Michaela Freeman
ESOL & International Women's Group Facilitator/Community Liaison Officer	Catherine Costello
International Women's Group Crèche Leader	Shkurte Bejtullahu
ESOL & Special Projects Officer	Sarah Cole
Volunteer Coordinator	Rushel Moulton
Volunteer Coordinator (Temporary)	Libby Ruffle
Fundraising and Communications Officer	Martin Simmonds
Finance Officer	Vanessa Ransby
Office Systems Coordinator	Marianne Walker

Board of Trustees (as of September 2021)

Chairman	Gerry Toplis
Vice Chairman/Treasurer	Dr Keith Faulk
Trustee	Kevin Clements
Trustee	Greg Dodds
Trustee	Christina Sweet-Escott
Trustee	Felicity Szesnat
Trustee	Danielle Waller
Honorary Trustee	Alan Blackshaw
Honorary Trustee	Beteja Grajqevci Dovao

We would like to thank the following trustees who resigned during 2020/21 for their services to SRS: Ian Stewart, Marian Lanyon, Pauline Lane; and Maggie Barradell who resigned in April 2021

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Bob Tostevin, former chair of our Board of Trustees, from Covid-19 late last year. Bob did so much for Suffolk Refugee Support in our early days and remained a committed supporter. His childhood experiences gave him a lifelong empathy for refugees—in 1940, along with other children fleeing Guernsey before the German occupation, an eight-year-old Bob got on a boat to England not knowing where he was going or who would look after him. After the war Bob returned to Guernsey but never saw his mother again. And he never forgot that when war or disaster cause people to flee their homes in desperation, their fortunes are dependent on the kindness of strangers. Spending his last years in Ipswich he was very proud to help Suffolk Refugee Support, including as a Chair and Trustee. Bob will be greatly missed, but we will carry the memory of his kindness and compassion in all that we do.

