

Suffolk Refugee Support Annual Review 2025-26



"It was a real pleasure to spend time with your team and learn more about the remarkable work being carried out by SRS. Their kindness, hard work and commitment to supporting others is something of which they should be immensely proud. The positive impact of their efforts reaches far beyond the individuals they help and strengthens our wider community."
[Oliver Paul DL, High Sheriff of Suffolk]

Supported by:



SUFFOLK
Community
Foundation



COMMUNITY
FUND



EST
Local Government
East



in collaboration with
EAST



Supported by
Children
in Need



IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION



people's
health
trust

Contents:

- 1—Photo montage
- 2—Contents/Grant funders
- 3—Overview/Message from our Patron
- 4—Chair's report
- 5—Charity Manager's report
- 6—Advice service/Our year in numbers
- 7—Advice contacts/Countries of origin
- 8—Housing/Employment & training
- 9—Ukrainian refugee support
- 10—Refugee resettlement work
- 11—Youth work/Refugee football group
- 12—English classes/Volunteering
- 13—International Women's Group/Sewing Group
- 14—Personal story
- 15—What our clients, volunteers and supporters say
- 16—Media & talks/UK & international context
- 17—Treasurer's report
- 18—Financial summary/Client Partnership work
- 19—Personal story
- 20—SRS Values & Aims/Equity, diversity & inclusion

Our grant funders for 2025/26:

National Lottery Community Fund
Garfield Weston
Ipswich Borough Council
BBC Children in Need
Mrs LD Rope's Charitable Settlement
Limbourn Trust
EON Programme (via LGE)
Lovel Foundation
Mulberry Trust
People's Health Trust
Simon Gibson Charitable 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
English Language Integration Programme (via LGE)
Ipswich Health & Wellbeing Fund
Richard Waynforth Trust
Sustainable Community Food Fund

Funds secured through Suffolk Community Foundation for 2025/26:

Suffolk Police & Crime Commissioner's Fund
Frank Jackson Foundation
Suffolk Futures Fund
Maurken Grantmaking Programme
Cancer Community Partnership Fund
Co-op Community Cares Fund
Pear Family Fund
Digital Inclusion Fund
Suffolk Giving Fund
D'Oyly Tates Fund
Women & Girls Fund
Food & Drink Fund
Private Fund

Suffolk Refugee Support, 38 St Matthew's St, Ipswich, IP1 3EP
www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk Registered Charity 1078794

Printed by: Ipswich Design & Print, September 2026

Overview of our year

Over the past year, the need for our services across the whole of Suffolk has grown at an unprecedented rate against an increasingly challenging backdrop for refugees, asylum seekers and SRS as an organisation.

The number of asylum seekers dispersed into Suffolk increased threefold over the year (and continues to grow), with people being placed in new parts of the county, often in communities experiencing high levels of deprivation, with limited cultural diversity and little prior engagement with refugee issues. Elsewhere we have seen arrivals in more remote areas lacking transport links, support services and community networks. In response, we have expanded and adapted our support, working across Suffolk and increasing the number of advice contacts delivered by 49%. Alongside essential advice and urgent practical support, we have continued to build relationships with new local partners and community groups, ensuring services are in place as needs continue to rise.

Like many refugee support organisations, we have faced a rise in hostility towards our organisation and the people we support, including threats and online abuse. In response, we have strengthened security measures and shared information and personal stories, ensuring refugee experiences are represented with accuracy, humanity and context. We have helped strengthen community cohesion, supporting communities to stay safe while celebrating the power of welcome and connection through shared events and activities.

Alongside our Advice Service, we continue to provide guidance, educational support and activities for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and to work extensively with resettled and Ukrainian refugees, supporting individuals and families to rebuild their lives and take positive next steps within their new communities.

Sadly, the number of people forcibly displaced globally continues to be extremely high. Together with the landscape of refugee and asylum seeker needs in Suffolk, this means our full range of support services is more vital than ever. We are sincerely grateful to all our funders, donors and supporters over the past year for helping us to meet this need and keep Suffolk a place of welcome and safety. We hope this report demonstrates our impact on the lives of refugees, asylum seekers and the communities that support them.

A message from our Patron, Sir Nick Young

My involvement as Patron for Suffolk Refugee Support has really opened my eyes to the challenges of life as an asylum seeker in this country, and to the demands placed on the organisations and individuals that seek to support them. Contrary to what you might see in the media, or hear from politicians, it is a daily battle to survive, and a constant pressure on organisations like ours to make scarce resources stretch ever further.

Our volunteers and staff do a really wonderful job in very difficult circumstances - and that's why I have felt so honoured to be able to play my part in helping to find new supporters, to encourage and thank those who already give so generously, and to meet along the way so many people from war-torn and poverty-stricken countries who have come here seeking security and a life for their families—and for whom our help means so much. So many of them, once settled, come back and want to help with our work. The needs are growing. Please, think about how you might be able to help us too. Every little helps.



Chair's report



As this report makes clear, our clients continue to face serious challenges as they seek safety in the UK, with past trauma often exacerbated by delays in receiving decisions on their claims for asylum and, for those arriving after March 2026, prolonged uncertainty due to receiving leave to remain for 30 months only.

And then there is the good news, such as the client who recently received leave to remain in the UK, and who volunteers regularly in the SRS office, and another who recently passed his GCSEs and has qualified as a football referee. This is the amazing stuff of daily life that all too rarely greets us when reading the news, but which continues to motivate and drive SRS' work, and that of the Board of Trustees.

