



My phenomenal year

a 14 year-old seeking sanctuary looks back on 2019

The past year has been nothing but phenomenal for me. I completed my bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award in May. At the end of the year, I won the Female Expeditioner of the Year award at school. Following on I played excellently during my rugby tournaments. I was scouted to play for Hampshire girls but unfortunately I was recovering from knee surgery and couldn't make it to my trials.

Alongside that, I am the head of the Cantell radio team in partnership with Unity 101. We broadcast our first live show after the Christmas holidays and it has been a success. During the last academic year, I captained the school STEM team to victory in our regional competition. Sadly we came third in the international competition in Aberdeen. After recovering from my surgery I trained for City Athletics 2019 and came second in discus, achieving a new personal best.

I joined the school string orchestra. I performed three pieces at a concert which was really fun and by the end of the year I had achieved grade 3 in my double bass and was accepted into all my GCSE options. For my trip to the Young Life International Camp at Cairn Brae, Scotland, I organised a cake sale at my church to raise money which did excellently well, as well as bake for our annual car wash. The week I spent at Scotland was amazing, inspirational and fun-filled. I made lots of

friends who gave their lives to Christ at the end of the week. I would love to go again this year.

Furthermore I have been doing more with my rugby in the sense that I took my initiative and joined my local team, Trojans. I play for the under 15s team and it feels so lovely to be part of such a team of amazing girls, playing the sport I love. In my first match I received the player of the match award, which made me feel special. Lastly, I have planned my work experience for the end of year 10 in Lloyds Pharmacy and am really looking forward to it.

To conclude, I would like to thank SWVG for all the help and support they rendered to my family and me.

The young writer arrived in Southampton from Nigeria with her mother and younger brother in January 2018. SWVG has been involved since their arrival and they have participated in outings and events and contributed to discussions about issues such as the right to work and bus fares. Bus fares are a particular concern because they have needed many trips to hospital.

The writer's mother is a volunteer with CLEAR and would love to be able to work. She is currently making a fresh asylum claim.

On the 10th January the writer received the Cantell award at the Grand Harbour hotel from Unity Radio 101 for making an excellent contribution to society as part of the school radio team.



Chris Stephens reports on changes to the SWVG board of trustees

At the AGM in December Angela Sealey and Elizabeth Prescott-Decie both stood down as trustees of SWVG after more than ten years' service. Angela, who was deputy chair, has been involved in SWVG since the very early days of visiting asylum seekers in Winchester prison. Although stepping back as a trustee she continues to be involved with training and supporting the coordination team. Elizabeth remains deputy coordinator and both are involved in MAG and the legal justice group. I would like to thank them for their hard work and commitment. Though we will miss them as trustees we still have access to their advice and experience.

I am sure we are all particularly thinking of Angela at this time as her husband, Chris, sadly died after a short illness in January.

We have appointed three new trustees David Retter, Stephen Sizer and Mark Courtice. David worked with Hampshire County Council to support the education needs of children made vulnerable through trafficking, modern slavery or at risk through domestic circumstance.

Stephen is the director of a small charity called Peacemaker Trust, concerned with persecuted minorities and those whose human rights are suppressed.

Mark was chief executive at theatres in Southampton, Portsmouth and Winchester. He has been a visitor with SWVG since 2012 and has been teaching English with SWVG for the last two years.

SWVG Funds

Donations

Anonymous donation £900
 St Matthew Church £100
 St Lawrence Church £585
 Winchester Quakers £130
 Collection at Turner Sims concert £343

Fundraising events

Talk by John Pilkington £770
 Anne Leeming's quiz £535 +gift aid

Grants

The Tolkien Trust £20,000
 The Observer Trust £500
 The Sheba Trust £500
 The St Clare and St Francis Trust £500

Our thanks to the many individuals who donate to us.

Walk The Test Way raised £5,780 in total. Our thanks again to those who walked and those who donated.



Taking the wheel at a recent SWVG trip to the Sea City Museum in Southampton, organised by the events team.

Searching for a home

by Lesley Sheldon-Browning

'B' and her two children were granted refugee status on 21st May 2019 and received their residence permit in August 2019. It was a cause for celebration after four and a half years of waiting but brought with it a new period of risk and anxiety. The letter granting status told her she would have to leave her refugee accommodation in 28 days time and she had nowhere to go.

