

**Minutes of the 22nd Annual General Meeting of
Suffolk Refugee Support
Thursday 30th September 2021 at 7.30pm via Zoom online**

Attendees - 53 of which 26 members (M) present – therefore Quorate.

Roger	Abbott	Member
Will	Atkins	Proposed Trustee & Member
Mike	Bowen	Volunteer
Kevin	Clements	Trustee & Member
Sarah	Cole	Staff
Catherine	Costello	Staff
Edward	Creasy	High Sheriff of Suffolk
Rebecca	Crerar	Staff
Sharafatullah	Danish	Staff
Greg	Dodds	Trustee & Member
Cllr David	Ellesmere	Ipswich Borough Council, Leader of the Council
Mary	Engleheart	Proposed Trustee & Member
Keith	Faull	Vice Chair & Treasurer of SRS Board of Trustees & Member
Ken	Fitchew	Volunteer
Stella	Frangleton	Suffolk Constabulary
Juliet	Freeman	Volunteer
Michaela	Freeman	Staff
Robert	Halliday	Member
Jane & Kevin	Hardman	Members
Mary & Mike	Hope	Lovell Foundation
Cllr Elizabeth	Hughes	Mayor & Councillor of Ipswich
Denis	Johnston	Member
Cllr Carole	Jones	Ipswich Borough Council
Jasmine	Kay-Moyle	Volunteer
Helen	Korfanty	Member
Alan & Barbara	Lamberton	St Felix Church, Felixstowe & Members
Izzy	Lane	Member
Christine	Laverock	Member
Ray	LeCouteur	Member
Beverley	Levy	Member
Sue	Liddell	Member
Patrick	Lillistone	Volunteer
Cllr Inga	Lockington	Ipswich Borough Council
Michael	Lumb	Member
Ashley	Meyer	Member
Malcolm	Mitchell	Member
Jodi	Peck	Staff
Andrea	Pittock	Suffolk Community Foundation
Jodie	Rendell	Suffolk County Council (in lieu of Allison Coleman)

Ellie	Roberts	Staff
Libby	Ruffle	Staff & Member
Martin	Simmonds	Staff
Christina	Sweet-Escott	Trustee & Member
Felicity	Szesnat	Trustee & Member
Lizzi	Thistlethwayte	Limbourne Trust
Gerry	Toplis	Chair of SRS Board of Trustees & Member
Marianne	Walker	Staff
Rev Peter	Wintgens	Member
Souzan & Raied Ajaj	Yousif	Volunteers

Apologies - 33

Peter	Aldous	MP for Waveney
Faizaa	Ali	Staff
Dre	Betts	Supporter
Joy	Bounds	Supporter
James	Cartlidge	MP for South Suffolk
Philippa	Charles	Garfield Weston
Allison	Coleman	Suffolk County Council
Therese	Coffey	MP for Suffolk Coastal
Albert	Daley	Ipswich Disability Advice Bureau
Beteja	Dovao	Trustee - Honorary
Geoffrey & Rita	Drake	Members
Ashraf	El Husseiny	Staff
Countess	Euston	Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk
Christine	Geeson	Suffolk County Council
Cathy	Gonzalez	Staff
Shiona	Hardie	Member
Matthew	Hicks	Leader of Suffolk County Council
Nick	Hulme	CEO of ESNEFT
Tom	Hunt	MP for Ipswich
Hugh	Jolly	LD Rope Charitable Trust
Steve	Jupp	Suffolk Constabulary Chief Constable
Fatima	Khan	Staff
Marian	Lanyon	Volunteer and Member
Sara	Noonan	Member
Angela	Page	Member
Tim	Passmore	Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner
Vanessa	Ransby	Staff
Amelia	Whitworth	Proposed Trustee
Lois	Williams	Member
Vanessa	Wiseman	Volunteer
Liz	Wood	Staff
Jackie	Wright	Volunteer
Sue	Young	Member

Gerry Toplis – Chair

1) Welcome and apologies

The Chair Gerry Toplis (GT) introduced himself, the Charity Manager Rebecca Crerar (RC) and the Vice Chair & Treasurer Keith Faull (KF). He welcomed and thanked people for attending including the Mayor Cllr Elizabeth Hughes, Council Leader Cllr David Ellesmere, High Sheriff Edward Creasy, representatives from funding organisations, 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.

