



# Newsletter

Winter  
Edition  
Dec 2014

## RSD volunteers receive Right to Remain Training



## Right to Remain Hold RSD Training Workshop

On the last Wednesday of November the asylum and immigration justice organisation Right to Remain (RTR) held a workshop with members of RSD, Student Action for Refugees and Be The Change. It was led by experienced RTR campaigners Lisa Matthews and Michael Collins and took place at the University of Exeter.

Initially the group discussed the asylum system, its legal and procedural barriers and inherent inequalities. The aim was to focus how knowing the system is vital for those fighting for their right to remain in the UK, those supporting them and everyone campaigning for asylum justice. Following this the group looked at practical campaigning tools [R1] and strategies that can aid local advocacy work and to link in Exeter groups with national campaigns e.g. against immigration detention and to support detainees.

These are matters that are becoming especially important for South West support groups given the recent opening of IRC The Verne in Dorset. The workshop ended with the different groups exchanging updates on the links established with the detained at The Verne and its management and possible actions for the future. To find out more about the excellent work of RTR and to access their excellent toolkit helping you to support yourself or someone else going through the asylum system visit their website: <http://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/>

By Friederike Schumacher

## Exeter Students Raise Syrian Refugee Awareness



Students from the Exeter Student Action for Refugee (STAR) group spent Wednesday 26th November raising awareness of the current debates and facts concerning the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the UK amongst the students of the University of Exeter.

At the time of writing there are 3.3 million Syrian refugees and a further 6.5 million Syrians internally displaced as the civil war enters its 4th year. This year the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) stated that the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people worldwide has, for the first time in the post-World War II era, exceeding 50 million people; this is largely attributed to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

Whilst neighbouring countries have opened their borders to Syria, with Lebanon and Turkey both offering refuge to over 1 million Syrian refugees respectively, the UK has resettled 50 with the non-committal pledge of resettling 'several hundred over the next few years.'

On the 9th December 2014 the UNHCR is holding an urgent global resettlement pledging conference where they will appeal to Governments around the world to offer more resettlement places to Syria's refugees.

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Currently the UNHCR has asked the countries in the EU to pledge to resettle 100,000 Syrians; less than the number of refugees who entered Turkey in one weekend in September 2014. STAR, along with other notable charities such as Refugee Council and Amnesty International, believe this is a pitiful response. With the support of over 130 students who signed our petition, we are asking local MP Ben Bradshaw to call on the Home Secretary to ensure that at the conference on 9th December the UK pledges to substantially expand the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme and follow the example of Austria, Germany,

Ireland, and Switzerland to help Syrians with a connection to this country to join their relatives here in the UK. Representatives of STAR who had already written to Ben Bradshaw regarding the issue were informed that he would be writing to Theresa May regarding the issue and inform us of the outcome. If you would like to support the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the UK then please email your MP at this link: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/syria](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/syria)

By **Lauren Carrington**

## STAR Conversation Classes

STAR are running conversation, reading and writing classes for women from 1-2pm on Thursday afternoons.

A small team of students have been putting their teaching skills to the test by working with a group of women to help them develop natural and confident conversation in English. Training for the volunteers was kindly provided from International House London language school, where we learnt some top tips for stimulating conversation from a range of texts. Through utilising ESOL (English for

Speakers of Other Languages) resources we have been able to cater the classes to individual needs in line with college courses and provide a relaxed environment to explore the necessary language of day to day life in the UK. It's a great opportunity to practise conversation, ask questions and widen vocabulary. We are looking for as many women as possible to get involved! If you are interested come along on Thursdays from 1-2pm at Exeter Community Centre- no booking necessary!

