

REFUGEE SUPPORT DEVON

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020



RSD's new website goes live!

Anyone who has visited our website recently will have seen a message on the homepage saying 'We are working on a new website! We hope to reveal our new improved site soon! Watch this space!' We are now delighted to announce that the new website is now 'live'. We have kept the old website address, <http://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk> but hopefully anyone visiting it will consider it a huge improvement on the old version, with a much more 'visual' appearance, easier navigation and - we hope - greater 'user-friendliness'.

The whole RSD team have been closely involved with creating the new website. Staff and trustees contributed suggestions and comments on the new design and the last few months have seen a steady dialogue between RSD manager Annette Hughes and website creator Belal Almassri and his colleagues at Codea Digital Ltd. Belal will soon be providing website maintenance training for all the RSD staff; in the meantime please excuse any minor errors you may find in the website's content. If you wish to find out more about Codea Digital, please visit their website, <http://www.codeadigital.co.uk> .

What our new website means for you...

We will be linking our newsletter subscription to an account with Mailchimp. This means that anyone wishing to subscribe - or unsubscribe - to our newsletter in future will be able to do so by clicking on a button on our new website and their e-mail address will be automatically added to or deleted from the list. This will cut down on the amount of time we need to spend on maintaining our newsletter subscription list and will ensure that the list is always fully up-to-date. To set this up we will need to provide Mailchimp with your e-mail address. Mailchimp is one of the world's foremost marketing platforms and will keep your data safe (information about data security is available by visiting <https://mailchimp.com/about/security>) but if you do not wish us to provide them with your e-mail address please let us know. E-mail info@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk and we will unsubscribe you.

Return to the Community Centre - update

A number of people have been asking us recently about when - and how - we will be returning to our offices in the Exeter Community Centre. The latest information we have is that the building will be re-opening to tenants at some stage in August and to the general public in September. The Centre's trustees have protocols in place to enable people to use the building safely after reopening. These include use of separate entrances and exits, restrictions on the numbers of people using the building and access to sanitising and disinfectant materials. The Centre will almost certainly operate on an appointment-only basis to begin with and we have been working in close consultation with them about how RSD's drop-in service can resume as quickly as possible.

We will keep everyone informed about the situation via our website. In the meantime we continue to provide as many services as we can whilst working from home. We would particularly like to thank all the RSD volunteers who have either been continuing to help us provide our services to our clients during lockdown, or waiting patiently for an opportunity to do so. RSD could not function without our volunteers and we look forward to seeing them again soon.

Masks!

Everyone currently has to wear a face-covering in the shops and on public transport but, of course, RSD always likes to be ahead of the game so back in May RSD Resettlement Coordinator Souad Fadel set a task to our female clients - several of whom had received a sewing machine donated via RSD - to sew masks for their families and send us photos of the results. We share some of the results here.



Ghaliya said: my children were excited when I was sewing the masks for my family. They were sitting next to me watching and when I was finished they wore the masks at home.



Suhair said: I made these masks for my family using a shopping bag I brought with me from Turkey.



Neama said: I don't have a sewing machine but I have good crochet skills so I made crochet masks for my family.



Douha said: I have good experience with sewing as I worked at a clothes factory when I was in Lebanon.

Our thanks to all the ladies who made masks, and to their children who modelled them. Thanks also to Souad for setting them this task and for sharing their photos!

Cevdet's story

RSD volunteer Cevdet Acu was in Jordan when the Covid-19 crisis struck and what follows below is an edited version of what he wrote about his experiences. The full text can be found at

<http://m.bianet.org/english/world/226639-pandemic-days-and-corona-crisis-in-jordan>

I came to Jordan around four months ago to do interviews with Syrian refugees as part of my PhD research; and my original plan was to stay only around two weeks. I had also arranged everything including my clothes based on the two-weeks-stay, but the COVID-19 crisis changed everything.

I did not pay much attention to the COVID-19 issue in the beginning. I naively even thought that people were exaggerating it a little bit. Yes, I have witnessed some major social and political crises, but none of these crises occurred at the same time and almost everywhere in the world, as it is now. Hence, I was somewhat sceptical about this new virus and its side effects in the early days. However as time passed, the rapidly increasing mortality rates and the drastic measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus put me in a dilemma. During these times, whenever I walked on the streets in Amman I could not believe the scenes that I saw. There were long queues in front of each supermarket and bakery; it was even possible to observe fights among people who were waiting in the queues.

It was too late for me to leave Jordan as the government had already closed all airports. An order came from King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, the top official of the country, saying that no one was allowed to leave their house for four days and four nights. Following the King's decision, on March 21, the start of the curfew was signalled at seven a.m. by air-raid sirens that sounded across the country. King Abdullah then approved a National Defence Law, which gives the Jordanian government absolute power to impose curfews, close businesses and place restrictions on freedom of movement of the people.

Amman suddenly became a ghost city where there was no noise or people around. Based on the United Nations agencies' data, there are millions of Palestinian and Syrian immigrants in Jordan as of June 2020, but right now no one is allowed to enter or leave the country. Everyone must remain in place, and no one can step out of their home unless they receive special permission from the relevant ministry.

As a result, my voluntary migration to Jordan has turned into something else. I am not able to leave the country even if I want to. What could I do when all these things were happening? Nothing! I do not have a choice apart from waiting patiently. I have to view a glass as half-full to consider more optimistically until everything gets back to normal as it used to be. I believe that being happy is also related to the way we interpret life, so it is always good to stay positive.

I have had to change my lifestyle and the habits that I have lived up until now to adapt to this "new life". Around midnight, I go to the terrace of the house where I live almost once every two days, and I share my loneliness with the stars shining in the sky.

