



Chair's Report for Refugees Welcome Crawley May 2022 - April 2023

Overview

The past year for Refugees Welcome Crawley (RWC) has been one of significant expansion and challenge. Our volunteers have continued to welcome, support and improve the wellbeing of refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants in the Crawley area.

The number of **people we support** has continued to increase and now comprises 5 Afghan and 13 Syrian long term resettled refugee families, around 1800 people accommodated by the Home Office in 9 local hotels who are awaiting the outcome of their asylum claims and a small, more transitory number of vulnerable migrants needing, for example, support with destitution or homelessness and referral to other appropriate agencies.

Governance

The **governance of RWC** continued in the past year to comprise a Board of five Trustees including the Chair and Treasurer, a Steering Group of 9 members and a total number of 47 active volunteers including our Secretary and Admin Assistant. Volunteering roles include English class teachers, Children's literacy group tutors, one-to-one support teachers and Conversation group volunteers as well as interpreters, refugee family befrienders, volunteers delivering clothes to hotels and others helping with sewing, gardening, home preparation or charity events. We also have the support of a volunteer yoga teacher and two Art teachers both running free sessions for RWC refugees and asylum seekers. Many volunteers are carrying out more than one role or offering help wherever it is most needed at the time.

Thanks

The Chair and Trustees extends heartfelt thanks to all volunteers for their compassionate and dedicated support. Without this, Refugees Welcome Crawley could not continue to offer welcome to those seeking sanctuary here at such a difficult time in their lives.



Partnerships

Our charity works within a network of other local organisations and charities to support the wellbeing of people accommodated in hotels awaiting the outcome of their asylum claims. We work with **Sussex Aid for Refugees** (SAR) to provide clothes, shoes and multiple other items. Requests are processed by SAR lead and a team of volunteers at our Manor Royal Storage Unit. Items include maternity, baby, children's, men's and women's clothes for people seeking asylum who arrive with very little and cannot provide for themselves. New warehouse style premises will be required from August 23 when the current lease expires. Three RWC volunteers make weekly deliveries to hotels while another two join the SAR team of volunteer clothes sorters.

Several events have been organised by SAR in the past year for hotel families including a soft play session today for 110 refugee children and their parents, a children's party and deliveries of presents to children at Christmas and Eid.

We have also continued to work with a number of **local organisations and charities**, including **Alliance for Better Care (ABC)** who act as a link between vulnerable people and the NHS to ensure that people in hotels are accessing the NHS services they need. Their invaluable support to RWC includes the provision of vital bus tickets for people needing to reach hospital, dentist and GP appointments and urgent care treatment as well as to train stations for solicitor and Home Office appointments in cases where tickets have not been provided for them.

We attend a monthly **network meeting of local agencies** chaired by ABC, to discuss issues arising and offers of support for hotel people seeking asylum. The network meeting attendees include NHS social prescribers and representatives from SAR, Crawley Community Transport, Love Your Neighbour, Home Start, Happy Baby, Surrey Police, Surrey FA, Nuffield Health, SBHL (hotel accommodation management), Carers Support, Crawley Community Action, WSCC and local councils.



Our Activities

With the kind support of volunteer teachers, RWC offers a weekly women's **yoga/dance class** to hotel asylum seekers and refugees at Crawley library which is well attended and much enjoyed:

"I really enjoyed the yoga class because my teacher was great. As it's a healthy activity which is very important for everyone to live a healthy life."

The popular and friendly **Women's Dance** class led by two sympathetic dance teachers at one of the hotels offers a welcome opportunity for wellbeing to women in one of the more isolated hotels.

Two Arts teachers from Community Creations Art also offer a weekly **Arts class** in Crawley which is greatly enjoyed by a small group of attendees:

"As far as Art class, I'm learning a lot from my mentors and they've always encouraged me and appreciate my work. And I want to learn more new things from them."

A **Gardening group** continues at Worth Abbey under the leadership of two volunteer gardeners offering an Afghan and a Syrian family living in flats a chance to grow and take home vegetables to enjoy.

Two **Sewing Groups** have been offered by a lead sewing volunteer and her team over the past year, one for asylum seeking women and one for women at one of the Afghan 'bridging' hotels. There is both a practical and a creative need for these sessions as attendees, many with amazing tailoring skills, not only want to mend clothes but also to sew clothes for themselves and their families.

