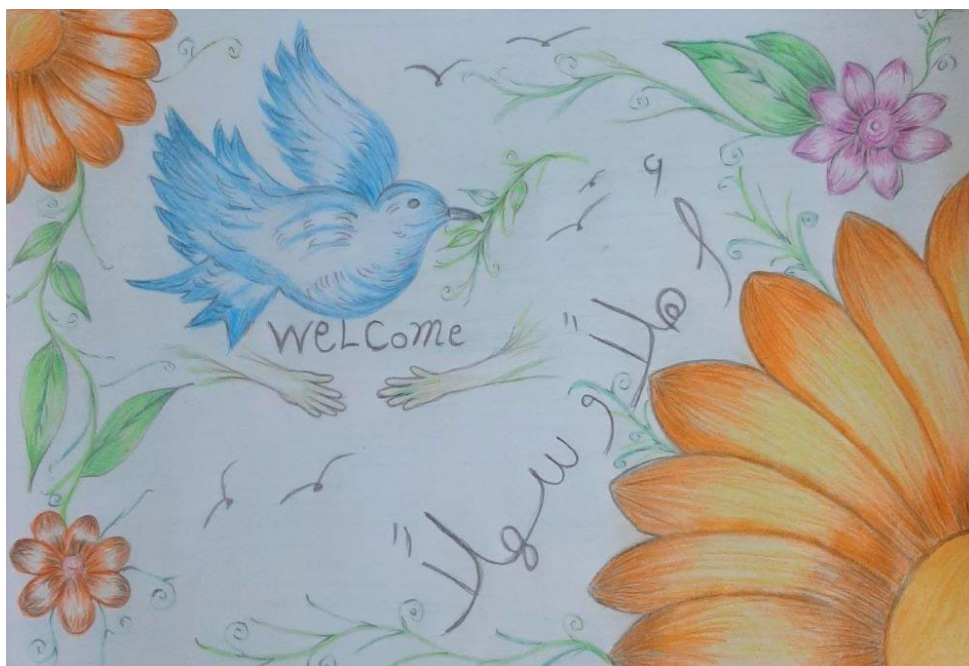


## Annual Report of Refugees Welcome Crawley 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021



### Report from the Chair

It will come as no surprise to anyone that the past year has been very challenging for everyone involved with Refugees Welcome Crawley, for our refugee families and individuals, our volunteers and RWC officials.

I am immensely proud of how everyone has risen to this challenge, developing new ways of working, keeping in touch with Syrian families and others we work with and maintaining support where need. As a group, we have done our best to keep a sense of community and to combat the isolation all of us have felt at some time or other during the past year and which must have been especially bewildering for anyone living without local friends or family nearby or adapting to an unfamiliar culture and language.

We have sent out regular communications on our Talk Club WhatsApp group chat, updating the government Coronavirus guidance in Arabic and English each time the regulations have changed. Our secretary Pam has sent out birthday cards and messages on the group chat to all the children on their birthdays throughout the year.

I want to thank each and every one of our volunteers, the trustees and steering group, all supporters of our charity and the partner organisations we work with including the Refugee Resettlement Team at West Sussex County Council.



## **Who do we support?**

We continue to offer support in various ways to 88 refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants. Of these 88 individuals, 67 are from the 13 Syrian resettled refugee families in Crawley, East Grinstead and Burgess Hill. We also offer support to 3 other individuals and one family with refugee status; 3 asylum seekers, 2 further families with limited leave to remain and another person seeking humanitarian protection. We also support a vulnerable person from the Mauritian community in Crawley and a resettled Sri Lankan family. Of these 88 people, just under half are children.

