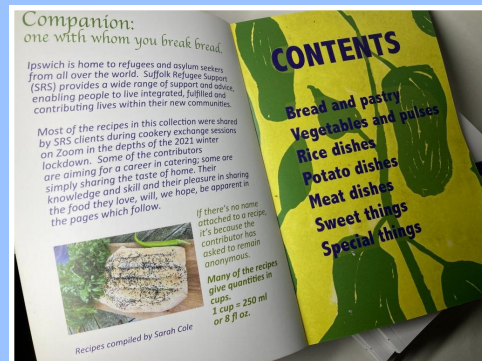


Suffolk Refugee Support Annual Report 2021-22



The year covered by this report has been one of the most challenging in our 23 year history, reflecting growing international crises and record levels of global displacement. We have seen urgent new demands on our services as a result of the Afghan resettlement programme, the short notice arrival of refugees and asylum seekers in temporary hotel accommodation, increasing numbers of young people being placed in Suffolk, and most recently refugees fleeing the terrible conflict in Ukraine. We have also continued to deal with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our clients and services. We are proud of how our team has adapted, giving vulnerable people reassurance and security, supporting their sense of purpose, and helping to begin rebuilding lives in safety. We hope this report begins to capture the breadth, importance and impact of this work.



“The work that you do here in Suffolk is overwhelming. The more I read about it, the more I admire you all.” [The Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Elizabeth Hughes]

Supported by:



Chair's report



SRS has experienced the past year as one of continuing challenge in a rapidly changing world landscape. Covid-19 has been a continual presence, requiring SRS to close and open our offices and services when restrictions have been re-introduced and then relaxed. Alongside this, the sudden military withdrawal from Afghanistan in August required us to respond very quickly as people were moved into hotels and homes in Suffolk. In February, the war in Ukraine resulted in a rapid movement of refugees across Europe with the British government initiating two schemes to enable people to enter the UK: Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Family Scheme.

As a result, not only has the amount of work required of SRS increased significantly, but the speed at which people have come to this country has required us to be agile and creative in our response. I would like to thank Rebecca, her Management Team, all the staff and our volunteers for their hard work, flexibility and responsiveness over the last year. The leadership shown by Rebecca 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 rapid change and increased demand.

The Board of Trustees has also had to be responsive to these demands, supporting the management team to review and meet the challenges of delivering a more dispersed service across Suffolk; the implications for SRS of government schemes which differ significantly from previous ones; and now having a larger staff group, necessitated mainly by the introduction of these schemes. The Trustees and Management Team have been concerned to ensure that, in meeting these challenges, SRS continues to deliver flexible, innovative services with excellent local contacts and relationships across Suffolk. It is these qualities that enable us to support each individual and family as they seek to become members of their local community and forge the lives they wish to have.

The governance of SRS is the prime responsibility of Trustees and we have continued to review policy, budgets and processes to ensure these are in good order. The work to better report outcomes achieved by our clients, and to learn from their experiences, remains a priority as we look at the design of our services.

The Board now meets face to face for alternate Board meetings, with other meetings held via Zoom. This continues to be an effective use of Trustees' time. We have been active in recruiting new Trustees and have been fortunate to have people on the Board with a wide range of experience, including international experience of refugee services.

The Board is very mindful that, although much attention and effort has, rightly, been given to people from Afghanistan and Ukraine, there continue to be people from many other countries who are seeking refuge and asylum because of persecution and danger in their home country. We continue to serve them as they come to Suffolk. It is our belief and commitment that all people seeking refuge and asylum should have help and support and we will continue to deliver this to the best of our abilities with the support of the people of Suffolk.

Gerry Toplis,
Chair (2021/22)

Charity Manager's report



Thankfully the restrictions faced by us all due to Covid were slowly lifted this year, allowing us to get back to face to face work. Some activities have remained online to allow some clients to access them more easily. Our office is operating an appointment system, which is working well and allowing us to help those in greatest need, and our groups are back up and running again.

The year has been our busiest ever, with demands on our resources forcing us to make rapid changes to the way we work. The fall of Afghanistan to Taliban control and the exodus of people fleeing for their lives, often in traumatic circumstances, brought over 100 Afghan refugees to Suffolk. Many of these people had worked for the British and US forces in Afghanistan; or held senior positions in the Afghan administration. Staying in Afghanistan would have been extremely dangerous for them and their families.

We were asked by Suffolk County Council to provide casework support to Afghan refugees being accommodated across Suffolk. This was a new way of working for us, with most of our clients previously based in Ipswich. We recruited staff and volunteers (many with language skills) to support people across the county with settling into new lives here.

