



Suffolk Refugee Support Spring Newsletter

www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk

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Registered Charity Number: 1078794

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Supporting Ukrainian refugees in Suffolk

In the three months since Russia invaded Ukraine, 14 million people have fled their homes—one in three of the total population. We are appalled by the brutal violence and the scale of destruction, displacement and human suffering, and our thoughts are with all those affected. We know all too well the human cost—the trauma of lives turned upside down, the heart-breaking decisions families are forced to make, and the pain of loss and separation from loved ones.

We have been deeply moved by the amazing response of the Suffolk public, with communities and local support groups coming together across the county to welcome refugees and provide practical support. We welcome the UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme as a way of harnessing this generosity, but we remain concerned that the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable refugees is not being prioritised, that some matching processes are not safe, and that there is still a lack of clear information. We are providing updated information and useful links on our [website here](#), and we also recommend the Together for Suffolk [Facebook page](#) as a useful place for hosts to share advice and support.

More than 500 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Suffolk so far under Homes for Ukraine, in addition to those arriving on family visas, and we are providing practical support to help people access services and feel secure in their new environment. We are supporting hosts and guests with a wide range of issues, from benefits to employment advice, access to ESOL classes and free SIM cards. We also worked with Ipswich Town Football Club to arrange a [tour of the stadium](#) and free tickets for two Ukrainian families to a recent match (see photo above).



As of 31st May, we have provided:

- Support to 147 Ukrainian families
- Advice/support to 350+ hosts
- 278 free Vodafone SIM cards
- Support to 50 hosts/guests to access English classes
- Employment support to 35 people

We are recruiting!

If recent events have inspired you to want to work with people fleeing war and persecution, we have three exciting opportunities to join our team and improve the lives of refugees in Suffolk. We are looking for a Resettlement Manager, Youth Projects Coordinator and Health & Sports Activities Coordinator. Deadlines for applications are 6/9 June—[full details here](#).

Supported by:



Afghan refugee resettlement work

As well as responding to the Ukraine crisis, we continue to provide intensive support to Afghan refugees who have arrived in Suffolk in recent months under the government's resettlement programmes. We are delighted that in seven out of 21 households the Dads have already found employment with our support, we have had two babies born to newly-arrived families, and a number of Afghan women continue to showcase their skills and make new friends at our sewing group (see below). We are also supporting resettled Afghans who worked with British forces in Afghanistan who find themselves still in bridging hotels, and we are very grateful to Ipswich School for hosting a recent cricket session (pictured) for Afghan interpreters and young asylum seekers.



Sewing group

Our sewing group goes from strength to strength, with over 25 regular attendees creating beautiful items and making friends in the community. Women from Afghanistan, Albania, Kurdistan and elsewhere meet weekly to share their skills and traditional designs. We are very grateful to the New Wolsey Theatre for hosting the group, and have exciting plans to exhibit some of the costumes. There is also the chance to purchase items made by the sewing group from our stall at the [Saints street market](#) during Refugee Week (see page 4).



Our response to UK plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda

With record numbers of people forced from their homes around the world (see page 4), and the British public showing such compassion towards Ukrainian refugees, we think the government's plans to ship asylum seekers to Rwanda are cruel, inhumane and unworkable, and do nothing to tackle the root causes of displacement. The majority of asylum seekers arriving here on small boats are proven to have a genuine need for protection, so it is simply wrong to treat victims of war, violence, conflict and persecution in this way. Instead, we call for safe legal routes to be established for the relatively small number of asylum seekers who attempt to reach the UK, often for family or language reasons. Allowing people safe, orderly access to the UK asylum system would stop them risking their lives on increasingly dangerous journeys and would undermine the people smugglers' business model. The numbers are manageable – last year there were around 50,000 asylum applications in the UK, compared to 105,000 in France and 190,000 in Germany, while Poland has taken in more than 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees.

But behind the numbers are human beings looking for safety. At Suffolk Refugee Support, for 23 years we have seen successive governments enact ever more punitive measures against asylum seekers, with little effect but to create more human misery. The majority of the people we have supported in that time were forced to enter the UK through clandestine means due to lack of safe, legal routes. Today, they are our friends and colleagues, they are British citizens, doctors and local business owners. Many of them would have been denied the chance to rebuild their lives in safety and contribute so much to our communities under these plans, as might Ukrainian refugees or Afghan interpreters arriving in the UK without documentation today. If it would be wrong to send a Ukrainian refugee to Rwanda, we should not consider doing so with other people fleeing conflict and violence.

Thank you for your amazing support!

We have been blown away by the support shown for refugees in recent months from individuals, community groups, schools, businesses and churches across Suffolk. We know the terrible conflict in Ukraine feels close to home and has highlighted the reality of refugee issues and experiences, so it is our sincere hope that this outpouring of compassion and empathy might mark a broader shift in treatment of people forced to seek safety by circumstances beyond their control.

