

# Suffolk Refugee Support Annual Review 2024-25

25 years of  
supporting  
refugees



**"I am so proud to be the Patron of an organisation which continues to provide the most wonderful emotional and practical assistance for asylum seekers and refugees in Suffolk" [Sir Nick Young, Patron of SRS]**

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## Our grant funders for 2024/25:

National Lottery Community Fund  
Garfield Weston  
Ipswich Borough Council  
BBC Children in Need  
Mrs LD Rope's Charitable Settlement  
Tudor Trust  
Limbourn Trust  
EELGA EON Programme  
Lovel Foundation  
Mulberry Trust  
People's Health Trust  
Suffolk County Council Digital Inclusion Fund  
Sport England Movement Fund  
French Huguenot Church of London Charitable Trust  
Energy Redress Scheme  
Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust  
Suffolk County Council Holiday Activities Fund  
Ipswich Health & Wellbeing Fund

## Funds secured through Suffolk Community Foundation:

Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner's Fund  
Cancer Community Partnership Fund  
Pear Family Fund  
Community Voices in Health Research  
Wider Horizons Grantmaking Programme  
Frank Jackson Fund  
RJB Grantmaking Fund  
Household Support Fund

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## Overview of our year

During our 25th anniversary year we continued to operate in a highly challenging environment, delivering a range of vital services to meet the urgent and growing needs of refugees and asylum seekers across Suffolk. We provided specialist advice and one-to-one guidance across a wide range of issues, alongside practical support, group activities and outings, and recreational and integration opportunities, all with an increased emphasis on client partnership. We joined with our clients to celebrate their successes, contributions and creativity, while also providing reassurance and implementing additional security measures when the safety of our communities came under threat.

Key challenges this year included an increase in destitution and urgent homelessness issues, ensuring the safety of our clients and staff during and after the riots and civil unrest during summer 2024, and supporting our clients over an increased geographical area. On this last point, we are seeing refugees and asylum seekers being placed by the Home Office in new parts of the county with limited support infrastructure, plus other local authorities placing asylum-seeking children and refugee families in Suffolk.

However, we also held a special celebration of the creativity and contribution of the people we work with and everyone who has supported us over the past quarter of a century with a Refugee Week fashion show at Dance East. Our Sewing Group, who created the outfits for the show, and our Refugee Football Group, in partnership with the Ipswich Town Foundation, continue to thrive, and we have worked with local communities and partner organisations across Suffolk to give a warm welcome to refugee families.

Sadly, with the number of people displaced globally hitting new record levels each year, the need for our full range of support services has never been greater. We are sincerely grateful to all our funders and supporters over the past year, and hope this report demonstrates our impact on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers across Suffolk.

## A message from our Patron, Sir Nick Young

It is a sad fact that the very principle that a civilised country has a moral duty to take in those fleeing oppression in their own land is under attack throughout the western world.

This is of course partly driven by the unprecedented numbers seeking asylum globally, and by confusion and concern that some of those arriving on these shores may be fleeing, not from oppression as such, but from economic or other hardship.

The solution to these issues must lie in the hands of the world's political leaders, who should be working together to find practical answers to these challenges. The answer will not be found by demonstrating outside accommodation for asylum seekers, still less by attacks on asylum seekers themselves.

I am so proud to be the Patron of an organisation which continues to provide the most wonderful emotional and practical assistance for asylum seekers and refugees in Suffolk, and which so many local people continue to support so generously, both financially and through volunteering. We all have a part to play in advocating for the rights of asylum seekers to be protected, and for those who help them to be both applauded and safeguarded.





## Chair's report



SRS's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year has now come to a close – and a very successful year of celebrations it was too! A major highlight was our Sewing Group Fashion Show at Dance East, attended by clients, staff and trustees past and present, including founding members of SRS. I'd like to thank our Patron, Sir Nick Young, for his ongoing support, all those who attended the anniversary events, and Becks, Martin, and the whole SRS staffing team for all they did to make this year memorable.

### Trustees

In February, Dr Keith Faull, who served on the Board for many years, resigned to focus on his retirement. We thank him for his service and, in particular, for his skill in coming at complex issues from different perspectives. In December 2024, Paul Reeves resigned as Honorary Secretary, and Lena Kushakovska was elected to replace him. Our thanks to them both.

During 2025, the Board co-opted three new members, all of whom are standing for formal election during this AGM. Please take a moment to read their "pen pictures" on our website, for they are a remarkable group of women:

Caroline Crabb (co-opted at the March 2025 Board meeting)

Emma Sheppard (co-opted at the March 2025 Board meeting)

Lisa Hilson (co-opted at the May 2025 Board meeting)

This brings the total number of serving Trustees to nine, an increase which was sorely needed, given the Board's workload.

### The Board of Trustees' work during the period under report

This past year, the Board has mostly focussed on fundraising and financial reporting. The charity sector continues to be asked to do more and more with less and less, and SRS is no exception. As such, the Board supported the development of better and more detailed financial reporting to inform its decision-making. As part of this process, it became clear to the Board that the management team was under-resourced for the number of employees and the large range of activities SRS delivers. As such, the Board decided that an additional manager was required and, subsequently, an Evaluation & Programmes Manager (Sam Vinyard-Jones) was recruited, whose role it is to improve the collection and reporting on the impact SRS's work has, both for its clients and the wider community. Other key activities this year have been:

- Leading on revising SRS's strategic values and aims document, which will be presented to you at the 2025 AGM;
- Streamlining the work of the three sub-committees whilst continuing to provide scrutiny and support; and revisiting the membership of these sub-committees to ensure the skills of those Trustees sitting on them align well;
- Supporting the ongoing work of partnering with SRS's clients to determine what activities should be delivered, and how. A particular success has been the launch of Client Advisory Groups: my thanks to Anna Girling, Jodi Peck, and Gerry Toplis in particular; and,
- A continued focus on staff well-being.

