

Annual Report for Refugees Welcome Crawley April 2021-April 2022



The past year for **Refugees Welcome Crawley** has been one of significant challenge and change. Our charity has come a long way from its early beginnings back in 2016 and the number of people we support now has increased beyond anything we could have imagined then.

When **Afghan** families started arriving from Kabul in September last year, we were part of a joint charities effort, overseen by the West Sussex

'Hope' ©Alisson H

County Council Refugee Resettlement Team, to supply clothing and toiletries for Afghan families in quarantine hotels. While many of these Afghan families remain in 'bridging' hotels waiting for long term accommodation to become available across the UK, we were pleased to welcome three Afghan refugee families into their new long term homes in our area. One of these individuals said,

'I came to Crawley from a hotel in London. When I got home, I was greeted very warmly by Crawley's kind team, who had kindly prepared everything that day, and a family from Syrian Kurdistan also brought us some delicious food for our lunch. There was a lot of work to be done after that day, but our kind family supporter worked hard, day and night to provide everything, which was done the best. We are very happy for living here. I would like to be a useful person in this city and serve the neighbours, the city and the people here. Crawley's Welcome Refugees Team is a really great team and I can say that this team is a role model that works hard for refugees and tries to solve their problems.'

Afghan families remain very concerned about family members back home in Afghanistan with little prospect of the situation improving in the near future.



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We endeavour to allocate a volunteer family befriender to each new family to help them integrate as well as offering one-to-one English learning if this is needed.

We continue to support Syrian refugee families as we have always done. Long term volunteer support for these families is varied as our focus moves on from the initial settling in process to empowering refugee families to manage all aspects of their own daily lives independently. However, limited English and the need to manage so much of daily life online now means that many still need support with accessing GP, hospital and dental services, communicating with schools, enrolling for ESOL classes, managing benefits online, applying for jobs and dealing with household bills and home repairs. It has been good to meet face-to-face again with these families now that the pandemic has receded though much of our support continues to be virtual, for example, with families checking in with their family volunteers on Zoom once a week, with volunteer interpreters if needed.

The most significant change for us this past year resulted from the Home Office decision to use hotels in the Crawley area for recently arrived asylum seekers. Initially we were called on to supply clothes and shoes for asylum seekers in just one hotel. From this point, our partnership with the amazing Cerian from Sussex Aid for Refugees, to meet these needs began. Residents at this hotel included Afghans whose stories were similar to those on the Afghan resettlement schemes but who had unfortunately not managed to secure a place on any scheme or safe flight back. We spoke to Afghans whose families had been targeted by the Taliban for supporting allied forces, perhaps just by offering them food or driving a delivery lorry to a UK or American base. These stories highlighted for us the callous disregard of current government policy in discriminating against refugees from troubled countries just because of the way they travelled here.

The number of hotels accommodating asylum seekers from many different countries – Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Iran, Sudan,



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Chad, Eritrea, Pakistan, El Salvador to name a few - soon increased from one to the six hotels housing around 1300 people which we now support. The scale of this work is such that with Sussex Aid for Refugees we are now jointly renting an industrial unit to store and process the clothes, shoes and other items for the many people - men, women and families with children - who arrive with very little or nothing. The messages we receive from people who receive these basic necessities from us show how much difference a touch of humanity makes in an increasingly unwelcoming environment for those who are seeking refuge here.

Since September Cerian has been managing first a temporary storage facility in Tilgate and now the Manor Royal industrial unit, sorting and processing countless donations of clothing with a small band of volunteers, selecting and labelling up individual bags to meet all the requests that come in to us by WhatsApp and email, ready for collection and delivery to the hotels by our kind volunteer drivers. Cerian estimates that she has sent out over 17,000 items since September fulfilling individual requests for clothes, shoes, toiletries and other items for around 1100 men, women and children as well as bulk deliveries to hotels of hygiene items, underwear and winter hats and gloves along with toys, balls, cards and other games, prams, school uniforms, Eid packs with dates, Qurans and prayer mats, Easter eggs for the children and Christmas presents. One of the typical messages we receive thanking us.

My package has arrived, thank you very much, and everything fits perfectly, I am very grateful!

In addition to providing clothes, shoes, toiletries and toys, we have also fulfilled some special requests such as a keyboard and a guitar for two talented musicians and art equipment for two skilled artists. Our joint charities have also supplied a number of smartphones which are needed to contact loved ones back home, communicate with the Home Office and access online learning and other information. A donation of refurbished laptops has enabled us to provide a medical



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research scientist, a language teacher and an engineer with a laptop to help them with their studies. The Home Office prohibition on asylum seekers working results in a massive waste of abilities and competences amongst this group of people while they wait so many months for their claims to be assessed and so the ability to keep up with their studies is very important for them to look more positively towards the future.

