

REFUGEE SUPPORT DEVON

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2019



RSD at the Barnfield Theatre



Humanitarian Magician Jamie Jibberish performing at a refugee camp in the Lebanon

Refugee Support Devon is very pleased and proud to announce that, on 20th June, we will be hosting an exciting evening of magic and dance at the Barnfield Theatre as part of Exeter's Refugee Week events. Humanitarian Magician Jamie Jibberish (www.magicforsmiles.com) will be giving a talk about his 'Magic for Smiles' work, entertaining refugee and other vulnerable and deprived children in the Middle East region. Jamie's talk will be illustrated with photographs of his work and he will also be performing some of his magic tricks. In the second half of the evening the local Shumba Arts (www.shumba.org.uk) African drumming and dancing group will round off the evening with a high!

RSD representatives will also attend the event, giving a brief talk about RSD's work with the local refugee and asylum-seeker community. Event organiser Liz Oxburgh said "Jamie has the skills to allow children to marvel again at the world. We're lucky to be given this chance to make it happen and I hope you'll be able to come and enjoy the evening - and marvel yourselves!" Doors will open at 7pm and the evening is scheduled to commence at 7:30pm. Tickets are available from the Barnfield Theatre Box Office (www.barnfieldtheatre.org.uk/magic-for-smiles) and cost £9.00 standard tickets, £7.00 unemployed and students, £5.00 children.

Any money raised will go to support the work of Magic for Smiles, Refugee Support Devon and Shumba Arts. Refugee Week 2019 will be 17 to 23 June. This year's theme of 'You, me and those who came before', is an invitation to explore the lives of refugees - and those who have welcomed them - throughout the generations. People escaping war and persecution have been welcomed by communities in the UK for hundreds of years, and their stories and contributions are all around us. From the Jewish refugees of the 1930s to people fleeing Vietnam in the 1970s, Kosovans in the 1990s to those arriving today; they are part of who we all are. This Refugee Week everyone is invited to discover the experiences of displacement that are found in our families, neighbourhoods and history, and find out what can be learnt from those who sought safety in Britain generations ago. In addition to the Barnfield evening Refugee Support Devon will be organising other Refugee Week events: please visit www.refugeesupportdevon.org.uk for details.

Refugee Week

A show for all the family!

Magic for Smiles

Talk and Magic by Jamie Jibberish
a Humanitarian Magician working in Refugee Camps in the Middle East region

Donations please to crowdfunder.co.uk/magicforsmiles

Charity 1182676

magicsmiles.com

Have a Great Get Together in the interval!

PLUS
African dancing and drumming from 

Thursday 20th June 7.30 pm
Barnfield Theatre EX1 1SN

£9.00 individual, £7.00 concessions, £5.00 child
from barnfield.org.uk Box Office 01392 271808



see our website! refugeesupportdevon.org.uk

Thank you, Lauren!

In April we said a sorry 'farewell' to Lauren Stone. Lauren has been working with RSD since October 2018 as part of her degree at Plymouth University. Before she left we asked Lauren to write a few words about her experiences with RSD and about the memories she will take away with her. This is what she wrote:

Firstly, I want to say a heartfelt thanks to RSD's clients, staff and volunteers. I have met some truly extraordinary people who face overwhelming issues with courage and grace. My thanks for allowing me into your lives. I have learnt not only academically but also more about myself. I have been lucky enough to have a 70 day placement at RSD as part of the second year of my Social Work Degree at the University of Plymouth.

After my first day I was very aware of how little I knew about the plight of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, their daily complications and struggles. Having watched the news programmes, read the newspaper headlines, listened to the radio and completed my own research to local support, campaigns, law and policy I honestly thought I had some understanding!

All the daily chaotic catastrophes happening to families seemed to be far away from my life; from picturesque Devon. It was and is surreal.

Previously I worked with people who have experienced trauma within the counselling profession. However, this situation was different as there are practical issues which need creative problem-solving urgently. Situations which require calling and sending case files to the Home Office, HMRC and the NHS. For the clients at RSD these situations are mountains to climb. Refugees and Asylum Seekers are faced with British culture and social norms as soon as they arrive which can be frustrating, confusing and simply unjust. It is the staff and volunteers at RSD who explain UK bureaucratic processes, translating, advocating, supporting and listening to clients who navigate the path for integration into the community.

