



SWVG becomes new charity

At our general meeting on 1st April, members voted unanimously to set up a new charity but with the same name. By becoming a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), SWVG will be able to enter into contracts in its own name and trustees will have limited or no liability for debts.

Chris Stephens, SWVG chair, explains, "This cuts out the need to register with and report to Companies House. It has several benefits including reduced administrative burden."

Trustees have drawn up a new constitution based on a Charity Commission model. This states that the objects of the CIO are: "For the relief of need, hardship and distress in the UK amongst refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants by providing such charitable assistance as the trustees think fit, including providing such persons with advice, assistance, representation, counselling, in matters such as money, debts, welfare, benefits, housing, health, asylum, immigration, education, training and employment".

People are eligible for membership if they are active volunteers and have undergone training. A committee will be set up to consider a suggestion that membership be extended to include asylum seekers and refugees who receive our support.



All aboard

with Sue Jessup and Celia Cox

A group of sanctuary seekers and their visitors went to the market town of Romsey in February. We had a lovely afternoon starting with a visit to the restored Romsey Signal Box where everyone had fun ringing bells and pulling levers to operate signals and points.

We also visited Romsey Abbey and admired the embroidered curtain of the saints. In the War Memorial Park we saw the bronze warhorse statue commemorating the 120,000 horses which were trained in Romsey in the first World War before being sent to France. We all had a go exercising in the outdoor gym and finished with a hot drink in Asanti café.

We are looking for ideas for other enjoyable and low-cost activities. Do let us know: Sue at smjessup01@gmail.com or Celia at cox.hear@btinternet.com.

Forced removal from the UK



Last month a select committee of MPs condemned the Home Office for its “shockingly cavalier” attitude to the use of immigration detention. Now, newly released data shows that detainees are being hospitalised at the rate of almost one a day, raising concerns over the safety of vulnerable people.

At SWVG we have recent experience of the detention and removal of a vulnerable woman we have supported.

When M went to report as required to the police station she was served with a notice informing her she would be removed from the United Kingdom within the next few weeks. At the time she was trying to find evidence for a fresh asylum claim, having been initially refused. After one night in a police cell she was released but remained in a state of high anxiety, knowing that at any time of day or night she could be picked up and detained or put on a flight to the country and dangers she had fled.

Two months later she was again served with notice of removal. Her solicitor submitted a fresh asylum claim on her behalf but M was arrested again and taken to Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre near Heathrow. An expert who assessed her mental state expressed extreme concern.

After five days she was moved to Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre in Bedfordshire. By this time, the Home Office had acknowledged receipt of her fresh asylum claim and her solicitor investigated the chance of getting her bail while starting the process of seeking a judicial review. Four days later, M was again released without explanation. She was traumatised, and her mental state deteriorated further.

When the fresh claim was refused two months later, M was arrested a third time and taken to Colnbrook. The notice of liability of removal set out a 16 day removal window*. Her solicitor prepared to apply for an injunction to prevent this, requesting that M’s mental state be assessed by a doctor to determine whether she was fit to be detained under rule 35 of the Detention Centre Rules. However, time was running out.

Again M was transferred to Yarl’s Wood but without her medication. She became nauseous and dizzy. Because she had been given no specific date and time of removal, her application for an injunction was rejected. Next day she was woken at 3am and taken to Gatwick. She asked for her medication but was told that she could be removed without it. A nurse at Yarl’s Wood contested this, but was ignored. Her solicitor re-applied for an injunction but it was too late. The flight took off shortly after 11am, with M on board.

Throughout this terrifying period, M was in almost continuous contact with SWVG by phone and text, and her pleas for help became ever more frantic. She was supported by her SWVG visitor and back-up visitor, and members of the teaching team who had come to know her well. Each of them played a role in providing her and her distraught family with practical and emotional support. They liaised with M’s solicitor and with the SWVG coordinators, visited M in detention and took relatives to see her. In a dual approach, while protesting against her treatment and removal, they also contacted a charity in her country of origin who would help if the worst came to the worst. Members of this organisation were indeed able to meet her at the airport and offer some support to ease her return. However, being powerless to prevent her eventual removal was a devastating blow for all those closely concerned.

*Since 2015, the Home Office has been able to inform someone they are *liable* to removal, and then remove that person without further notice at any point during a removal window of up to three months. This is subject to a legal challenge.