As to the Board, Gerry Toplis resigned in late 2025. SRS owes him a debt of gratitude for his significant contribution in the role of Chair, then Vice-Chair, to its robust governance and its response to a period of rapid change due to the war in Ukraine and COVID-19. He always centred clients and their needs in our work, and it is thanks to him that SRS' approach to client partnership is going from strength to strength.

We also bid farewell to Paul Reeves, who resigned as a Trustee earlier this year. Paul's ability to assess issues from both a strategic and operational point of view will be missed. Recently, Miles Cole was co-opted to the Board. Miles brings previous experience as a trustee and an educator, including teaching English as a second language.

The Board's key focus over the past year has been to lead on the development of the new three-year strategic plan. Central to this is the work being done on ensuring we collect the right data and use it effectively. More work is needed, but analysis of this data has already been key to identifying that more needs to be done to support longer-standing clients into full independence, freeing resources to focus more on the needs of asylum seekers and those whose claims for refugee status have been recently recognised.

Other elements of the strategic plan will be to: i) significantly improve our measurement of impact which, once done, will further shape our work and underpin our whole person approach; and ii) review SRS' links to the external organisations to which we refer clients and/or with which we work in partnership to ensure we streamline our work whilst still offering our clients the best possible service.

Finally, I will be stepping down as Chair in a couple of months, having served four and a half years in this role. It has been at times daunting, challenging, inspiring, and never, ever dull. I could not have held this role without my brilliant fellow trustees, our very dedicated and talented staffing team and volunteers, and our inspiring clients. A huge thank you to our donors, too, without whom none of this would be possible.

Dr Felicity Szesnat

Chair of the Board of Trustees
September 2026

Charity Manager's report



Hello again — another year has passed, marking my 21st year with the organisation.

It has been another busy and successful year. With excellent staff, volunteers and trustees, we have made a significant positive difference to the lives of asylum seekers, refugees and their families in Suffolk. Whether from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Iran or elsewhere, the people we support have been uprooted by conflict and persecution. They want to be safe, to work, to raise their families and to live in peace.

The St George's flags have not deterred us, nor has Suffolk County Council's move to Reform leadership. We remain stronger than ever in our commitment to the right to seek protection in the UK and to be treated humanely and fairly. Without this right, the world cannot protect innocent victims of conflict and persecution.

A key success has been expanding support for newly arrived asylum seekers housed across Suffolk, including in places with little recent experience of welcoming people from overseas. Our teams ensure people are contacted, offered ESOL classes and helped to find meaningful activities while they await asylum decisions. We are grateful to local people who have welcomed and supported their new neighbours. Numbers in Suffolk, though still below those in some northern counties, are rising steadily and putting pressure on our services.

Our advice and employment service, alongside weekly groups — including Women's Group, football sessions, Homework Club, Sewing Group, ESOL classes, one-to-one sessions and trips — have improved clients' skills, awareness and circumstances. Our first charitable aim is: *"to address our clients' fundamental needs including immigration status, housing, education, physical and mental health, employment and personal safety."* Every service supports this aim and helps clients move towards independence.

We continue to deliver work on the Resettlement and Homes for Ukraine schemes under a government-funded contract, supporting 350 people this year to work and live healthily and safely in the UK. We have provided advice and activities to more than 200 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)—young people here without their parents, many of whom face an uncertain future. We help them understand risks and avoid trouble, while offering opportunities to progress and contribute to society if they receive a positive asylum decision.

Our work is greatly enhanced by our wonderful volunteers, who give their time and energy so generously. We are extremely grateful to them and to our generous individual donors, whose monthly gifts show solidarity with our clients. Without the many grants and charitable trusts* that cover our delivery costs and provide direct financial support to those in need, we would cease to operate — heartfelt thanks to them all. **A full list can be found elsewhere in this report.*

There is so much more we would like to do, but costs are high and securing funding for new work remains difficult. Our plan is to continue delivering services at the same level over the next year. We are developing our 2027–31 strategy. Priorities include increasing our work with newly arrived asylum seekers and strengthening impact measurement. We hope to publish the plan by the start of the next financial year, in April 2027.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy reading this review of 2025–26. Thank you for your continued support.

Rebecca Crerar

Advice service

Our Advice Team continues to support asylum seekers and settled refugees across Suffolk with urgent practical support and a wide range of advice and guidance, including accessing school places, health assessments, employment, training and volunteering, housing support, budgeting, benefits and digital inclusion.

During 2025–2026 we saw a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers placed in Suffolk by the Home Office. In response, we expanded the scope of our advice service to ensure we reach all asylum seekers across Suffolk. As well as remote support, we have begun organising regular outreach visits to dispersal locations, enabling us to meet clients face-to-face, provide direct support, and help connect them with local services in their area.

