

REFUGEE SUPPORT DEVON

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2022



RSD to co-host Refugee Week Symposium

Prompted by concern on how to help an increasing number of refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in the South West, RSD has teamed up with Exeter City of Sanctuary to host a conference in June to mark this year's Refugee Week.

The Symposium on Refugees on Friday, June 24th will link up interested organisations across Devon and beyond to share experiences, seek solutions to challenges and consider greater collaboration. Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) and its neighbour, the Phoenix Arts Centre, will be the venues for the half-day meeting running from 2pm to 7pm.

"With thousands of people seeking sanctuary across Europe from the appalling events in Ukraine, the question of how best to help refugees from across the world has been a major concern for many organisations in our area," says RSD volunteer and symposium organiser Jeremy Toye. "This symposium is an opportunity for them to examine a wide range of topics affecting asylum-seekers and refugees, from housing to mental health, against the backdrop of new government initiatives." RSD's Chair of Trustees Jenny Longford added, "RSD will continue to offer support to all refugees and asylum seekers, however they have arrived in Devon, but we are a small charity and working in partnership with other agencies is essential to providing the best service possible for them." Clare Henry, of Exeter City of Sanctuary, co-sponsor of the event with RSD, commented: "Excos, as part of the national City of Sanctuary movement, continues to work and campaign to promote a culture of welcome and support across the city for all refugees and asylum seekers. We also continue to fight for positive changes to national policy. Working together with groups and people across the city and wider is fundamental to achieving this."

A distinguished panel of experts will prompt round-table discussions on four main themes:

1. What can we do better to support existing refugees and asylum-seekers in our area, including greater collaboration and information exchange?
2. How can we provide help to newcomers looking for support in the medium-term future, including the anticipated arrival of more individuals who are not part of officially-authorized schemes?
3. How can we prepare for the potential requirements of Ukrainians, Afghans, Syrians and others whose official period of support comes to an end (there may only be funding support for Afghans via the ARAP (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy) and ACRS (Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme) Programmes for one year, and even some Syrians on a five-year support programme are likely to need ongoing support) or who arrive by unauthorised means.
4. How can we prepare for the impact on our region of the Government's new Nationality and Borders policy?

More information about the invited speakers, and further details about the Symposium will be announced on RSD's website and via e-mails to our newsletter readers closer to the date. If you work with an organisation involved with refugees in any way, and are interested in sending a representative to the symposium, please contact Jeremy (jemtoye@gmail.com). If you would like to support the symposium by contributing to its costs, Please visit <http://www.justgiving.com/Jeremy-Toye> - thank you!

Meet the Subhiehs...of Cullompton!

“Mohamed looked as if he was going to burst with pride,” says RSD volunteer Chrissie Mortimer, “but he was rather surprised to find strange ladies throwing their arms around him!” The occasion was the Devon Under-Fourteen Rugby Union Final in Newton Abbot and Mohamed’s son Samir (pictured below in his kit and, at the bottom of the page, with the rest of the team, standing just to the right of the boys holding the trophy) was playing for Cullompton. “Rugby is not played in Syria,” Chrissie says, “but Samir has wings on his heels. He scored two tries in the semi-finals, leaving the rest of the field way behind, and nearly managed one in the Final. And he was fasting, don’t forget. The coach was

lovely and took him off for 10 minutes at the end of the first half as, of course, he wasn’t drinking from 4am to 8.30pm and it was a fast game.” Mohamed was watching the game with Samir’s three siblings. Mum Maysaa was at home, preparing for Eid. “She was there for the semi-final though,” says Chrissie, “just imagine, a lady in a hijab yelling with excitement at a rugby match!” The Subhiehs arrived in the UK in September 2017 under the government’s Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme. “They come from Douma, just outside Damascus in Eastern Ghouta,” Chrissie says, “an area infamous for the chemical attacks in 2013 and total devastation of the area. Assad and his Russian troops were particularly vicious in Douma as this was where IS were taking a stand so the fighting and bombing was horrific.”