## **Who provides this support?**

Refugees Welcome Crawley has 37 volunteers on its database. Of these, 27 are actively engaged in volunteering and the other 10 volunteers have previously volunteered at some point during the year or are ready to volunteer again when a suitable opportunity arises. Najwa recently resigned from RWC after 5 years of interpreting and befriending families. The thanks expressed to her by the families included these words: *'Thank you, we appreciate every situation in which you were cheerful and kind-hearted. Thank you for the help you provided me with and your love for children. When they hear your name, their love for you appears in their smile. Thank you very much'*

Our clients frequently express their appreciation of all that volunteers do to support them throughout the year

***A huge thank you to all the volunteers who help in so many ways.***

## **How do volunteers help?**

**Over the past year, volunteers have been involved in these ways.**

Our volunteer **interpreters** have been absolutely crucial in helping Syrian families make sense of many key aspects of their daily lives, helping them to understand and manage medical issues, benefit claims, school meetings, job applications and much else besides. Special thanks go to Iyadh, Najwa, Layla and Maha and also to peer interpreters Azezah, Lina and Samar.

RWC runs two **English groups** on Zoom, a Men's English group led by Mark , with Roger and Iyadh supporting and the Women's English group led by Cathy with Ruth, Paula and Zinah supporting.



## Men's English Report 2020/21

*The group successfully transitioned to online learning from June 2020 in response to the pandemic. Mark and Roger share teaching role, with Iyadh interpreting when needed.*

*Lessons are weekly, currently on a Wednesday evening. On average 3/4 men attend. Numbers dropped during the first few months, 7 being the highest number.*

*There are some challenges ensuring learning resources engage all learners. Some learners have low level literacy in their own language, and there is a big gap between most advanced and the lowest level. There is a good group dynamic, relaxed, inclusive and fun. The most advanced learner supports others.*

*Lessons tend to be theme-based, embedding learning from previous lesson and then moving to a new topic. Online learning has been good for trying different media (You Tube, videos, visuals). Some challenges are presented with not being in classroom as it is more difficult to do group work/games, although we do try! Topics covered include introductions, family, numbers, alphabet, likes/dislikes, daily routines, work, shopping, directions, transport, home, health & wellbeing (5 Ways to Wellbeing). We ensure learning is relevant and useful for everyday life/integration, for example, booking appointments; Covid rules; Census.*

*Good progress is being made by regular attendees and some learning is being consolidated outside the group with one-to-one support.*

**Looking forward**, objectives are increasing numbers and the continued engagement and progress of current learners; focusing on certain topics over longer sessions – Work, Health & Wellbeing with the potential for a visit to the library or other venue.

**Mark Savage, Men's English lead teacher**

## Women's English Group

*Asked to reflect on our Women's English sessions, one of our group commented that they were the best lessons she participated in all week. This was very kind of her and the teachers can no doubt think of all sorts of improvements they could make but it is probably more useful to consider why she said this. Reflections on the year by one of the regular teachers, Paula suggest an answer. She said 'I think the thing that springs to mind so much about the women's group is how positive it's been with overcoming isolation. It is great to practise English and some students are really making progress, but I feel like our strength is the sense of community it gives to us. Especially this year, I think that's been really important, for all of us'*



*By the time we recommenced online lessons in September 2020 after the summer break, both the women and the teachers were becoming more confident with using the technology and as more laptops became available to the women it got better and better. There has been a core group of about five women who have attended almost every session and another four or five who have attended when they could.*

*Three teachers, led by Cathy, have also attended and helped planning nearly every session with excellent additional help coming from Zinah when she was free. Lina, Samar and Layla have assisted with interpreting when available. Recently when none of these was available, two of the group who have made really good progress, in the just under two years they have been here, have stepped up to help us. This has also made us focus on how in future planning we can facilitate the lessons to cater for a wider range of competency in English amongst the women.*

*The group has met every Tuesday in school term time. At the women's request we are currently having a short pause during Ramadan but we will recommence in mid-May with online lessons until the end of the summer term. No decision can be made yet about whether or not we will resume face to face or online sessions in September.*

**Ruth Longley, English teacher**

### **One -to-one online English learning support**

This has been given to 8 adults by 8 volunteers and homework support to 20 children by 17 volunteers, some of whom are helping both adults and children with their learning. Some of this support was given during the home-schooling stage of each lockdown and some is ongoing. We are most grateful to Adrian, Aiysha, Cynthia, David, Georgia, Jane, Kira, Margaret, Mo, Paula, Penny, Rachel, Ruth, Sue and Zinah for this support.