At the same time, we saw an increase in the number of asylum seekers housed in Suffolk, with over 120 arriving at short notice in late 2021. Again, we adapted services to support these newly-arrived individuals and families and ensure they had access to medical help, schools, sports activities, ESOL classes and essential items such as school uniforms.

Then, from February 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine brought Ukrainian refugees to Suffolk to join family and host households—again with little prior notice or time for us to plan. We recruited more staff to work with Ukrainians and continue to develop services, with other voluntary and statutory sector partners, for the over 1000 people (as of late August) whose lives have been thrown into turmoil and who have found safety in Suffolk.

It is very easy to sit and write all this without fully acknowledging the immense trauma and pain that every single person arriving as an asylum seeker or refugee feels at having to witness the loss of their homeland, their jobs, homes, the break up of family units and the intense worry about those left behind. Suffolk Refugee Support's staff and volunteers have shown compassion and understanding and have provided reassurance, compassion and specialist support for those in pain and anguish. Their ability to deal professionally with the practical issues faced by new arrivals, so often held up by bureaucratic delays, coupled with sensitivity and empathy for those in need, has been a core strength. We are proud to have staff from eight different countries in our team.

The trustees, capably led by Gerry Toplis, our Chair, have enabled us to work strategically and with vision and awareness of who we are and why we are doing what we do. We continue to develop and strengthen our approach to the needs of the organisation and our clients, and we strive to create robust governance of the processes needed to be effective. We are very grateful to our funders, large and small, including generous private donors, for enabling us to respond in the ever-changing environment of refugee support.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has helped to make 2021-22 a successful year for Suffolk Refugee Support and its clients, despite the many challenges faced.

Rebecca Crerar, Charity Manager
August 2022

Advice service

Our Advice Service remains at the heart of our work, and this was the busiest year it has ever seen, despite our office being closed for face-to-face appointments for three months due to lockdown. Our advice workers have taken learning on remote working from the previous year and been able to work successfully and constructively with refugees and asylum seekers on a wide range of issues. We have given a warm welcome to new arrivals and put in place plans to tackle emerging issues created by the pandemic. We gave advice services to 618 people from 43 different countries, with the top three areas of support being employment, housing and health.



“I’m very glad to tell you that I got my refugee status this week! My education here in the UK continues, and it’s all due to the fantastic support you have given me over the last two years.” [from a client we supported remotely during lockdown]

“I can’t believe I didn’t know Suffolk Refugee Support existed before and I finally feel my life is beginning again.”

P had been the victim of domestic violence and her husband had left her with large debts. He had not allowed her to have any involvement in the family finances and she was overwhelmed by her financial predicament as well as the emotional effects of the breakdown of her marriage. Our Advice Workers, including a Bilingual Advice Worker who speaks her language, were able to establish a good relationship with her. They were successful in securing funding to cover part of the outstanding bills, but P needed more assistance with budgeting. We provided an interpreter so a debt charity could assist her further. Having someone to interpret and holding the meetings in our office meant P could feel comfortable and receptive to advice. P was supported to manage her finances and how to shop on a limited budget. She is now much more confident, and the financial advice has improved her emotional health and given her a sense of independence.

Our year in numbers

- 7099** individual client advice contacts delivered
- 2000+** people supported directly or indirectly across our services
- 618** refugees and 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 attended our new Youth Club
- 50** people gained paid employment through our intensive support
- 43** different countries of origin for people we supported

Improving physical & mental health

Once again, health has been at the forefront of our work, as the Covid-19 pandemic continued to heighten the health inequalities faced by those we support. We gave 900 health-related advice contacts to 238 clients, and supported 51 young people with wellbeing issues. We delivered in-depth and holistic advice, helping people access health and wellbeing services and working with partners to provide a range of activities and interventions, including yoga sessions, walk and talk groups and period poverty workshops. We also played a key role with partner organisations in a new Unity Centre health project in Ipswich, and as part of Suffolk's Engaged Communities collaboration.