After the family house took a direct hit - thankfully when they were out - the Subhiehs fled, first to Egypt, where they did not have an easy time, and then they were put forward to be resettled in the UK. When they arrived they spoke no English but Chrissie, who worked for several years in the Middle East, had acquired enough Arabic to permit basic communication. Now, five years on, Mohamed has passed his driving test - having done the theory in English - and both parents can now communicate with English people well. Mohamed (left) works as a landscape gardener and Maysaa (below) is applying to volunteer at Noah’s Ark Nursery in Cullompton, as well as her day with Hospicecare

every week. Thirteen-year old daughter Tala continued at school over lockdown and two letters from school to her parents praised her to the skies, calling her ‘a role model for her peer group’. As for the rugby final, Cullompton won the game 24-17, which is why Mohamed had various female arms flung around him. “I just hope Samir kept his mouth shut when the players were sprayed with cider after the game,” Chrissie says. And afterwards? Chrissie left the Subhiehs in Newton Abbot. “There was obviously a town get together,” she says, “and the Subhiehs are definitely regarded now as Cullomptonians.”



Our thanks to Chrissie for this wonderful story and to the Subhieh family for giving us permission to publish it. Thanks also to everyone at Cullompton

Rugby Club, for their kind co-operation and for providing the photos. Best wishes to you all from everyone at RSD.

Care - and cuts - in Tiverton

In January - at 24 hours' notice - the Home Office placed 69 pre dispersal asylum seekers into a bridging hotel in Tiverton. A rapid local response was required and RSD played a central role in its coordination. RSD Manager Rupert Blomfield takes up the story...

RSD is the local accredited asylum support organisation but we had to accept that we were not able to respond to the needs of this group with our current staff and volunteer levels. We were obliged to approach other accredited organisations and ask them to help us with the unexpected and overwhelming caseload. We were joined by Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support (DCRS), the British Red Cross Refugee Support Service (BRC) and Plymouth Hope, all level 1 - accredited organisations, and between us and without any additional funding we developed a needs assessment system that could be conducted over the phone once consent from the clients had been obtained. We worked with local volunteers, our own English-teaching volunteers, local church groups and charities to provide a wraparound package of support for those asylum seekers while they were with us in Devon.

Rupert applied successfully for funding from the Devon Community Foundation to provide translation services for the asylum-seekers, who came from a wide range of backgrounds and seldom had English as a first language. Thanks to the efforts of the local response group, in which RSD staff and volunteers played a central role, the asylum seekers were provided with some basic comforts and access to local services including, as RSD volunteer Jeremy Toye reports...haircuts...

What does a young man cooped up in a hotel for weeks on end need to stay in trim? Yes ... a haircut.

So it was that RSD arranged for some 70 asylum-seekers with temporary accommodation at a Tiverton hotel to have free haircuts at the town's Petroc College Barber School. While RSD and other volunteers catered for needs ranging from completing paperwork to arranging health care, the school's student barbers snipped away.

But the hotel residents weren't the only ones to benefit: "We're delighted to have them, as our students need practice cutting different styles and textures of hair," said one of the college's staff who welcomed them to the school's impressive premises. One young man needed to practice a particular style - and a volunteer was swiftly found.

However, one of those who went along didn't want a haircut - as a trained barber himself, he wanted to see how the skill was taught in the UK.

While he watched, he indicated with his snipping fingers that if he had some kit of his own, he could offer haircuts himself. The college duly found some barbering tools for him, and within hours he was in great demand back at the hotel.

Between the college and a volunteering barber, the simple pleasure of looking smart was delivered, with smiles all round.

Rupert concludes: In 2022, RSD continues to find that our services are more in demand than ever. The legal and policy environment for migrants and refugees in the UK is increasingly hostile. Devon is expecting to receive a greater number of asylum seekers as a result of wider government dispersal, and we anticipate that the new Nationality and Borders Act 2022 will generate new support needs among asylum seekers and refugees in the region.

RSD also continues to be involved in Government resettlement programmes. We are currently in dialogue with the local authority about providing support to Afghan refugees accommodated in Exeter and Devon, and expect to be involved in responding to further waves of refugees to Devon via resettlement programmes.

Thank you, Betsy, Richard...and Martha!

Much of RSD's work is supported by private grants and donations and the organisation could not exist without the generosity of our donors. Large or small, regular or one-off, all donations are gratefully received and we greatly appreciate them all. In this newsletter we wanted to say a particular 'thank you' to three people who have (literally) gone the extra mile to raise money for RSD in the last few months...