### **RWC learning mentor comments:**

**Paula:** *'I supported Rabah, Asmaa and Ali one-to-one. I think they found it useful, particularly when they weren't allowed to go into school. Having access to the work that their teachers set was really helpful. I enjoyed the one-to one sessions and I think Zoom works very well for this. At the moment I am supporting Ghada, though currently with a break for Ramadan.'*

**Adrian:** *'I've enjoyed helping Safwan with his English on a one-to-one basis. We meet once a week and talk about his daughter Rital's schooling, about one-year-old Bilal, and about the food he, Safwan, has been preparing (although I avoided the subject of food last week as it's Ramadan!). We practise telling the time and basic questions and answers to do with transport, visits to the doctor, favourite foods, plants, colours, animals etc. Safwan is an enthusiastic student and a pleasure to engage with.'*



**Ruth:** *'I find one-to-one lessons rewarding. Both the children and their parents are now on the whole very grateful and positive and they are making progress. Bit by bit we are being able to have useful simple conversations about school and life in general. The actual lessons are some of the most genuinely 'bespoke' teaching I've ever done! But it's been a very long process to achieve some consistency and it's needed determination to get there! (with essential interventions from Cathy and others along the way!).'*

We also ran a series of online group sessions, led by Bill, on passing the **Driving Theory Test**, which is a huge challenge for many of our resettled families because of the level of English language needed.

**Bill:** *'A number of the men and women want to take a driving test when they can. So when lockdown came last Autumn, we started weekly Zoom sessions to help them prepare for the Driving Theory test. I couldn't have run it without the help of Abdo and Samar, and also Azezah, who translated. All three had already passed theirs so they were very helpful indeed. In fact, it began to feel like a social gathering at times! By January, I wound it up, as by then we'd covered all the main Highway Code sections and run lots of Hazard awareness video clips. I sent attendees the links to the study material so they could revise these when their tests neared. Their success will ultimately depend on their English ability.'*

We are most grateful to those volunteers who are involved in **befriending** a family or individual. This is particularly valued by those individuals who are living here alone without any support from family or friends. It can make a vital difference to an individual or family's wellbeing to have someone keeping in touch, whether by phone call, message or meeting for a walk and chat. Heather supports three of our women in this way, meeting up for a walk and chat when restrictions and weather have permitted, and Cathy keeps in contact with others while Kate, Zinah, Layla, Miguel and Haydee have also provided individual and family support.

**Day to day support** for our clients is provided mainly by Cathy, often with the help of interpreters, and includes making medical appointments, requesting prescriptions, explaining medical letters and Covid test instructions; helping people manage their benefit claims including Universal Credit online; understanding their rent and council tax and also helping families to access and understand communications from school and college and set up meetings with school staff and parents. We have also supported families who have had to isolate with food shopping.

We recognise the importance of finding **employment** and have started to support individual jobseekers with creating CVs and making job applications. We have referred some of our refugee jobseekers to Alpa from the National Careers Service for CV writing and to Jo from Employ Crawley, a new employment hub for minority ethnic





jobseekers in Crawley. Cathy filters suitable job opportunities advertised each day and Penny, Iyadh, Maha and Mark have supported our jobseekers in making applications.

Many of our families have made remarkable use of their gardens and balconies to grow flowers, herbs and vegetables. Volunteers Ruth and Rose have started **gardening** again with one of the families growing vegetables in the Worth Parish garden. Many thanks to them both and to Father Paul at Worth. Mo is also growing tomato plants to distribute to the families. Mo and her husband Mike have also provided DIY help at very short notice, fixing curtains and curtain rails for a new house within a few days for a disabled Mauritian client, with Alex also contributing his time and DIY expertise, so that it was ready for her to move in.

