



Suffolk Refugee Support Summer Newsletter

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Ukrainian refugees in Suffolk—update

In the six months since Russia invaded their country, more than 1000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Suffolk under the Homes for Ukraine or Ukraine Family schemes. They have settled in communities the length and breadth of the county, children have joined local schools, adults have found employment, and many new friendships have been made. None of this would have been possible without the incredible generosity of hosts and community groups across Suffolk. However, we know there is still a great deal of uncertainty about the future, both for Ukrainian refugees and their UK hosts. See page 2 for an update on the Homes for Ukraine scheme and next steps. We are continuing to provide a wide range of advice and services, supporting people into employment and training, helping with benefits applications, facilitating access to ESOL classes and providing SIM cards. We have provided direct support to 276 Ukrainian families as well as 464 free SIM cards, and recently helped to organise a [kite-flying event](#) bringing together more than 200 members of the Afghan and Ukrainian communities, who have both been through so much over the last year (pictured above).



"I would like to express my thanks, as you have always written back to me, for your kind help, support, good advice, and willingness to help in all the matters I asked about." [message from a Ukrainian family we have been supporting]

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



We are recruiting!
If recent events have inspired you to want to work with people fleeing war and persecution, we have two exciting opportunities to join our team and improve the lives of refugees in Suffolk. We are looking for a Housing & General Advice Worker, and a Receptionist/Administrative Officer—[full details here](#).

Supported by:



Afghan refugees in Suffolk—one year on

On 15th August last year, the Taliban took over Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and imposed their brutal regime on the country. For millions of people life changed overnight, and those who had worked with western or Afghan security forces were in immediate danger. Farida (pictured right) was starting the final year of her medical studies and preparing for a surgery exam. Her brother Abdul (also pictured)



worked for British Special Forces and was planning to celebrate his birthday. Both found their lives turned upside down without warning. In the year since, we have worked with around 150 Afghan refugees, many of them interpreters with UK forces, across Suffolk—some placed in houses and others in bridging hotels—as part of the ARAP resettlement scheme. As well as a warm welcome and orientation, we have provided volunteer support, English assessments, access to health services, employment support and assistance getting children into school. A significant number of people have gained employment, while others are starting to resume their studies or taking part in activities such as our sewing group. However, many still live with fears for the safety of loved ones in danger back home—family and friends living in hiding or, in some cases, missing. These fears are compounded by one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with half the population suffering from food insecurity and 6 million people on the edge of famine. To mark the anniversary, we arranged for Farida and Abdul to tell their powerful stories to the [East Anglian Daily Times](#). We also helped to arrange a kite-flying event in Christchurch Park in Ipswich (see page 1)—using the popular Afghan pastime as a way to mark the one year anniversary and bring together people from different refugee communities who share a common experience of violence and displacement.

Homes for Ukraine update

More than 1000 Ukrainian refugees have found safety in Suffolk through the Homes for Ukraine scheme in the last six months thanks to the many hosts across the county who have taken families fleeing the brutal conflict into their own homes. To put this into perspective, Suffolk welcomed around 140 refugees (mostly Syrian) over five years of the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme. The human impact of this generosity is beyond measure, but we know that there are also challenges, and as many sponsors start to approach the minimum 6 months' hosting commitment there is a lack of clarity and information as to what happens next. A recent [Office for National Statistics survey](#) suggested around one fifth of hosts could only continue their commitment for six months. We have consistently raised the need for clear housing solutions and host support information in meetings with Suffolk County Council, DLUHC (the government department responsible) and other partners. At this stage, the [government guidance](#) where hosting arrangements cannot last beyond 6 months is for guests to seek a new host or rent private accommodation. We know this latter option is extremely difficult, even for those who are in employment. For more guidance, including how to find a new host, see the housing section of [Suffolk County Council's information for guests](#). Because of this new guidance, Suffolk County Council are also looking for new hosts who might be able to take on the sponsorship of Ukrainian refugees—if you can help, please [contact SCC](#) or [register your interest here](#). We are hoping the government will also announce [improved support for hosts](#)—both increased thank you payments and an extension of these payments beyond 12 months—and we have raised directly with them the urgent need for hosts and guests to have this information as they make difficult decisions.