Some people I have met have left behind successful lives to establish a safe environment for their families in the UK. These clients' main concerns are building their new lives with their new community, learning English and providing for themselves whilst giving back to the community. Having the privilege to listen to some refugees who want to prove their worth to the UK Government and are grateful to be able to walk to the shop to buy toiletries without fear is very humbling.

These experiences drove me to help clients integrate into the community. Drawing on my previous experience of working with domestic violence trauma I wanted to learn from the Women's Group understanding of domestic violence while exploring a UK definition. This was an enlightening experience for all involved. Again my thanks to all who took part in the discussion.

I appreciate there have been some challenges along the way. For example I had never used an online translator before and honestly it wasn't much help! However, thanks to staff and volunteers' commitment to give time as translators, I was able to communicate with clients from Iraq and Syria.

Finally, I have had some wonderful moments with lots of food, fun and laughter. I have met new forever friends from different parts of the world. I will remember my time at RSD with fond memories. It's been unforgettable.

Lauren Stone

Everyone at RSD would like to say a huge 'thank you' to Lauren for her efforts and wish her every happiness and success in the future.

RSD featured in 'One' Magazine

Anyone who lives in the Exeter area should be familiar with 'One', a free magazine delivered through the doors of houses in and around Exeter every month. If you receive it, please do not put the May edition in the bin, at least until you have read it! It includes an article about RSD entitled 'a new life in Devon' and it will undoubtedly be of interest to anyone reading this newsletter. If you do not receive 'One' Magazine (or if you have already disposed of the May issue!) the article can be found online at the following website:

<https://www.one-mag.co.uk/a-new-life-in-devon/>

You may also be interested in the following page from the online version of the January edition of 'The Justice Gap' magazine, which gives detailed background information about the set-up of RSD's OISC-accredited immigration clinic and features an interview with Neli:

<https://www.thejusticegap.com/fighting-immigration-law-advice-deserts/>

RSD gets support at May Day event

The RSD stall at the May Day celebrations in Kenton Village on May 6 attracted a steady stream of visitors ranging from curious schoolchildren to long-time residents, with many buying a badge or putting cash in our tins.



RSD Chair Jenny Longford and volunteer Jeremy Toye were on hand to field a wide range of questions, from a youngster's chirpy "What's going on here then?" to detailed queries about our work and the people we serve.

Several visitors had experience in similar fields, sparking lively conversations on subjects such as how Germany makes refugees welcome locally and a scheme to house asylum seekers in the spare rooms of Devon householders.



While Jenny and Jeremy struggled to keep our banner aloft in the breeze, RSD supporter Tom Woodd was running a five-a-side football tournament on the other side of the primary school playing field, raising more funds for our cause.

Jeremy Toye, RSD volunteer

Amin's Story

Setting up home in Devon - no easy matter after the traumas of war.

It's hard to imagine that the leafy village of Dartington might be a scary place for a new arrival. But if that person has been through the agonies of the Syrian war and the huge challenges of escaping it, even Devon can be a frightening experience.

Amin and his young family arrived at the old Foxhole school in Dartington in 2016 a few hours after being met at Bristol airport by RSD. "We arrived at sunset, it was almost night," Amin recalled as he chatted at RSD's outpost in Newton Abbot. "There was nobody there, an abandoned school, in the fields, in the woods. It wasn't easy for us to just to understand what was happening. Thank God we've moved now to a proper house within Dartington and that couldn't happen without the huge amount of support by RSD and Dartington Hall Trust.

"Maybe because we had fled a country at war, when we arrived we still felt scared," he remembers, then breaks into a smile as he compares his home town in Syria of some 32,000 people to the few hundred who live in Dartington. As he talks, mostly in translated Arabic but with a few hesitant sentences in English, Amin relaxes and talks positively of how much he and his family have really settled into Devon life. "RSD volunteers used to visit us at the school," he says. "But eventually you need to know that you are living within a community, not only to wait for somebody to visit you." Together with his brother and his family, who had travelled with them, they began to make contacts with more people in the village. "We found the best way was to prepare good food and then invite people," he says. "Now we know everybody and everybody knows us. This is the Syrian way, we are very sociable people."



Amin with RSD's Resettlement Coordinator, Tameem Shaaban

With help from villagers and local support groups, Amin's three children settled into the local school and nursery, while Amin and his wife found another way to join in. "I told everyone I knew from day one that I would accept any work that came up. Given my background, I didn't have that high rank of employment - I was a labourer. So we started to volunteer for Food in the Community. Every Thursday, we used to go and help them pack and distribute vegetables to all the needy people." He added that he was shocked to find that there were homeless people in a country like ours.