900 health related advice contacts given

238 clients given health advice

51 young people supported with wellbeing issues

30 clients attended a series of cookery classes

7 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children attended cookery classes with women from their nationalities demonstrating healthy eating



Launch event for new Unity Centre health project



Period workshop led by ex-client [Credit: Charlotte Bond]

“You cannot change the culture, but you can change some people’s minds. Men can pay attention to women, be patient with them and help them to feel comfortable. Men don’t go through these things, so it’s difficult for them to understand, but we have to give them information so that they will be more knowledgeable.” [from Kurdish attendee at period workshops]

N was placed in temporary housing in Ipswich when she was the victim of domestic violence. Although only in the town short term, she felt very isolated and upset at what had happened. She also had an ongoing health issue causing her great pain and struggled to access a GP appointment. She felt ignored and that her condition was not being recognised. We were able to contact the surgery and get a call back from a GP. An emergency appointment was organised at a clinic some distance from where she lived, late on a Sunday afternoon. We arranged a taxi for her and also ensured she had transport for an ultrasound appointment at the hospital. N began to get the pain relief she needed and started to be more trusting. Our Employment Advisor was able to talk to her about her aspirations and encourage her to think about the future. She attended the period workshops and the experience appeared to be very cathartic for her in that she enjoyed the experience of being with other women. The health professional who was present was also able to allay some of her fears about the long term consequences of her gynaecological issues.

“I am so grateful for the support received from SRS. I hope I will get help from support workers as kind and nice as your staff.” [message from N when she moved to another town]

Employment & training work

We are providing an increasing number of clients with intensive employment and training support, with an emphasis on education and skills training to give people the best chance to fulfil their career potential. Our employment team help people to create CVs, apply for jobs, prepare for interviews, find volunteering placements and work experience, explore employment opportunities and register for training and further education courses. We delivered nearly 1000 job seeking advice contacts and more than 750 adult education and training contacts. Through the AMIF (asylum, migration and integration fund) programme, 40 people were skills assessed and 45 referred to specialist courses, including IT, childcare and IELTS language courses.

1750 job seeking or adult education/training contacts given
262 job applications completed with our support
67 people we helped with CV writing
50 people gained paid employment with our support
42 clients attended work-related courses
22 clients entered work experience/volunteer placements

"I hope this picture helps others to get confidence and follow their dreams. For me working here is a dream come true...it was not possible without you, I don't know how to express my thanks."



"Thank you so much for your help, guidance, enthusiasm, fabulous and overall positive energetic attitude. I have got my right job and I am very happy."

We supported I with job search skills, including teaching her how to write a cover letter and apply for jobs effectively, and notifying her of suitable opportunities. We helped her secure volunteering and encouraged her to sign up to a Level 2 Community Interpreting Course through WEA. I had a background in community work before coming to the UK, so we encouraged her to apply for a community role at Suffolk County Council, but she lacked self-confidence in her English levels at the time and decided not to apply. We supported her to gain employment in a retail role, which she felt comfortable with, and continued working on building her confidence to apply for higher level roles. When further staff were recruited to the same SCC department we are pleased to say she felt more confident to apply and was successful, becoming employed as a Community Engagement Officer. She has since progressed to a further role at SCC.

F arrived in the UK two years ago with her family as asylum seekers. When our employment advice worker first met her she was depressed and had little opportunity to integrate or talk to anyone in a similar situation. She was (and still is) also a carer to a family member. Over the last year, we have supported her to start a college course to gain English and Maths qualifications. Her dream is to become an architect and in September she will start a course more specific to this career path. Our employment advisor also supported her to find a part time job and sign up as a volunteer for a community-based project, where she has become so involved that she has been asked to join the board of trustees. We have noticed a dramatic difference in her confidence since she has had the chance to integrate more and meet new people.

Youth work



Cricket net session at Ipswich School

144 young people from **17** countries supported

55 people attended our new Youth Club

45 young people given academic support at our Homework Club

21 young people involved in external sports groups through our activities

We support growing numbers of young refugees and asylum seekers with employment advice, guidance on school/college places, and educational and recreational groups. In the last year we set up a new Youth Club, with table football, pool and carrom (a game popular in Afghanistan), and over the summer we arranged group trips to London and Felixstowe beach. We also set up a volunteer-led Homework Club in Bury St Edmunds, having identified a need there. We held 78 Sports Group sessions, including 31 summer holiday activities, from bowling to rock climbing. During Refugee Week 39 clients joined a football match at Ipswich Town Football Club, we held cricket sessions at Ipswich & East Suffolk Cricket Club, leading to two young men playing for the first team, and we organised group cookery classes for unaccompanied teenagers. While Covid restrictions were in place we found creative solutions to enable sports to continue, and provided Covid-19 guidance, helping young people to stay safe and reducing vaccine hesitancy.