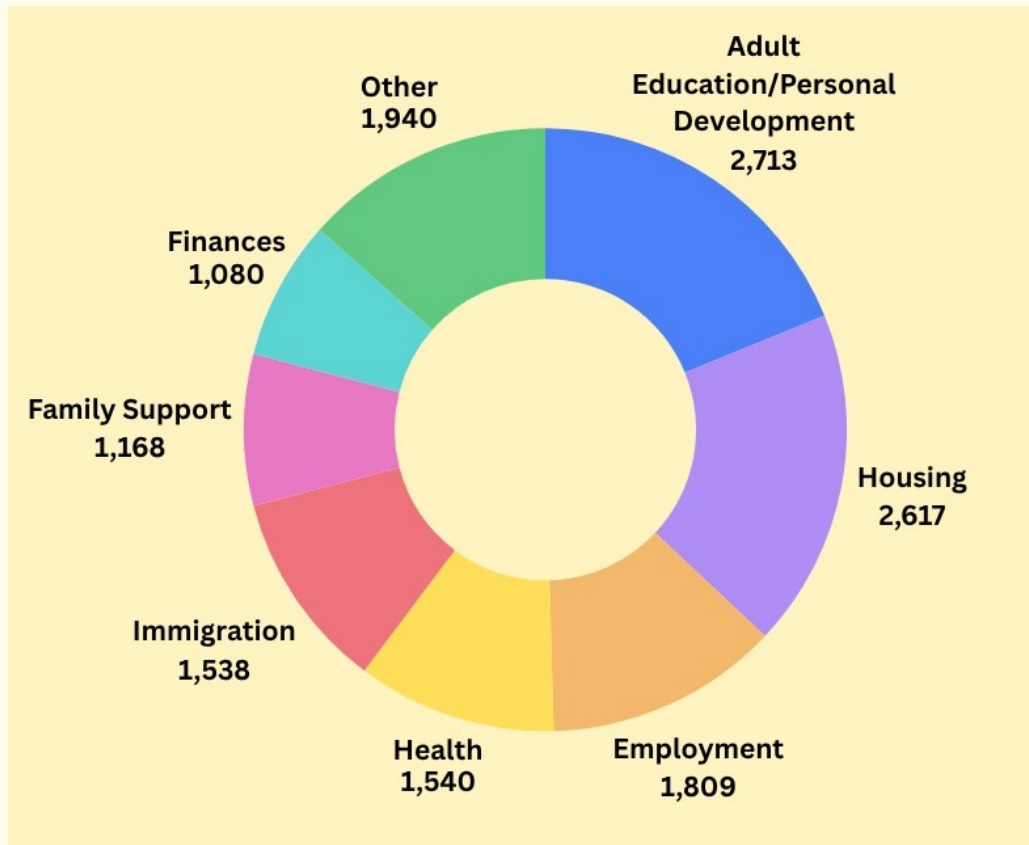
We continue to face challenges in obtaining up-to-date information about new arrivals and departures, as the Home Office does not share this information with the charity sector. We work closely with local authorities, housing providers, statutory and voluntary agencies and community groups to keep track of new arrivals and avoid acute situations. We also maintain regular contact with clients to check on any changes in their circumstances and identify any new support needs.

“We have no family here, but we see our advice worker as important as family. We would be lost without her help. She was the only one in the UK that we could contact if we needed help, advice or just to talk to someone.”

Our year in numbers

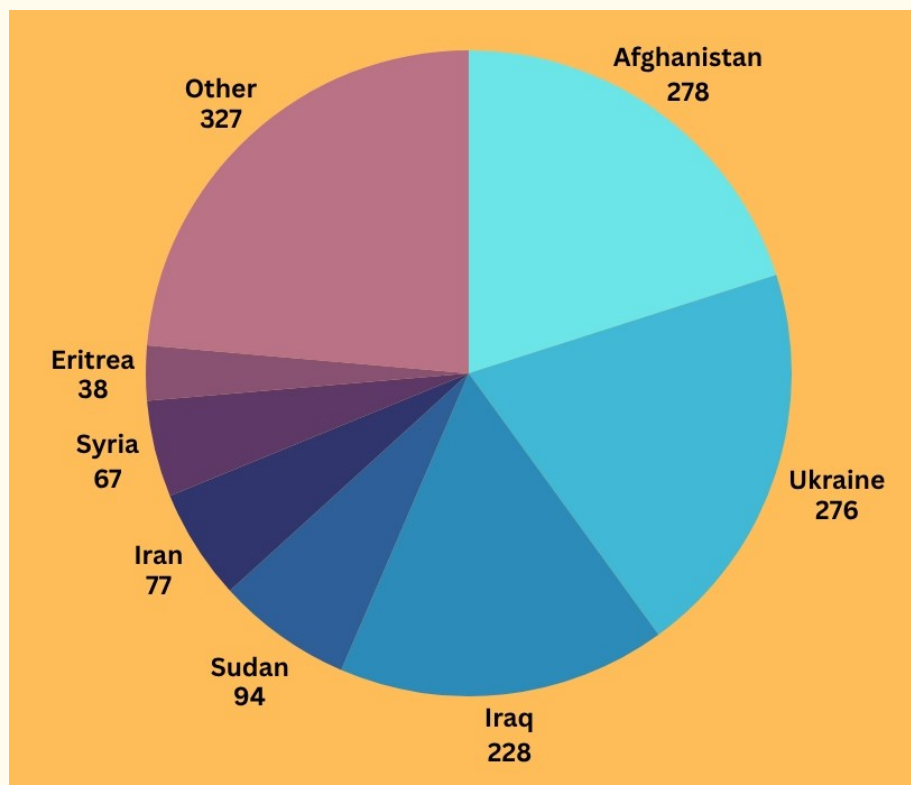
14405	individual client advice contacts delivered (not including group work) [49% increase on previous year]
4860	total attendances across all our group activities and ESOL classes
1385	people directly supported by our services (excluding family members) [16% increase on previous year]
607	people had reduced isolation as a result of our support and services
507	people were better able to communicate in English as a result of our support
276	refugees on Ukrainian schemes supported (excluding family members)
155	people had improved digital skills/access as a result of our support
103	young people attended our Football Group
102	people had an improved housing situation as a result of our support
99	people supported to access green spaces through trips and activities
87	people secured employment with our support
86	women attended our International Women’s Group
85	women attended our Sewing Group
50	different countries of origin for people we supported

Breakdown of advice contacts across our services



Top countries of origin across our services

These numbers reflect clients we have recorded a direct service with – they do not include family members. They are all countries significantly affected by serious conflict, oppression or persistent human rights violations.