I'd like to end by noting that, in July this year, Rebecca Crerar celebrated her 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with SRS. Please join me in congratulating Becks on this milestone!

Dr Felicity Szesnat, Chair of the Board of Trustees  
August 2025

# Charity Manager's report



It feels just a short while since I wrote my report for the 2023-24 annual review, and yet when I reflect on SRS's activities over the past year, I realise how much has happened.

Since my last report, asylum housing has been extended into towns other than Ipswich across Suffolk. This has happened with little and often no notice being given to the local authorities, health service or SRS. We are working hard to ensure we contact every new asylum seeker as they are housed in Suffolk, to ensure they have essentials such as money for food (not always given even though they are entitled), access to a GP (excellent support from the Health Outreach Team with whom we share information about new arrivals) and meaningful activities such as English classes and sports. This can be challenging.

We have experienced cases of asylum seekers without food, heavily pregnant women without access to health services, children with special needs without specialist support and asylum seekers sleeping rough after receiving a positive asylum decision but having nowhere to live. Our advice staff have picked these clients up and linked them to the appropriate support and provided essential emergency help in the meantime. We advocate for improvements to the systems serving asylum seekers and for mainstream services to recognise the unique and difficult circumstances our clients are in.

The dedication of the staff at SRS is enduring and I am proud of the difference we are making in so many people's lives. We are working not only with asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their claim for protection in the UK, but also with Ukrainians still uncertain of their futures and living in limbo in Suffolk whilst the war rages in their homeland; resettlement refugees mainly from Afghanistan who have fled the Taliban regime; young unaccompanied asylum seekers with little life guidance or understanding of what is happening and many other needy individuals for whom life in their home countries has become untenable. The move to the UK is a difficult process and as systems struggle with resource limitations and fast paced technological change, the people with the least experience of accessing help, suffer the most.

We watch with horror and sadness as the world's leaders use human lives as payment for power and control. We are angered by the way those who have fled, risking their lives in the process, are criminalised and blamed for our country's problems. Little credit is given to the enormous and vital contribution that people from abroad bring to our hospitals, care settings, building industry, hospitality industry and more.

I am proud of SRS's unwavering support to help people rebuild their lives here – we work hard to get people into work, speaking English, following the UK's rules, helping one another and contributing positively to our beautiful county. There are hundreds of people responsible for SRS's achievements this year which I hope you will enjoy reading about in this review. Great thanks go to our amazing team of volunteers, our wonderful staff, our expert board of trustees, our generous supporters and funders large and small. You all play a vital role in making Suffolk a place where asylum seekers and refugees can experience safety and hope. A heartfelt thank you to you all.

Rebecca Crerar  
Charity Manager  
August 2025

# Advice service

Our Advice Service continues to meet the urgent and complex needs of newly-arrived asylum seekers and give trusted support to settled refugees in Suffolk. We provide advice and guidance on a wide range of issues plus practical support for individuals and households, from destitution support (including food and clothing) to help with health, energy bills and family support. In the past year we have seen acute issues around homelessness, with our advice team often picking up the pieces where other support services have failed. Our Housing Advice Worker has worked intensively with clients, local authorities and housing providers to find positive accommodation solutions.



***"This is the only place whose doors are always open to offer help at any time. It makes me proud to be part of your journey and your dedication to service."***

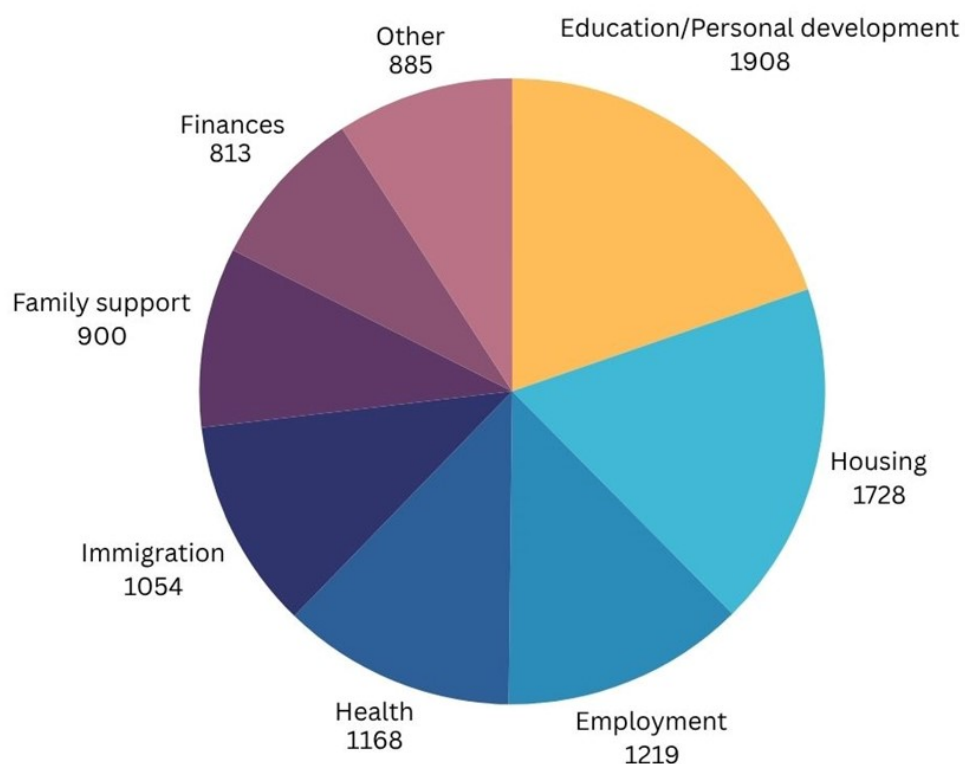
## Our year in numbers

<b>9675</b>	individual client advice contacts delivered (not including group work)
<b>1195</b>	people directly supported by our services (excluding family members)
<b>285</b>	refugees on Ukrainian schemes supported (excluding family members)
<b>160</b>	unaccompanied asylum-seeking children supported through work with colleges across Suffolk
<b>133</b>	people supported to access green spaces through trips and activities
<b>111</b>	people supported to learn English through our ESOL classes
<b>97</b>	people secured employment with our help
<b>82</b>	women attended our International Women's Group, and more than <b>60</b> women attended our sewing group
<b>52</b>	young people supported through our Homework Club
<b>47</b>	different countries of origin for people we supported