We are hugely grateful to a range of grant funders and charitable trusts for their generosity and flexibility, allowing us to respond swiftly to this latest crisis. We also appreciate every single offer or donation we have received (from sponsored boxing to beer and cheese tasting!), but special thanks go to: Creative Computing Club (pictured), Music for Peace, Churchgate Sinfonia, James White Drinks, Debenham Crafters, Big Sky Writers, Suffolk County Council staff networks, Palmer & Partners, East of England Coop, Woodbridge Society, The Duke of Marlborough Pub, Somersham, Wood Ley and Witnesham Primary Schools, Ipswich School, Kesgrave High School, Framlingham College, the Baha'is of Ipswich, Christ Church Ipswich, Lavenham Church, St Felix Catholic Church, Felixstowe and St-Mary-at-the-Elm Church.



To support our long-term work with refugees fleeing Ukraine and other conflicts and crises around the world, click the button below...

CAF Charities Aid Foundation

Donate Now >

Your support over the past year has helped us to achieve the following:

- 7099** individual client advice contacts delivered
- 2000+** people supported directly or indirectly across our services
- 618** refugees/asylum seekers supported through our advice service
- 300+** people given employment, training or adult education support
- 238** clients supported with health and wellbeing issues
- 146** newly-arrived resettled refugees from Afghanistan supported
- 100+** people supported to learn English through our ESOL classes
- 55** young people from **9** countries supported through our new Youth Club
- 43** different countries of origin for people we supported

Recipe books and cookery news

The sharing of food is such a powerful way to celebrate what we have in common, so we're pleased to have reprinted our recipe book (the first print run sold out in no time!). Featuring 50 recipes, from Afghan Bolani to Ethiopian Spice Bread, it is currently available from the following outlets (do check ahead to ensure they have copies): LoveOne (Ipswich), Aldeburgh Bookshop, St Mary's Shop (Woodbridge), Pump St Bakery (Orford), Leo's Deli (Framlingham), Old School Café/Woosters shop (Bury St Edmunds) and Woosters in Bardwell. We also continue to have online cookalongs led by refugee chefs, and as a bonus we have (by popular demand!) made available [here the recipe](#) for okra and rice pudding (see pic).



Crossings exhibition at Ipswich Museum

In October 2013, an overcrowded boat carrying refugees from Somalia and Eritrea caught fire, capsized and sank near the Italian island of Lampedusa. 311 lives, fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in Europe, were lost. Moved by the plight of survivors, the island's carpenter, Francesco Tuccio, made crosses from the wreckage. One of these crosses is on display at Ipswich Museum until 12 June as part of the British Museum's 'Crossings: community and refuge' touring exhibition. Alongside the cross will be a display of 12 tiny boats from Syrian-born Issam Kourbaj's series Dark Water, Burning World. Made from repurposed bicycle mudguards tightly packed with burnt matches, the artwork represents the fragile vessels used by refugees to make their perilous voyages as a response to the ongoing tragedy in Syria. We're very grateful to Colchester & Ipswich Museums for bringing this powerful exhibition to Suffolk and recommend visiting while you can! Find more details [here](#).



*They say: When do we meet?
I say: After a year and a war.
They say: When does the war end?
I say: When we meet...*

Asylum and refugee numbers in context

In May 2022, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) reported the global number of forcibly displaced people had passed 100 million for the first time, describing it as a “staggering milestone” and “a record that should never have been set”. The UK’s annual asylum statistics were also released recently, and it is worth understanding them within this global context. In the year to March 2022:

- There were 55,146 asylum applications (main applicants only) in the UK, a 56% increase from the previous year (but still well below the peak in the early 2000s)
- There were 4,081 applications from unaccompanied children, 63% more than the previous year
- 75% of initial decisions made on asylum applications were grants of protection, meaning people were awarded refugee status or humanitarian protection
- 49% of asylum appeals were allowed—the appeal success rate has steadily increased over the past decade (from 29% in 2010), with the quality of Home Office decision making often poor and many refugees having to rely on the courts to award protection
- In number of asylum applications per head of population, the UK ranks 18th highest in Europe
- 109,735 people were waiting for an outcome on their initial claim for asylum. Of these, 73,207 (67%) had been waiting for more than 6 months—this backlog has risen steadily in recent years.

Refugee Week is fast approaching!

Refugee Week runs from the 20-26 June and we are busy planning a number of events to celebrate the resilience, achievements and talents of the people we work with, including a trip to the University of Suffolk, a cricket match, and a stall at the Saints street market in Ipswich on 26 June featuring handmade items and greetings cards. You can keep up-to-date with the latest plans via our [Facebook page](#), and you can find a schools activities pack for children and young people on the Refugee Week [website here](#).

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!