Housing work

Over the past year our Housing Advice Worker has provided intensive support to clients facing homelessness, housing instability, and poor living conditions. Along with our advice team they support clients with housing applications, homelessness referrals, communication with local authorities and accommodation providers, safeguarding referrals, tenancy issues, and accessing emergency support. We also assist growing numbers of newly recognised refugees transitioning out of Home Office accommodation.

Challenges throughout the year included the shortage of affordable housing, increasing rental costs, delays in local authority responses, and the pressure on temporary accommodation services. Many clients also face language barriers, limited understanding of the housing system, and complex vulnerabilities including mental health and family safeguarding issues. Despite these challenges, our team achieved positive outcomes for many clients by preventing homelessness, supporting families to remain safely housed, improving clients' understanding of their housing rights and responsibilities, and enabling vulnerable individuals to move into more stable and suitable accommodation.

Employment & training work

Our employment and training team work closely with refugees and asylum seekers to improve their employability, confidence, and access to sustainable employment, training and volunteering opportunities. Over the past year the team has provided one-to-one employment advice, CV-writing support, interview preparation, job search assistance, digital skills support, referrals to ESOL and vocational training courses, and guidance around volunteering and qualification recognition. We also worked collaboratively with local employers, training providers, colleges and other partner organisations to create pathways into employment and skills development. Throughout the year, clients faced significant barriers including limited English language skills, lack of UK work experience, mental health challenges, transport difficulties, and delays in receiving immigration decisions or work permissions. Despite these obstacles, many clients successfully enrolled in training programmes, improved their English and digital skills, accessed volunteering opportunities, and secured paid employment, helping them increase their independence, confidence, and integration within the local community.

Our work in action

F came to us as a long-term rough sleeper facing declining mental health, language barriers and difficulty navigating housing and health services. We provided intensive, ongoing support, including coordination with his GP for medical evidence, supporting a housing assessment (with interpretation), help with housing applications, and persistent advocacy with the council to ensure the extent of his vulnerability was understood.

During this period, F's mental health remained fragile, and he experienced continued instability, including the loss of temporary accommodation. Our team supported him to attend appointments, verify his homelessness and gather documentation. We also worked closely with other agencies to keep his situation under review and ensure he did not lose contact with them. After months of sustained casework and multi-agency advocacy, F was eventually accommodated earlier this year. For someone facing multiple barriers, having a secure place to live was an important step towards greater stability.

Ukrainian refugee support

In 2025–26, we gave direct support to 276 Ukrainian refugees, with many more reached once family members are included. Alongside our advice work, we launched a conversational English group that proved so popular we continued beyond the end of its funding. During school holidays we focused on supporting families and giving parents the chance to spend quality time with their children. We organised cinema and theatre visits, an arts and crafts workshop, and worked with the Art Station in Saxmundham to give clients the opportunity to take part in the Port to Port travelling installation project.



We also launched a series of walks around Shotley peninsula—attended by clients from 4 to 74 years old—to introduce the nature and history of the area. On 24th August we celebrated Ukraine Independence Day with a special event at The Hold in Ipswich where the community came together to thank the people of Suffolk for their ongoing support and to share inspiring stories about the contributions Ukrainians are making to the region, both economically and culturally. We also marked the day with [local media coverage](#), as we did in February 2026 around the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Our work with Ukrainian refugees in numbers

2,180	individual contacts with Ukrainian clients
860	adult education and personal development contacts
532	employment related support sessions with Ukrainian clients
276	refugees on Ukrainian schemes supported (excluding family members)
150	guests at our Ukraine Independence Day event
38	Ukrainian clients successfully secured employment through our support
34	Ukrainian clients entered training, university or college with our support
7	walks around Shotley peninsula introducing clients to nature and history

Our work in action

At SRS we take pride in being a trustworthy source of support that people can approach at different stages of their journey. One Ukrainian family of mum and two daughters (pictured above) arrived in the UK having already been internally displaced when they were forced to flee their hometown in Eastern Ukraine after the first wave of the full scale Russian invasion.

We supported the family over the course of two years, including housing advice and communicating with letting agents, immigration support with e-visas, engagement in volunteering, support with CV and training courses, referrals to both internal and non-SRS English classes, mental health support, and wellbeing activities and trips.

With our support, the family have overcome many obstacles to independent living and in the last year they were able to move into privately rented accommodation, secure employment, improve their English and strengthen their ties with both local and Ukrainian communities via volunteering.

Refugee resettlement work

The UK resettlement programmes 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 2025 to March 2026, we welcomed twelve new families to Suffolk, bringing the total number of families supported across the schemes to 36 (34 under the Afghan schemes and two families under the UKRS, which is for refugees of other nationalities). We continue to support families from the point of arrival in Suffolk with accessing education, ESOL classes, employment and social activities, navigating UK systems and customs, and integration. In total over the year we delivered 2,817 individual contacts with resettlement clients, with the main topics being Adult Education, Housing, Family Support and Health.

