

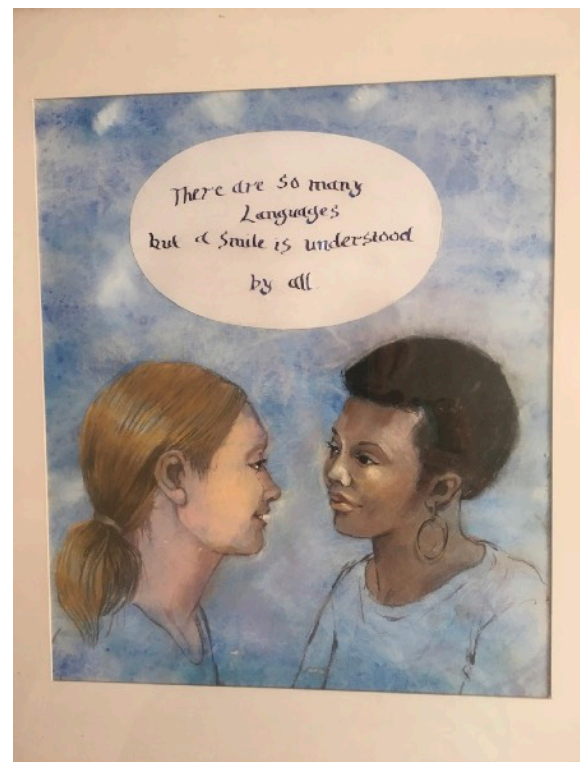


This is the first of our new quarterly newsletters for members and friends of SWVG. We aim to keep you up to date with SWVG news and events and with national policies that affect the asylum seekers and refugees we support. We also want to celebrate their many talents. If you have a story you would like to share, please contact news@swvg.org.

BREXIT AND THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Addressing a packed audience at the annual general meeting on 3 December, SWVG's legal advisor Jo Renshaw, head of immigration at Turpin and Miller LLP, spelled out the consequences of the Government's 'hostile environment' for migrants and warned that things could get worse after Brexit.

Since 2012 when Teresa May, then Home Secretary, announced the aim to create a 'really hostile environment for illegal immigration', Jo Renshaw said bank staff, landlords, doctors and employers have all become involved in enforcing Government regulations. As a result, anyone who cannot prove their right to be in the UK is shut out of services. Some landlords are so fearful of being fined for housing an 'illegal' migrant that they will not accept any tenant who cannot produce a British passport and the number of rough sleepers has increased sharply. Asylum seekers have become afraid of seeking hospital treatment, even in emergencies. For those without leave to remain, it has become a criminal offence to work. Even the terminology is more hostile. Instead of having 'temporary admission' while their cases are heard, asylum seekers are granted 'immigration bail'. *(continued on p.2)*



Speaking without words

Before seeking asylum in Britain, Henrietta was a secretary and book-keeper and had never done any painting or drawing. She went to her first art class a year ago and has already proved to be an accomplished artist. Henrietta, who has also qualified as a counsellor, designed this poster to show the value of friendship.

The Windrush scandal was one result of these draconian measures but Ms Renshaw warned there would be others. 'The next group to worry about are European nationals,' she said. 'After Brexit, their status won't be on a paper document; it will be on an app.'

She said that very little had been said about immigration policy after Brexit but the signs were not good. Although the Government has no plans to come out of the UN Refugee Convention, many of the existing safeguards for asylum seekers spring from European regulations. These include detention to be used only as a last resort, the provision of ID cards and free schooling for children of asylum seekers. Humanitarian protection, granted to those not deemed eligible for asylum yet in danger of serious harm, similarly derives from a European directive and could therefore be at risk.

Despite this negative prognosis, Jo Renshaw said it was heartening to work with a group like SWVG which is so supportive of people seeking refuge.

The perilous road to safety

Rachel Masker joins a packed audience to hear the tale of a former child refugee

Former child refugee Gulwali Passarlay spoke to a sell-out audience at Winchester Discovery Centre on November 1.

His deeply-moving talk, arranged by SWVG events group, raised awareness of the plight of unaccompanied child asylum seekers forced to leave their homes and families as well as the small acts of human kindness that promote a more welcoming environment.

Gulwali was sent away from Afghanistan at the age of 12 by his mother to save his life after his father and grandfather were killed by the US Army and several uncles joined the Taliban.

Making a perilous journey to the UK over the course of a year and through eight countries,



Gulwali Passarlay signs a copy of his book for SWVG patron Dr Shirley Firth

Gulwali suffered hunger, spent time in prisons, trekked across mountains without food or water and nearly capsized in a tiny, over-loaded boat crossing the Mediterranean. Like thousands of other migrants, he could so easily have died but somehow survived.

After a hellish month in the 'Jungle' at Calais, he finally made it to Dover in the back of a refrigerator lorry.