**Over the past year we have put an increased emphasis on supporting people to access the mental health and wellbeing benefits of nature and green spaces.**

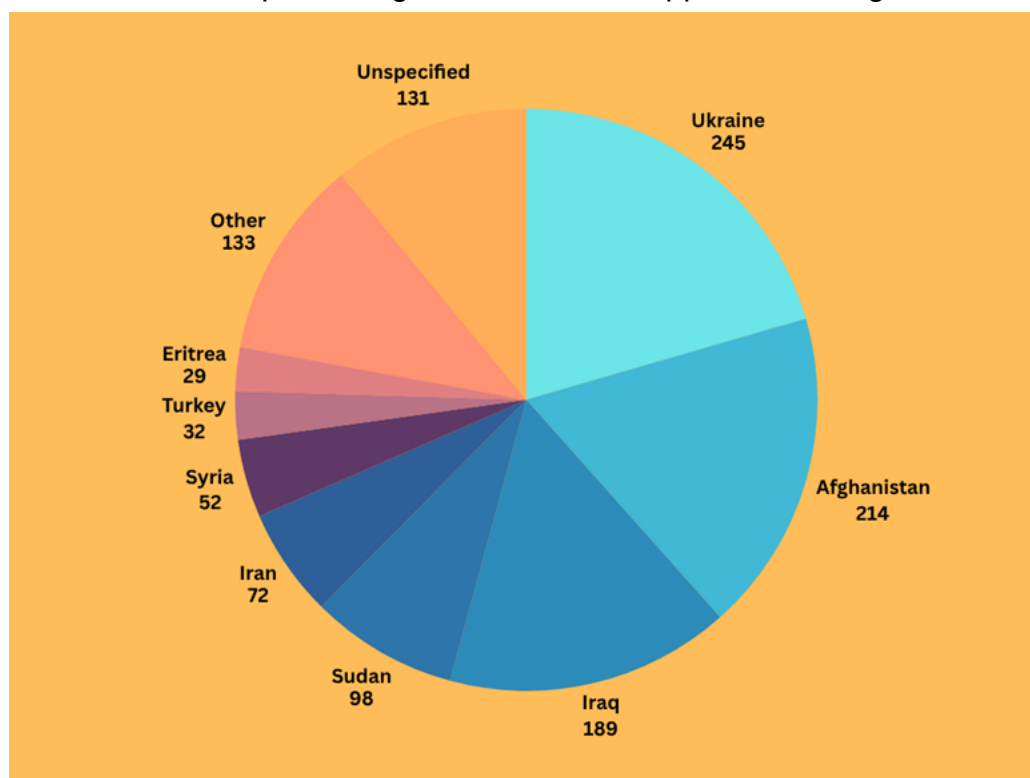
We had been working with Mr A for some time through our advice service, where we became aware of his struggles with mental health. We invited him on a farm visit with a small group of asylum-seeking men, and he attended and was able to share his love of cooking with the group. It was immediately evident that the experience had a positive impact on his wellbeing. Mr A shared that it had been a long time since he had left the house for anything other than counselling sessions or medical appointments. Following the trip, although his counselling sessions ended due to the provider's funding constraints, we were able to refer him to further mental health support through alternative NHS provision. Encouragingly, he also began leaving the house more frequently and even signed up for gym membership with our support.

## Breakdown of Advice Service contacts



## Top countries of origin across our services

These numbers reflect clients we have recorded a direct service with – they do not include family members or everyone supported through our groups or outreach work. They are all countries experiencing serious conflict, oppression or rights violations.





## Ukrainian refugee support

We provide one-to-one support to refugees on the Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family schemes, as well as working closely with Suffolk County Council and local councils, support groups and partners to address the needs of Ukrainians in Suffolk, with an emphasis on employment support. We also had the pleasure of organising an uplifting Ukraine Independence Day celebration at The Hold in Ipswich, with more than 200 guests, held online seminars on the UK education system and led group trips to places such as Sutton Hoo and Dunwich Heath.



***“From me personally, as your mentee, a massive thank you for your work and for everything you do for people like me – those who arrived stressed, distressed, and unsure of what to do. I can finally say that my life is gaining new colours and directions, and a significant part of this is thanks to you.”***  
[feedback from a Ukrainian client]

### Our work with Ukrainian refugees in numbers

<b>2,240</b>	individual contacts with Ukrainian clients
<b>1,500</b>	employment related support sessions with Ukrainian clients
<b>285</b>	refugees on Ukrainian schemes supported (excluding family members)
<b>56</b>	Ukrainian clients successfully secured employment through our support
<b>47</b>	Ukrainian clients entered training, university or college with our support
<b>16</b>	Ukrainian families given donated Christmas hampers
<b>6</b>	group trips organised to support people to access nature and culture
<b>4</b>	events organised for Ukrainian jobseekers in coordination with partners

**We take a holistic approach to supporting people, recognising that multiple issues are often interconnected and require a joined up response**

Shortly before Christmas we received a referral from a partner organisation about a Ukrainian family living in Suffolk. The family of eight included grandparents, parents, two children and two aunts, all living in a crumbling rented property. We found out that, despite applying, neither grandparent received Pension Credit, and the parents were struggling to pay for the youngest daughter's nursery. We provided a Christmas hamper for both girls (using donated hampers from Suffolk Libraries), prepared all the documents and re-applied for Pension Credit and a free bus pass for the grandparents, this time successfully. We also helped them secure the free childcare to which they were entitled as both parents were working, plus other SEN and family support. As they were less worried about finances, the parents were more able to provide a positive impact for the children. We invited the family to our Easter-egg making workshop (conducted by a Ukrainian volunteer) where they could meet other people from the Ukrainian community, engaged the grandparents in community events, and the parents in learning English.