Link to meeting recording:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/WoxrSDGWBXBHSc5VOXxmmMwWvkKLK/W4YLcYLQAFff7r1BVIBppruFUHgSn5bp91v.RyE4Vu8gT5nJm61Z>

2) A few words from the Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Elizabeth Hughes

The Mayor spoke about feeling very privileged to be present at this AGM and talked about her childhood experiences of the importance of welcome, kindness and sharing shown to strangers. She said these, offered by SRS in Ipswich and Suffolk, are overwhelming and the Mayor spoke of her admiration for the team. She said that the work SRS does is very important and humbling and how very proud Suffolk can be to have such an organisation. The Mayor offered thanks on behalf of the people of Ipswich who appreciate the work SRS does and her best wishes for the year ahead.

GT thanked the Mayor and the valued partnership with Ipswich Borough Council.

3) Reports

3a) Minutes of 2020 AGM

The minutes of the last AGM were recommended by Andrea Pittock, seconded by Keith Faull and agreed as a correct record by members.

3b) Annual Report 2020-2021

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

2020 was a tough year for everyone in the country and our thoughts go to those who have lost someone to Covid, to those suffering with Long Covid or lost jobs as a result of Covid. It's also been tough for SRS staff and clients. GT described how SRS staff responded magnificently to the challenges, making changes to meet the needs of our clients. He offered sincere thanks from the Board of Trustees to all SRS staff and volunteers for the hard work, commitment, good humour and team efforts. GT thanked Rebecca and her management team for their leadership and creativity in responding repeatedly to changes needed to deliver services and keep people in touch with each other. He also thanked the Board of Trustees for their hard work and flexibility.

There have been some big changes in the Board with Ian Stewart stepping down as Chair after 13 years (and as a Trustee for 18 years). We are indebted to him for his service. GT offered thanks for the significant contributions from Trustees Marian Lanyon and Pauline Lane who stepped down this year, and to Maggie Barradell for her fantastic efforts as Secretary of the Board, especially for the

recruitment of new Trustees. The Board has worked hard on Strategy and Governance to ensure SRS operates properly within the Memorandum of Association.

Success depends on our ability to look outwards and work well in partnership with agencies and funders and a key part of SRS Operating Principles is that respect, kindness and self-determination are central to helping our clients achieve the lives they want in Suffolk. GT offered a tribute to the team for providing this, and for the speed and effectiveness with which they have responded to the recent impact of events in Afghanistan. The fortitude and strength of character in overcoming obstacles shown by SRS clients is an inspiration for us all. The achievements we set out in our Annual Report are often their achievements and demonstrate the talents and energy they bring with them.

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

RC welcomed everyone and offered thanks to all those who have provided support in the last year during which Covid continued to provide lots of disruption. She thanked the Chair, Gerry, for his efforts leading SRS this year and the team, the Management team, all staff and all volunteers for the work done so flexibly in these difficult times. RC thanked funders for their support.

SRS has been really busy despite being in and out of Covid lockdown restrictions, helping 462 clients with advice. In addition SRS has continued to operate the Women's Group, ESOL classes, Sports group, yoga, the homework club and conversation group. Other activities include a bread making course with the Museum of East Anglian Life, a regular walking group in Christchurch Park, a client running a course on periods, and 1:1 sessions for clients with volunteers.

RC talked of how proud SRS is to have become a Message Cascader for Suffolk County Council's Covid messaging service giving key information to clients regarding Covid. Clients are both concerned about coping with restrictions, with catching coronavirus, but also about their family members back home affected by Covid.