Gulwali told the audience he owed it to those who didn't survive or make it to safety, to tell his story and "be a voice" or advocate for refugees, calling for Britain and Europe to do more to help.

The only time he nearly lost hope and attempted suicide was after Kent social services refused to believe he was only 13, which meant he was housed with adults and couldn't go to school. After a long battle, officials eventually accepted his true age, he was fostered, went to school and went on to win a place at Manchester University to study politics. He was also granted asylum.

For those who missed the talk, read his brilliant memoir 'The Lightless Sky, My Journey to Safety as a Child Refugee'.

Date for Diary: John Pilkington's talk on his travels to Eritrea and Ethiopia. 24 Jan at 7.30pm. Avenue St Andrews Southampton.

Suba's handmade flowers

Suba, a refugee from Sri Lanka, is full time carer for a disabled friend of the family. When he became wheel-chair bound, she gave up work to look after him and wanted something she could do at home. She started to make flower displays out of fabric and recycled plastic. It was an idea borrowed from her father who used to make garlands for their local temple and continues to do so in Canada where he has asylum.



As well as the frangipane, hibiscus and jasmine she remembers from home, Suba produces bouquets of English flowers such as the crocus, daffodil and iris for display at weddings and other special occasions. Her SWVG visitors helped her produce a brochure and she sold her flowers at the Christmas market in Romsey.



A skilful craftswoman, Suba is also a dress-maker and has recently turned her hand to cushion covers. She would like to study upholstery but there are no nearby courses.

If you want to commission her work, you can email subascrafts@gmail.com



Tereza's pumpkin pie

Tereza keeps home traditions alive with this traditional Armenian dish - a pumpkin stuffed with rice, dried fruit, butter and honey and baked in an oven. She and her son and daughter-in-law were supported by SWVG for 18 months before getting leave to remain.

New chair and trustees

At the AGM, deputy chair Angela Sealey thanked Anne Leeming for her steady hand in the chair over ten years of growth and change. During that time SWVG has opened its first hostel, started to offer English language tuition, expanded activities including the use of an allotment and hosted a visit by the immigration minister Caroline Nokes. In the last year, a dozen new visitors were trained and another 15 have signed up for training this month.

Chris Stephens takes over the chair, and his role as lead co-ordinator is taken by Claudia Glyn. Catherine Hartley, William Brook-Hart and Chris Holloway have joined the board of trustees.

Minutes of the AGM are available on the website: <http://swvg-refugees.org.uk>



Rosa and Baila took part in an SWVG outing to Winchester's Christmas market. Guided round by local members, they started at the museum where they watched an introductory video and admired artefacts such as the Roman mosaic and a penny farthing. Then they strolled along the river Itchen - a tranquil contrast to the bustling market stalls and whirling ice skaters at the Cathedral Close.

Donations

Mrs Celia Middleditch £1,000
 New Forest Agricultural Show £50
 Southampton Quakers £736
 Mrs Wendy Draper £500
 St Matthew with St Paul's £100
 St Lawrence Church £540
We would like to thank all those individuals who make regular donations.

Grants

Observer Trust £800
 The Grail Community £10,000
 Sheba Trust £500

Fundraising events

Southampton Quiz £240
 Gulwali Passarlay talk £1,646
 Collection at concert £621
 University of Southampton Xmas quiz and Rob North's football tournament £280

Asylum News

- Cost and fears about how they will be treated, or consequences for their immigration status, prevent people seeking or refused asylum from using health services. This is the conclusion of a recent report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, prompting a call for greater separation of the immigration and healthcare systems. Barriers to healthcare include the cost of travel and prescriptions, NHS charges and concerns about data sharing with the Home Office.
- The NHS, UCL-Lancet Commission on migration and healthcare warns that stricter immigration rules increase the costs and risks for health services and reduce GDP. In a review of six European countries including Britain, the Commission debunked some of the myths around migration, reporting that migrants are healthier and have fewer children than non-migrants.
- The Home Secretary Sajid Javid has said there are no plans to lift the ban on asylum seekers working in the UK while waiting for a decision. He made the comment during the parliamentary debate on the Brexit withdrawal agreement but said he would like to review the ban. SWVG is one of the organisations campaigning for the right to work.
- Police will no longer check the immigration status of victims of crime and share the information with deportation authorities. Police chiefs in England and Wales agreed to stop officers from checking the national database simply to see if someone had leave to remain in the UK..

Listeners

The Listeners (www.thelisteners.org.uk) is a small Christian charity in Southampton which gives grants to relieve poverty and has responded positively to a number of requests from SWVG. Liz Statham says, 'My client is a Christian with two teenage children. She has received two lots of funding totalling £400 to enable the family to get to events and outings. The funding has been invaluable, particularly for much needed hospital visits'.