

# Refugee Support Devon

## Annual Review

Year ending

31 March 2020





# CHAIR'S REPORT

One Sunday in April 2019 six RSD directors (trustees) cycled or walked along the River Exe to meet at a pub for lunch. Our conversation naturally turned to our usual concern over how to continue to secure funding for RSD's vital services for refugees in Devon. We estimated that if we could get 400 individuals to sign up to a £10 per month direct debit, we could at least ensure that a very basic drop-in service would continue. And so it was that the *400 Appeal* was born.

While we rely on grant funding to maintain our core services, fundraising in the community has an important part to play too. For instance, it is through individual donations and the proceeds of fundraising events that we are able to offer small, but vital sums of money for essential items or travel to destitute asylum seekers. In 2019 choirs raised money for us at their concerts, an amateur football tournament also donated their proceeds, not to mention the brave individual who raised several hundred pounds for RSD by shaving her head in a sponsorship drive. Churches regularly donate to us. We are grateful as ever to all the people who have chosen to raise funds for us.

So I offer my sincere thanks to the many individuals and organisations which support RSD through

donations and grants as well as to our wonderful staff and volunteers. I also wish to thank directors Peter Bainbridge and Elena Isayev who have stepped down from the board during the year. Peter had been instrumental in drawing up RSD's Business and Operating Plans in recent years, enabling us to produce a more professional management and reporting structure. Elena had played a key role in promoting sanctuary scholarships at Exeter University which have enabled some of our service users to take up higher education courses. In the autumn we were pleased to welcome Shurouk Al-Sabbagh and Grace Frain as new directors.

The year has ended with the challenges posed by Covid-19. Staff working from home have continued to support our service users with ongoing needs as well as new ones arising from the lockdown.

Our *400 Appeal* has succeeded in doubling the number of regular donors, but we still have a long way to go. Meanwhile RSD's directors are looking forward to a time when we can enjoy another bike ride along the River Exe.

**Jenny Longford**

# VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers continue to be at the heart and soul of everything we do. We simply would not exist without their passion and dedication. They bring a rich diversity of experience and skills to all the work they do with our clients. Their backgrounds vary from retired professionals and students to refugees and migrants.

129 community members applied to volunteer with us; we invited 38 people to one of our five training sessions. 16 eventually went on to join up. This number is lower than in previous years, but we're now trying to ensure that all the volunteers we recruit are assigned to at least one project. We have a relatively stable cadre of 85 active volunteers at present.

Volunteers are given job-specific training on a regular basis. Fifteen staff members and volunteers also completed level 2 of a *First Aid for Mental Health* course successfully.



We were fortunate to have Sofia Assif on a four-month internship from France. We were truly in awe of her energy, enthusiasm and commitment to her work. We also welcomed Billie Buchanan, a social work student (BA course) from Plymouth University. She too brought huge passion and dedication in all her work with our clients.

***"I feel my advocacy and communication skills improved through working with non-English speaking individuals. I learnt a lot about the reality of being a refugee or asylum seeker in the UK."***

**RSD volunteer**



# A NEW VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

*"I graduated from university in summer 2019 with a degree in Farsi and moved home to Exeter a few months later. Instead of moping around the house all day, every day I decided to put my language skills to some good use and did a bit of research into refugee support charities in the area. A few emails and a training session later, and I was sitting at a desk in RSD's office as a drop-in centre volunteer."*

*"My experience so far has been a real joy. I love the spontaneity of the drop-in clinic. The problems people come in with are so broad and each situation so unique that you have something totally different to do every time you come in. So far I have written emails and letters to lawyers, bosses and landlords, argued over the 'phone with the Home Office, job-hunted and flat-hunted with and on behalf of clients, and a great deal else besides."*

*"I have really enjoyed getting to know the staff, other volunteers and clients at RSD and I look forward to continuing my involvement in the future!"*

**Sam**



Sam at the mausoleum of Tamerlane in Samarkand, Uzbekistan

# DROP-IN SERVICE

*“I had a lot of help especially when I was applying for my maternity allowance.” RSD client*