SRS are proud to have been given the initial contract for supporting Afghan interpreters and their families being resettled in Suffolk. 4 families have already arrived with around another 20 due. RC gave thanks to all those offering support for this work. SRS also welcomes families arriving through the general resettlement scheme which has now re-started after being put on hold due to Covid. This includes helping to get children into schools, accessing health services, getting qualifications transferred for use in the UK, assisting clients to get jobs, toys for children, completing paperwork etc.

SRS are also proud to continue to support people who have settled here and made new lives for themselves doing things such as the Kurdish family running the supermarket near SRS offices which sells excellent products!

RC provided an update on the plan to resettle new arrivals in Woodbridge - currently this is on hold due to factors outside SRS control. Apologies to those people who have volunteered and trained to offer support to this project.

RC ended with big thanks to staff Martin Simmonds, Marianne Walker and Ellie Roberts for their efforts enabling this Zoom AGM to work effectively and efficiently.

4) Some words from our clients - personal stories and achievements

Ellie Roberts (Operations Manager) introduced the next section: client stories in their own words. Before doing so she spoke about the SRS priorities of keeping our clients safe and continuing to provide support. This has required the ability to quickly adapt services - ER described how many changes some services have undergone in the past year. A useful outcome has been that staff, volunteers and clients have all improved their IT skills! ER gave examples of the creativity used in finding workable solutions giving the example of SRS Sports Coordinator giving clients fitness challenges via WhatsApp and the sharing of recipes on Zoom Cook-along sessions and offered thanks to staff and volunteers for being so creative.

Jodi Peck (Employment and Training Advice Worker) introduced Mahmood who became a client during the first lockdown when he had newly arrived in Suffolk and was looking to re-start his studies for law which he'd left in Gaza. Jodi then shared a video made by Mahmood talking about the different ways he's been supported by SRS including help to get work, access English learning, and reduce his isolation.

Libby Ruffle (temp Volunteer Coordinator) introduced a client called Selma who she met at the SRS Skills Exchange project. Selma described how concerned she was on her arrival in England about not being able to read, write or speak English, but that SRS helped her to get onto courses for English, Maths and IT. She also described how lonely she had felt, but that through the Skills Exchange project she got to meet people and find out about places to go. Selma now volunteers at BBC Radio Suffolk - a connection she made through SRS and can help her children with their homework. She thanked SRS for helping her to move forwards in her life and for helping others like her.

Sarah Cole (ESOL tutor) talked about organising a cookery exchange via Zoom during lockdown. She talked of the pride people have in their cooking skills and the comfort to be had from sharing their 'tastes of home' which form a vital part of their cultures. Sarah shared a video of Mimi who talked about enjoying sharing with the group about Ethiopian coffee and spicy food.

Martin Simmonds (Fundraising & Communications Officer) talked about how horrendous it has been recently for Afghan clients witnessing events unfolding in Afghanistan. They are a big part of SRS work, and have been from the start of the organisation, with Martin giving an example of an Afghan doctor who needed help to do his IELTS needed to qualify to practice medicine here. That client has now been a GP for many years and his daughter is currently training to be a doctor. Martin introduced the video which SRS had arranged for BBC Suffolk to film recently with an Afghan client who arrived as an unaccompanied child in the late 1990's. 'Ahmed' talked about what he wants for his children, some of the experiences he had in Afghanistan and on his journey to the UK, and his worries for his Mum and sister still in Afghanistan.

GT thanked staff for their presentations, reminding the meeting that the most important aspect of SRS work is supporting people to achieve what they want to achieve.

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

SRS Treasurer Keith Faull (KF) gave a brief introduction to himself and his role although pointed out that SRS money is looked after by a team of people including the Finance Sub-committee, Ed Day the accountant, the Charity Manager Becks and the new Finance Officer Vanessa Ransby. KF thanked the team and also the

Independent Examiner, Foreshore Accounting. Despite the challenges of Covid19 SRS has managed to continue to deliver a full range of services in line with grants and donations received during the year. Costs have stayed in line with the planned budget. SRS is grateful to funders who have offered support to allow the safe delivery of services in difficult circumstances.