Thanks from a laptop recipient:

I cannot express my gratitude and excitement enough for having a laptop. Without it, all of these research wouldn't be possible. Not only research, but attending classes for instance -both English and medical- are much easier than it used to be. For an academic, a laptop is everything. I hope to be a prolific writer -as much as I can- And having a laptop is the beginning point.

The mental and physical wellbeing of the hotel asylum seekers inevitably deteriorates from living day in day out with such uncertain future prospects and reflecting on the traumatic events that led them to make such dangerous journeys to reach the UK. Together with the other agencies involved in promoting their wellbeing, we are trying to provide meaningful and enjoyable activities that can be accessed by all even though there is little or no space or provision for these at the hotels. We have provided table tennis table equipment, Carrom boards, footballs and donated bicycles and liaised with a local cricket club to provide an informal weekly cricket session accessible to two of the hotels. Thanks to generous grants from East Grinstead Lions and the St Christopher Trust, we will soon be purchasing other sports equipment including volleyball and badminton sets for the only hotel that has some outdoor space.

We are very grateful to the Bike Project, a charity that supplies refurbished bicycles for refugees, who have agreed to provide 25 bicycles for us; to the Sussex Police Property Fund for their grant to RWC for bicycle costs and to the Together fund at Active Sussex who have agreed to fund 10 bicycles. All our



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bicycles are given to hotel asylum seekers with full safety kit on a loan scheme to be returned to us when they are moved on to dispersal or other accommodation to be reallocated to the next person on our long waiting list. These bicycles make a huge difference to the wellbeing of the people who receive them as they are then able not only to benefit from the exercise of cycling but also to reach the town centre, English classes, college for those who have managed to enrol at East Surrey college and to get to their places of worship.

Our two charities have also networked with other local charities to offer volunteering opportunities to some asylum seekers since volunteering is permitted as long as it is for a charity rather than a business. One group of women has been cooking meals for the homeless and another person has been volunteering in a local charity shop. These opportunities help mental health and general wellbeing.

Asylum seeker volunteer's report

When I came to England in October 2021, I felt lonely and broken after a long and arduous journey. I emailed Refugee Welcome Crawley and requested essential needs like food and clothing. [REDACTED] came to my place, and without any questions, she brought me food, clothing and hope; I realized someone here cared about me. After that, I saw she tried to help everyone, talk to them, get them stuff and provide English books and English class. In February 2022, I asked her to introduce me to a charity for a volunteering job. She introduced me to Crawley free shop, and they accepted me to be with them two days a week. Working with lovely and kind people and feeling valued makes me stronger to continue my life that is full of anxiety. Nowadays, I learn a lot from them, and I can't forget their kindness never.

Refugees Welcome Crawley now runs five weekly face-to-face ESOL (English teaching) sessions, two at local church centres, two in hotels and one for children on Saturday mornings with up to 100 people attending in total across the week. In addition



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to these, we run three online Zoom classes at three different levels and one Women only group.

Belinda, one of our wonderful, endlessly flexible English teachers:

Face-to-face teaching restarted in February 2022 after Covid restrictions lifted. Classes are advertised in the hotels and students are encouraged to drop in (there is no formal enrolment procedure), either to classes held in their hotel, or in a meeting place such as The Charis Centre in Crawley. There is a face-to-face class held somewhere in the area every weekday. Numbers attending vary hugely week to week (40 +); it's hard to know whether this is because of the weather or any other number of external factors. But this is quite an appealing feature of the classes as it keeps the atmosphere informal and relaxed, students are very welcoming to new arrivals, and are excellent at helping new attendees feel included and valued. There is a real sense of community.

Students learn relevant everyday English such as greetings, describing health complaints, shopping, or describing emotions and feelings. The volunteer teachers use props, games, worksheets, books and role play to support learning. Students are roughly grouped according to ability; sometimes there are less able students within a group, but the stronger learners support them well. Students are encouraged socialise, and have the opportunity to ask for support regarding English learning or of a more pastoral/administrative nature.

Our objective is to continue developing a scheme of work which will work on a rolling 20-week cycle, and to add to the team of volunteer teachers and increase our bank of teaching resources.

Some weekly classes are also held online, using Zoom for groups, and also more frequently for individuals who have needed more intensive learning. Online and face-to-face learning complement each other well, and I imagine that both will continue well into the future.



