



NEW MEASURES FOR LOCKDOWN AND BEYOND

How SWVG has adapted to a challenging environment

We had our last face to face trustees meeting just before the lockdown in March. Our group secretary Jessica Hasan has been great at adapting to the virtual meetings, taking notes and circulating minutes. She has continued to organise training and subgroup reports just as normal. Our administrator Xanthe Hackett has stayed in touch with volunteers while the multi-cultural centre has been closed. She has been visiting hostel residents fortnightly to check they are alright and give them their money. At the end of July she organised the move to the new hostel, which went well. You can read her account on p.4. The trustees would like to thank both of them so much for their flexibility and commitment. **Chris Stephens**

Money Allocation Group

We normally meet monthly to review the position of those asylum seekers who receive our financial support. While many of them will have found lockdown very difficult and it has certainly added to the tensions within the hostel, we are not aware of any cases of particular hardship. The six hostel residents each had cases pending with the Home Office but progress came to a standstill. Requests were discussed by email. We normally give one-off payments and help with gym membership and bus passes but lockdown stopped most activity. Last month's meeting was by Zoom and we anticipate a busier caseload soon. **Elizabeth Prescott-Decie**



The Events Group continues to meet virtually

Training Group launches new online package

There's plenty to do if you support SWVG's aims but don't want to be a visitor or teacher. Lockdown has nudged us into making it easier for you to get started. Before, it could be discouraging to apply to become a SWVG volunteer and learn you couldn't do anything till you were trained. With our new approach, we invite people to do an introductory programme in their own time, on their own computer. We aren't losing the personal touch, but it means people can get started much more quickly in roles such as organising events, campaigning, keeping the SWVG website and social media up-to-date, or helping with meetings. Follow-up training is arranged for people who want to work one-to-one with an asylum seeker, whether befriending or teaching English.

It is a PowerPoint programme with internet links. It was sent to members in their Weekly Notice so you can see what's in it. There are three elements - about SWVG and how you might help; safeguarding; and about asylum. There is also an outline of further training to be a teacher or visitor. **Chris Holloway**

Events Group

Events planned to raise funds for SWVG have been brought to a standstill. However, the April car boot sale will now be held in 2021 and, instead of the Test Way sponsored walk in September, people are asked to arrange their own walk or bike ride, using a Just Giving page for donations.

We have set up Amazon Smile meaning that 0.5% of any purchase made is added to SWVG's account. Even if you disapprove of Amazon this is one way to contribute.

We'll continue to meet on Zoom, keeping an eye on what COVID allows us to plan, ever aware that our funds need boosting. It is good to be able to check in with the group and keep up some impetus on ideas... who knows, some of us who find it difficult to attend a meeting one winter's night may opt for Zoom as an alternative, now we are set up for it. **Hazel Still**



Activities

The last activity before lockdown was an open pottery session led by Lesley Dixon and attended by 35 children and adults who created objects reminding them of home for this magnificent tree. Celia Cox and Sue Jessup, who organise these activities, regret the fact that currently social distancing makes group outings impossible.

SWVG awarded grant to support online teaching

SWVG teachers managed to keep in contact with nearly all their students throughout lockdown and many continued to teach online. Lockdown has had unexpected benefits. For example, teachers who are away for a few weeks can now continue to teach their students just as well as if they were at home. To capitalise on what we have learnt during lockdown, we will now build up our online teaching in a systematic way. We are extremely excited to be supported in that aim by a grant of £8000 from a partnership of Migration Exchange, Refugee Action and the No Accommodation Network, NACCOM. **Catherine Hartley**

Campaigning Group

The campaigning group continues with enthusiasm. We meet online (somewhat erratically) and miss our monthly sessions around Diane's kitchen table. A few good intentions at the start of the year, such as joining in public events in Southampton or supporting outreach, have been curtailed. However, lockdown has provided opportunities for more contact with other organisations around the country, whether in online meetings organised by NACCOM and Cities of Sanctuary or exchanging information on campaigns and policies. We also want to improve contacts with local organisations such as students (STAR) when they come back in September.