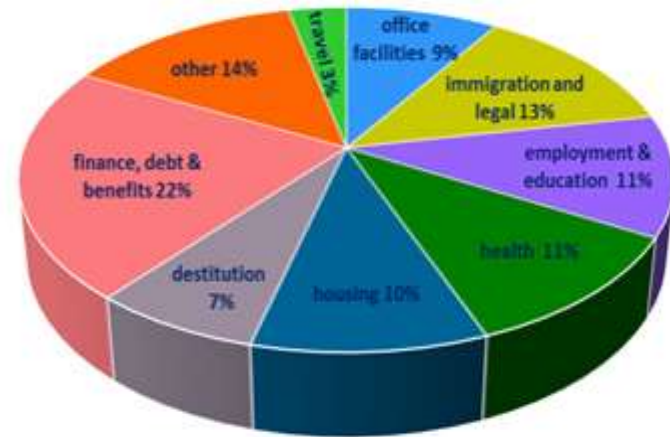
Our drop-in service continues to be at the heart of our organisation. We helped 150 individuals during the course of the year through our drop-in service and immigration clinic with a total of 584 visits between them. Of this total, just over half identified themselves as refugees or with a refugee background, 22 per cent were asylum seekers and the remaining 28 per cent either did not reveal their status or had settled residency in the UK. We had clients from 38 countries with the majority being from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Finance, debt and benefits, immigration and legal support, health, education and employment, and housing were the major reasons for seeking help from RSD.

The office space is seen as a safe place and is frequently used as a social hub, with people seeking it out for a friendly chat with a cup of tea and biscuits!

We are proud that so many people have the trust and confidence to pop in for emotional and practical support.

Drop-in services used April 2019 - March 2020



*“I so much appreciate the help you’ve provided and I will definitely be back on my feet at the end of the month. The fact that you helped me get through these tough times will forever remain with me.” RSD client*

# MERLIN'S STORY

*"When I came to the UK in 2018 at age 17, I finally got a chance to live with my brother. He's the only family I have left since our parents passed away.*

*"I'd only been here a few days when my brother told me we were going to RSD. I had no idea what it was, or how my brother knew about it.*

*"At RSD I met a volunteer who told my brother about the asylum thing, then he booked the first interview for me (with the Home Office) in Croydon. I went there and they checked my fingerprints and stuff like that.*

*"After that, I was assigned to Neli (at RSD) and she found a solicitor for me. RSD felt sympathy for me; they helped me. I was really impressed.*

*"The Home Office first rejected my application, so I was meant to go to court to appeal. The court date was cancelled three times, the last on 21<sup>st</sup> March because of Covid-19. A solicitor then rang me to say that the Home Office had reversed their decision; they had decided to give me refugee status. I was really happy. The first person I told was my brother, then I contacted Neli.*

*"I don't know how to thank Neli, but maybe the best way is if I can come in the summer and also help other people who are going through the same situation as me. I was thinking that if I didn't get this support (from RSD) I don't know where I would be. For me to get this status as a refugee, it's because of them.*

*"People at Exeter College helped me get back on track with my schoolwork. That's how I passed GCSE in English. I'm now on an access course, then I'm going to a university of my choice, studying accounting and finance."*

**Interviewed by Jeremy Toye, volunteer**

# OUTREACH

There are times when staff and volunteers have to offer support to individuals / families outside our drop-in clinic, especially to those who are learning to speak English, as well as those who are still building their confidence to access other services.

Ten volunteers / staff helped 16 individuals in this reporting year. They spent just over 130 hours in:

- ♦ providing intensive support to an agoraphobic person and accompanying them to dance classes
- ♦ helping someone with buying a laptop and food shopping
- ♦ accompanying people to:
  - ♦ asylum application interview in Cardiff
  - ♦ asylum appeal in Newport
  - ♦ Citizens Advice
  - ♦ housing appointments
  - ♦ job centre
- ♦ helping a client move into a new home
- ♦ assisting clients in finding part-time jobs
- ♦ providing adult training
- ♦ giving practical and emotional support to those who needed it

*“I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping me. I know it’s your job but I could see inside you were doing it with love and passion. Please continue doing that.”*