English (ESOL) classes

Our ESOL classes are run by a dedicated team of ten ESOL trained teachers and assistants. Over the past year we have offered up to 9 weekly English class sessions for refugees and asylum seekers of many different nationalities at three levels both online and in person at asylum hotels and in Crawley. We also run weekly classes for Ukrainian refugees in East Grinstead and in Crawley. All classes are well attended and much enjoyed by the learners who make progress with their English at the same time as benefitting from the social



interactions that come from communicating with each other in a welcoming environment.

This year also saw the addition of the **Horley Welcome Club** run by a group of volunteers in Horley offering a friendly drop-in group for English conversation and hospitality. This offers a much-needed opportunity to practise English for people seeking asylum who are accommodated in Horley hotels.

Club volunteers:

“What felt like positive interaction with the guests made me feel that we had shown that they were welcome here, despite government rhetoric.”

“Our conversation club is fun and very much enjoyed by our guests who are so appreciative and lovely to engage with. We all enjoy the meetings very much and I feel we are helping with their language skills and mental health.”

The **Children’s Literacy Sessions**, run by a lead teacher and her volunteer team continues each Saturday morning with a number of children from refugee and asylum seeking families benefitting from this each week.

Session volunteer: *“The literacy sessions have been particularly rewarding as the children are so willing to learn.”*

One-to-one learning support was also provided by four learning support volunteers-to school students needing help with their homework. All tutors report their students are progressing well and benefitting from individual attention.

A further six volunteer tutors have been supporting Afghan women one-to-one with English conversation. This is a vital link for these women who would otherwise be very isolated since having small children and babies at home makes it very difficult for them to attend ESOL classes outside their homes

Asylum support

RWC receives many requests not only for clothes and shoes but also for phones, laptops, bicycles, sports equipment, games, study books and sometimes musical instruments. We receive requests for travel



fares for essential appointments , health related requests as well as queries about English classes and access to exercise. With minimal asylum support income of £8 per week, asylum seekers cannot afford to fund any of these items themselves.

Many of our people in hotels are in desperate need of smartphones to communicate with family and friends back home by WhatsApp or email through the free wi-fi in the hotels as very few have any phone credit. Phones are also essential for receiving text or email communications from the Home Office or solicitors as well as for any online study or Zoom classes.

For similar reasons, especially for people who were studying back in their home countries, we receive many requests for laptops or tablets. We received a generous donation of Chromebooks from Tesco via Level Up charity during the year and hope to access more charitable donations of this kind in the year ahead. We have received amazing support from a local IT expert who kindly gives his time and expertise for free to repair and refurbish donated laptops for us to pass on to a small number of the many people on our waiting lists.

We also have a very long waiting list for bicycles and have received two donations of 25 bikes in the past year from the Bike Project. Sadly, this enterprise has halted their bicycle donations programme for the time being. We accept and refurbish pre-loved bikes with the generous help of a local bicycle enthusiast and another volunteer who manages basic repairs. We received a very welcome bicycle grant this year from Active Sussex to help with the cost of safety kit – helmet, lock, lights and hi-vis- without which we cannot donate a bicycle to anyone needing one. We have been offered some bicycles by WSCC which we are starting to allocate now that we have grant provision for purchasing more safety kit.

Resettled Refugee Family Support

Since the arrival of the first Syrian refugee families in 2016 right up until the summer of 2022, RWC volunteers have continued to help integrate a total of thirteen Syrian and five Afghan families, preparing their homes by painting and constructing furniture, welcoming them on arrival and helping with the initial settling in process. Some of these families still have a volunteer befriender who



continues to visit and assist householders with managing bills, benefit payments, communications from school, medical appointment, prescriptions and other issues. It has been very rewarding to witness families becoming gradually more settled, with children in particular speaking English fluently, parents finding work, passing driving tests, redecorating their homes and in some cases acquiring British citizenship. Resettled families have also celebrated one wedding and the arrival of eight babies during these years. In the past year, families and volunteers came together for both Christmas and Eid celebrations, notable for the wonderful Syrian and Afghan dishes that are shared with guests.

