

## **TONBRIDGE WELCOMES REFUGEES ANNUAL REPORT**

### **TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT**

**December 2021**

#### **Reference and administration details**

Tonbridge Welcomes Refugees  
c/o Burns & Co  
2a Bank Street  
Tonbridge TN9 1BL

Registered charity number: 1173758

#### **Trustees:**

Jane Blessley  
Ruth Connelly (Chair)  
Jan Lloyd  
Nicky McGregor  
Lee Mead (Treasurer)  
Fiona O'Brien

#### **Term(s) of office:**

January 2019 -  
July 2017- July 2020, July 2020 -  
January 2020 -  
December 2018 -  
August 2020 -  
July 2017 – July 2020, July 2020 -

#### **Structure, governance and management**

Tonbridge Welcomes Refugees was registered with the Charity Commission as a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) on 11 July 2017. Our governing document is our constitution (foundation model).

#### **Appointment of trustees**

The charity's first trustees were Johanna Elderfield, Fiona O'Brien and Ruth Connelly (serving from July 2017 for an initial period of three years). Subsequent trustees are appointed by a resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the charity's trustees for a term of three years. Nicky McGregor was formally appointed a trustee at the AGM on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Jane Blessley was appointed trustee at a trustees' meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019. Jan Lloyd was appointed as trustee in January 2020 and Lee Mead became trustee and Treasurer in August 2020. Fiona O'Brien and Ruth Connelly were reappointed trustees in July 2020.

#### **Objectives and Activities**

Our charity's objects, as set out in our constitution, are as follows:

1. For the relief of those granted refugee status and their dependents, or those seeking asylum living (temporarily or permanently) in Kent.
  - The relief of financial hardship;
  - The preservation and protection of their physical and mental health;
  - The advancement of their education and training so as to advance them in life and assist them to adapt within a new community.
2. To advance the education of the public in general about the rights and needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

### Overview:

We work closely with Kent County Council and staff from their appointed social care provider, Clarion, to support refugees resettled under the government's **Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) which replaced it in February 2021** in our area of Kent, specifically in the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC) area. In 2022, we also hope to be supporting families under the government's **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ARCS)**. As Maidstone does not have a Welcomes Refugees Group, we have a group of volunteers working to support families within the Maidstone Borough Council area. Our Maidstone volunteers also work with some of our SVPRS families in TMBC, as sometimes their location is closer to Maidstone. The Maidstone team of volunteers complete their DBS with us. We also work very closely with our sister charities, Tunbridge Wells Welcomes Refugees and Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees.

We assist by assigning small teams of volunteers to support each family, by welcoming and befriending visits soon after initial arrival, sourcing household and other items, accompanying and/or giving lifts to appointments, advocating for their needs, all while cooperating closely with their designated Clarion support worker. Perhaps most importantly, we have an experienced and dedicated team of volunteer teachers who teach English to refugees, as a much-needed supplement to the English classes provided by local adult education providers and funded by the SVPRS and UKRS. More recently, we have identified secondary school children as a priority area, as they may arrive with beginner English, but they are placed into normal secondary school classes, sometimes with little support, so it is very difficult for them to access the National Curriculum.

## **Refugee resettlement in our area**

When the UK government expanded the SVPRS in September 2015 to accept 20,000 refugees, predominantly from Syria, by 2020, the founding members of TWR, successfully lobbied our local council, TMBC, to commit to a target of welcoming ten families under the scheme. Currently, there are a total of eleven properties let under the Resettlement Schemes within Tonbridge and Malling and Maidstone, providing homes for Syrian refugee families and a Sudanese family. The family units vary in size, but one young man who was originally resettled with his uncle and aunt's family now lives on his own. The first family who settled in Tonbridge in April 2016, moved in 2021 to be closer to friends and family members in the West Midlands.

Local landlords who agree to take part in the Resettlement Schemes, despite the fact that the funding only covers rent at local LHA rates (rather than a commercial rate), make the Schemes work. Thanks to them, families, who would otherwise be living in much worse conditions in countries bordering Syria or Sudan, are now living safely in our community and able to start rebuilding their lives.

As in 2020, in 2021 our operations have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, two families who were due to have arrived during the first lockdown in 2020 finally arrived in January and March 2021. They are settled in houses in Tonbridge and have their own family support teams and English teaching support is being provided to all the children and adults in those families who want it.

In January 2021, the Government introduced a new resettlement scheme, operational from April 2021, the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). This was designed to assist, "any current or former Locally Employed Staff directly employed by HMG assessed to be at serious risk of threat to life ... regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served." Examples of the people covered by ARAP include army interpreters, cultural advisers and individuals working in counter-terrorism roles.

In August 2021, in response to the rapid Taliban advance and the fall of Kabul, the Government introduced a further scheme, the Afghan Citizens Relocation Scheme (ARCS). ARCS is designed to provide support for vulnerable Afghan citizens.