## Refugee resettlement work

We provide intensive support to people arriving in Suffolk through the UK resettlement programmes, which give limited numbers of refugees a safe route and a sense of security, with Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK upon arrival. From April 2024 to March 2025, we welcomed nine new families, bringing the total number of families supported across the schemes in Suffolk to 41 – 37 under Afghan schemes focusing on those who worked for the UK government in Afghanistan (alongside their immediate family members), and on particularly vulnerable families and individuals, and four under the UKRS, for refugees from other nationalities. We continue to support the families from the point of arrival in Suffolk with accessing education, ESOL classes, employment, navigating UK systems and customs, social activities, and other aspects of integration.

### A personal case study – Fazal Rahman Nazari

My name is Fazal Rahman Nazari, and I am originally from Afghanistan. I left my country because my life was in danger, and it was no longer safe for me and my family to stay. Leaving Afghanistan was one of the hardest experiences of my life. I had to say goodbye to my home, my community, and everything I knew, without knowing what the future would bring.



After leaving Afghanistan, my family and I moved to Pakistan, where we stayed for one month. From there, we travelled to the United Kingdom. When we first arrived, we were placed in a military camp, where families had to share basic facilities and live in very limited conditions. It was a challenging time for us, as we had little privacy and comfort. After some time, however, we were moved into our own home. With the support of Suffolk Refugee Support, we were able to settle and begin to rebuild our lives.

When I arrived in the UK in February 2024, I felt safe, but I also faced many challenges. Everything was new to me: the language, the culture, and the education system. At first, I found it very difficult to communicate because my English was not strong. I struggled to make friends and sometimes felt lost and unsure if I could fit in.

With the support of Suffolk Refugee Support and the people around me, I slowly began to rebuild my confidence. I started studying Health and Social Care at college. At the beginning it was not easy, but step by step I learned to manage, and I realised that with patience and effort I could overcome these struggles.

I have also had positive experiences outside the classroom. I am passionate about cricket and have taken part in competitions across the UK, winning matches with my team in places like Brighton and Cambridge. I have also given presentations on topics such as asylum seekers, refugees, and breaking stereotypes. These opportunities gave me the chance to use my voice, share my story, and inspire others.

The biggest challenge for me has been the pain of leaving my country and starting again from zero. But I now see this as my strength, because it has pushed me to grow, to learn, and to use every opportunity to build a better future. I am thankful for the support I have received so far. My journey has not been easy, but I believe that each step forward, no matter how small, is progress. I hope to continue improving myself, contributing to my community, and to be the first person in my family to go to university, while also being a voice for young people who have been through similar experiences.

## Youth work

There are growing numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers in Suffolk, with most under the care of Suffolk Social Services but others placed here by neighbouring local authorities too. We support young people from countries such as Sudan, Eritrea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Somalia and Turkey. Our work focuses on wellbeing and learning new skills, integrating and making new friends and building confidence and independence.

We run a weekly Homework Club at Ipswich School for students to improve their English, Maths and other subjects supported by volunteers and sixth form students. We have organised monthly celebrations at the YMCA to celebrate festival days, such as Christmas and Eid, bringing young people together with social workers and housing providers to share food, chat and listen to music. The Eid party saw more than 60 young people attending along with 30 adults.

We ran a popular ESOL Summer School and have delivered sessions at Suffolk New College, West Suffolk College and East Coast College (in Lowestoft) on subjects including Internet Safety, Drug Awareness and Extremism, and Violence Against Women and Girls. We organised trips to green spaces (including Shingle Street and Abbey Gardens in Bury), recreational outings (including trampolining and pantomime), and workshops on subjects from carpentry to life-saving skills. We also supported young people to take part in music projects, including a fabulous [performance](#) at our AGM.



***“Everyone is so nice and helpful that I have met. I thank you for opportunities to get involved.”***

***“The drumming and DJ sessions have given me a lot of confidence”***

### Gender breakdown of all clients across our services where known/specified

**51%**

**49%**



**Women**



**Men**

## Refugee football group & health activities

Our Refugee Football Group in conjunction with the Ipswich Town Foundation has been hugely successful over the past year, with a regular attendance of more than 30 young people. The group participated in a tournament at Portman Rd, and were part of the Ipswich Town Foundation fixture and a visit from His Royal Highness, The Duke of Gloucester. [One participant](#) who could no longer play due to injury has been supported by the Foundation to pass his refereeing qualifications.



We continued to run weekly women's keep fit classes, as well as a 12-week weight management course supporting women to improve their weight, wellbeing, sleep and stress management, plus a women's wellness day. We have also organised wellbeing trips including farm visits and badminton and kick boxing sessions for young people.