The year has also seen challenges—an MoD data breach compromised the personal details of over 18,000 Afghans eligible for UK relocation, exposing them to Taliban risk and leaving many of our families in Suffolk understandably worried. We have also seen an increasing number of families being placed in more rural parts of the county, which can leave many feeling isolated initially. Nevertheless, we continue to celebrate our families' successes - 100% of all (adult) arrivals in the past year are attending ESOL classes, with 95% of young people accessing college/further education and many looking to go onto higher education.

Our work in action

Hasib, his wife and their children arrived in Suffolk in 2024 under the Afghan Resettlement Programme. Although happy and grateful to be safe, the family readily admit that they found their arrival in Suffolk difficult initially. They were placed in a very rural area where there were no other Afghan families and limited public transport, with infrequent buses to the nearest (small) town meaning access to local shops and opportunities to integrate were limited.



Our Resettlement Team worked intensively with Hasib and his family to overcome initial tenancy-related issues and help reduce their isolation. We supported the eldest son to join his local football team (where he is now a star player!) and helped the family explore their local area, including the community centre, which they now use. The family too have shown unbelievable determination and resilience with their biggest goal being to learn English. The eldest son is now fluent, while the other adults in the family attend multiple ESOL lessons at various settings and their English language skills are improving rapidly.

The children have great aspirations, with the oldest four all aiming to work in the medical sector, including medicine, midwifery, and dentistry, with one volunteering at West Suffolk Hospital to further his dream of becoming a doctor.

The family also love to socialise. Hasib's wife (and two daughters) credit the SRS Sewing Group with alleviating their isolation and she speaks of not sleeping the night before because she is so excited! One of the sons was given the title of 'Student Rep' and 'The Friendliest Classmate' at college due to his commitment to helping his fellow students. This gift of helping runs through the family—Hasib volunteers at SRS and is a valuable member of our team. He recently told us: "I love working here (SRS) and helping others. I know what it feels like to be new to the country and I like to use my experiences to help others. I am so grateful for the support of SRS and for giving me this opportunity".

Youth work

We work with growing numbers of young asylum seekers and refugees, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers under the care of Suffolk Social Services, as well as those placed in the county by other local authorities. Our youth work includes a Homework Club, Football Group, Youth Club events celebrating festivities, college guidance sessions, trips and activities and one-to-one advice and support.

Our Homework Club provides young people with additional tutor support on a range of subjects. The small group ensures they can focus on areas where they need the most help, with support from SRS volunteers and sixth form students at Ipswich School, where the group meets weekly during term time. Maths is one of the areas where attendees seek most support, so one of the volunteers now also leads an offshoot group giving more intensive tutoring for those preparing to take exams—leading to some great [success stories](#).

Refugee football group

Our Refugee Football Group, delivered in partnership with the Ipswich Town Foundation, has continued to flourish over the past year, with a move from GOALS to Portman Road adding a sense of prestige. The joy and excitement around the sessions is palpable and it is inspiring to see the sportsmanship and respect that young players from different backgrounds, many of whom arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, display to each other and all involved.



Nearly half the attendees are Sudanese, with others from countries including Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia. Over the year, a total of 103 clients attended the Football Group, with 25-30 keen participants each week and 16 who hardly ever miss a session. Tournaments have also provided exciting opportunities to play other diverse teams. Two young people who attend regularly and show especially good sportsmanship took part in the Ipswich Town Foundation fixture and the half-time pitch walk (pictured).

Our work in action

Z is a young person from Afghanistan who first came to SRS in September 2025. As he had turned 18 he was placed in shared housing with other adults. He shared with us that he was struggling with mental health due to loneliness and the wait for a Home Office decision. We told him about our ESOL classes, Homework Club and Football Group and he has been a regular attendee at them all since. He was given a pair of football boots and also a bike from the Genesis Green Bike Project to help him get to all his activities.

Z expressed a desire to do other useful things to occupy his time and we supported him to begin volunteering at the Fresh Start charity shop as a volunteer, where he enjoyed meeting others and working in the shop three days a week. Z's passion is football and he asked if it was possible to join a local club. Through our links with the Ipswich Town Foundation we arranged for a trial at Coplestonians FC, where he was welcomed as a member and is delighted to attend their training sessions and take part in matches.

Z told us: "Thank you for all the help you have given me. You are the only one I have here. Thank you for all your hard work".

English classes

Over the past year our ESOL work has been increasingly busy, with classes larger than ever. Our Pre-Entry class is the largest we have ever taught, but we have kept it manageable with four excellent volunteer teachers who assist our ESOL Tutor and offer small group help. We have prepared students for Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 and Level 1 reading and writing exams. We also teamed up with Ipswich Community Media to enable some students who struggle with literacy to take speaking exams at Entry Level 1. In total across the year, 217 people attended our ESOL classes and 43 exams were taken, with 36 passes. As well as covering the content necessary for exams, we provided sessions on topics such as energy conservation, cancer prevention and digital inclusion.

We also delivered a volunteer-led online class for students who find getting to classes difficult for health, childcare or location reasons. This greatly increases learning options for some people, such as the mother who was able to return to an online class with her two-week-old baby. In addition to providing English skills learning, our sessions offer the opportunity for otherwise isolated clients to socialise. During one class we discovered, through a conversation about hobbies, that one student is a talented musician. As a result, he was invited to perform at the St Peter's Band Christmas concert, which raised funds for our work. Other highlights include helping a severely dyslexic student, who was determined to pass her first written exam. Her joy at doing so was a pleasure to see.