But what Amin really wanted was a job, and his lack of English and knowledge about regulations were major barriers. "It's not easy to cope with an environment where you don't have enough language to communicate with others." Then a Belgian he met introduced him to the manager of the Green Table café in Dartington, who offered him a part-time job in the kitchen. He's been there since last September. "I don't like to be seen as a refugee," Amin says softly. "My first aim is to be an active member in this community. To work, make money and live with that money, like we used to do." Amin goes to regular English lessons, and takes every opportunity to listen and learn.

Looking ahead, a sensitive question: would he ever like to go back to Syria?

"Myself, no, and I don't think my children would accept to go back, because the fear is still there in my heart," Amin says with feeling. "Syria is something scary for us now and forever, even if the war stops." He begins to relive a life where the only thought for each day was how to stay safe and get food for the family, where escape meant going through 37 checkpoints, any one of which could have meant disaster, and the agonies of trying to earn enough to eat in Lebanon by toting huge loads on his back for very little money. Then he says in a quiet voice: "I fear going back because there is memory there. If I go back and the war settles down, we go back to the same place where we saw people killed on the streets."

Talk of what he does now, within the community that found him a home, brings out his determination: "We don't want to be a burden on this community," he says. "We are trying our best to be like everybody else. We are not here to take your wealth, to take your benefits, take your money. We came to this country because we were forced to come, and we will make sure we do our best here."

He says he enjoys life too, and he'll be even happier now - his favourite football team is Liverpool...

Introducing the 400 Appeal

Spring 2019 sees the start of a major new RSD fundraising initiative, 'the 400 appeal'. Chair of RSD's trustees Jenny Longford explains:

"Since 2001 RSD has welcomed and assisted refugees to overcome the hurdles they face to settling in Devon. Whether it's through a simple phone call to sort out a bill, help to deal with complex paperwork or emergency support for destitute asylum seekers, RSD staff and volunteers have built up the necessary expertise and experience to provide an efficient and much valued service. But now we are facing a new challenge: finding the funds which underpin the services we offer. In recent years we have been successful in securing grants, but these sources of funds are fast running out. The competition to secure grant funding has never been greater and our recent applications have not proved successful.

"We must find other ways to raise money. That is why we have created this initiative. We're calling it "the 400 appeal" because that is precisely what we aim to generate over the coming months. Yes, we intend to get 400 people to sign up to a monthly £10 direct debit to RSD which will enable us to continue to provide the most essential and vital services we provide to refugees and asylum seekers. We will be calling on our supporters and friends to help us reach our target of 400 subscriptions. A large number of people have already signed up to this appeal: can you help us build on that number by getting friends, colleagues and others to sign up to RSD?"

Anyone wishing to join this appeal is invited to e-mail (info@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk) or telephone (01392 682185) RSD: we would love to hear from you. Alternatively you can contact your bank to set up a direct debit. RSD's bank account details are given below.

THANK YOU!

Refugee Support (Devon) Ltd., Cooperative Bank account number 6584 9280, sort code 08 92 99.

How else can you help?

Besides joining the 400 Appeal, described above, here are some options which may appeal to you if you would like to help Refugee Support Devon in its work. Whichever way you choose, and no matter how small or large your contribution, your support will be warmly appreciated.

- Make a one-off donation direct to Refugee Support Devon by bank transfer, using the account details given above
- Make a one-off or regular donation through TotalGiving which takes a small fee from RSD for managing the contribution. (<https://www.totalgiving.co.uk/donate/refugee%2Dsupport%2Ddevon%2Dltd>)
- Hold a community fundraiser, for example a coffee morning or a cake stall. (We can lend you a collection box and provide useful information about RSD).
- Make Refugee Support Devon your charity when you take part in a Marathon, a Triathlon, a sponsored cycle ride. Set up your own funding page through TotalGiving and win support on social media.
- Leave a legacy to Refugee Support Devon in your will. For advice speak to a solicitor or a will-writer. You will need the details set out below.

Many thanks!

Refugee Support Devon, Exeter Community Centre, 17 St Davids Hill, Exeter EX4 3RG

Registered charity no.1143884. Phone 01392 682185. <http://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk>.