“I have good news to share. I got my results yesterday and I have got accepted to University of Brighton to do Electrical and Electronic Engineering.” [young person we supported academically through our Homework Club]

“I relax, talk to others, meet my friends, people from my community. It’s a happy place.” [19-year-old Eritrean who attends our Youth Club]

D came to the UK from Afghanistan as a 15-year-old unaccompanied asylum seeking child and was placed in foster care on the outskirts of Ipswich. He had an excellent relationship with his foster carers and got on well at school, but missed meeting young people of a similar background. He started coming to our conversation group, which he enjoyed, and his confidence with spoken English improved. He participated in discussions around shaping our new Youth Club, and since it started he has attended regularly and said that it’s exactly how he imagined the group to be. He enjoys meeting other Afghan boys and young people from other nationalities and has made good friendships, helping him feel less isolated. He is taking his GCSEs this year, and is thinking of going to college to do a plumbing course in September. He has also been chosen to play in his local football team which he loves and he plays most Saturdays.

For **M**, an 18-year-old from the Sahel region of Africa, life has been a struggle since arriving in the UK. M had no formal education and very little comprehension of English. He struggled during lockdown as he lived out of Ipswich town centre, found it hard to communicate with other boys his age and was frustrated at the wait for a Home Office decision on his asylum claim. When restrictions allowed we took him a bike to make it easier for him to get into town, our French-speaking youth worker called him regularly and he started attending our Homework Club and found it a great place to meet other young people in a similar situation. He has now been given refugee status, his English is slowly improving, he attends our new Youth Club, and he is discussing his options for future training and employment with the SRS employment advisor.

Refugee resettlement work

It has been an incredibly busy year for our resettlement work. In addition to the approximately 130 people in Ipswich who arrived in previous years under the VPRS (Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme), the crisis in Afghanistan and emergency evacuation of Afghan refugees who worked with UK forces had a significant impact on our work. We welcomed 146 newly-arrived refugees from Afghanistan—some placed in houses across Suffolk and others in bridging hotels. 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 number of people have gained employment, while others are taking part in activities such as our sewing group. Towards the end of the period covered by this report, we began preparing to welcome Ukrainian refugees to Suffolk under the government's Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family Schemes as a result of Russia's invasion of their country.

Abdul's story

I'm from Helmand province in Afghanistan. I worked with British special forces in Afghanistan and my house in Helmand was once attacked by Taliban. Me and my family members did not feel safe so we had to leave Afghanistan. It feels bad when you leave your homeland where you grow up, where you fight for your soil and country. My Mom and Dad, my sisters and brother, and my little daughter who was left behind because we couldn't move her during the evacuation with us, are still in Afghanistan. It's really hard and painful when you leave your family members, especially in these days since Taliban took control of the country, where there is no work, no food, and the fear of being arrested is faced by everyone. Life in the UK is good and we learn new things every day. Ipswich is good, we find the locals very friendly and nice here. Suffolk Refugee Support is a good and helpful organization and I would like to thank SRS and its staff for being supportive to us. My dreams for the future are to have a good and peaceful life and to be able to take care of my children and family, Especially my children who experienced a lot of difficulties in the last days when we were leaving Afghanistan.



"Ipswich is great. I love this town, and SRS is wonderful, helping and supporting me beyond expectations." [R]

R came to Suffolk under the ARAP scheme (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy). We helped him enrol in English classes and gain a one month paid work experience placement in a local construction company. This helped him learn how UK systems work in his field, as some processes were different to those he was used to in Afghanistan. From this he was able to assess gaps in his knowledge and we helped him enrol on a CSCS course and an online AutoCad training course. Through regular 1-to-1 work we supported him with finding suitable jobs to apply for, worked with him to develop skills in completing job application forms to the required standard for his field, and helped him with interview preparation, including mock interviews. We are delighted that R has now gained full time employment in an architecture firm. We have continued to support him in his employment, offering in-work support to ensure he understands his rights and responsibilities, and explaining his contract, pay and annual leave. We have also helped him to transition from benefits, making sure he understands his new household income. R is very happy in his new role.

Women & families support work



International Women's Group Refugee Week picnic

Our Women and Families Advice Worker has dealt with increasingly complex and challenging casework over the past year, in particular around Afghan families, with some separated from close family members and experiencing traumatic circumstances. Having been used to living in extended family households, many of the women we work with can suffer from loneliness and

isolation. Limited English and lack of confidence can lead to low mood and depression. We put together a number of activities to try and tackle these issues. During this period 53 women have attended our ESOL classes, while 48 women have attended our International Women's Group (IWG). Twelve women attended a bread-making and sharing course in partnership with the Museum of East Anglian Life, while our new sewing group is hugely popular and provides a highly supportive environment.