Volunteering

Volunteers are vital to all our activities and programmes. They bring new skills, experience and value to our services and act as informal ambassadors for our work. Currently we have 50 regular volunteers who give at least one hour of their time each week, and 13 volunteers have lived experience as past or current users of our services.

Our volunteers are involved across the charity: welcoming clients at reception, supporting the advice and operations teams with admin and basic enquiries, leading or assisting ESOL classes and conversation practice online and face to face, offering one to one support in English or Maths, coaching football, helping at the Sewing Group and International Women's Group creche, delivering food and gifts to clients at Eid or Christmas, and assisting at community events.

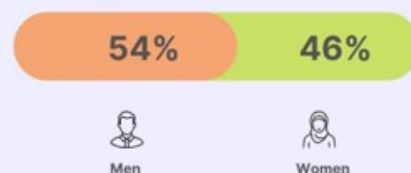
"It gives me a purpose in life and helps me feel that I am making a positive contribution to society. The vast majority of contacts with clients have been very satisfying and have increased my understanding of other cultures and life in other countries. Of course, there are downsides when one feels powerless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

Dear everyone at SRS,

Thank you so much for making me feel so welcome during my time with you. The work you are doing is truly incredible and I feel so happy to have been a part of it for a small time.

Best wishes,

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



International Women's Group

Over the past year, 86 women attended our popular weekly group, which provides a supportive environment for women of different nationalities, with a focus on peer support, English language skills, and activities enhancing integration, wellbeing and knowledge of life in the UK. There are four face-to-face English classes each week, and two online, with consistently high rates of attendance.



One of the highlights of the past year was a visit from Cancer Support Suffolk, with the speaker describing her own experiences of being diagnosed and treated for cancer. The talk highlighted the importance of seeing your GP when there are signs that something is wrong. The women were encouraged to self-advocate, and a number of women spoke afterwards about their personal situations. During end of term feedback the women said the session on cancer was very important and that they learnt new information about symptoms. Other sessions focused on digital skills, reducing energy bills, health and wellbeing and the importance of play, while visitors included Suffolk Fire Service, Music in our Bones, and Future Female Society.

Sewing group

Our Sewing Group continues to be very popular, with 85 women attending over the past year. The main nationalities are Afghan, Iraqi Kurdish, Sudanese and Kosovan, and 25-30 women attend each week, with around half taking part in English conversation classes while the other half sew, with plenty of interchange between the two groups. The group also acts as a social hub and an opportunity for new arrivals to learn about life in Ipswich and the UK from those more established. Lasting friendships form at the group and it plays a vital role in reducing isolation. Even for women who are well settled here, there can be few spaces considered safe or culturally suitable for them to meet.

Several people have learnt to sew simple things this year and progressed to more difficult projects. Apart from developing new skills, people bring in clothes to be fixed or help each other make clothes for celebrations such as Eid, while others make bags and aprons for the group. The conversation classes are very popular and we have seen significant improvements. Many speak only their native languages at home, so these conversation classes can be almost the only time they have a conversation in English. We are very proud that the group were runners up in the Community category at the BBC Make a Difference Awards. Members of the group were able to attend the awards ceremony in September, which further boosted confidence and integration.

Our work in action

W is an Afghan lady who has been in Ipswich around three years, having arrived as part of the resettlement programme. She is an excellent tailor and volunteers at the Sewing Group. Many Afghan women bring her clothes to mend, new dresses to cut or projects to work out and she works very hard to help them. She has a brilliant eye for dress design. As with many SRS clients, the shift to the UK was very stressful, involving a big loss of status for the family. The sewing group provides a calm space where W can take her mind off her own struggles by focusing on other peoples' needs. It also gives her a strong sense of self worth as her services are greatly sought after.

Personal stories of resilience and achievement

My name is Omran Nayab, and I am a 19-year-old young man from Afghanistan. In November 2023, at the age of 17, I arrived in the United Kingdom due to the difficult circumstances following the collapse of my country and in search of safety for myself and my family. I currently live in Suffolk, and since arriving in the UK, I have worked hard to build a positive future for myself and to contribute meaningfully to my community.

One of my greatest achievements has been learning English as my second language. Despite the challenges of adapting to a new country and culture, I have successfully developed my English language skills and can now communicate confidently in both educational and social settings. This accomplishment is a source of great pride for me and reflects my determination, resilience, and commitment to personal growth.

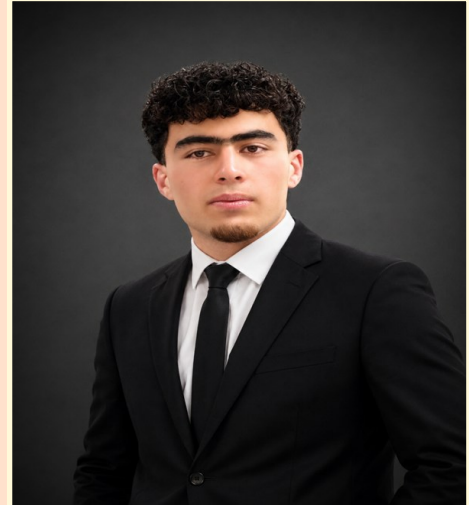
Since moving to Suffolk, I have remained focused on my educational goals. My dream is to become a doctor and dedicate my life to helping others. To begin working towards this ambition, I enrolled in Health and Social Care and successfully completed Level 1 with strong results. I am continuing my studies with enthusiasm and determination, taking each step closer to achieving my long-term goal of working in healthcare and making a positive difference in people's lives.