By **Lilian Bankiyan-Monfard**



## Student Hardship Fund

Exeter City of Sanctuary is currently engaged in talks with the University regarding the widening of the Student Hardship Fund to make it more accessible to International Students who find themselves in an emergency financial situation during their studies, due to unforeseen political and humanitarian crises in their home countries. The current Tuition Fee Waiver is available only for asylum seekers whose applications are already

being processed by the Home Office at the time of beginning their studies and those who have already been granted Refugee Status. There is currently no emergency fund available for those whose circumstances change during the academic year, leaving a number of International Students without means to continue their studies but also unable to return.

By **Yaz Millican**

## Sexual Violence Training

Last week I was fortunate enough to attend two training sessions hosted by RSD, the first given by Jodie Das of Sea Change and the second by Alexis Wright of Njenni Enterprise. The first session, given by Jodie, looked at how we might recognise signs of domestic abuse and how volunteers can practically and responsibly help those we encounter who might be facing such abuse. Importantly, the training introduced us to local organisations that would be able to provide specialist support. A key part of Jodie's message and training was that volunteers should not put themselves in a position where they have to take on the role of specialists. An important step in protecting others is protecting ourselves. The training session led by Alexis - which dealt with the themes of forced marriage and so-called honour based violence - was also difficult in subject matter but just as rewarding. I think many of us who attended were shocked to discover the scale of these problems, and I am certain all of us left feeling more educated about these issues and the efforts to resolve them. Like Jodie, Alexis helped us to realise the importance of awareness and the role we ourselves can play in raising it. I found both days enormously helpful, and I'm certain the training will help me in both my professional and personal lives.

By **Ruby Levine Shrimpton**

Harmful Traditional Practices are practiced in Devon. They go largely undetected and unreported by Public Bodies. In many cases people who have been affected by Harmful Traditional Practises first open up about their experiences to voluntary organisations. This is why we are so pleased to have been able to deliver training on Domestic Abuse and Harmful Traditional Practices to Devon Refugee Support Group volunteers. It is our hope that this training will enable the volunteers to encourage their users to report any form of Domestic Abuse they may suffer.

By **Alexis**

### INFORMATION

REFUGEE SUPPORT DEVON

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EXETER, EX4 3RG. TEL 01392 682185

EMAIL: [info@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk](mailto:info@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk)

## RSD Chosen as Waitrose 'Community Matters' Charity for January



RSD has been selected by Waitrose to be one of the supermarket's three 'Community Matters' good causes in January 2015. Shoppers at Waitrose on Gladstone Road, Heavitree, will be able to designate green tokens received with

their shopping towards supporting RSD. Waitrose will donate a total of £1000 to the three charities involved, with RSD receiving a share of that total in proportion to the number of green tokens shoppers allocate to us.

Since its launch in 2008, the scheme has donated over £14 million to local charities around the country.

By [Steven Maclean](#)

## Busy Term for Be The Change By [Emma Flinlinson](#)

Be the Change society's Project Refugee have been collecting pledges from students and staff supporting the City of Sanctuary Initiative, with well over 100 people signing already, and have held stalls in the main forum on behalf of RSD, to help raise awareness for the charity.

On top of this they have been busy raising money, raising £320 in a day selling Krispy Kreme doughnuts to hungry students and creating a team who are being sponsored to

grapple their way through 5km of the muddy, obstacle ridden Rock Solid race in March!



Something else they have in the works is a series of talks and lectures around the issues of asylum which will be held at various venues in the city. These will begin at the end of January, so watch this space!

Three students attended a meeting with the Verne Visiting Group in Dorchester in November, to see in which ways they could help support detainees. The Verne is the newest immigration detention centre in the UK, and our closest here in Exeter. It holds over 500 detainees and was previously a prison. Students hope they can help with campaigning and also translation needs that aren't accessible in Weymouth, where the centre is situated, and have already collected cards from fellow students to send to those in the centre this Christmas.

"Be The Change had a great day selling 480 doughnuts to raise money for RSD. Getting up at the crack of dawn to collect the doughnuts from Bristol and flogging them to hungry students was all worth it to raise £320. Well done team!"