252 refugee and asylum-seeking children supported

53 women attended our ESOL classes

48 women attended our International Women's Group

48 children whose parents we supported to apply for school places

12 women attended a bread-making course at the Museum of East Anglian Life

"Thank you for showing me the path, I could not have got my daughter there without your help. Also when I passed my driving theory you were the first person I wanted to tell, even before my husband, because you got me a volunteer to help me through it." [Client whose daughter gained a scholarship at Ipswich School having attended our Homework Club there]

SRS had supported **M** and her family when they had been asylum seekers in Ipswich and she had received support from our employment team. The family had not contacted us for a number of years, but unfortunately they had taken bad advice when making their application for Indefinite Leave to Remain following the expiration of their five years of Refugee Status, and had completed the wrong application forms. As a result, the Home Office had rejected their claim, leaving them in an uncertain situation. When the family contacted Suffolk Refugee Support they were very anxious as they realised this could affect their ability to work, enrol in higher education and access other services. We were able to contact a firm of immigration solicitors, with whom we enjoy a good working relationship, who agreed to take on the case and apply for legal aid so there were no costs to the clients. This work was all completed within the week. When the family received their new status documents they were relieved and very appreciative. Their experience shows both the importance of getting good quality immigration advice from a reputable source and of the long term work we do with families. It also illustrates the uncertainty that refugees can still sometimes face after years in the UK even when they are integrated and independent and it seems their future is settled.

English teaching

We are aware that some families might not speak much English at home, and many of our students felt their English had suffered during lockdown, so we set up additional classes at the start of the year to help students catch up on course content, and included vocabulary from key Covid areas, such as vaccinations. We stayed online with our ESOL students until July 2021, at which point we asked students what format they preferred. Some asked to stay online as it worked best with childcare needs. From September we returned to face-to-face teaching and found a new, more Covid secure venue. We run classes across four English levels, from Pre-Entry to Entry Level 3. We have also set up new ESOL groups with volunteer support in other parts of the county where asylum seekers and refugees are being housed for the first time.

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

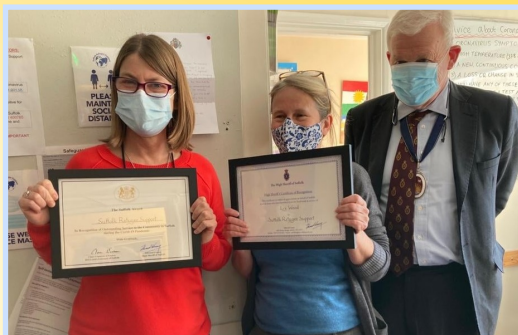
“An extra big thanks to you for keeping the show on the road throughout lockdown. Your creative planning, adapting to Covid guidelines and regular updates has been helpful” [ESOL Volunteer]

“MN has made very good progress. She tries really hard and is a joy to have in the class. She’s so positive and brings a sense of fun to the lessons.”

[MN’s teacher at our International Women’s Group]

MN has been an outstanding student at our International Women’s Group classes. She has attended very well and shown an impressive commitment to learning English. She always tries hard to answer questions in class and is invaluable at helping others in her group to understand key concepts. She is a very active participant during the whole group presentations and activities, which helps such sessions to be more interesting and enjoyable for the group. Her willingness to learn prompted her teacher to ask if there were any further classes she could attend. MN has since joined another ESOL class and has brought all of her infectious enthusiasm with her, inspiring other students to work hard.

Suffolk Refugee Support has a deep understanding of what’s required to support refugees. The breadth of service and support provides the foundation from which refugees can build a new life and a new future in Suffolk. And it’s clear from talking to those who have settled and work in Ipswich that they have benefited hugely from SRS. The many challenges that the asylum process presents are dealt with in a practical, flexible, and compassionate way; and the organisation can react in a fast and focused way to whatever is thrown at it by the next political crisis. We came away inspired by what SRS can do and has done. [Edward Creasy, High Sheriff of Suffolk 2021-22]



Special projects

At the start of this year, our projects work took place mainly online due to Covid-19. Numbers had to be kept low, with 12 regular attendees, and skills sessions included IT, furniture upcycling and bike repairs. When restrictions allowed, we re-evaluated the group and focused on two main areas of client interest—cooking and sewing. We have since run an online healthy eating course, a bread-making course, and client-led online cookalongs, culminating in the publication of a recipe book. The sewing group has also been a great success, with talented and experienced members working alongside beginners.