Other activities include a weekly online **story time** for children, a well-attended and much enjoyed new initiative led by volunteer Kir, who reads the stories to the children.

Last month, we sent out a **Volunteer Survey** to which 24 volunteers responded. In answer to the question, 'How rewarding have you found your volunteering experience?', 46% gave the top rating of 5, 29% rated 4, 25% 3 and just one person gave the rating 1 (not rewarding).

Explanations for the top rating included:

*'(It is rewarding) to be doing something practical to support people and raise awareness of the needs of refugees. Mostly to bring some amount of happiness and show some dignity to other people beyond the label of refugee.'*

*'It has been good getting to know and help where I can, different people and their different culture. To try to understand their needs and be a friend when they have so little friendship particularly in last year.'*

*'It was a very pleasant, positive experience and I felt that it helped to deliver a warm welcome for the families as they 'found their feet'.'*

### **What links do we have with other organisations and individuals?**

The **Refugee Resettlement Team** at **West Sussex County Council** has an overall responsibility for the families who have been resettled here through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme over the past 5 years. That scheme ended last year and the first three families to arrive here have now applied for Indefinite leave to remain, the next step in settling here after their 5 year refugee status expires. We work in partnership with the Resettlement Team on various family support issues.



We also have links with **Crawley Jobcentre**. Four of the Syrian women have attended a series of Employability sessions run by the Jobcentre for minority ethnic women, with our volunteers interpreting and also attended by Cathy. We have taken part in surveys commissioned by the NHS from **Citizens Advice** on the provision of health care during the pandemic to minority ethnic patients and to the Citizens Advice focus group, putting the viewpoint of our refugees, especially with regard to the limited availability of interpreters within NHS services.

We are very grateful to Dave, **IT expert**, who has given his time and expertise to refurbish donated laptops and to Phil from **Computers4Kids** for the same reason.

Adam at **Deersleap Bikes**, Phil at **Bikes Revived** and bike renovation enthusiast Steve have been most generous in renovating bikes for us.

### **What about funds? How does RWC manage its income and expenditure?**

(See Appendix: Year End account)

***The RWC Trustees are extremely grateful to all donors, especially our regular givers and to our grant funders.***

### **Grants and donations**

During the past year, we received a grant from the **Sussex Community Foundation** of £3,500 which enabled us to provide a much-needed laptops for each of the resettled families in Crawley and East Grinstead. These laptops were an essential tool for online learning, especially during periods of school closure in the past year. Both volunteers and recipients of the laptops worked hard to learn new IT skills to access the new ways of working, not an easy task when all support had to be remote.

We were awarded a grant of £744 by the **West Sussex Community Initiative Fund** with which we were able to supply refurbished bicycles and new cycle safety equipment for 10 adult and child riders. Additional bicycle costs during the year came from RWC funds.

Our website hosting for the year was provided free of charge by **34sp.com** for which we are grateful.

A very kind anonymous individual donation of £500, intended for **funding future days out** was most gratefully received.

Many of our volunteers and supporters were also moved to make a designated donation to fund toiletries, phone top-ups and other essentials for the male asylum seekers who were moved from the appalling accommodation at **Napier barracks** to Tinsley House immigration removal centre at Gatwick.



The Year 6 students at **Milton Mount School** held an Apprentice Fair just before lockdown last year which raised a wonderful sum of £400. Some of these funds have been used to enable refugee children to attend after school sports clubs. This year the children are fundraising again for us this year with our '**Step into Spring**' fundraiser on **JustGiving**, after studying refugee issues at school, reading a book called 'No Ballet shoes in Syria'. Samar agreed to be interviewed by the children on Zoom and she spoke courageously and movingly about her family's experience of war and the decision to leave Syria.

At **Christmas** we were most touched by the donations from one family and a group of parents from **Worth School** which enabled RWC to purchase a generous Christmas present and sweets for every child supported by the charity. L.A. kindly donated fruit and chocolate biscuits for all the families and Suzaan and her family also kindly donated presents for our lone individuals and non-Syrian families.