**RSD client**

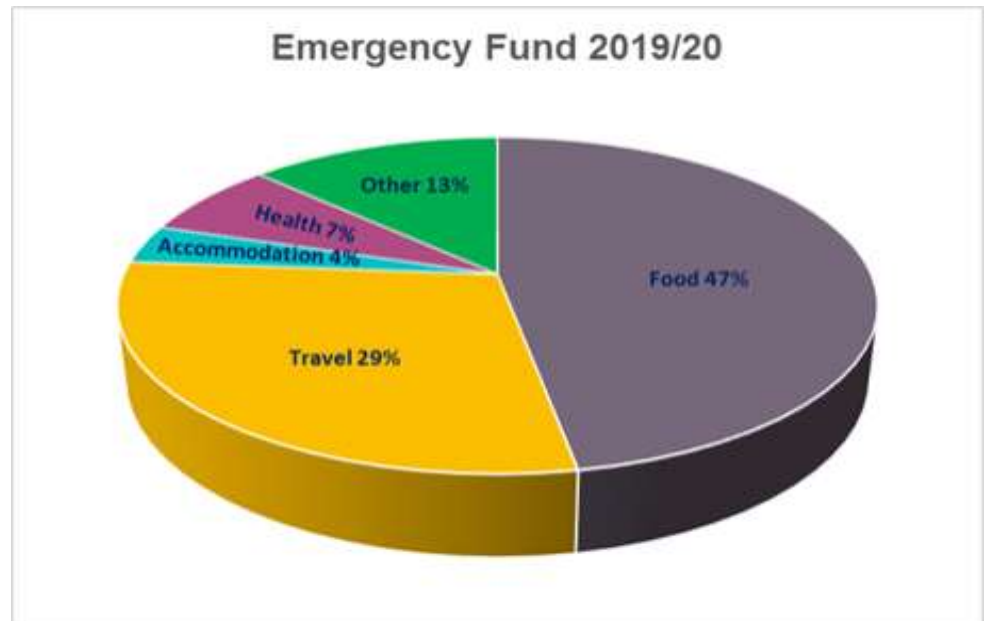


# DESTITUTION

Our destitution project is designed to help asylum seekers and refugees who are experiencing severe hardship. They may need a small cash injection to tide them over a financial crisis or they may not be entitled to government support or there may be delays in benefit payments. This project is made possible by individuals who make regular or one-off donations and by the amazing fundraising activities from volunteers and other supporters of RSD. Twenty-five individuals—of whom six were women—made 139 claims. Six of the claimants had 10 dependants between them. We gave a total of just over £2400 in this period. We also issued 41 Foodbank vouchers to individuals and their families. Our allotment provided fresh produce for those in need.

*“Whenever I popped in with any problem, they helped me with it.”*

RSD client



# IMMIGRATION ADVICE CLINIC

***"Refugee Support Devon has been nothing but accommodating and supporting. The staff members are really polite and phenomenal. I really appreciate all the help I get from them. Thank you."*** RSD client

Our weekly immigration advice clinic has now been up and running for two years with the four advisers kept busy with clients seeking immigration, asylum and protection advice.

We are accredited with level one of immigration advice with the government's Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). So, while this means we cannot represent claims for asylum or deal with complicated applications for visas, our immigration advisers acquire and bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and skills to their jobs. They've also built up a formidable network of contacts for further support and to whom they can pass on the more complex cases that may require higher level advice.

This year our immigration advisers helped 45 clients and their families to navigate the complex morass that is the UK immigration legislation. So far, we have been successful in all the cases we've represented; these include family visas, legal aid, UK citizenship and travel document applications. These cases formed 65 per cent of all our enquiries. We had to refer a further 20 per cent of the more complex cases to higher level advisers, such as solicitors. 11 per cent of the cases are still ongoing. The remaining 5 per cent of the enquirers received a quick response from us / resolved their cases by other means / did not return back to use our services.



# VOLUNTEERING FOR THE IMMIGRATION ADVICE CLINIC

*"I have volunteered with RSD for about five years now, first with the women's group, then the drop-in. For the last two years I've been part of the immigration clinic team. Of the clinic volunteers I am the least experienced in immigration law, but my day job investigating wildlife crime gives me a good understanding of how to interpret legislation, as well as the importance of carefully evidencing a case. These skills have been well exercised in my role as an immigration adviser. I studied hard for the registration exam and after initially just missing the pass mark, I revised harder and passed the second time round.*

*"My highlights so far must be the times I have successfully helped two people to apply for Exceptional Case Funding. This gives individuals access to legal aid to pay for a solicitor to advise in their complex cases.*

*"The fact that it is so hard to find a solicitor willing to take such cases on in the South West*

*is probably the lowlight. RSD is working with partners to try and address this.*