During the last few months the British Red Cross held weekly meetings with the Home Office to review migrant policies during COVID-19. They asked questions sent in by local organisations and sometimes got replies. The government has introduced some improvements, for example the temporary suspension of trips to Liverpool to submit fresh evidence, a partial basic safety net for those with no recourse to public funds and a substantial reduction in the number of people held in immigration removal centres. We have been told for years that these could not be done; however this shows that they can be done. Now the challenge is to make them permanent.

William Brook-Hart

Widening our membership

At the August general meeting, Mark Courtice laid out the trustees' plans for a new more inclusive membership structure, putting asylum seekers and refugees on an equal footing with volunteers and supporters. He said that we should build on what is already a fantastic organisation by harnessing the talents and skills of sanctuary seekers and making sure their views inform all future decision-making. He suggested this membership could be extended to those who currently do not meet our criteria for needing support.

About 30 people took part in the Zoom meeting and the response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. A committee will now be set up to consider ways of taking these issues forward. Anyone interested should contact mark.courtice@swvg-refugees.org.uk

Communications Group

Despite the fact that two of us have been working on the Southampton City Council and University of Southampton COVID-19 saliva testing pilot programme, we have managed to tick most of the tasks off our to do list. We've been preparing materials for a PowerPoint presentation that can be given by members invited to talk about asylum and the work of SWVG and we've produced business cards and a leaflet. We are developing a better system for managing our photos and the consents for them, and are updating our banner. Chris Holloway is keeping the website up to date and we are gradually refreshing the members' pages. Jenny Cuffe

Donations

W Draper £1,000

Members of Winchester Quaker Meeting
£850

Grants

The Knight Trust £400

29th May 1961 Charitable Trust £3,000

Support Groups

The restraints of lockdown have made it impossible to meet as normal in each other's houses. Not to be thwarted, most groups decided to meet via online platforms. These virtual meetings maintained a sense of belonging and connectedness as well as the usual moral support and advice. Some people shared their concerns about the people they support but have not been able to visit. They have found other local organisations or extended their IT skills.

One teacher had extra time so was able to offer daily instead of weekly sessions but not all clients found this method of interaction workable for them. Just as not all volunteers are comfortable with or have access to the necessary IT resources, the same applies to those they support. They may have phones but not WiFi facilities in their accommodation.

Sharing suggestions and learning from each other has been invaluable to visitors and teachers and kept the notion of support going, despite obstacles and restrictions. In the case of one support group, the members have become more connected since lockdown and plan to stay that way. Jackie Batchelor

Fundraising Group

There are six of us in the fundraising Group, including Stefan Lipa, a consultant who provides us with advice. At our meetings we always discuss a financial update from our treasurer, which helps us to decide the best time to make grant applications so that we achieve a steady income through the year. We review existing grants and share news on progress of the bids we have made.

Luckily we had a meeting just before lockdown and were all allocated plenty of tasks. We stayed in touch by email and then met remotely, using Zoom. This went well and was as efficient as a "real life" meeting.

We decided that we now need to carry out a wider search for funding bodies and Stefan has provided us with a comprehensive list of funders who may support our work. Sue Turner

Moving house

SWVG has opened a new hostel for destitute asylum seekers. Xanthe Hackett helped the first five residents move in.

When I saw the address in Northam, I wasn't sure about it but the house is perfect and the neighbours seem fine. There's a side gate, a long garden with a washing line and it's a short walk to the town centre.

The five residents - three men and two women including a mother and baby - have been living in a house rented by SWVG. When I visited them the day after the move in July, they were gathered in the kitchen cooking. This is the only indoor communal area but that's not a bad thing as it's



less for them to keep clean. The move went smoothly. I'd checked in advance to see how much luggage they had and bought a supply of black bags. Their belongings were very disorganised but they were able to identify their own stuff at the other end so

it didn't matter.

I'd ordered a Luton van with a rear lift and two men to carry the fridge freezer and washing machine. We had only been allocated two hours but got everything loaded in one go so it all worked out. After finding that one cash machine wasn't working, I had to rush around the corner to get the payment before the men would unload.

To avoid arguments, I had allocated rooms. There was one request - for mother and baby to be on the ground floor. They have a lovely large room with space for high-chair and cot and she's really pleased with it. She teased all the men saying she'll keep an eye on them to make sure they don't bring any girls back!