In addition to my academic progress, I was given the opportunity through Suffolk Refugee Support to join my local football team. During the past year and a half, I have become a valued and committed member of the team. Through hard work, discipline, and dedication, I have earned the respect of my teammates and coaches. Football has taught me important life skills such as teamwork, perseverance, leadership, and responsibility.

I have also had the honour of participating twice in cultural festivals at one of Suffolk's respected colleges, where I proudly represented Afghanistan and shared my country's culture, traditions, and values with others. These experiences allowed me to promote cultural understanding, mutual respect, and community cohesion. Furthermore, I was privileged to speak on the BBC about Afghan culture and traditions, which was one of the most memorable and meaningful experiences of my life.

I am deeply grateful to the United Kingdom for providing opportunities, support, and a safe environment for refugees and young people like me. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Suffolk Refugee Support and to all the teachers, mentors, volunteers, and community members who have encouraged and supported me throughout my journey. Their guidance has helped me gain confidence, develop my abilities, and continue striving towards my goals.

Although I have faced significant challenges in my life, I remain optimistic, determined, and motivated to create a bright future. I believe that through hard work, education, and service to others, I can achieve my ambitions and make a positive contribution to society. My journey so far has taught me the importance of resilience, gratitude, and perseverance, and I am committed to continuing my personal, academic, and professional development in the years ahead.



What our clients, volunteers and supporters say

"SRS have helped us a lot in every part of settling into our life in Suffolk. We are very happy and grateful. Our advice worker helped us from the very first day we arrived until now. She is so kind and patient."

"SRS have given me the confidence to help achieve my dreams. I want to be the first person in my family to go to university and I feel that I can now achieve this! I am in the process of studying at college to help me achieve it."

"I was once an asylum seeker and I was supported by Suffolk Refugee Support. Rebecca and the team supported me in different ways. I never forget and I am grateful for what they did for me and my children. Well done for what you still do! Thank you!"

"Thank you very much for your love and support. It is a great honour for me and my family to see my daughter's talent and art in such an environment." 🍷🍷

"Thank you again for sharing my story with such care. I hope it has helped, even in a small way, to show the human side of the refugee and asylum experience and to change the narrative a little. There have been so many lovely and encouraging comments. It was really heartwarming to see how many good people there are."

"Thank you so much to SRS for the support and encouragement we have received throughout summer school, and for the lovely treat of the farewell coffee and cake yesterday. We are fortunate to volunteer for such an amazing charity which values its volunteers and affords us the privilege of meeting and working with so many wonderful people through the different classes, outings and activities. Thank you for your continuing support."

"SRS is an efficient, effective, compassionate organisation doing such important work."

"The activities led by the Suffolk Refugee Support client volunteers were brilliant. They were exceptionally kind, patient and engaging with our children, making the learning experience supportive and memorable. The children loved every moment and are still buzzing about the day."

"Your work is like a beacon in the night. Keep up the good work."

"Huge credit to Suffolk Refugee Support for all the work you do. It's a blessing we have you working across our town and county."

"We are about to move from London to Suffolk and this post...made my heart sing. I'm so relieved to see that this county has open arms."

"Well done Suffolk. A welcoming place to so many people seeking refuge for centuries."

"I really enjoyed your talk last evening. Thank you. The number of people who attended spoke volumes for the interest on the subject of asylum seekers. It was a great endorsement for SRS and the work it carries out."

Media and talks

With increasing hostility towards our client group and asylum seekers and refugees being placed in new parts of Suffolk, our external engagement work is more important than ever. We have delivered a range of presentations to external audiences, from health, housing and social care professionals to churches, schools and community groups, giving on-the-ground expertise and the reality of refugee experiences. We also delivered our [History of Refugees in Suffolk talk](#) to an audience of 180 at the University of Suffolk (pictured) to provide fresh insights on current issues. Our media work continues to give voice to our clients, providing factual perspectives, increasing empathy and [reframing negative narratives](#).



We have also put an increased emphasis on organising events and taking part in activities and forums to improve community cohesion, such as a Refugee Week meal bringing people together to share food and conversation, using the 'Community as a Superpower' theme to place [positive stories](#) in the media.

UK and international context

The refugee situation in the UK (and here in Suffolk) should always be seen in an [international context](#). And sadly, forced displacement around the world has almost doubled in the last decade. Despite this, the number of refugees finding safety through resettlement or sponsorship pathways globally fell by more than half last year. A tiny fraction of the world's refugees attempt to reach the UK. For those who do—often because of family connections, English language, community or historical links—safe and legal routes are vital to reduce dangerous journeys. However, the UK is closing off the few safe routes that exist. The Afghan Resettlement Programme is closed to new applicants, Refugee Family Reunion has been suspended for a year with no timescale for resumption, and in the year ending March 2026 just 4,894 refugees were resettled to the UK, down 52% in two years (with few arrivals through the UNHCR route).



117.8 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2025 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations

65% of refugees are hosted in countries neighbouring their own

More than half—the fall in the number of refugees finding safety through resettlement or sponsorship pathways globally in one year

0.7%—the UNHCR's estimate of the proportion of refugees in UK population

93,525 people claimed asylum in the UK in the year to March 2026, down 14%

15th—the UK's rank in Europe in asylum applications per head of population

Two thirds of small boat arrivals in 2025 were from five countries: Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan & Somalia – all suffering horrific conflict or oppression

Treasurer's report



In 2025-26 SRS delivered a comprehensive range of services whilst continually monitoring expenses against budget to ensure that assistance offered fell within our planned costs. These efforts were supported through a combination of grant and donation income, along with contract funding from Suffolk County Council to assist resettled refugees.

