



Suffolk Refugee Support Autumn 2021 Newsletter

www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk

38 St Matthew's Street, IPSWICH, Suffolk IP1 3EP

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Update on Afghan refugees in Suffolk

When Suffolk Refugee Support was set up in 1999, some of the first people we worked with were Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban regime in power at the time. Since then the Afghan community in Ipswich have been our friends and colleagues. We have shared with them their hopes and fears for the future of their country, so to see the Taliban once again take control of Afghanistan and yet more innocent people uprooted is heartbreaking. Two months on, our thoughts remain with our Afghan friends and all those affected by these events. We have



provided additional support to our existing Afghan clients, including settled families and more recently arrived Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs). Some have family members missing or under direct threat in Afghanistan. We are providing up-to-date information and a sympathetic ear, listening to people's fears, worries and even feelings of guilt for loved ones in danger back home. You can watch the powerful testimony of one Afghan refugee in Suffolk [here](#), and read about the concerns of an Afghan man we work with in Ipswich who interpreted for the British Army [here](#). We welcome the [commitment](#) from Suffolk's local authorities to play their part in the Afghan resettlement programmes. In the last few months we have welcomed four Afghan interpreters and their families to Ipswich under the ARAP (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy) scheme and we expect to welcome further Afghan families to multiple places in Suffolk in the near future. We stand ready to provide a warm welcome and are committed to giving long term support to refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan, however they arrive and whatever their needs. Thank you for every single one of the messages of support, kind gestures and generous donations we have received—the response to this crisis really has shown the best of Suffolk! We are not taking any donated items at the moment but will put out appeals as and when needed. We are currently recruiting an Employment and Training Advice Worker to help meet the needs of those arriving (see our [Current Vacancies page](#) for details) and are also looking for volunteers in West Suffolk (Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds in particular) to help support families arriving in this part of the county—see our [Volunteer page](#) for more. We are also keeping [this page](#) on our website updated with the latest information.

Supported by:



Thank you!

In the last two months we have been busier than ever providing extra support to our Afghan clients and preparing for new arrivals, alongside our full range of services for refugees from around the world. We have only been able to do this with your support. Thank you to everyone who has given towards our work—each one of your donations is incredibly valuable to us. Thank you to those who have undertaken amazing fundraising efforts on our behalf, such as [Rebecca](#) and [Hugh](#) (pictured) who are putting in the miles to support refugees through [sponsored walks](#). Thank you for all the offers of donated items (and sorry we haven't been able to take up more of them!). Thank you to everyone who has responded so generously to our recent appeals for bikes. Thank you to all those who have signed up to our [mailing list](#) and followed us on [social media](#). And thank you to everyone who has sent such kind comments and welcome messages, which we will share with the families we support. We are in this for the long term to help people rebuild their lives, and your compassion, commitment and generosity will make this possible. Alongside recent events, a whole range of emerging issues and lack of access to other services due to the Covid-19 pandemic means that demand for our specialist support and advice is extremely high. If you would like to make a donation to help us support some of the most vulnerable in our society, you can do so [here](#).



Afghan cricket sessions

Many of the young Afghans we work with love cricket, so over the summer we organised net sessions as part of our Sports Group summer activities. This provided an escape from anxieties about the situation back home, and the young people proudly hung the national flag. There was some serious talent on display, and we're delighted to report that two players made successful debuts for the Ipswich & East Suffolk first team before the end of the season! Many thanks to the club for their support, and also to Nacton Cricket Club and Mavericks Suffolk for the generous kit donations.



**STOP
PRESS**

We are looking for kit and coaching support for a new football team made up of young Eritreans in Ipswich, as well as items such as table football, a pool/snooker table, carrom board and other board games for our new youth club. If you can help, contact Cathy: cgonzalez@suffolkrefugee.org.uk

Woodbridge update

Earlier this year we reported on plans to house asylum-seeking families at the old police station in Woodbridge, as part of the Home Office's contracts to accommodate destitute asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their asylum claims. Having put considerable resource into planning for this, registering volunteers and coordinating a groundswell of generous local community support, we are disappointed that the plans have not come to fruition. We understand that the ownership consortium have become insolvent, official receivers have been appointed and the property is on the market again. Clearly this places a serious question mark over the project going ahead. To everyone who has offered support, we apologise for the ongoing uncertainty and thank you for your patience. We have no control over this situation and will share any further news as we get it.