## Students Hold Tea Morning

Exeter University students decided it was time to take hold of the Macmillan Coffee Morning craze and give it a revamp in aid of Refugee Support Devon and their much needed emergency fund.

On the drizzly Saturday afternoon of the 25th of October, 29 Herschell Road hosted an open house tea and cake morning to raise money for refugees and asylum seekers in need of urgent food, accommodation and transport.

In true 'Great British Bake Off' style we hosted a baking competition where students opted to bring along their most imaginative masterpieces as a donation to the cause. The selection of cakes, flapjacks,

shortbread and scones were so tempting it's safe to say that it wasn't just Refugee Support Devon that gained a few pounds. Students generously donated and spent the afternoon drinking a selection of traditional and fruit teas while enjoying a well-earned break from the library. It was a fantastic way to discuss the issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees to raise awareness, hand out RSD leaflets and tempt people to get involved or find out more.

Overall, we raised £60 simply by drinking tea and eating cake with friends! I personally think it's an ingenious idea and would urge anyone to follow in similar footsteps for such an important cause.

By [Lilian Bankiyan-Monfard](#)



amazing response from shoppers in Exeter and collected over £100 worth of clothing, sweets and toy donations on that day. We also held a collection stall at the University where we were selling Christmassy treats and cakes. Societies and students came to the stall to drop off their completed boxes of donations but also to donate money to the Trussell Trust appeal.

Overall we managed to collect, wrap and pack 118 boxes which were collected by the Trussell Trust on the 26th of November and will be shipped to Bulgaria where the Trussell Trust has strong partnerships with local orphanages and refugee hostels. We are also sending a cheque of £90 to the Trust to help with the transportation of the boxes overseas.

We would like to say a special thanks to the support of the community and to Exeter's local businesses, namely Shoe Zone, Sainsburys and Wilkinsons for their help and support with our appeal.

This year, thanks to the generosity of students, staff and the general public even more people living in desolate conditions will have gifts this christmas.

By [Lucy Lodewyke](#)

## Project Refugee Organize Christmas Shoe Box Appeal

This year, Project Refugee of the University's Be the Change society, once against organised the Christmas Shoe Box Appeal.

We worked in partnership with The Trussell Trust, collecting and sending off shoe boxes full of gifts for refugees, orphans and other individuals living in desolate conditions at Christmas. In raising for our appeal we held a stall in the Guildhall shopping centre in Exeter, encouraging shoppers to pick up a few extra items when shopping and donate them to our stall. We had an

## Computer Classes

"Each week has seen each woman persevering at their chosen skill and all women, and especially those women who have attended most weeks, have really progressed."

Many of the women who have attended the women's computer classes over the last 6 weeks have either never used a computer before or at the best just used one to check email.

Each week has seen each woman persevering at their chosen skill and all women, and especially those who have attended most weeks, have really progressed.

All the women started with a free touch typing programme off the internet in order to learn about the keyboard and the layout of letters and characters. Many have been happy to continue with this and are now happily typing sentences and paragraphs much faster and more accurately than when they started.

Others have moved on to using Word and keying in long paragraphs to practice their newly acquired skills. Several of the women went on to copy type a Word document complete with formatting and images and with varying degrees of help successfully produced an impressive document. One or two have even started using Excel to set up a simple spreadsheet complete with formulas and data lists. My feeling is that if they continue with their computer workshops they would gain in confidence and skills.

I'm particularly impressed with the dedication they have shown in learning to type as this is a skill key to mastering other aspects of the computer; nearly everything computer based

involves keyboard work, whether it's internet searches or typing documents. It isn't easy but week after week they have chosen to continue with this skill without giving up in frustration!

Obviously with every woman progressing at her own speed it takes a little time to get everyone started with what they would like to carry out in that lesson but as they progress several are now able to bring up and continue with what they had been doing the previous week. Language was a slight problem at times but they're all pretty supportive of each other so normally someone will translate for anyone struggling to understand.

By [Philippa Benjamin](#)