***"I really enjoy the sense of community and teamwork. It's a great way to meet new people, stay active, and just have fun playing football. The sessions are welcoming and inclusive, making it easy for everyone to feel comfortable, no matter their skill level."***

***"I love this group, I am very happy. My body likes exercise, and my blood pressure is better. The teacher is very kind."***

**We have seen an increase over the last year in complex and vulnerable housing situations, and are often required to step in where other services have failed in order to prevent harm and destitution. It is a particular challenge to get up-to-date information from the Home Office or other agencies on the movement of asylum seekers and refugees into or out of Suffolk. This can delay our ability to offer early support and engagement, which is critical in the first few weeks of a client's arrival.**

A family with daughters aged three and five had been placed in accommodation in Ipswich by the London council of Hillingdon, with no clarity on their housing situation or local support. After nine months in Ipswich, they were suddenly asked to vacate the property and presented at our office at 4pm with nowhere to go. With no recognised local connection, neither the council or social services could assist in placing the family in emergency accommodation to prevent them from becoming street homeless.

We arranged emergency hotel accommodation and purchased train tickets for the family to return to London the next day. Our advice worker stayed in contact throughout the day, advocating directly with Hillingdon Council to secure appropriate support. Eventually the family was successfully re-accommodated by Hillingdon and are now in safe, stable housing. They expressed their sincere gratitude for our support during this very difficult time.

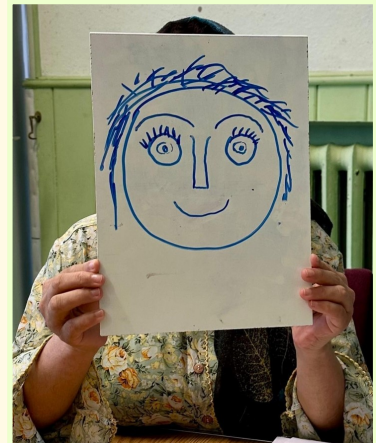


## Employment and training work

Our employment team provides specialist support tailored to the needs of different clients, whether Ukrainian or Afghan refugees seeking work or professional qualifications, asylum seekers interested in training or volunteering opportunities, or settled refugees looking to progress in their employment journeys. Over the past year we had 567 client contacts regarding job search/applications, 97 people secured employment with our support, and 35 people secured volunteering placements.

## English classes

With the closing of local asylum contingency accommodation, we have returned to our original four ESOL classes at different language levels, led by our qualified tutor and exceptional volunteers. We also offer one-to-one tuition face-to-face or online – often volunteer led – for people in different parts of Suffolk or for whom childcare makes travel to classes difficult. Including sessions at our International Women's Group, 109 people have attended our English classes over the past year. With a continued emphasis on people taking and passing exams, we are delighted that 22 students took 37 exams in total this year and achieved a 100% pass rate. In addition to this, we have taught literacy skills to our Pre Entry learners and delivered workshops on topics such as cancer prevention, hypertension and reducing energy consumption.



***"Thank you for helping me to learn language, because with two children, I really need to learn the language."***

## Volunteering

Volunteers are key to our work, adding skills, experience and value to all that we do and helping to increase awareness and empathy for refugees across different communities. We have 40 active volunteers who dedicate at least one hour per week of their time, 16 of whom have lived experience as past or current users of our services. Our volunteers lead or assist with ESOL classes and English practice groups (face to face and online), deliver one-to-one English or Maths practice, support our International Women's Group and creche, perform office reception duties, support the advice and operations teams, assist at our sewing group and football, and help out on SRS stalls at community events.

***"It gives me a purpose in life and helps me feel that I am making a positive contribution to society. I have found that the vast majority of contacts with clients have been very satisfying and have increased my understanding of other cultures and life in other countries. Of course, there are downsides when one feels that you are powerless and unable to provide the help a client needs. On the other hand, the atmosphere generated by staff at activities, events and in an office setting is very energising and full of vitality and enthusiasm—what more could you want? I am very happy volunteering at SRS."***

## International Women's Group

This friendly, volunteer-supported group with crèche provides a welcoming, safe and social space for women of different nationalities, prioritising those who are asylum seekers, isolated or socially marginalised, and providing support with English skills, health and wellbeing activities and knowledge of life in the UK. Over the past year we have provided ESOL support to 82 women face to face or online, hosted visits from Suffolk Police, the NHS and Cancer Support Suffolk, and enjoyed a trip to the People's Community Garden. A particular focus has been cancer screening awareness and reporting signs and symptoms. Many of the women do take up cervical screening, but there is very low uptake in some groups. We have worked with the NHS to connect them to these women to overcome barriers. The women also learnt about the importance of regularly checking their breasts for lumps. These sessions led to much discussion and were highly valued by the women. We have seen women grow in confidence in speaking English, while our online group has gone from strength to strength, with women in our lower online class blossoming.



## Sewing group

Around 25 women attend our sewing group each week, from a wider group of around 50. The group encourages women who might otherwise be isolated to learn to sew, to practice their English and make friends and socialise, with the New Wolsey Theatre providing a welcoming space. Skilled seamstresses from Afghanistan and Kosovo share their skills with others, alongside an excellent team of English-teaching volunteers.



Our fashion show featuring the group's work at Dance East to celebrate 25 years of SRS was a highlight this year, with twelve clients braving the stage to show off their beautiful work. Suffolk New College students directed the show and we were very proud of what we achieved together. Another high point was our exhibition at Ipswich Library, [featured](#) by ITV Anglia and Woman 2 Woman Radio, with participants describing how important the group is to them in making friends and restarting their lives.