*"As the case probably is with many RSD volunteers, as well as knowing we're doing the right thing by our clients, there are personal benefits to volunteering too. Becoming a registered immigration adviser has been massively rewarding personally. I have learnt so much, met amazingly inspiring people, and worked as part of a fantastic team."* **Alex**



# NELLY'S STORY

*"I came to the UK from Ivory Coast in 2003, when I was 26, to study, supported by my parents. I renewed my visa several times, each time at higher cost. There was fighting in my country, so my parents moved back to their village. But armed rebels came and they were dispersed: we don't have news of my dad, I think he is no more.*

*"I spoke to a lady who said that if I told immigration that I hadn't been to Africa since 2003, they would send me back. I was so naïve at the time I told them I had just come from Africa. That was my mistake. My application to stay was refused. So I had to hide again.*

*"When my daughter was born, I went back to the Home Office. I told them I was destitute, that I needed a place to live. The National Asylum Service (NAS) found me a place to live in London for a year, then they said, 'Get ready, next week you go to Devon.'*

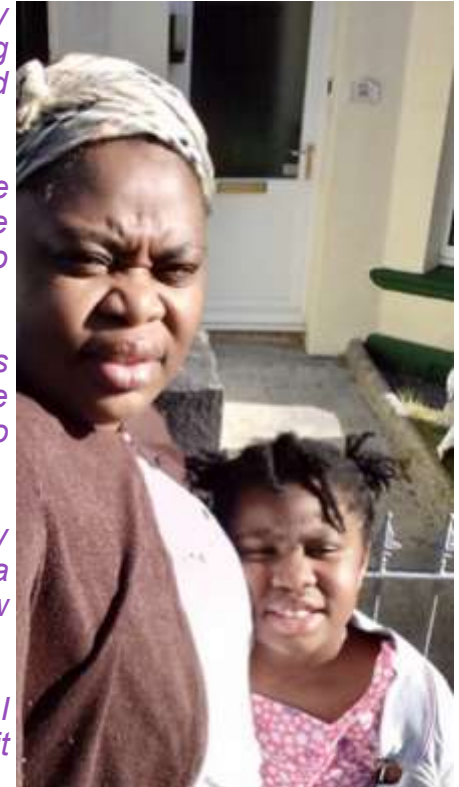
*"I was put in touch with RSD and they contacted a solicitor so I could continue my application for asylum. It was refused, and I was told, 'Very soon you will receive a letter so we can send you back to your country.' My fear was that with the baby, now you refuse me, am I going back in the street?*

*"So I put in a claim for asylum on behalf of my daughter. She's the one claiming but I may get a decision as well for me, I don't know. I've now been told we'll have to wait until the end of Covid-19 to get a result.*

*"RSD is so good, because you can see them fighting for you, collecting information. Really it's only recently that I feel at peace. Most local people, they are wonderful, from church to the neighbours.*

*"I'm 43, I deserve to live, that's what I'm fighting for. I try to make sure my daughter is happy. There is only she and me."*

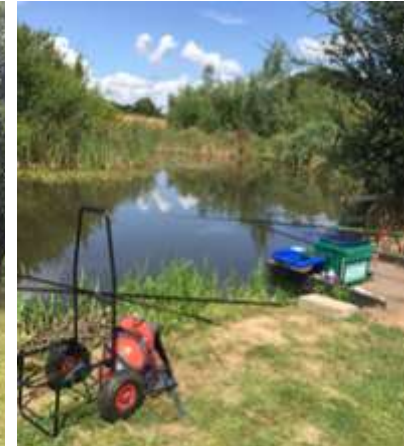
**Interviewed by Jeremy Toye, volunteer**





# WOMEN'S GROUP

Our monthly women's group events are designed to help women to build networks, develop confidence, learn new skills and have fun. We ran nine events during the course of the year. The monthly get-togethers attracted 15–26 women and 20–35 children each time, so they were as popular as ever. There was a workshop on raising children in the UK, which provoked much discussion amongst the participants, especially on what is and isn't acceptable under the UK law. There were fun outings to Crealy Theme Park, Stover Country Park and even a fishing trip to the new Harpers Lakes; the latter was a family event. A few women took part in a *Home Sweet Home* project at the RAMM Museum, which looked at objects from different cultures and times that might have been used to welcome people into their home. The project was then turned into an exhibition. There was also a lovely craft workshop at the Newton Town Council and Museum. The Ramadan party was a memorable gathering and involved much cooking and eating, of course. Exeter's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Southgate Church both very kindly hosted separate events for the families. The families really appreciated getting to know new people in the community and the thoughtfulness that had gone into organising the programmes. We look forward to reviving our group again in the coming months and when the health crisis is over.





# REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME



We continue to provide support to vulnerable families in Devon as part of the government commitment to resettle 20,000 families displaced by the Syrian conflict (the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme) and an additional 3,000 at-risk children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa region (the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme).

There are now 43 families in Devon (excluding Plymouth and Torbay). We manage 29 of these families, the rest are coordinated by community sponsorship and our partners in Plymouth. We had seven new families who arrived this year. One family left Devon in early 2020. We were also delighted to welcome one new baby into the community.

*are gaining confidence and becoming independent members of their communities. They're able to book their own health appointments, be part of their children's school community, deal directly with their local councils and energy suppliers. This is a fantastic achievement as they all faced huge challenges settling into a new country and most families didn't speak any English when they came here,"* says Souad Fadel, one of our Resettlement Coordinators.

Tameem Shaaban, our other Resettlement Coordinator, adds, *"Many of the older families are indeed more independent of us; they have made friends, especially those who are working. Some of these families still need high levels of support due to serious health conditions, living in rural areas, and other long-term challenges. A few of the newer families have been able to stand on their feet more quickly as they've had the confidence to be out and about, they're generally younger and are able to absorb their new environment more easily. There are many factors at play here."*

*"Many of the families who have been here for a while*

*More families are now making use of our twice-weekly*



advice clinic (VPR clinic) at Exeter office – 125 people came to see us over the course of the year, with a total of 647 visits between them.

We and our volunteers have worked tirelessly with families to help them find jobs, volunteering opportunities, and apply for full-time education. Sixteen people are now either working or volunteering, three are in full-time education, three have a full UK driving licence and six more have passed their driving theory test.

As ever, we are very grateful to our volunteers' commitment and drive to work with families to make

them more independent and integrated members of their communities. We also work closely with Devon County Council, Devon's District Councils and a wide range of other agencies under this programme.

The Olive Tree, Hikmat and West Devon Safe Haven have provided regular support to families in the areas of teaching English, education, health and well-being, and practical advice.

We would also like to thank Exeter Mosque, Exeter Muslims Association, South Devon Islamic Organisation, Southgate Church, Exeter's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, EMTAS, Exeter Advancement in Life Charity, Exeter Relief-in-Need Charity, Dartington Hall Trust, LEAP, Newton Abbot Museum, as well as local support groups such as Ottery Refugee Response Group, Newton Crisis Aid, and Open Hearts Open Borders for their unstinting support of the families.

We feel privileged working with and supporting these families. We're looking forward to welcoming more people once the Covid-19 crisis is over.



# IMAN'S STORY

Iman and her family arrived in Dartington a few years ago under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and are supported by RSD. She began her volunteer work with packing fruit and veg boxes for the charity *Food in Community* based in Totnes. It seeks to reduce food wastage, food poverty and social isolation by collecting and redistributing mostly organic surplus vegetables and fruit that would otherwise have been composted or gone for animal feed or to landfill.



Iman helping at a pop-up fish and falafel stall.

Iman and her family now live in Newton Abbot. She has started a Food Hygiene course and is hoping to take a test once the Coronavirus crisis is over. Her voluntary work involves cooking. Along with others from the refugee community, Iman helped to cook Middle Eastern cuisine for a *Food in Community* café that originated in Totnes and spread to Newton Abbot. It

provides meals on a 'pay what you feel' basis for members of the public. The Middle Eastern lunch was a huge success and Iman remembers that "around 100 to 150 people attended".



Andrew Rose from *Newton Crisis Aid*

said, "The mums had a great time working with others to provide the food and what was even more pleasing was to see the children relishing their roles as waiters and waitresses."

Volunteering has helped Iman to improve her knowledge of the English language and customs. She's now planning on a career in catering and "to maybe in the future open a café or cook food for other outlets".