Family befriender: *"It has been a pleasure to see the family grow, improve in speaking English, have more confidence with things like making telephone calls and hear how the children are progressing at school as well as their hopes for the future. I feel happy that I am able to help them in some small way, to hopefully feel better supported in their adjustment to life in the UK."*

Grants

We are extremely grateful for the grants we have been awarded in the past financial year as well as donations from individuals without which we could not begin to offer all the services detailed above. In particular, we gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance we have received from

West Sussex County Council (previous year award)
St Christopher's Trust
Balcombe Parish Council
Milton Mount Primary School
Active Sussex, Sport for All
Ifield Community College
Cuckfield Church
Balcombe Walk fundraising event

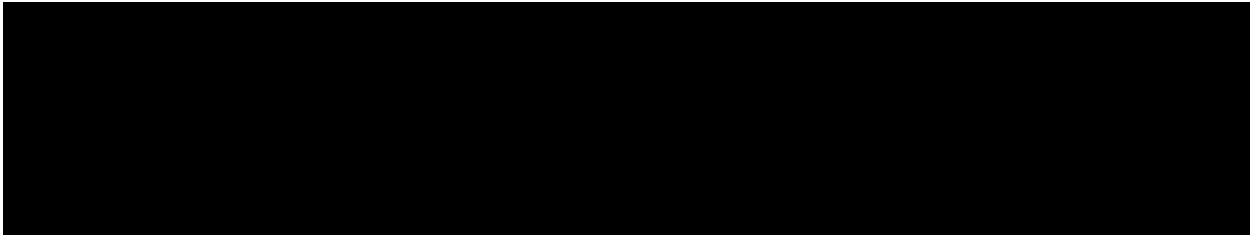
Annual Accounts 2022-2023(attached)

Expenditure for the year at £39,585.19 exceeded income of £23,892.06 leaving a deficit of £15,693.13, reflecting the significant increased demands on the outgoings of the charity associated with the high number of asylum seekers needing support and including the rental cost for our clothes storage unit. A balance of £32,026.84



from April 2022 ensured that the charity balance for the end of this year stood at £16,333.71. Income from grants, donations and fundraising and expenditure on the charity's activities and services will continue to be carefully managed by the RWC Trustees in the year to come to ensure that we can continue to provide this ongoing support to our clients.

RWC Officers 2022-2023:



Year ahead

The year ahead looks set to be one of equal challenge and some uncertainty. The changes to asylum policy intended by the current government will clearly have a significant adverse impact on people coming to the UK to seek sanctuary if they pass into Immigration law. Our support for these men, women and children who are already here will remain constant and we will continue to help those who come after them in whatever ways we can.

Grateful thanks from the Chair and Trustees to all who have supported Refugees Welcome Crawley in so many different ways during the past year.

From people we support:

You are the great organization that provides humanitarian assistance to the refugees here. I am unable to express my gratitude to you for all the help you give me.

Thank you all that provide for us.

I will never forget your kindness ☺♥

And from our volunteers:



It is encouraging to see the work of the RWC has improved all aspects of the welfare of Refugees being supported. I feel humbled to be contributing a small part of the good support being given by RWC group to the Refugees in Crawley.

It has been so interesting meeting new people and listening to their stories. I can see that some of the help I give makes a difference to people's lives; I find that rewarding.

(Our aim:) 'To be welcoming through acts of kindness so that people who have suffered trauma and injustice know that there is hope for them and a chance to 'live' life rather than just existing.

[Redacted]

Chair

Refugees Welcome Crawley

24.07.2023



RWC
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE TO 31-Mar-23

Treasurer

Date:

INCOME

Donations	£8,292.64
D Atkinson	£1,200.00
St Christophers	£6,000.00
Just Giving	£1,214.41
PCC Sussex	£500.00
Greensand	£1,005.63
Sussex Sport	£1,000.00
C Jordan	£1,250.00
lfield Community	£810.00
Astra ReCycling	£1,069.70
HMRC	£466.68
Cuckfield Church	£1,083.00
TOTAL INCOME	£23,892.06

EXPENDITURE

Monthly expenditure	£16,939.70
Hire of halls	£2,323.63
Insurance	£368.98
DBS	£72.00
P+H (storage Unit)	£11,000.00
Asda (vouchers)	£670.00
Clothing for Refugees	£1,678.96
Activities (Dance&Yoga)	£1,795.68
Leeli cycles	£1,431.51
Just Giving	£216.00
WSSC	£388.00
Migrant Help	£342.06
Volunteer expenses	£1,509.77
Miscellaneous	£848.90

TOTAL EXPENDITURE

£39,585.19

DEFICIT

£15,693.13

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2023

Balance at 1 April 2022

£32,026.84

DEFICIT

£15,693.13

TOTAL

£16,333.71

CURRENT ASSETS

Barclays Current Account

£16,333.71

Signed