## What our clients, volunteers and supporters say

*"Thank you so much to SRS for all the opportunities I have been given. When I first arrived, I was so sad and depressed and now I have hope and have a future here in England."*

*"Exercise is for everyone. I feel good and want more exercise classes in the week. Thank you for being a kind helpful teacher."*

*"Thank you teacher for teaching me. Now my English is getting better. I can talk. I can enjoy deep conversation. My life is completely changed. Thank you so much. I really appreciate."*

*"I am so happy with refugee football session and it makes me feel so good and more energy"*

*"There are many benefits [to volunteering with SRS], but the best thing is the feeling of a joint endeavour in a common purpose of providing support for clients and the friendships that are generated in the process"*

*"It's a fantastic way to stay fit, make friends, and be part of a positive and supportive group. I think anyone who enjoys football, or just wants to be active in a fun way, would love it 🙌"*

*"Proud of you all, upholding traditional British values of equality, tolerance and decency"*

*"Thank you for everything you are doing for me"*

*"I stand with you and applaud the work you do! Sending love and solidarity ❤️"*

**As a frontline charity we regularly provide emergency support to those who have fallen through the gaps of statutory provision and otherwise have nowhere to turn.**

Mr C, who had lived in the UK for more than 20 years, came to SRS in a highly vulnerable state—he was physically unwell, emotionally distressed and lacked the language skills to communicate his situation clearly. Our Advice Worker ascertained that he was undergoing chemotherapy for colorectal cancer and had no secure accommodation. He had previously been working informally in exchange for basic accommodation under conditions that suggested exploitation. When the business was sold, he was evicted with no notice or support. A member of the community later took him in, but the living conditions were unsuitable for someone with serious health needs. He had no income, legal status, or support network.

As a first step, we provided emergency financial support and essentials, including food. Our staff offered regular emotional and practical support, including accompanying him to hospital appointments. We liaised with Migrant Help and other agencies to coordinate appropriate legal, medical, and housing assistance. We supported his application for asylum support and helped to facilitate a Leave to Remain application based on long residence. After 65 days of our continued support and advocacy, the client was finally granted asylum support and safely housed in Home Office accommodation in Chelmsford. He is now stable, receiving the medical care needed and is awaiting a decision on his immigration application.



## Media work

As media coverage of refugee issues increasingly lacks any reflection of lived experience or positive stories, we try to highlight the reality on the ground and the success and creativity of our clients. Over the past year we have [shared the hopes of Syrians](#) in Suffolk following the downfall of the dictatorship in their country, spoken out against [appalling UK citizenship changes](#), and reflected on our [25 years](#) of supporting refugees. We have also highlighted the [resilience and reality](#) of refugee lives and the [successes of people](#) settling in Suffolk. We have shared the skills and creativity of the people we work with—ITV Anglia featured our [sewing group exhibition](#) and we shared a fantastic performance of [Kurdish singing](#) at our AGM on our YouTube channel. Our refugee football group with the ITFC Foundation also featured in the [Sports Gazette](#) and we were delighted to feature in episode 5 of the [Rolling With the Punches](#) podcast about ITFC.

## UK and international context

The people we work with here in Suffolk, their experiences and the situations they have fled, are always a small scale, local reflection of [global trends](#). Sadly, forced displacement around the world has almost doubled in the last decade and is becoming an increasingly common human experience.

Almost none of the UK coverage of refugee and asylum issues includes any wider context that might help to take some heat out of the domestic debate. For instance, we think a lot of people would be surprised to learn that the UK ranks just 17th in Europe (EU+) in asylum applications per capita. In this vacuum we try to provide as much accurate, up-to-date information as we can, as well as humanising the issue with case studies and real world experiences. You can find the latest refugee and asylum facts and figures on our [website](#) under Media/Useful documents.



**123.2** million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2024 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations

**1 in every 67** people on Earth has been forcibly displaced from their home

**67%** of refugees live in countries neighbouring their own

**17th**—the UK's rank in Europe in asylum applications per head of population

**Top 5** nationalities for small boat arrivals in the year to June 2025: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Syria and Sudan – all have suffered horrific conflict or oppression

**68%** of all initial decisions on asylum applications from people arriving by small boat from 2018-2024 were grants of protection (with more successful on appeal)

**7,815** refugees were resettled in the UK in 2024 (**0.01%** of all refugees)

## HR Subcommittee Report 2024-25

The HR Subcommittee monitors SRS policies on equality, diversity, and protected characteristics in terms of employment, trusteeships, and volunteering; adopts and reviews policies to support the functioning of the organisation; and has oversight of staffing issues within SRS.



Regarding the first function, the Subcommittee and Board are satisfied that SRS continues to be an equal opportunities employer with a diverse workforce. We recognise our current offices can pose challenges in making reasonable adjustments for clients with physical disabilities, although mitigations are available when needed. Regarding the second, the Subcommittee has a rolling programme to review all SRS policies and is meeting its objectives in this regard.

With the third, the Subcommittee has agreed improvements to the planning of staff training proposed by the HR and Training Officer. These will, annually, provide a comprehensive staff training programme with improved budget planning for staff development. 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 they can, in turn, continue to provide individualised, flexible support to refugees and asylum seekers in Suffolk. As part of achieving this aim, the Subcommittee has agreed that an annual Staff Wellbeing Report will be provided to the Board using, amongst other information, an annual staff wellbeing survey.

Gerry Toplis

Chair, HR Subcommittee

## Client Partnership Subcommittee Report 2024-25

The Client Partnership Subcommittee's role is to lead and support SRS in the development of its partnership with clients to enable consultation, engagement and co-design of the services it offers. These are key tools for the quality assurance of SRS services and people's empowerment to have more control of their lives.

The much anticipated Client Partnership Coordinator (CPC) took up post in September 2024, the first person in this role for SRS. This marked a significant step change for taking the client partnership work forward. As a consequence, the terms of reference for the Subcommittee were revised to reflect its move to a more strategic role rather than undertaking field work.

The CPC has continued the work to identify effective channels for gaining the views of clients whether via tablet surveys, the Padlet app or face to face interviews. The CPC completed the What's Life Like 2024 survey. This followed up that undertaken in 2022 with 105 people interviewed about various aspects of their lives in Suffolk. The terms of reference for a Client Advisory Group to the SRS Board were also agreed and work was undertaken to convene a first meeting with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The outcomes of both these substantial and significant pieces of work were reported to the Board in July 2025, outside the scope of this review.