**Written by Yvonne and Leah Bearne, RSD volunteers**



# ALLOTMENT

*"I have volunteered on RSD's allotment since last summer. We've had a productive year in spite of the horrible weather. The runner beans and courgettes did well and we had lovely blackberries and apples in the autumn. It's always amazing to think that the tiny seeds we put in the ground grow and produce fruit with a little attention!"*

*"Horse manure and spent hops improved the soil considerably. In November, I attempted to rescue the strawberry beds by raising and covering them with a black cloth to get rid of couch grass, which was mostly successful. We had a tidy up day in November. Lots of people came to help which was fantastic. They also brought food to share which was excellent."*

*"It's lovely to see the variety of wildlife on the allotment, especially the birds and slow worms. I am starting to wonder if we could make space for a wildlife pond!"*

Mark, volunteer

We'd like to say a huge thank you to all those who maintain and develop our allotment. It continues to provide a small, but welcome oasis of peace and tranquillity to all those who go to it.



# EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

*“I enjoy the class with my teacher very much. We talk about lots of things, about Afghanistan and England. My English is better. Sometimes I think I speak better than my husband. Now I can drive.”*

RSD client on her one-to-one tuition with an RSD volunteer

We continue to provide English language teaching through one-to-one tuition and group classes. The teaching provided is carefully designed to help individuals gain confidence in using English in their everyday lives, seeking employment, completing official forms, doing voluntary work and furthering their educational prospects.

There have been exciting developments this year, most notably a new initiative to run a weekly Book Club. We're also working in partnership with another charity *Read Easy Exeter* to improve the literacy skills of a few of our clients.

We have around 30 volunteer tutors working with 27 clients in their own homes, as well as running conversation classes in Newton Abbot and Exeter. We are very grateful to the Mint Methodist Church Centre in Exeter and the South Devon Islamic Organisation in Newton Abbot for providing us with venues for our English classes. STAR (Student Action on Refugees) volunteers from Exeter University also did a fantastic job in helping out with the Exeter classes. A few of these students are Arabic speakers, which was invaluable for

individuals who really struggled with the English language.

We are working closely with two local language schools who have kindly offered free places to a few of our clients — wishing to pursue higher education — with General English and IELTS preparation. Other clients are taking the GCSE route in Maths and English with a volunteer supporting them in English lessons. We also have good contacts with Exeter University who have offered one of our clients a free place at a global conference (unfortunately the conference has had to be postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic).

We offer advice and support to individuals who are seeking vocational training or paid work. We've helped several clients to produce their CVs when they're searching for jobs. We are working with *Recruitment Solutions*, a recruitment consultancy, who are committed to helping our clients find part-time or full-time work. Sadly, our very experienced and capable employability volunteer left us in January. We're now in the process of recruiting at least one other volunteer who can work with clients in finding them paid or unpaid employment.



*"I have improved a lot in my speaking and reading and I have learned a lot about life in the UK, elections, climate change and helping my children with their reading. Thank you for your kind support to us."*

**RSD client attending one of our conversation classes**

## THE BOOK CLUB

*"Our Book Club for Refugees is held weekly at St Sidwell's Centre and runs for 1.5 hours. This new initiative began in October 2019 and has had loyal members ever since.*

*"I facilitate the Club. Having ten years of secondary school English teaching experience certainly helps. Each week, a different Arabic speaking volunteer from the University of Exeter attends to help with the finer points of translation – or with all the things that can't be mimed!*

*"On average, eight people turn up to each session. Most are from Syria, but there are a few from Sudan and Yemen. They are a lovely group of people, and they support each other's learning in each session. Some of them are very much beginners in English (still learning the alphabet), whereas others are pre-intermediate. I plan different resources for all abilities, often working on written and conversational skills. A typical session would involve vocabulary development; reading a few pages of the book as a group; written activities based on a need that's been identified (using prepositions, for example);*

*and discussions around the book's themes.*

*"All regular members have made improvements in their pronunciation, vocabulary, and ability to interpret simple texts independently. Group members are now more equipped to read signs and official letters, and can converse in English more confidently. "*

**Emma Draper, RSD volunteer**



Feedback so far:

*"I like the books."*

*"I like to learn new words."*

*"The best thing is practising English."*

*"The Club is perfect."*

**We're very grateful to Chris Hill, U3A and to Veitch Penny Solicitors for their generous donations to support our Book Club.**

# COMMUNITY EVENTS

We had a packed year leading and taking part in events to raise awareness of refugee issues and valuable funds for our work. We are extremely grateful to our supporters and volunteers who helped us to run these events.