SRS Annual Report

We published our 2020/21 Annual Report recently, with updates and case studies from all our areas of work. The report covers the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has presented such unique challenges for our service delivery, and in particular for the people we work with. We hope the report captures the scope, impact and continuing importance of our work in overcoming these challenges, and we would like to thank all our colleagues, volunteers, supporters, friends and funders for helping to make this possible. You can read the [full report here](#).

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.



- 462** individual refugees or asylum seekers received an advice service from us, with up to **1500** supported directly or indirectly through our services
- 42** different countries of origin for people we supported (with the top 5 being Iraq, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan)
- 30** volunteers delivered regular 1-1 English language tuition and guidance during lockdown

Can you help?

Do you have a spare room? Could you host a young refugee in your home? The Benjamin Foundation are looking for people with compassion and empathy to provide a stable home and support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (aged 16-18). There is also a real need for foster carers for under-16s. [More details here](#) or for more fostering info contact Cathy (cgonzalez@suffolkrefugee.org.uk).

Our 22nd Annual General Meeting

We held our 22nd Annual General Meeting recently—and 2nd online via Zoom! We were delighted to see so many friends in the virtual room to hear about our work over the past year and the achievements of those we support. We heard video messages from clients who had gained placements at BBC Suffolk through our skills exchange scheme and shared the secrets of Ethiopian cuisine through our cookery project, and, most powerfully, from an Afghan refugee expressing his fears for family members still in Afghanistan and a plea for understanding for refugees. Thank you to everyone who attended and showed such support for our work, in particular the Mayor of Ipswich, Cllr Elizabeth Hughes for her very kind words. If you weren't able to attend on the night, you can watch a recording of the meeting [here](#).



“The work that you do here in Suffolk is overwhelming. The more I read about it, the more I admire you all. What you do is humbling and I'm very proud to be here tonight.” (The Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Elizabeth Hughes)

“Thanks to you all for organising and presenting such an informative and professional AGM. You're a great team and we feel proud to be a part of SRS.” (SRS member)

Museum of East Anglian Life baking project

Recently, we arranged for a group of women to join baker Lindsey Wright for four busy sessions at the Museum of East Anglian Life in Stowmarket. Ideas from different countries were shared and explained, then made by all the participants and baked in the museum's recently built wood-fired oven. From milling the flour for soda bread to perfecting the art of the Afghani bolani, via Iranian nan berberi, hot Turkish yoghurt soup and cinnamon buns, a lot of ground was covered. Everyone really enjoyed the sessions and the results were delicious!



Channel crossings—a few facts

There has again been much coverage of people crossing the Channel to claim asylum in the UK this year, often mentioning 'record numbers'. So we again need to point out a few facts:

1. These are not record numbers—250,000 refugees fled across the Channel in 1914 after Germany invaded Belgium, including [16,000 arriving in Folkestone](#) in one day, and 1,700 who arrived at Southwold harbour on October 15th (see photo).

2. There are no safe, legal routes for the vast majority of genuine refugees who have specific reason to try to find safety in the UK

3. The UK sees far fewer boat arrivals and asylum claims than many European countries (France received three times as many asylum claims as the UK last year and Germany four times as many)

[This excellent piece](#) explains clearly why words and fact-checking matter so much.



Tree of Peace



We work with so many people whose lives have been torn apart by violence and conflict, so we were honoured to take part in a ceremony recently on International Day of Peace to dedicate a beautiful new Tree of Peace in Woodbridge. Many thanks to all involved and to the other inspiring speakers.

Good news

We were delighted to hear that Cynthia Capey, who played such a key role in setting up Suffolk Refugee Support 22 years ago, has been [awarded an honorary doctorate](#) by the University of Suffolk. This is a hugely well-deserved recognition of Cynthia's work over decades to improve the lives of refugees and promote mutual tolerance and understanding.

Period poverty can be a serious issue for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, and for women in refugee camps periods can make life especially challenging. So we were very proud to work with Maria, a local businesswoman, recently on a much-needed series of [period awareness workshops](#).

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!