Both the sewing and cookery groups are a positive way to get attendees out of their homes, where many of them lead quite isolated lives. They give people a platform to meet others in similar situations and talk about their experiences, and also to showcase their impressive skills, build confidence and in many cases to move towards paid work.



“Everyone seemed sad that it was the last session - including me. I've really enjoyed it and I've learnt a lot. The most touching thing is how proud they are of their cuisines, and how passionately they talk about them.” [cookery course leader]

Pictured above—Sewing Group items on display at the New Wolsey Theatre Community Picnic, a Persian okra stew and rice pudding made at our Cookery Group, and attendees at a bread-making course at the Museum of East Anglian Life.

X comes from Afghanistan. She has been in Ipswich for over a decade, but although her husband and children now speak very good English, she has remained isolated in the house and still speaks little English. She told us that all her family in Afghanistan are now dead and she finds herself thinking of the past all the time and getting depressed. She started coming to cookery events in the autumn of 2020. The other clients encouraged her to learn English and to get out of the house more. She is both an excellent cook and a talented seamstress. She joined the sewing group in 2021, and has attended regularly since. We have held two stalls selling items made by the group and her creations have been snapped up. She is also an excellent and patient teacher for beginners in the group. She has taken a big role in various food events which have been a great success. These experiences have given her the confidence to get a job with a tailor in Ipswich where she now works several days a week. She seems much happier and more confident and her English is improving rapidly.

Volunteering

We're incredibly grateful to all our volunteers for their commitment to improving the lives of refugees in Suffolk. During lockdown periods, volunteers supported our clients with remote English learning, helping to lead Zoom sessions, meeting one-to-one in open spaces and attending larger, Covid-secure group work. More recently we have taken on additional volunteers across Suffolk to support newly-arrived Afghan families housed in different locations. We currently have around 75 volunteers providing vital support to refugees and asylum seekers, often linking people in to local communities.



Hasan, who volunteers on our reception desk

A is a 17-year-old from Afghanistan who was studying a one year GCSE preparatory course. **J** is a former English secondary school teacher who has volunteered for SRS for the past year. They first met online in February 2021. The initial introductory meeting was a success and they agreed to meet weekly. This was initially online, but when Covid restrictions eased, the meetings became a mixture of face-to-face and online. **J** has helped **A** focus on his studies, especially English, and **A** feels his English has improved as a result. In addition, **J** has helped **A** to look at career options and goals for the future. After extensive talks with **J**, **A** decided to apply to study Health and Social Care to further his aim to become a doctor, and **J** helped him with the application forms.

Partnership and co-production work

We work with many different partners in order to improve our clients' access to services. In turn we enable other organisations to reach some of the communities they might struggle to engage with. Partners in the last year have included Terrence Higgins Trust, OneLife Suffolk, Turning Point, Lighthouse, Leeway, Cancer Awareness Suffolk, the New Wolsey Theatre and the Museum of East Anglian Life. We have worked with fantastic new partners—including Active Suffolk, Phoebe, and Fresh Start New Beginnings—through the Unity Centre Project, and have been lucky to have support from individual professionals such as a GP and yoga teacher. Many of these partners have made great efforts, with our support, to adapt their services to better engage with our clients.