During Refugee Week, we invited Jamie Jibberish, a humanitarian magician, to perform magic tricks and Devon's Shumba Arts to



was just the same mix of wonder and laughter. Shumba Arts also lit up the theatre with their energetic and joyful display of drumming and singing from across Africa. We also partnered up with the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) for a painting, drumming and story-telling session during Refugee Week.

Earlier in June, we had our stall at the Exeter Respect Festival, where visitors were challenged with the thought-provoking question of what they would take with them if they were forced to become refugees. This simple game was a good starting point for stimulating discussions and donations from the general public.



entertain children and adults at Barnfield Theatre. Jamie's show was an echo of what he performs in refugee camps in the Middle East and the impact on the children



We marked Holocaust Memorial Day in January with an exhibition stand at Exeter's Guildhall. It was a reflective time for our volunteers who staffed our stall as well as visitors who came to the exhibition.



Newton Crisis Aid (NCA) organised a beach games and picnic in June for refugee families. Families had to find their own way there by train. It proved to be a happy and joyous occasion. This inspired a few of the families to meet

up again in Courtenay Park for a picnic in the summer holidays. NCA also teamed up with the Newton Town Council and Museum to hold a craft workshop for a few of the families in December. Each family prepared a decorated box that reflected their interests and culture. These are going to be displayed and provide a focus when Newton's Place, the new community and museum centre opens. In February NCA arranged for three women to be involved with the Totnes-based *Food in the Community* which now runs a monthly community café



in Newton Abbot. This was a huge success as the women thoroughly enjoyed using their creative culinary skills to provide tasty and spicy dishes made from ingredients donated to the organisation. See Iman's story in a separate section.

As ever, we are extremely grateful to all organisations, churches and individuals who regularly organise events and raise funds on our behalf. Our story and work are so much richer for their involvement.



# A SNAPSHOT OF A FEW FUNDRAISING EVENTS



RSD stall at Kenton May Day celebrations. Tom Woodd, a supporter, also organised a fundraising five-a-side football tournament.



Jade Rossiter, a former RSD volunteer took part in the Santa Run to raise money for RSD.



Exeter Choral Society hosted a superb concert in December. In addition, Corinne Richards, from the choir, bravely had her head shaved to raise even more funds for our work.



Annual Shobrooke Bus Stop Bakery where volunteers sell baked home-made products. This is a much-anticipated event in the village where all the bakes literally sell like hotcakes!



Margaret Fingerhut, an acclaimed international pianist, played a special concert at the United Reform Church in Exeter in April.



Bee Harley and friends held a beautiful lunch-time concert at St Stephen's Church in Exeter in August.

# ALAA'S JOURNEY

Alaa was an RSD volunteer for 18 months. This is his story:

Alaa was born in Damascus in the late 1980s, and was a qualified plumber. When the Syrian war started, fearing conscription into Assad's army, he moved with his disabled and widower father to Lebanon. They lived in an unfinished apartment block and Alaa worked on vinyl artwork for vehicles. When his father returned to Syria for the funeral of a brother, the border was closed and he was unable to join Alaa back in Lebanon.

Heartbroken, and afraid of deportation to Syria, Alaa decided to go to Europe. He had saved \$1,000 but had to pay Lebanese Immigration \$600 to leave, and \$400 for a flight to Turkey. In Istanbul, he was lent money to pay a smuggler for a passage to Greece. He and other refugees boarded an inflatable dinghy, operated by an unqualified Kurdish refugee, whose only instruction was to travel west. It was February, cold and wet, and the rough seas were terrifying. Hours later, a coastguard vessel shepherded them to Lesvos. The Greek authorities then took them to a refugee camp. After four days, Alaa took a ferry to Athens.

As an asylum seeker, he couldn't travel to another EU

country. Macedonia, now North Macedonia, was not in the EU then, so he travelled to northern Greece, staying in squalid camps, assisting with translation and helping refugee families. But the border opened only sporadically. By May, the uncertainty meant returning to Athens and eventually to Thessaloniki where Alaa finally managed to fly to Berlin. The kindness of other Syrians helped him reach Paris. From thence he entered the notorious Calais 'Jungle', attempting to stow away to the UK because he'd heard that British people were kinder. After being ejected and beaten many times, he hid in a freezer lorry where he almost died of hypothermia and suffocation before finally reaching his goal.

Alaa is now on leave to remain in the UK. His brother, Bilal, arrived here in spring 2019. Alaa's father died in summer 2019; Alaa hadn't seen him for five years. His sister and half-brother are still in Syria. While Assad is in power, Alaa and Bilal can never return home.

