



Four students from SWVG's teaching to read scheme, Abdullah, Wajia, Leila and Sazan, were among adult learners honoured at a ceremony conducted by the Mayor of Southampton at the city's civic centre in June.

Long awaited day in court ends in joy

Legal advice funded by SWVG has helped a Pakistani family win the right to stay in Britain after years of battling with the Home Office.

Kaleem and Nagina fled Pakistan with their two sons because their religion put them in grave danger. But when they came to Britain asking for refuge, the Home Office repeatedly said 'no'. Four times the family submitted fresh claims for asylum, providing new evidence, and on each occasion these were rejected.

As well as supporting them emotionally and financially, SWVG enlisted the expertise of legal advisor Jo Renshaw. Believing the family had a strong case but had not always received the best legal advice, Jo helped them put in yet another fresh claim. While waiting for a decision, the couple's two sons, who were both under the age of 18, reached the point of 7 years' residence in the UK which made them eligible to apply for leave to remain. This led to the Home Office granting the family leave to stay for two and a half years. However, at the same time they were again refused asylum – this time with no right to appeal.

Jo Renshaw immediately challenged that decision forcing the Home Office to reconsider the asylum refusal. Although another rejection letter followed, there was now a chance to appeal and so at last, in May, Jo was able to present their case at an Immigration Appeals Tribunal. After hearing the evidence, the judge took the unusual step of delivering a decision in the family's favour there and then. Kaleem and Nagina are overjoyed and send their heartfelt thanks to all at SWVG. Their only sadness is that Auriol Mayo, their visitor, is no longer with us to share the good news.

Away from the daily cares

Summer days can be long when you have little more than £5 a day to live on, which is why outings are so important as Sue Jessup explains

The SWVG activities team has organised trips in recent years to Winchester, Romsey, London, Hamble, Portsmouth Kite Festival and the Blue Reef Aquarium, a falconry display at Brambridge, Royal Victoria Country Park, Woodmill Activity Centre and London. We are very grateful to Nuffield Theatre and Winchester Chamber Festival for complementary tickets to performances which people have really enjoyed.

This summer's trip to Bournemouth was organised at the request of the group who went to Romsey. We aim to plan a variety of enjoyable activities in a trip suitable for individuals and children, taking into account level of English, physical abilities and different interests.

We do risk assessments, make it clear that parents are responsible for their children at all times and plan meeting points. We also aim to be economical with SWVG funds, so we look for free or reduced admission and group travel. We often give each person attending £5 spending money or buy them all a drink or ice-cream. We refund bus fares to the station. Some people may feel they cannot attend on the day, so we avoid committing funds in advance.

We rely on all visitors to show the leaflets in Sunday notices to those they support and encourage them to sign up and attend. We hope that the trips and activities help relieve the depression so many asylum seekers suffer, providing memorable and happy experiences within the SWVG community.



Gazing at the exotic inhabitants of the Blue Reef Aquarium in Portsmouth.

The next outing will be a trip to see the birds of prey at Brambridge Park Gardens on August 17th and, due to popular demand, we will be going back to Bournemouth on August 21st or 22nd, depending on the weather.

If you have ideas for cheap or free trips please contact me or Celia Cox: smjessup01@gmail.com or cox.hear@btinternet.com

Quality of Home Office decisions reaches a record low

Over half of all Home Office immigration decisions were overturned last year when challenged in the courts.

In the year ending March 2019, 52 per cent of immigration and asylum appeals were allowed and 23,514 people saw their asylum refusals overturned. This compares to 39 per cent of cases in the previous year.

For asylum seekers, a poor decision may lead to separation from families, detention and even forced removal from the UK.



Idriss Mousa, who is from Sudan, has been learning English with his SWVG tutor Mark Courtice for a year. A session with an artist at Southampton City Art Gallery inspired this picture and he then wrote about it.