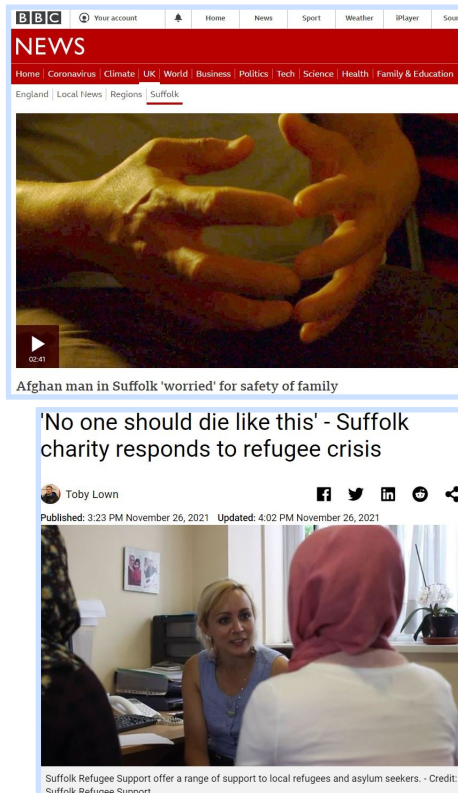
Client Partnership Sub Committee Report

The Client Partnership Sub Committee's role is to lead and support SRS in the development of its partnership with clients to enable consultation, engagement and co-design of its services and support. In 2021/22, the Sub Committee led a listening exercise called 'What's Life Like' to find out the key concerns of our clients. This involved staff and volunteers interviewing 92 clients and asking them to rate how they feel about various aspects of their lives. Out of 10 possible areas, the top 4 of concern were: language, money, employment and health and fitness. SRS is now using this to further develop its services for the future. The What's Life Like report is [available here](#). The Sub Committee has a plan of work for the next two years including: encouraging clients to volunteer with SRS; learning from informal feedback; carrying out more listening exercises; and encouraging people with lived experience to become Trustees.

Gerry Toplis, Chair, Client Partnership Sub-committee

Media work

Refugee issues have been in the news a great deal over the last year, in particular as a result of the situation in Afghanistan, Channel crossings and the war in Ukraine. We have therefore seen high demand for media interviews, quotes, information and case studies. Wherever possible we try to give voice to our clients' lived experience of the issues and provide compassion, facts and understanding—which, sadly, can all too often be missing from the debate. Over the period covered by this report, we featured more than 15 times in each of the Ipswich Star, East Anglian Daily Times and BBC Suffolk (radio and online), in addition to other local media outlets. Coverage has included a [BBC video interview](#) with an Afghan client talking about his family's experiences, and [our response](#) to the tragic deaths of 27 people who drowned attempting to cross the English Channel. Elsewhere, we were delighted to see the [1000 Dreams project](#) from Witness Change come to fruition. The project, which we helped in a small way to facilitate through our ex-client and journalist Osama Gaweesh, tells the stories, in their own words, of 1000 refugees across Europe, including those here in Suffolk.



UK and international context

The UNHCR's [Global Trends Report](#) this year shows the number of people forced to flee their homes around the world due to conflict, violence, persecution and human rights violations has more than doubled in just a decade. The figures below are from 2021, but by June 2022 a staggering 100 million people were forcibly displaced globally. Against this appalling backdrop, asylum applications in the UK have increased—although they are still far lower than elsewhere in Europe and the vast majority of refugees are still hosted by neighbouring countries. We [continue to speak out](#) against the government's cruel, inhumane plans to remove asylum seekers to Rwanda and will continue to provide a warm welcome and practical support to asylum seekers in Suffolk, no matter where they are from or how they arrive 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 (excluding dependents) 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 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

Treasurer's report

This is my second annual report as Treasurer. The work of maintaining the finances of SRS relies on the team effort of the Finance Sub-committee, and I want to reiterate my thanks to other members of the team. Our discussions over the past year are difficult if not impossible to summarise, but a great deal of effort by all goes into ensuring that the finances remain stable. This stability is maintained through what sometimes seems an ever-changing context for the work of SRS, particularly if one includes the increase in the cost of operating as costs increase, the impact of Covid, the ever-changing demands on our services, and what appears to be an explosive global political situation. I remain in awe of the sacrifices that people make in order to keep themselves and their families safe.

Covid restrictions have changed the profile of how our services are delivered, as alluded to elsewhere in this report. In addition, our services are moving toward a more countywide delivery, which has required adjustments to our costings of delivered services. Our charitable aims and objectives remain constant, but it is common for government, both national and local, to ask us to aid them in achieving their statutory obligations. This has been the subject of much discussion in the Finance Sub-committee. Whilst their requests often fit with our overall objectives and often come with generous grants, the inflation of the pool of money can be deceptive. Government grants can be short term and come with conditions relating to what we can and can't do. The money is attractive but to what extent does it take us away from our central aims? How do we apportion our time resource to achieve statutory aims? Does this take us away from our core objectives? What plans should we make when the money runs out? This fine balance has been the subject of much and ongoing debate in our sub-committee.

During the year, I have a sense that SRS' finances are on a secure footing, and we haven't taken our eye off the ball. My view is that the professional managerial team and the Trustee group are on the same side when it comes to strategic issues relating to the work of SRS. This means that there is a great deal of lively discussion about the ongoing work of SRS and the finances needed to support it. During this year, we have updated our accounting software, and are now able to interrogate the numbers in a more sophisticated way. This new financial year will enable us to extend our use of the software. Our reserves are in line with our stated policy of having in the region of 50% running costs available.