Lynne McVernon, another RSD volunteer, wrote this extract of Alaa's life story while researching for her novel *Jigsaw Island*. Lynne said of Alaa, "*It has been an honour and privilege to meet this courageous, generous man. My précis of his journey hardly does it or him justice.*"



# STAFF AND DIRECTORS

We are fortunate to have retained our staffing levels through the year. Key roles of all our staff include -

- ♦ ensuring we provide excellent direct response to the needs of local refugees, asylum seekers, their families and other migrants who need our support and
- ♦ creating and coordinating teams of skilled volunteers to help carry out this important work

This year staff took up training opportunities in a wide range of areas to support their continued professional development:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| → Vicarious trauma awareness               | → First aid for mental health                         |
| → Connect 5 - mental wellbeing in practice | → Making every contact count                          |
| → Managing mental health at work           | → Iraqi and Sudanese cultural awareness               |
| → Managing volunteers                      | → Improving ESOL teaching—EFL, IELTS and pre-literacy |

We are governed by a team of directors, also known as trustees, who give their time unstintingly and for free to ensure that the organisation is run efficiently and effectively, and that we adhere to all legal requirements.

## Staff

Annette Hughes	Manager
Nelida Montes de Oca	Casework Coordinator
Denise Parker	Education and Employment Coordinator
Tameem Shaaban	Resettlement Coordinator
Souad Fadel	Resettlement Coordinator
Trupti Desai	Adminstrator
Nick Floyd	Administrative Assistant

## Directors (Trustees)

Jennifer Longford (Chair)  
David Mezzetti (Secretary)  
Chris Hill (Treasurer)  
Peter Bainbridge (until September 2019)  
Bob Mycock  
Elena Isayev (until January 2020)  
Liz Oxburgh  
Bernadette Chelvanayagam  
Shrouk Al-Sabbagh (from November 2019)  
Grace Frain (from November 2019)

# OUR HEARTFELT THANKS

We've had a dynamic year filled with splendid fundraising events and we are indebted to all the individuals and groups who raise fabulous amounts of money for us each year. We are so proud of this fantastic community support. We are sorry not to be able to mention you all, but you know who you are.

We would also like to thank our funders this year, including:

29th May Charitable Trust, ARM Trust, Ashworth Charitable Trust, National Lottery Awards for All, Central Exeter C of E Churches, the Cooperative Local Community Fund, Devon County Council, Didymus Trust, Exeter City of Sanctuary, Exeter Quakers, Exeter Relief in Need Charity, Exmouth Quakers, Garfield Weston Trust, Holy Cross Catholic Church in Topsham, Jamieson Bystock Trust, Lloyds

Foundation for England & Wales, Lush Charity Pot, Marsh Christian Trust, Mike Ellis Deceased Charitable Trust, Norman Family Trust, Newton Crisis Aid, Ottery Refugee Response Group, Souter Charitable Trust, St David's South Street Baptist Church and Swan Mountain Charitable Trust.

To them and to everyone else who made a donation to RSD... THANK YOU!

Our full accounts and report to the Charity Commission will be available from October 2020.



# FOOD FOR THOUGHT



*Eat With Us* is our first collection of delicious recipes by our clients from around the world. We are very proud of our book and are expecting there to be more of these collections in the future. You can order your copy by calling or emailing us. See the back cover for our contact details. We suggest a donation of £5 for each copy.

# THE 400 APPEAL

You have read the Review. Now comes the easy bit -

Join the 100+ already signed up and you will soon be one of the 400.

We launched our 400 Appeal last year. Our goal is for 400 people to sign up to a monthly direct debit of £10 per month (or any other amount) in support of the work we do with refugees, asylum seekers and their families. So far the response from the public has been fantastic. Reliable income, local support, credibility with national grant-givers - all these outcomes are at the heart of the 400 Appeal. Please don't delay. Sign up today. We need you.

It is easy to become a regular donor of Refugee Support Devon –

- ♦ visit us at [www.refugeesupportdevon.org.uk](http://www.refugeesupportdevon.org.uk)
- ♦ call us on 01392 682185
- ♦ set up a standing order with your bank to Refugee Support Devon, Cooperative Bank account number 6584 9280, sort code 08 92 99
- ♦ use the QR Code here to set up a monthly donation





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**Company Number 7731995**

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