Gerry Toplis

Chair, Client Partnership Subcommittee

## Treasurer's report



In 2024/25, SRS maintained costs within budget while continuing to deliver a comprehensive range of services. These efforts were supported through a combination of grant and donation income, along with contract funding from Suffolk County Council to assist resettled refugees and we continue to be deeply grateful for the generosity of our funders and private supporters. Their continued commitment to our work makes a profound difference to the lives of those we serve. We sincerely thank them for their invaluable help and ongoing support.

Our budget increased from £868,000 in 2023–24 to £922,000 in 2024–25, largely due to a salary review aimed at aligning managerial pay with sector standards. Additionally, a 5% cost-of-living increase was applied to all staff to reflect high levels of inflation over the previous year. However, staff vacancies and the decision not to fill one post led to a reduction in projected expenditure.

At the end of March 2025, reserves remain within our policy of retaining around 25% of contract costs and 50% of other running costs to allow for confident planning for the subsequent year.

The main risk facing SRS is a substantial reduction in income resulting from a significant decline in funding, grants, or donations. In such circumstances, maintaining our reserves in line within our policy would enable a managed adjustment to service delivery, or—in the very worst case scenario—an orderly and responsible closure of the charity.

The Finance Sub-Committee meets regularly to assess our financial position, comparing costs against internal budgets and forecasts. These routine reviews provide the Board of Trustees with a strong understanding of our financial health, enabling controlled planning and informed decision-making to deliver our objectives within our budgetary constraints.

The Board continues to have confidence in SRS's internal controls, which not only ensure compliance with our obligations but also underpin the long-term stability and sustainability of the charity.

Stuart Gordon, Honorary Treasurer

Our heartfelt thanks go to all the individual donors and community fundraisers who give regularly or make one-off donations to our work. These unrestricted funds are of vital importance as they allow us to meet the most urgent needs of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Suffolk.

We are sincerely thankful to the following organisations for providing grants towards our work in 2024-25: National Lottery Community Fund, Garfield Weston, Ipswich Borough Council, BBC Children in Need, Mrs LD Rope's Charitable Settlement, Tudor Trust, Limbourne Trust, EELGA EON Programme, Lovel Foundation, Mulberry Trust, People's Health Trust, Suffolk County Council Digital Inclusion Fund, Sport England Movement Fund, French Huguenot Church of London Charitable Trust, Energy Redress Scheme, Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust, Ipswich Health & Wellbeing Fund, Suffolk County Council Holiday Activities Fund.

We are very grateful to Suffolk Community Foundation and their funders for all the guidance and support in securing the following funds: Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner's Fund, Cancer Community Partnership Fund, Pear Family Fund, Community Voices in Health Research, Wider Horizons Grantmaking Programme, Frank Jackson Fund, RJB Grantmaking Fund, Household Support Fund.

We continue to deliver refugee resettlement support under the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP), UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), and Ukraine refugee schemes, and we are very grateful to Suffolk County Council for their commission of our services and supportive partnership working.



# SRS Values & Aims

## SRS's Purpose (Mission)

Suffolk Refugee Support ('SRS') exists to support and enable Asylum Seekers and Refugees ('Clients') in Suffolk to lead integrated, fulfilled and contributing lives within their new communities.

## SRS Values

**Individuals Matter**—Each Client is unique and has an intrinsic value and constructive role to play in UK society

**Respect**—We are open, welcoming, respectful, and transparent in our dealings with one another and with others

**Self Determination**—We direct our efforts towards self-determination and ultimate independence for our Clients

**Client Centred**—We are led by the needs and interests of our Clients and design our services to work holistically to meet these

**Safe Environment**—The all-round safety and security of our Clients and everyone who works for and with SRS is of paramount importance

**Keeping Informed**—We keep ourselves fully informed and knowledgeable about every sphere of our work

## SRS Aims (the following aims have equal priority)

**Basic Needs**—To address our Clients' fundamental needs including immigration status, housing, education, physical and mental health, employment and personal safety

**Social Well-being**—To facilitate and support recreational and leisure-time activities aimed at enhancing our Clients' social well-being and quality of life

**Independence**—To support our Clients in transitioning towards independence from SRS' services

**Awareness and Rights**—To promote awareness and understanding of our Clients' experience in the community, including advocating, advising, and lobbying to encourage statutory and other bodies to meet their obligations to our Clients

**Client Partnership**—To develop our partnership with our Clients to achieve a co-production model of service design, evaluation, and delivery

**Governance**—To uphold the effective governance and management of SRS in order to maximise its impact and ensure that its work is informed by 'voices of lived experience'

**Staff**—To maintain a workplace that values and supports Staff, enabling them to effectively carry out their roles in a healthy working environment

**Volunteers**—To increase and develop Volunteers' contribution to the work of SRS

## Equity, diversity and inclusion

Suffolk Refugee Support (SRS) is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion in the provision of services and as an employer. In addition to people with protected characteristics, SRS recognises that refugees and asylum seekers can be an especially vulnerable group of people who experience additional prejudice and discrimination.

Guided by our values and aims, we strive to ensure that all refugees and asylum seekers we work with have equitable access to local activities and support services, ensuring that we take proactive steps to reach and involve those who might have additional barriers to inclusion, for instance due to protected characteristics, rural isolation, language or health issues.

In our recruitment of staff, volunteers and trustees, we actively encourage applications from people with lived experience as refugees, promoting vacancies through local community networks. We are proud to be a member of the Experts by Experience Employment Network which aims to increase representation of people with lived experience in the charitable sector. Our Codes of Conduct and our inductions are very clear on our expectations from our team in terms of EDI and we believe that this has resulted in a diverse and strong team.