Yesterday I went to the Gallery and I saw a lot of pictures. Then we went down to the workshop then we drew a lot of pictures. When we finished she said "If you want to do more let's do it." And then we said "Next time". Then we left the workshop. We had a nice time together. - Idriss Mousa

CAMPAIGNING

SWVG had a stall at the May Day People and Planet event organised by Unite in Palmerston Park, Southampton on 6th May. Visitors were invited to fill in a quiz which sparked questions about justice in the asylum system. As members of the national 'Lift the Ban' campaign, we also asked them to join us in pressing for the right to work for those who have been waiting six months for their asylum claim to be heard.

Three babies and an extraordinary meeting

News from Chris Stephens

We seem to have been quite busy these last three months with three new babies being born to clients. The hostel remains full but most of the cases of asylum seekers who live there progress slowly.

We heard that Jaffar, who was supported by SWVG over a long period and is now in Newcastle, has been given five years leave to remain.

Following an Extraordinary General Meeting on the 1st April, Andrew White, the treasurer, completed and submitted a comprehensive application form to become a new charity and we heard back on the 23rd of May that the Charity commissioners had approved the application. This is great news as it can sometimes take months to hear. You will remember that the new charity will be a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) – a combination of a charity and company. Andrew is working on setting it up to start at the beginning of the next financial year.

Funds gratefully received

Donations

Catherine Jessup £900 (Running Vitality 10k)
 United Church coffee shop £208
 St Paul's Church £250
 Southampton Quaker Meeting

Grants

The Knight Trust £400
 29 May 1961 Charitable Trust
 £3000

Fundraising events

Dina Nayeri talk £1,530
 Southampton quiz £350
 Winchester Cathedral £300
 Winchester College recital
 collection £485

The ungrateful refugee

Ase Feiring reports on an event at the Winchester Discovery Centre

About two years ago I was struck by an essay in the Guardian titled The Ungrateful Refugee, written by Dina Nayeri who fled Iran when she was ten and subsequently settled in the USA. So when it came to thinking about a fund-raising event, I suggested we contact her.

In the essay, now expanded into a book, the author looks at the subject of refugees from an interesting angle, using her own and other experiences. Refugee stories, it seems, often follow a pattern of fleeing danger, a perilous journey and then finally safety in a western country. She is more concerned with what happens afterwards - settling somewhere, going to school or work, trying to make friends, to live life, and how in some ways this is the most difficult part, in part due to attitudes and expectations.



Dina Nayeri (left) in conversation with Jenny Cuffe at Winchester's Discovery Centre.

In conversation with Jenny Cuffe at the Discovery Centre in June, Dina Nayeri started by telling us about her journey from Iran to the United States via a few months in an Italian refugee centre.

Drawing on this and her conversations with other refugees, she gave us a picture of how it is to be that person, "a refugee", in a new country.

She spoke passionately and eloquently about how refugees and migrants are perceived and treated, giving the example of an asylum officer who is often unable or unwilling to listen to refugees' stories, to understand them from their point of view and to realise how people from different cultures tell stories in different ways.

She explained how people can have conflicted feelings regarding their status as refugees. It can be a source of both shame and pride, but these feelings can be very private.

She believed the common assumption that you should always express your gratitude was both intrusive, as gratitude can be a private feeling, and simplistic as it assumes a give and take situation.

At the heart of Dina Nayeri's message is a plea that we treat everyone with dignity and kindness, that we remind ourselves that our circumstances ultimately are coincidences of birth, that fleeing another country doesn't mean that you flee from a bad place to a good place but you flee from a dangerous point in time, whether that is war, political persecution or grinding poverty and lack of opportunities. What you left behind might still have been something good, something that you might take pride in and miss. And finally, that it is not, or should not be, a case of one side gives, the other side gratefully receives. Both parties benefit equally from learning about each other and hearing each other's stories.

Members' website area goes live

Starting this month, the SWVG website will have a special area with information, documents and forms for the use of all members. It will be password protected.