We were also given a kind donation by the **Seventh Day Adventist church** to buy Easter eggs for all the children at Ester.

RWC has registered with **AmazonSmile** and with **Easyfundraising.com**, whereby these companies donate a percentage of the purchase price of goods bought online by anyone who signs up with RWC as the recipient charity at no extra cost to the donor.

Our '**Step into Spring**' fundraiser is live on **JustGiving**. The idea is to create your own challenge around the number 5 as we have been in operation for 5 years. This could be an active challenge- running, walking or cycling or a creative challenge. We have raised £175 so far and challenges have included sponsored cake making and an ultra-marathon run by Cathy's son, David, of 50 (5 x 10) km!

## **Expenditure**

**RWC day-to-day expenditure** includes support for asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants who are not permitted to work or claim benefits. For these individuals we provide limited support such as money for food, toiletries, phone top up or travel tickets.

Over the past year, we have accepted and distributed good quality toys, baby items and some clothes and shoes for those who needed these. We have a very good relationship with **Oasis Baby Charity** in Crawley, who provide free baby equipment for needy families.

We have also accepted, refurbished and delivered bicycles and laptops as mentioned above. These gifted items enable us to keep costs down when providing these items.





Expenditure over the year has included contributions to **household repairs**, such as electrician and gas engineer visits, and towards **replacement household goods** such as a fridge-freezer. One of our vulnerable clients was moved out of temporary accommodation into council accommodation this year which involved carpeting and other new home set up costs. We have applied for a grant to cover some of this cost.

We increased expenditure on **taxi fares** for visits to hospitals where public transport was not possible or appropriate and as volunteers were not permitted to drive our clients during the past year.

Finally, we have also paid for some **driving tests** for Syrian refugees wanting to drive and for **DBS checks** for new volunteers.

### **The way ahead**

We are looking forward to the year ahead with cautious optimism. We will continue to observe government and local council guidance on Covid-related issues, all of which clearly have a direct impact on the ways we can work together.

As we gradually emerge out of lockdown restrictions, we will carefully consider which of our pre-pandemic activities we can resume and in which ways we will need to adapt these. It is likely that our activities in the year ahead will consist of a blend of virtual and face-to-face support, assessing and managing risk to maintain volunteer and client safety as best we can at each step.

We hope to have a summer outdoor gathering in Crawley after June 21<sup>st</sup> when we can finally get together and celebrate all that is good about Refugees Welcome Crawley.

***Catherine Merry***

**26.04.21**

### **RWC Officers 2021-2022,**

elected at the RWC AGM 26/04/2021:

#### **Officials:**

Chair: Catherine Merry

Secretary: Pam Henderson

Treasurer: Alan Reuter

#### **Trustees**

Alan Reuter, Catherine Merry, Chloe Berrisford, Susan Joy, Richard Lawrence

#### **Steering Group members:**

Heather Allen, Iyadh Daoud, Mo Frampton, Ruth Longley, Catherine Merry, Samar Qrahmade, Mark Savage



## Appendix: Year End Account

		REFUGEES	WELCOME CRAWLEY	
	INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021			
INCOME				£
Donations				3603.00
Sussex Community Grant				3500.00
West Sussex CC				744.00
Milton Mount Primary				400.00
HMRC- Gift Aid				611.99
TOTAL INCOME				8858.99
EXPENDITURE				
Day to day expenditure for Refugees				4170.10
Bicycle costs				1104.92
Laptops				3509.99
Software				101.48
Driving test costs				238.59
Insurance				236.27
DBS				180.00
Room Hire				92.90
Tinsley men				424.36
New home set-up cost				700.00
Miscellaneous				50.86
TOTAL EXPENDITURE				9704.55
SURPLUS OF EXPENDITUE OVERINCOME				845.56
CURRENT FUNDS			BANK £3281.83	
			CASH £ 126.42	
Alan Reuter				
Treasurer				
Refugees Welcome Crawley				