Keith Faull, Treasurer

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. We offer our heartfelt thanks to the many individual supporters and community fundraisers 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.

Many organisations provided grants for our work during 2021-22 for which we offer our sincere 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; Suffolk County Council Engaged Communities Group; Suffolk and North East Essex ICS Community Ambition Programme; Ipswich Borough Council Seeds for Change; Mulberry Trust; Swan Mountain Trust; Woodbridge Town Council

We are extremely grateful to Suffolk Community Foundation and their funders, through whom we secured: Ipswich & East Suffolk CCG Realising Ambitions Fund; Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner's Fund; New Anglia LEP Community Challenge Fund; Youth Intervention Fund; Frank Jackson Fund; Healthy Heart Fund; Suffolk Giving Fund—Martineau Fund; Covid Fund—A Cook; Digital Inclusion Fund; Hopkins Charitable Fund; RJB Fund; Suffolk Hardship Fund.

We are delivering increased refugee resettlement support on behalf of Suffolk County Council, including the UK Refugee Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Afghan Relocations & Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), and we are very grateful to them for their commission and partnership working.

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 has three main functions: 1) to monitor SRS's policies on equality, diversity, and protected characteristics in terms of employment, trusteeships, and volunteering; 2) to adopt and review policies to support the functioning of the organisation; and 3) to have oversight of staffing issues within SRS.

In respect of the first function, the sub-committee and Board are satisfied that SRS continues to be an equal opportunities employer and are working in line with an action plan to progress in certain areas, particularly that of wider representation on the Board itself. Regarding the second, the sub-committee has a rolling programme to review all SRS policies and is meeting its objectives in this regard. Regarding the third, the sub-committee is leading on a review of SRS' staffing and salary structures. These are large pieces of work (especially given the growth in the staffing body in response to new refugee schemes, and cost of living increases) which we hope will be completed by spring 2023. We are very proud of the work SRS does and will continue to do our best to honour that work by ensuring our staffing body is supported so that they can, in turn, continue to provide tailored and flexible support to refugees and asylum seekers in Suffolk.

Staff team (as of September 2022)

Charity Manager	Rebecca Crerar
Operations Manager	Ellie Roberts
Advice Service Manager	Liz Wood
Refugee Resettlement Programme Manager	Patricia Ferreira
Fundraising and Communications Officer	Martin Simmonds
Employment & Training Coordinator	Jodi Peck
Employment & Training Advice Worker	Ronan Doorly
AMIF Employment Skills Assessor	Yelyzaveta Stepanishyna
Women & Families Advice Worker	Fatima Khan
Bilingual Advice Worker	Faizaa Ali
General Advice Worker	Emily McQuade
Resettlement Coordinator and Advice Worker	Ashraf El Hussein
Resettlement Support Coordinator—Ukraine Programme	Gemma Field
Resettlement Programme Bilingual Advice Worker	Sharafatullah Danish
Resettlement Programme Bilingual Advice Worker	Shakiba Alizadeh
Resettlement Programme Community Liaison Officer/Advice Worker	Rosie Voller
Advice Worker—Ukraine Programme	Olena Kotovska
Host Support—Ukraine Programme	Cathy Gonzalez
Youth Coordinator	Sarah Owens
Health & Sports Activities Coordinator	Geraldine Clarke
Volunteer Coordinator	Libby Ruffle
Projects Worker	Sarah Cole
ESOL Tutor	Michaela Freeman
ESOL & International Women's Group Facilitator	Catherine Costello
International Women's Group ESOL Coordinator	Amna Smith
International Women's Group Crèche Leader	Shkurte Bejtullahu
Finance Officer	Vanessa Ransby
Office Systems Coordinator	Marianne Walker

Board of Trustees (as of September 2022)

Chair	Dr Felicity Szesnat
Vice Chair	Gerry Toplis
Treasurer	Dr Keith Faull
Trustee	Will Atkins
Trustee	Greg Dodds
Trustee	Mary Engleheart
Trustee	Christina Sweet-Escott
Trustee	Amelia Whitworth
Trustee (co-opted)	Stuart Gordon
Trustee (co-opted)	Paul Reeves
Trustee (co-opted)	Eddie Thompson
Honorary Trustee	Alan Blackshaw
Honorary Trustee	Beteja Grajqevci Dovao

I am writing to you because I would like to say I am hugely impressed by your magnificent work for charity and refugees. I think you are making lives better for those who are in need of it. You are inspiring people to help the refugees and that is great as you are making the world a happier place for those who need it to be. [letter from Ethan, aged 10]