The ACRS prioritises:

- those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law
- vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+)

These Afghan schemes have different provisions from those for the SVPRS and the UKRS. They provide for indefinite leave to remain to be granted on first arrival, with a path to Citizenship after five years. Under the SVPRS and UKRS indefinite leave to remain is only granted after five years. There are further differences in that the period during which support is provided by support workers is limited to 3 years rather than 5 years under the previous resettlement schemes. However, many of those arriving from Afghanistan under the ARAP are likely to have a greater mastery of English than those arriving under the SVPRS or UKRS. Representations have been made to the MP for Tonbridge and Malling, Tom Tugendhat, about the shortcomings of the SVPRS and UKRS in an effort to ensure the same mistakes are not repeated. The most serious of the problems under the SVPRS and UKRS are caused by the application of the Benefit Cap to the refugee family's benefits on their first arrival when they may have so little English it is entirely unreasonable to expect them to find employment.

TMBC have pledged to support the resettlement of five Afghan families under ARAP and the ACRS over the next five years. One property has been secured and is currently being prepared and it is hoped the first family will arrive in the next month.

## English teaching programme

For refugees and asylum seekers newly arrived in the UK, learning or improving English is vital to their future job prospects and longer-term settlement. **We support refugees' English language needs by running a volunteer-led ESOL teaching programme**, supplementing the official classes organised via the council.

Until lockdown in March 2020, we provided three forms of support:

1. Classes were held twice weekly in rooms kindly provided free by Tonbridge Parish Church,
2. Home visits from our volunteer teachers for those unable to access group classes for childcare or other reasons,
3. Some students were supported at school.

In March 2020 face-to-face classes stopped due to the pandemic. After we obtained grant funding for laptops for the families, we were able to continue to teach online using Zoom. Some families had insufficient skills or confidence to attempt this form of learning, but gradually more families are managing to take advantage of this help.

As of November 2021, nearly all adult teaching continues online, but since spring 2021, some teachers have been back in school to support both primary and secondary school students. We are very grateful to all the teachers who have familiarised themselves with new technology and continued to support both adults and children during this period. We hope to return to teaching in person with groups of adults in the future, but bearing in mind the medical vulnerability of some students, the need for them to travel on public transport and the continuing high infection rates in Kent, it has not yet seemed appropriate to return to teaching with groups of students in an enclosed space.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Dora O'Brien, who has taken over coordinating adult English teaching, and to Eve Otley, who has taken over coordinating English teaching for children and to their fantastic teams of teachers who all go above and beyond to support our families, even in these particularly challenging times.

The teaching team works very effectively to provide an appropriate and personalised approach for all the students including those who are illiterate in their first language and who find the official provision of ESOL does not meet their specialised needs.

**Employment opportunities for family members.**

In 2020, we reported that our priority for 2021 would be to help find employment for members of the families and we set up a Jobs Group to assist in this. Unfortunately, owing first to the lockdowns and second to reluctance by Clarion to share information because of potential problems with GDPR regulations, this has not been as active as hoped. Early in the year, Clarion found job opportunities for some of the men at a fruit and packing warehouse in Paddock Wood. TWR assisted by attending an induction and providing notes of the many regulations, which Clarion had translated into Arabic to distribute to the men working there. However, the work was short-lived for a number of reasons. The contract was zero hours one where shifts could be cancelled at very short notice making it difficult to ensure employees would earn enough to avoid the benefit cap, the hours were very difficult and the work very heavy. All those who started at the warehouse have now left and many found themselves work at a car wash company where the manager is an Arabic speaker. Other families have found themselves jobs in construction or with a local Council.

### **Befriending / social support**

There have been few opportunities to hold social gatherings this year because of the pandemic. TWR has reviewed the feasibility of gatherings on a number of occasions, but concluded that while infection rates remain high, it would not be appropriate to encourage purely social gatherings in an enclosed setting. Volunteers have kept in contact with families remotely, with doorstep/garden visits or socially distanced coffees when possible. Some family teams have organised outdoor visits to Hastings or to the Hop Farm for the families they support. TWR has provided lifts on a smaller scale than in earlier years especially for medical, dental, vaccination or other essential appointments.

### **Achievements and performance**

- TWR has supported refugee families in both financial and material ways by e.g. funding broadband contracts to enable them to keep in touch with loved ones, supplying household goods, bikes, computers, items of furniture and other needed items, many of which have been sourced as donations. We have also funded extra-curricular activities (such as football clubs or tennis coaching) which would otherwise be too expensive for our beneficiaries to take part in.
- Our **English language teaching programme**, which started running in February 2017, has provided refugees, many of whom have very little or no English on arrival, with expert, small group and, when appropriate, individual tuition. This has supplemented the official English language provision for adults. In the last year, TWR has also increased the number of school children

who receive English support. Currently, six secondary school children are receiving tuition and one primary school child. In total, volunteer teachers spend 33 hours every week in school term supporting children and 34 hours a week in term time supporting adults. These figures include contact time, preparation and travelling time. A grand total of 67 hours each week. As we are shortly expecting new families to arrive, there is room to recruit further teachers and we would also like to be able to offer more support for mathematics.