The fact that she has children means Southampton City Council has a duty to help her find accommodation so we immediately went along to meet their homelessness officer. The officer undertook a "relief assessment", warned B there might be several moves and stressed she should try finding accommodation herself. I phoned a number of potential letting agents but, without a guarantor to support her rent if necessary, this was unsuccessful. In the meantime, B learned that she was eligible for long term council housing but might have to wait up to five years for a property.

On the day that B and her two children were to move out of asylum accommodation she still did not have anywhere to go. With my husband, another visitor and B's friend, we emptied the house where she had spent the last four years and packed her life into three large trailer-loads. I spent anxious hours on the phone to the homelessness officer asking simply "Where are we taking B and her two children and their belongings?" Eventually we were told she'd be spending the first night in bed and breakfast accommodation. After that, who knows?

Five minutes before the deadline, nothing else had been arranged and the family was asked to sit in a coffee shop in Southampton while further accommodation was found. On a wet day, with a hyperactive three-year old and a baby needing to be breast fed, I felt this was not an option so I negotiated with the manager of the B&B for them to stay until Monday and persuaded the council to agree and pick up the bill.

Monday arrived and by this time we had been given an address of another emergency fix, a room where they could stay for a couple of weeks. A



priority was ensuring her son continued going to pre-school where he was learning English and had other children to play with and this involved long bus rides across the city.

About three weeks later, B received notice

that she was to move into temporary accommodation. This is an old, poorly decorated, poorly insulated two-bedroomed maisonette in an area north of the city centre, a long way from her friends and a cheap supermarket. But, for the time being at least, it is a home of her own.

Then the challenging job of setting up direct debits to pay for bills, finding energy providers, negotiating discounts and so forth had to begin. B does not read, has no experience of running an English home and has never had a bank account. We began an uphill journey together and although we have not yet emerged on the other side, it is certainly greener ahead.

New ministers, new policies

Following December's general election, William Brook-Hart takes a look at the Government ministers whose policies and decisions affect refugees

Probably most influential is the Home Secretary, Priti Patel (first elected an MP in 2010). She was appointed to this role by Johnson in July 2019, having previously been Secretary of State for International Development from July 2016 to November 2017. A strong supporter of Brexit, she advocates an Australian style points system for controlling immigration.

Patel voted for "strict" asylum policies in 2015 and 2016 and previously she has called for faster asylum decisions, fewer appeals and for deportation of failed cases. More recently in her ministerial role she has stated that "we support the principle of family unity wholeheartedly, and the Government are committed to meeting our obligation ... to seek to negotiate an agreement with the EU on family reunion for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children." This type of statement has been made again by members of the government when they voted to remove the Dubs amendment from the Withdrawal Act Bill on 22nd January.

Dublin 111, the existing EU regulation determining which country is responsible for examining an asylum claim, will continue during the transition period. It is not known what will happen after that.

Kevin Foster (first elected in 2015) was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Immigration at the Home Office on 16 December 2019. This was previously a ministerial role held by Caroline Nokes MP. Foster trained as a lawyer, was Deputy Leader of Coventry Council and has held various government roles, including being a whip. He has tended to vote similarly to most other MPs in his party, notably to restrict the support

available to failed asylum seekers and illegal migrants (December 2015) and against giving asylum seekers permission to work if a decision on their application takes over six months (April 2016). However, he does not appear to have made many public statements about refugees and asylum as yet.

Victoria Atkins was first elected in 2015 and is Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Home Office for Safeguarding and Vulnerability since November 2017. Her many responsibilities include the Disclosure and Barring Service, modern slavery and all other safeguarding matters. She is also the Minister for Women (which is not a Cabinet role).

The Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Leaving the European Union (Stephen Barclay), as well as their special advisors, will also influence the policies and resources allocated to people seeking asylum.

Sir Mark Lowcock of the UNHCR, in his talk at our AGM, emphasised the need to remind our MPs of the groundswell of support for asylum seekers and refugees in this country, and to encourage them to pursue enlightened policies. We shall continue to do this through our meetings and letters, as well as our events and our support for particular campaigns such as those of Safe Passage and Refugee Action.

Useful resources on migration can be found on the BBC website covering issues relating to [small boat crossings of the channel](#) and [How has immigration changed in your area](#) . Here are the links to the following useful briefings:
[Download the complete BBC Briefing on immigration \(11.3MB\)](#)
[What would the UK be like without immigration?](#)
[How we made a life in Germany](#)