Eight-year old **Betsy Salt** (pictured right with Jenny Longford, RSD's Chair of Trustees, on her visit to the RSD offices at the end of February) captured the hearts - and the attention - of many people across Devon and beyond with her February Swimming Challenge. Inspired to help a local refugee charity after reading 'the Boy at the Back of the Class' by Onjali Rauf, Betsy set out to swim 5 km in February and to raise money for RSD in the process. Betsy smashed her original target of £100 before February had even begun and it was soon clear that she was going to raise a great deal more. Betsy pledged 'to swim as far as I can and to raise as much as possible' and, in bringing her challenge to wider notice, she featured on BBC Radio Devon, BBC Spotlight News and even on the BBC's Devon



news website (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-60382308>). Her challenge received a huge boost when Onjali Rauf pledged to match-fund anything raised up to £1,000. Betsy's final total was an amazing £3,267 and in the course of raising it she raised the public profile of RSD and the plight of refugees in Devon enormously.



Richard Toye (pictured left) is a professor of History at Exeter University. In April he ran the Zurich marathon and nominated RSD as his chosen charity because, he said, "I want to help people in a tough situation." Richard ran in memory of his father John, who died in November. "My father was a development economist," Richard said. "He looked at the economics of underdeveloped countries and he was particularly interested in helping countries develop in ways that would benefit all its people, not just a few of them." Although he has run several half-marathons, including the Great West Run, Zurich was Richard's first full Marathon. Before he ran it, Richard said, "Running a marathon for the first time at the age of 48 may not be very wise,

but perhaps it is wiser than doing it at the age of 49." In the event Richard completed the course in 4 hours, 10 minutes, and raised a fantastic £1,337.

And last, but by no means least...**Martha Nyikadzinashe** will be running the Plymouth Half marathon on 19 June to raise funds for RSD. "I grew up with refugees and asylum seekers," Martha explains, "and hearing their stories, you see how scary it can be for someone to flee their home, everything

they know, in search of safety to a new place where everything is so different. It's amazing what RSD does, helping people settle in a new country and integrate into society." But what does Martha say about herself? "Am I a runner? No. Do I enjoy it? Not so much. But am I going to do this? Yes!" You can donate to Martha by visiting

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/m-nyikadzinashe>

Our thanks to Betsy, Richard and Martha and to everyone who donates to RSD. Please see the next page for information about how you can help us to continue supporting refugees and asylum seekers.



Well done, Neli and Tony!

Congratulations to RSD's casework coordinator Neli Montes de Oca and immigration volunteer Tony Griffin, who have recently achieved accreditation to offer level 2 immigration advice. Immigration law is a regulated service and it is a criminal offence for unqualified people to provide immigration advice. However, many RSD clients need legal representation and are unable to afford solicitors to

take on their cases: there is also a huge shortage of Legal Aid immigration solicitors in the south-west. To address this problem Neli and Tony - together with RSD volunteers Alex Goodman and Suzy Aburagheb - achieved level 1 accreditation in 2018. The need for this service was quickly established, between August 2018 and the end of March 2019 the team assisted 25 individuals with their cases, and this number rose to 45 in the 2019-20 financial year. Achieving level 2 accreditation will allow Neli and Tony (pictured right, with the Level 1 certificate they were awarded in 2018) to assist with much more complex cases and will make RSD one of the very few organisations providing this level of advice for free in the south-west of England. The exam they had to take has a 65% failure rate, so passing represents a wonderful achievement. Well done, Neli and Tony, from everyone at RSD!



And finally...

We hope that the extra-mile stories of Betsy, Richard and Martha on page 4 have inspired you to go out and do something to raise funds for RSD. Whether it's a half (or full) marathon, a cake-sale or a sponsored silence we'd love to hear about it. Let us know what you will be doing and we can help promote your challenge in our newsletter and via social media. Even if you aren't contemplating anything like that you can still help RSD to continue providing its services to our vulnerable clients. **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 ask us about our **400 appeal**, which aims to get 400 people to sign up to a monthly £10



The 400 appeal

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 our website, <https://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk> and click on the 'donate now' tab. Lastly: 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: 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, call 01392 682185 or e-mail info@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk. And remember:

- £10 - pays for a vital medical prescription for those who are destitute
- £20 - provides mobile phone credit, enabling vital communication with solicitors and family
- £50 - purchases a bus ticket to attend an immigration hearing or legal appointment
- £100 - helps to equip someone's first home with essentials after long periods of destitution or insecure accommodation. It can also pay for a team of volunteers to be trained to help respond to queries from asylum seekers and refugees
- £500 - funds a staff member for a week to coordinate volunteers and respond to queries from the most vulnerable

Thank you!