Summer trips

Over the summer we have organised a series of trips, in particular to countryside locations, as part of our work to provide wellbeing activities and access to green spaces for families and young people who might otherwise not have the resources to do so. These outings allow people the space to relax and socialise in a new environment, and can be a great way of showing hospitality to others and exploring different cultures. We had a lovely trip to Woodbridge and walk along the River Deben (pictured), culminating in a fabulous spread, with more than 30 refugees from Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Ukraine, Sudan and Kosovo. Our International Women's Group had a sunny picnic (pictured) and a fabulous day out at the Suffolk Punch Trust meeting the beautiful horses, taking a tractor ride and even some scrumping! It was particularly lovely to see Kurdish women with a big pot of food sharing it with Ukrainian women. We have also enjoyed visits to Jimmy's Farm and Rendlesham Forest, a trip to the seaside with Syrian families, and a 'Big Hoot' owl trail round Ipswich for young people. Thank you to our brilliant volunteers for helping to make these events happen.



Refugee Week

It feels like a long time ago now, but during Refugee Week in June we celebrated the creativity and resilience of the people we work with through events at the University of Suffolk and Saints Street Market. We organised a tour of the university for clients—including Ukrainians, Afghans and asylum seekers—and a talk to find out more about how application processes work, including the University scholarship. One of the attendees is currently applying to study there this year, so fingers crossed! In the evening the University hosted an event featuring a preview of a new animated film by an Afghan refugee called *Where is Home* (pictured right), as well as beautiful items made by our sewing group, our new greetings cards designed by a talented artist called Tahira, and delicious refugee food. The evening was made particularly special by clients present who shared their stories of progression, including people we have supported who now work at the university. A huge thank you to the university for all their support. The week culminated in our first ever stall at the Saints Street Market in Ipswich where members of our sewing group displayed and sold items they had made, alongside our recipe book and brand new greetings cards.



Our work with asylum seekers

In recent months we have been working with a large cohort of asylum seekers placed in contingency hotel accommodation in Suffolk. These people, often vulnerable, alone and newly-arrived in the UK, are eligible for just £8.24 per week to cover clothes, non-prescription medication and travel. They are not allowed to work and can be stuck in limbo in temporary accommodation for long periods. The lack of certainty and meaningful activity can lead to mental health and wellbeing issues, so we are offering an increased range of activities to this group. Among the most popular are the free weekly barbering sessions led by trained barbers living at the hotel and facilitated by a volunteer who provides the equipment. We have three sets of clippers, and 3-5 barbers who stay throughout the afternoon offering free haircuts—in a range of different styles including hair art! There is often a queue of people waiting patiently for their chosen barber. Having a haircut can have a positive impact on an individual's mental health and builds social camaraderie. It also allows the barbers to practice their profession, when they might not otherwise get the chance. Also popular is football training at Goals at Suffolk New College. A volunteer coach leads the sessions, offering a range of training and game practice. It provides an opportunity to get out of the hotel, improves the physical and mental health of the residents, and brings people from different backgrounds together. Other activities include regular art and music sessions, kite flying and games and activities. Our heartfelt thanks also to Friends of Refugees Suffolk for all their fantastic work to improve the quality of life for the residents.



UK and International Context

The UNHCR's [Global Trends Report](#) this year shows that the number of people forced to flee their homes around the world due to conflict, violence, fear of persecution and human rights violations has more than doubled in just a decade. Against this appalling backdrop, it is unsurprising that asylum applications in the UK have increased (although they are still far lower than elsewhere in Europe). We continue to [speak out against](#) the UK government's cruel and inhumane plans to remove asylum seekers to Rwanda and we await the full legal hearing on this policy in September with great interest. We will continue to provide a warm welcome and practical support to asylum seekers in Suffolk, no matter where they are from or how they arrived here.



- 89.3** million people forcibly displaced globally (up 7 million on 2020)
- 83%** of refugees hosted by neighbouring or low income countries
- 48,540** asylum applications (main applicants only) in the UK in 2021, 63% more than the previous year
- 75%** of initial asylum decisions in the UK were grants of protection
- 49%** of asylum appeals in the UK were successful, up from 29% in 2010
- 18th** in Europe—the UK in terms of asylum applications per capita
- 109,735** people awaiting an outcome on their initial asylum claim in the UK

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!