- In terms of **community engagement**, we were able to participate in Tonbridge Calling in August 2021. The TWR stall main activity invited individuals to look at items refugees might wish to take in a hurry when they were forced to flee, which were displayed in a suitcase. Participants in the activity filled in postcards showing what they would take and what they would be sad to leave. This activity attracted a lot of attention and some very moving and thoughtful responses from both children and adults. The event coincided with the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and many individuals approached TWR to make known their horror at what was taking place and promise support.

A few weeks later, TWR took part in the annual Dragon Boat Race. This raised a record breaking £4063.29 and provided further opportunities to make contact with the public and explain our role in helping in the resettlement of refugees. These activities require a great deal of organisation and hard work and the trustees extend their thanks to Nicky McGregor and her team of helpers.

Volunteers have been invited to speak at Tonbridge Parish Church and St. Stephen's Church recently about the charity's work and we are grateful for the churches' help in publicising the need for landlords to enable refugees to be resettled and for offers of help in finding household items for the families. Tonbridge Parish Church invited us to write an article for the December issue of Perspectives. This details our role in resettlement and includes a contribution from a family member of one of our resettled families.

## • **New Volunteers and Safeguarding training**

This year has seen a large growth in the number of volunteers joining TWR. There have been 23 new volunteers since the beginning of 2021 and 12 of those have joined since the fall of Kabul in August. Many other individuals have also made contact through our website and have offered help. Our robust recruitment process involving an application form, interview, the taking up of references and a full

enhanced DBS check for each new volunteer takes a considerable amount of administrative time and is ably managed by trustees, Jan Lloyd and Nicky McGregor. It is essential that TWR adopts this process to protect the vulnerable individuals settling under the Schemes.

In autumn 2021, TWR secured a grant of £1000 from KCC for the provision of safeguarding training for volunteers. It is, however, difficult to find suitable courses which really match the needs of settling refugees. The trustees are currently researching to find suitable courses to cover safeguarding for both adults and children and volunteers who have contact with families will be invited to do an online course shortly and to update their Prevent training.

We hope to deploy some of our new volunteers in family befriending teams shortly and we plan to adopt new methods with the families we support by encouraging them to become more independent by setting their own attainable goals and working towards them to improve their English, gain employment and the like.

We also wish to form a team whose function will be to help organise fundraising events and a second team to organise social gatherings and outings so the families have a chance to socialise which has been missed during the pandemic.

- **Fundraising:**

In late 2020, TWR launched a drive to encourage regular donations by its Refugee Pledge, asking donors to subscribe the cost of a coffee each month. This has been a great success. Our regular giving now amounts to £5142 per year. Our regular donors are now 160, up from 8 a year ago. Thank you to all of them.

- The Dragon Boat Race raised £4063.29.
- The Grants group set up in 2020 raised £3490 (£2490 from the Lottery Fund for laptops and £1000 from KCC for safeguarding training) in grants and continues to



find grants opportunities and make applications. The trustees would like to thank Philip Badman, Caroline Field and Farzana Mohamedbhai for their work.

- One of our ongoing aims is to minimise our running costs, we would like to say thank you again to Dominic Burns of **Burns & Co. accountants** for allowing us to use their office as a c/o address.

### **Financial review**

Our financial report provided by our Treasurer, Lee Mead, is attached.

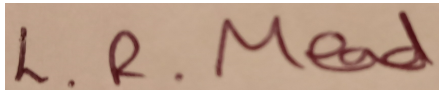
### **Strategic objectives for 2022**

1. To continue welcoming refugee families, including through our befriending and English programmes
2. To support refugees with educational and vocational courses
3. To maintain a hardship fund for families struggling financially
4. To encourage families to set and achieve their own goals, encouraging self sufficiency
5. To share more responsibility with family teams and other volunteers

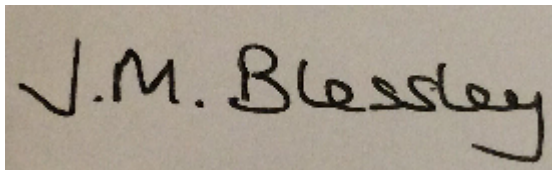
### **Declaration**

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

### **Signed on behalf of the trustees:**

<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Full Name</b>	Lee Mead
<b>Position</b>	Treasurer
<b>Date</b>	21 January 2022

<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Full Name</b>	Nicky McGregor
<b>Position</b>	Trustee
<b>Date</b>	22/01/2022

<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Full Name</b>	Jane Mary Blessley
<b>Position</b>	Chair
<b>Date</b>	22/01/22