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Rozina who runs the children's literacy support sessions:

The sessions started in May 2022 and have been a huge success. The classes are currently being held at the Crawley Museum. The sessions are informal based mostly around literacy activities for Key Stage 1-3, broken down into reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling. A volunteer tutor is paired with a group of students to work through the tasks that are individually tailored to their needs. We have consistent attendees that are working through the activities. Each student is given a notebook, which shows the progression they have made. Tutoring sessions help students improve their comprehension skills, build their confidence and improve

In recent months, Refugees Welcome Crawley is also part of the local support network for newly arriving **Ukrainian refugees** and their hosts. We attend the weekly drop-ins offered in Crawley and East Grinstead and Sussex Aid for Refugees has provided clothes, shoes, toiletries and toys to Ukrainian families who, in common with other refugees, arrive with little and need these items to help them settle in while they wait for benefits to be processed and work offers to be found. Unlike asylum seekers, Ukrainian refugees have the right to work and to apply for benefits and many of the refugees we have met have already started working. Those on the Homes for Ukraine scheme though not those on family visas are also eligible for initial extra help from WSCC Most Ukrainian refugees also want to learn English though some already have a high level and want to help teach others.

It has been extremely heart-warming to witness the outpouring of support and the open-hearted welcome from so many hosts offering their homes for Ukrainian refugees since the shocking invasion and ongoing war in Ukraine. At the same time, however, as the government supports Ukrainian refugee schemes, the draconian policy of relocating others seeking refuge from similarly terrible situations are being penalised and potentially removed to Rwanda purely because the journey they made to reach the UK can be deemed as 'dangerous'.



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Refugees Welcome Crawley is one of the charity signatories of the open letter to government opposing this brutal policy and we can only hope that the legal challenges being mounted against it are successful. We do not consider, if enforced, how relocating asylum seekers to Rwanda can achieve anything other than further harm to an extremely vulnerable group of people who deserve better than to be 'off shored' in this way.

None of what we do would be possible without our wonderful volunteers and our generous funders.

The first thank you goes to my long suffering and supportive husband, [REDACTED] who not only collects and delivers bicycles, clothes and other items but offers a supportive and encouraging ear at all times.

Secondly to my dedicated trustees, steering group and all our wonderful volunteers who give their time, dedication and compassion with endless humour and initiative.

I am especially grateful to Cerian at Sussex Aid without whose partnership we could not deliver the services to asylum seekers that help to make their lives bearable.

Thank you also to the many agencies who work with us in the multi-agency network, especially ABC Alliance for Better Care, hotel staff and WSCC Refugee Resettlement Team.

We are extremely thankful to our generous donors, both individuals who donate to us and to our grant funders including East Grinstead Lions, Worth Parish, Balcombe Community, Arundel and Brighton diocese, Milton Mount School and, in the new financial year, a wonderful donation towards education, wellbeing and other needs from the St Christopher's Trust and a further grant for bicycles from the Together Fund, Active Sussex. We gratefully acknowledge the grant award from WSCC which enables us to rent our unit.


Thank you all for helping us to build meaningful lives for the many refugees and asylum seekers we support, to spread hope



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and to build on a positive dialogue around migration and asylum in Crawley and surrounding area.


 Chair of Trustees
 Refugees Welcome Crawley

8/6/2022

Annual Statement of Accounts April 2021- 2022

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE TO	31-Mar-22
INCOME	
Donations	£7,413.29
D Atkinson	£1,700.00
Arundel&Brighton	£500.00
LEAP	£500.00
Side by Side	£350.00
Balcombe Community	£600.00
Worth Parish	£1,000.00
Al Zoghayyer	£1,000.00
Unison West	£250.00
WSCC	£25,000.00
HMRC	£497.75
TOTAL INCOME	£38,811.04
EXPENDITURE	
Monthly expenditure	£7,163.72
Hire of halls	£197.06
Insurance	£229.47



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DBS	£72.00	
Driving Lessons	£150.00	
Driving Test	£62.00	
Clothing for Refugees	£2,191.78	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£10,066.03	
SURPLUS	£28,745.01	
Refugees Welcome Crawley		
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH		
Balance at 1 April 2021	£3,281.83	
Surplus	£28,745.01	<i>I have examined these accounts, vouchers and bank statements and have found them to be correct</i> Signed Richard Holroyd FCIB DATE
TOTAL	£32,026.84	
CURRENT ASSETS		
Barclays Current Account	£32,026.84	



RWC

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE TO Mar 31, 22

INCOME

Donations	£7,413.29
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LEAP	£500.00
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Signed
Richard Holroyd FCIB
DATE

BANK RECONCILIATION AS AT 01 AUGUST 2020

Balance as per Bank Statement	£7,703.00
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Outstanding Cheques

01/08/2020	549	£33.75
01/08/2020	407	£7.15
01/08/2020	410	£133.05
01/08/2020	413	£43.75

Total o/s cheques	£217.70
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Bank Balance as per cash sheet	£7,485.30
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