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 expenses increased from £806,000 in 2024–25 to £923,000 in 2025–26, largely due to a salary review. Given the increased number of clients we have been supporting, we expect our services to continue to be very much in demand. To achieve this, we have a robust fundraising plan to help ensure we raise the necessary income to deliver these services.

Our Reserves Policy requires us to retain an agreed amount of contract costs and 50% of other running costs with an acceptable range of +/- one month of costs; the main risk to SRS being a substantial reduction in income resulting from a significant decline in funding. This policy allows for confident planning for the subsequent year as well as ensuring that, should we be required to partially or wholly wind down our services, we have six months' financial cover to allow for a controlled revision to the services we offer.

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 deeply grateful to all the funders listed on page 2 of this document for their generous support, and to Suffolk Community Foundation and their funders for all their guidance and support in securing vital funds.

We greatly value the support of Suffolk County Council and their continued commissioning of our services under the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP), UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) and Ukraine refugee schemes. We also appreciate their partnership working, along with District and Borough councils in Suffolk, to allocate a proportion of asylum dispersal funding to us in recognition of the services we provide.

Financial summary

Overview of Suffolk Refugee Support's income and expenditure for the financial year to March 2026



Client Partnership work

We have made significant progress this year in developing our co-production work, from strengthening client input, building effective engagement structures and ensuring accessibility of information. Focused feedback activities, including surveys for those who have not used our services for a while and previous resettlement clients, have enabled the collection of rich, qualitative feedback on clients' experiences of services and how they feel in their communities. These exercises highlighted the breadth and quality of support provided by our team, and also the increased confidence and independence of our clients following service involvement.

A key achievement has been progress with the Client Advisory Group for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Client Advisory Groups are structured forums where clients come together to share experiences, provide feedback, and help shape service design and delivery. Building on previous work, this group has successfully implemented agreed actions, creating a space for young people to share their experiences and shape the design and content of housing information. This is a big step in strengthening inclusive co-production practices and creating opportunities to work collaboratively. Work has also progressed on improving accessibility of information for client volunteers, including the development of Easy Read materials. Planning is underway for a further advisory group with client volunteers to explore their experiences, identify barriers to involvement, and gather ideas for the future, ensuring client partnership remains central to service planning and delivery.

Personal stories of resilience and achievement

I have a degree in Physics and a master's in Occupational Health and Safety. While at university, I took part in peaceful protests against the regime in my country. After completing my studies, I worked as an occupational safety specialist. Some time later, I was reported for my student activities, arrested and detained. I expected to be released after a few days, but instead I was imprisoned for five years.



After my release, I was summoned to another court hearing. Realising that I would likely be detained again, I made the difficult decision to leave my country.

I am now seeking asylum in the UK. Last year, the Home Office moved me to shared accommodation in Suffolk. Since arriving, I have taken ESOL courses at different levels and successfully passed all my exams. I have also worked regularly with one of Suffolk Refugee Support's volunteers to improve my English and learn more about British history and culture. These sessions have helped me build my confidence and develop a stronger understanding of life in the UK.

For the past few months, I have been volunteering with Suffolk Refugee Support. I have enjoyed being part of the team and supporting other people wherever I can. Although I have now been waiting two years for a decision on my asylum claim, I have tried to use this time positively by improving my English, learning about life in the UK, studying for my driving theory test and preparing for the day when I can rebuild my life with security and independence.

Despite the uncertainty I have faced, I have been deeply moved by the kindness and support shown to me by people in Suffolk. Their welcome has helped me feel safer, more hopeful and more connected to the community around me. I am grateful not only for the practical support I have received, but also for the friendship, dignity and sense of belonging that people have offered me. In return, I hope to continue contributing, using my skills, experience and determination to support others and build a positive future here.

Update—just before this review went to press!

I was just about to stand up and get off the bus when my solicitor called me. The noise of the bus made it difficult to hear him, and I missed parts of what he was saying. But I heard the part that mattered most: "Your refugee status has been approved. The documents arrived today."

At first, I did not fully realise what it meant. I got off the bus, moved away from the noise, and walked towards the seaside. I realised that when uncertainty finally disappears, a huge weight is lifted from your shoulders. I think I walked along the seaside for almost two hours without thinking about anything. I simply enjoyed that feeling of relief.

A few days later, through a friend, I was offered a full-time management position at an e-commerce company. However, for a long time I have been working towards another plan, to specialise in a niche engineering field. The only thing I was waiting for was the outcome of my refugee status application. I need to decide which path I will take.

Life sometimes forces us to make difficult choices. But at least today I have good options in front of me. After a long period of uncertainty and waiting at a crossroads, it is finally time to move forward.

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

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Our HR Subcommittee monitors SRS policies on equality, diversity, and protected characteristics in terms of employment, trusteeships, and volunteering; and has oversight of policies and staff wellbeing within SRS. In line with recommendations from the Subcommittee, the HR and Training Officer designed and rolled out Equality and Diversity Training to staff in March 2026 and continues to report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion annually. SRS continued to meet its obligations to provide reasonable adjustments as required. The Subcommittee and Board are satisfied that SRS continues to be an equal opportunities employer with a diverse workforce.



[Support our work](#)