Then, I understood that while this COVID-19 is a huge crisis for people it is a good chance for nature. Who knows, perhaps this COVID-19 crisis is revenge of nature as we, people, destroy the ecosystem more day by day unfortunately.

In the words of the very famous director and writer Andrey Tarkovsky: "Above all, I feel that the sounds of this world are so beautiful in themselves that if only we could listen to them properly."

During this deadly pandemic crisis, let's listen to each other and nature more carefully to feel the sounds of this world to make life better for all. Stay healthy, safe, and with solidarity.

Cevdet Acu

Refugee Week update: online events

We would like to thank everyone who participated in this year's virtual Refugee Week events. Liz Oxburgh's online competition attracted a number of very high-quality entries and Liz has been so pleased with the response that she has decided to extend the competition to the end of July. We are therefore unable to tell you who the winners are but all the entries can be viewed by visiting www.lizoxburgh.com and you can still 'like' your favourite.

We were also delighted with all the videos received from RSD clients, a selection of which can be viewed by visiting <http://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk/news/refugee-voices--children-and-adults-resettled-in-devon-tell-us-their-stories/> or <https://www.devon.gov.uk/refugees-in-devon> .

Refugee Week update: Dania's story

We are grateful to RSD client Dania Shawish, who sent us this story for Refugee Week:

I am writing today to explain the challenges of being a Syrian refugee, in celebration of Refugee Week. It has been a real learning experience to overcome the challenges, but I feel as though I'm now a part of the English community.

The first challenge is the language. I came here without knowing the language. It was difficult to live in an English community without speaking the language - on the first day we accidentally bought cream instead of yoghurt! But there is no problem without a solution so we decided to accept the challenge. I learned English at school, through socialising with English people, going to events, and taking opportunities to speak.

Another challenge is leaving family - when I arrived, my son Kareem was still very young. It was hard having a young child without family. In Syrian culture, families help each other out with childcare, and I found it hard to do that without more support.

I had to leave Syria because of the war, and then I moved to Jordan and then Turkey. The UN organised it all for us, and we all had to go to different places: My sister lives in New Zealand so I haven't been able to meet my sister's children, my brother in Canada, and my parents still in Jordan. I haven't seen any of them for six years. Some people living here might be able to relate to missing their family because lockdown has kept us separate.

Furthermore, learning a new culture has also been tricky. For example, in England you normally agree a time to meet your friends. However, in some places in Syria, you just turn up! Some people in England have been surprised when Syrians show up at the door wanting to socialize or asking for something.

At first when I arrived in Totnes, I was worried about how people would see me. I was scared they wouldn't like me because I was different. I thought they might be scared of me because my family was one of the first five to come to Devon. It was hard for people to know how to help us. Starting up bank accounts, for example, was difficult.

The thing I miss most of all is my family. I also miss the culture and the more social way of life and the community in Syria. But you can get all of that here, too, by making new friends, socialising and finding ways to benefit the community and people around you (like working in charity shops or helping vulnerable people).

At the beginning, support from RSD was very helpful. I would have felt lost without it. They also helped me stand on my feet to feel independent.

For other refugees, I encourage them to be as independent as possible and not rely on other people too much. When you try to be independent you learn a lot: the language, the culture, and so on.

Dania Shawish

Heaven in Devon

We hope that now lockdown has started to ease you have been able to get out and about again. RSD volunteers Peter Tansley and Shelia Sloan have taken the opportunity to show clients Hajji



Kippering at Huxham Brake

and Walaa and their children some of Devon's finest local scenery. "We took them in glorious isolation to the forest at Huxham Brake," Peter says. "Unfortunately I hurt my foot recently and can't do long walks so we set up camp in the

forest and introduced them to kippering." The children did what they described as 'explore things' while the adults unfortunately discovered some of Devon's less welcome residents - ticks.



Bivvy at Budleigh Salterton

Peter continues: "After that we went to Budleigh Salterton and introduced the word 'bivvy' to their lexicon. We were at the far end of the beach and thankfully no ticks were around." The family said they greatly enjoyed their outdoor experiences.

"They said it was "paradise," Peter said, "although after the tick incident I wonder if that lost something in the translation." After these successful trips Peter is already planning further adventures. "I would like to introduce them to nightjars next," he says. "Does anyone know when peak nightjar season is?" (Answer: between May and September and we can recommend Aylesbeare Common, near Newton Poppleford, but don't arrive until dusk and make sure you bring a torch).

RSD needs YOU!

RSD supports some of society's most vulnerable, marginalised people and much of our work is entirely reliant on private donations. If you do not currently donate to RSD now is the best possible time to think about doing so. Any amount, however great or small, will be gratefully received and will contribute directly towards allowing us to continue our important work. There are a number of ways you can help:



The 400 appeal

Donations via bank transfer can be made through our bank account, Refugee Support (Devon) Ltd., Cooperative Bank account number 65849280, sort code 08 92 99. If you would like to make a regular donation please contact us and ask about our **400 appeal**, which aims to get 400 people to sign up to a monthly £10 direct debit. To donate through PayPal or by using a debit or credit card, search for Refugee Support Devon via the PayPal Giving Fund or visit www.refugeesupportdevon.org.uk.

Lockdown is easing and perhaps you would like to organise something like a sponsored walk, marathon, triathlon or cycle ride, with RSD as your nominated beneficiary. Set up your own funding page through TotalGiving and win support on social media. Finally: please consider **leaving a legacy to RSD in your will**. For advice speak to a solicitor or a will-writer. You will need the following details: Refugee Support Devon, Exeter Community Centre, 17 St Davids Hill, Exeter EX4 3RG, registered charity no.1143884.

If you need more information about supporting RSD please visit www.refugeesupportdevon.org.uk or contact us. Telephone 01392 682185 or e-mail info@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk . Thank you!