Chris Stephens reports on his first months as SWVG chair

I took over chairing SWVG from Anne in December. What has impressed me is the commitment of the members, whether they are working with clients or supporting the organisation. Whether this is going the extra mile with a client, the energy of the coordinators, training new members, running support groups, managing the money, raising funds or developing communications – people are very committed and generous with their time. So thank you all.

I have chaired three meetings of the executive and we have also had an away day meeting. There are a number of new trustees on the executive and they bring different perspectives and enthusiasm which when combined with the experience of longer serving members I think makes an effective team.

At the away day in February we spent some time thinking about what the purpose of SWVG should be, particularly as the organisation has grown and the language tuition has taken off so well.

We came up with:

- Support people seeking sanctuary to resolve their asylum/human rights claim
- Relieve hardship and suffering
- Empower clients who may have been traumatised, be isolated, or destitute, and may have a mental or physical health problem.
- Help clients to develop a reasonable quality of life, before and after decision on Leave to Remain.
- Influence public policy and raise awareness of asylum issues.
- Raise funds to enable these activities.
- Build a strong relationship with other organisations working collaboratively.



We also thought about what we mean by a “client” and a “language student” and how we might involve them more in the organisation. We struggled to find a better word for “client”. These following definitions are broader than the criteria we currently use.

A client:

- Asylum seeker with an active or nearly active claim and receiving a service from SWVG.
- Lives in Southampton asylum dispersal area.
- Other ex-asylum seekers who have got leave to remain, but their financial support may be time limited.

A student

- A person seeking asylum with no or poor English and receiving a service from SWVG.
- A person with connection to the asylum world with no or limited access to suitable English language lessons.

A small working group has been set up to take these ideas forward.

We will be working on the outputs from the away day and how we explore and develop those ideas into our practice. There is lots to do: working with our partner organisations, exploring ways of hearing the client’s voice more effectively, encourage more diverse and younger members to become involved in SWVG, sorting out the members’ web site and updating policies so they remain relevant to our work.



As part of the Lift the Ban coalition, SWVG is campaigning for asylum seekers to have the right to work. MPs Christine Jardine and Catherine West have tabled private member's bills which would allow them to

work after three months.

SWVG has submitted a briefing note to MPs in the Winchester and Southampton area setting out the case for lifting the ban. For more information, please visit the campaigning page of the SWVG website.

Report from the treasurer on funds received, with thanks for this generous support to SWVG

Donations

St Peters RC Church £1,500
 Anonymous £1,000
 Lymington Quakers £44
 Mrs Wendy Draper £250
 Pro Vision Town Planners £750
 St Lawrence PCC £160
 H Martineau £200
 A family trust £10,000
 J Sanderson £250

Grants

St Clare and St Francis Trust £500
 Tolkien Trust £20,000
 Bromley Trust £15,000

Fundraising events

Southampton Art House cafe quiz £234
 Sponsored walk £656
 Anne's book quiz £536

Asylum News

- Data released by the Home Office reveals that sick and distressed inmates of immigration detention centres are admitted to hospital at the rate of almost one a day. This was revealed in the Observer newspaper on 7th April after a Freedom of Information request.
- The Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) has published a damning report into immigration detention, describing the Home Office's approach to this practice as "shockingly cavalier" and calling for an end to the use of indefinite immigration detention. The Committee warns that the 'utter failure' of the Home Office has led to serious problems with almost every aspect of the immigration detention system. As well as calling for an end to indefinite detention, the HASC recommends implementing a maximum 28-day limit on the time someone can be detained for, with a consultation on how time limit maximums should be applied to those who are vulnerable.
- A high court has ruled that right to rent checks requiring landlords to check the immigration status of tenants breach human rights. A judge said the scheme had "little or no effect" on its main aim of controlling immigration and even if it had, this was "significantly outweighed by the discriminatory effect".
- The number of asylum seekers waiting for their claims to be processed is unacceptably high, according to an internal Home Office document leaked to BBC News. Asylum registration should be completed in 10 days but is taking 17 days.

Hope for the Young

Hope for the Young is a charity which aims to help young refugees and asylum seekers who want to complete their education. It offers financial support for tuition fees, exam fees, transport and living allowances. The charity also provides mentors who can help with language development, advice and confidence building. <https://hopefortheyoung.org.uk/>