The front room upstairs is available for the next person to come along, as is the quiet back bedroom on the ground floor. All rooms have venetian blinds, a bit tricky for some to operate but they look nice and curtains can get so scruffy. There are separate toilet and shower rooms on both floors.

The Society of St James renovated the house for us with lottery funding. Luckily there were some maintenance men at the house working in the garden when we arrived and they plumbed in the washing machine.

Some of us returned to the old place in Portswood to collect some chairs and bikes and then I left them all to unpack. No problems so far.

DOWN ON THE SWVG ALLOTMENT with Jo Bailey

Just as the planting season began along came lockdown! But fortunately for SWVG and other plot holders, allotments were deemed to be the ideal places for social distancing, as long as you had the stamina to walk or cycle there and back! We've managed to keep down the weeds with the help of Claire Pigott's strimming, look after the fruit bushes and plant a good range of hardy veg.

Thank goodness Claudia stocked up on seed potatoes when she did as they became as hard to find as loo rolls at one point! All the other veg has been grown from seed or seedlings donated by other volunteers and friends. If you would like to try any of the potatoes, courgettes, currants or raspberries that are available this month, do let me know. We do hope that it won't be too long before more people can get to the allotment and share in the pleasure of growing our own food.



DOUBLY LOCKED DOWN

When your life is already constrained by the UK's immigration and asylum policy, further restrictions become almost unbearable. This was the message from sanctuary seekers who took part in a recent general meeting.

Sonila and Monica, sisters from Afghanistan, had only recently arrived in Southampton and did not know how to get practical help such as food or finance. They share a house with their father and were worried about his health but had difficulty finding information about lockdown rules. Maybe worst of all was having nothing to do, without good wifi, no TV and no way to keep busy. Sayed Khalili lives with his sister and said it was particularly hard for her small children who were confined to one room with few toys to play with. For these asylum seekers, anxiety about the virus has been made worse by not knowing whether they will receive medical treatment if they catch it and whether they will be rejected for asylum if they fall ill.

Saeed and his wife Leila have leave to remain so are able to work. Saeed, a bank manager in his country of origin, went looking for a job at the start of the pandemic and was taken on by a fishmonger but Leila said she was desperate to get back to her career as a maths teacher.

Everyone said the inability to help members of their families facing the virus in their country of origin added to their stress. They appreciated SWVG teachers keeping in touch with English lessons by phone and WhatsApp, and SWVG visitors who rang or knocked on their door to check they were OK and to reassure them about the Home Office's systems for claims during lockdown.

Leila's rules for lockdown

In every family, at least one person have to learn new language in Quarantine time, because you have enough free time.

you should pay 50 pound if you become fatter than ^{Past.}

you must pay 10 pound for every unnecessary calling to NHS or police at lockdown time.

Don't know why people do not vote for me!!!

Hello everyone two months ago everybody suffered and tired because of corona virus and people were scared and worried and it was a really difficult time for everybody in this world for moment and view all pas time ^{really} very hard.

Saman, who is from Iran, hopes for a future without the virus

I hoping for everybody in this world this virus thing hope he's gonna go finish. Everyone have a normal life again no everybody worried anymore and by this time now every country every day many people dying. very sad for everyone.

Abdullah Salih, came to the UK from Eritrea in 2017 and has leave to remain. He has been studying English with SWVG for two and a half years and has been working at South Coast Services.

On February the 7th I broke my leg I was playing football. When you play football these accident sometimes happen. I was in hospital for surgery I stayed in hospital for three weeks I was not bored in hospital because there were nurses to talk to and my friends came to visit me. My teacher Mark gave me books to read. Then I came back home I had to stay at home before lockdown. The lockdown is boring and scary. I live upstairs so it hard for me to get up and down. One day I got scared because I had a high temperature and sore throat and stomachache did I have the virus? it wasn't the virus because only one day. I have been doing my lessons with my teacher Mark twice a week on Thursdays and Fridays. My friend Idriss has been going shopping and he has been working. I still have the frame on my leg I hope they will take it off soon and I will go back to work. I think the lockdown will end before they take the frame off my leg. I will go back to the football but not soon.