Many organisations have provided grants for our work for which KF offered thanks on behalf of SRS: 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. SRS is sincerely grateful to the numerous supporters who give regularly or make one-off donations to our work.

KF went on to explain the difference between Restricted and Unrestricted funding, the latter of which has been particularly useful to allow us flexibility. As a result of the unprecedented year SRS reserves have risen above the 50% level we set out in our Reserves Policy in line with the Charity Commission's guidance. This was not unexpected in view of the service alterations made due to Covid and Trustees continue to monitor the situation.

KF acknowledged the contributions made by volunteers who enrich SRS services whose freely given time and energy make an enormous difference

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

- Presentation of Annual Accounts 2020-21, proposed by Keith Faull, seconded by Kevin Clements and *agreed unanimously* by members.
- Appointment of Independent Examiner Foreshore Accounting proposed by Keith Faull, seconded by Kevin Clements and *agreed unanimously* by members.

6) Election of Trustees to the Committee

1 existing Trustee was up for election:

- Gerry Toplis - Chair

5 co-opted Trustees were up for election:

- Christina Sweet-Escott
- Felicity Szesnat
- Amelia Whitworth
- Mary Engleheart
- Will Atkins

Nomination forms had been received for all candidates and all were *elected unanimously*.

RC expressed her thanks and how impressed she is by the level of skills and experience presented by Trustees. Profiles of each Trustee can be seen on the SRS website on Trustees page under 'About Us'.

GT advised SRS now has 9 Trustees in total and are keen to interview more potential trustee applicants.

7) Questions from the floor and Any Other Business

- 1) Mary & Mike Hope asked whether SRS clients experience problems gaining access to health services in Suffolk, especially regarding vaccines but also general services. Also whether SRS clients have experience of problems with charging regimes.

RC responded that she was not aware of those issues being a major problem in Suffolk and SRS has had a good service regarding Covid vaccines including being provided with a special clinic regardless of their asylum status. Mental health service access provides the biggest challenge and GP appointments are generally hard to secure. SRS are not aware of any clients being charged for services. SRS are taking part in the Engaged Communities with other local voluntary sector organisations, NHS CCG, GP Federation to feedback clients experience of vaccination and other health services, in particular their experience of barriers.

- 2) Inga Lockington asked whether SRS has a 'wish list' for things needed for clients.

RC responded to advise that Suffolk County Council do run such a list but SRS don't, instead relying on Facebook appeals to ask for specific items as and when needed. Money continues to offer the most versatility! MS stated that the outpouring of goodwill following the Afghanistan upheavals has been fantastic with about 200 individuals recently donating money. Updates are posted on our website.

- 3) Roger Abbott gave thanks for a very inspiring AGM and asked if there is any help which can be offered by the Chamber of Commerce branch in Felixstowe which he is a member of.

RC responded that it's really lovely to know there is support. There is only one refugee family currently known to be in Felixstowe but there may be more in future. MS commented that work placements or experience is always in demand.

- 4) Keith Faull asked, in response to Mike Hope's question, whether there is any research SRS could do regarding unmet mental health needs.

RC agreed and staff are currently doing a client survey which includes health questions but we could always do more. RC is very proud of the fact that we know our clients personally and therefore have many opportunities to pick up on health needs.

Michaela Freeman (SRS English Tutor) raised the issue of ensuring clients understand what mental health and ill health are, and where help can be obtained. It's really important that clients can talk together in a safe and respectful environment. SRS has a good referral route into the Health Outreach team and is also good at tackling low level isolation and anxiety through group activities.

Edward Creasy (High Sheriff of Suffolk) said that mental health has been a headline issue at every meeting he has attended in the last six months and the speed of recognition of a mental health problem is vital. He is delighted to hear what SRS is doing to address this and gives thanks for this.

MS highlighted the current job vacancies at SRS, including those with the ARAP (Afghan Relocations & Assistance Policy) scheme. These are all advertised on the SRS website.

GT drew the meeting to a close at 20:37, thanking everyone present for attending.