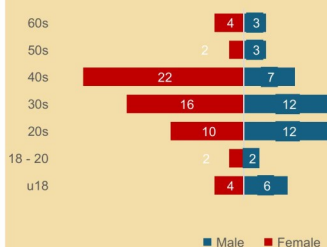
# What's Life Like report

At Suffolk Refugee Support, we believe in empowering our clients and amplifying their voices. Their lived experience and expertise are vital to shaping and improving our services. By working together, we can identify gaps, enhance effectiveness, and co-create solutions that truly meet their needs. We are committed to co-production, ensuring clients are involved in designing, delivering, and evaluating our services. Our Client Partnership Coordinator and sub-committee (see page 16) drive this vision forward.

Over the past year, we carried out our second What's Life Like survey to gather the views, hopes and experiences of people who use our services. In total, 105 refugees and asylum seekers in Suffolk from 25 countries were asked about eleven key areas of daily life—language, employment, education, money, housing, health, fitness, community/friends, family, immigration and life in the UK. The survey aimed to listen to clients, understand the challenges they face and collate suggestions on how best to provide support. The results gave vital insights into the views of our clients and gaps in service provision. The survey found positive feelings around language, community/friends and life in the UK for a majority of people, but highlighted challenges around financial hardship, employment and insecure housing, especially for people with certain statuses. In general, our clients expressed appreciation for their lives in the UK, highlighting a sense of safety, opportunities, access to education and rights for women in particular.

## What's Life Like 2024: survey & findings

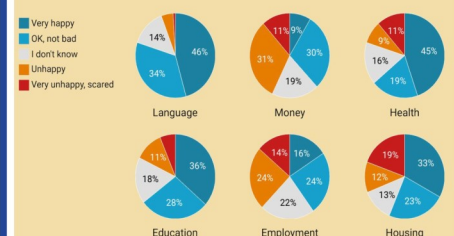
Age and gender of interviewees



Those interviewed came from



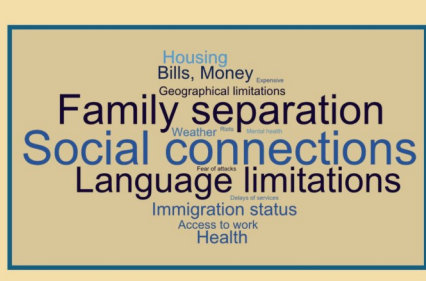
How our clients feel about...



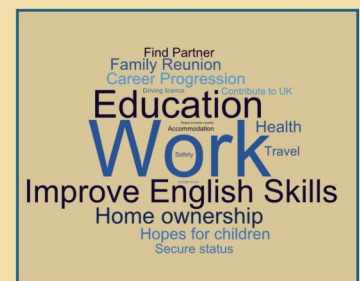
What clients appreciate about life in the UK



SRS clients most struggle with



Our clients' hopes and dreams for the future



SCAN ME



With thanks to all the clients who generously shared their views, experiences and suggestions, allowing us to better understand their needs and improve our services.

This project would not have been possible without the unwavering support of all SRS staff, volunteers and members of the board of trustees.

**For further feedback, please scan the QR code.**



## Staff team (as of September 2025)

Charity Manager  
Operations Manager  
Advice Service Manager  
Resettlement Programme Manager  
Evaluation & Programmes Manager  
Fundraising & Communications Manager  
Senior Advice Worker  
Bilingual Advice Worker  
Housing Advice Worker  
Advice Worker  
Advice Team & Office Administrator  
Support Coordinator & Advice Worker—Ukraine Programme  
Employment & General Advice Worker—Ukraine Programme

Resettlement Programme Advice Worker  
Resettlement Programme Advice Worker  
Resettlement Programme Advice Worker  
Resettlement Programme Advice Worker  
Employment & Training Coordinator  
Employment & Training Advice Worker  
Employment Advice Worker—EON  
HR & Training Officer  
Finance & Data Officer  
ESOL & Women's Officer  
Volunteer Officer  
Youth Coordinator  
Special Projects Coordinator  
Client Partnership Coordinator  
Facilities & IT Coordinator  
ESOL Tutor  
International Women's Group ESOL Facilitator  
International Women's Group Crèche Worker

Rebecca Crerar  
Jodi Peck  
Ashraf Elhusseiny  
Leah King  
Samantha Vinyard-Jones  
Martin Simmonds  
Fatima Khan  
Faizaa Ali  
Beatrice Carpenter  
Hasan Beshtawi  
Maha Elnahas  
Rita Fadieieva  
Alona Kotova/  
Nadia Kolesnykova  
Shakiba Alizadeh  
Maryam Arif  
Julie Harper  
Rona Panjsheer  
Gawain Fraser  
Cathy Gonzalez  
Ahmed Abdallah  
Marianne Walker  
Vanessa Ransby  
Catherine Costello  
Libby Ruffle  
Zakia Haydari  
Sarah Cole  
Isobel Morgan  
Darren Cooper  
Michaela Freeman  
Alina Dolgoplova  
Shkurte Bejtullahu

## Board of Trustees (as of 1st September 2025)

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Vice Chair  
Honorary Treasurer  
Honorary Secretary  
Trustee  
Trustee  
Trustee  
Trustee  
Trustee  
Honorary Trustee

Dr Felicity Szesnat  
Gerry Toplis  
Stuart Gordon  
Olena Kushakovska  
Paul Reeves  
James Wellesley Wesley  
Carolyn Crabb  
Lisa Hilson  
Emma Sheppard  
Alan Blackshaw

We would like to thank sincerely Keith Faull, who resigned during 2024/25, for his services to SRS.

**Donate Now** ➔

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01473 400785

[www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk](http://www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk)

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