



## A resounding “NO” to government’s new plan for immigration

**SWVG has submitted a detailed response to the Home Office describing its proposals as “misconceived” and liable to force more people to risk their lives attempting to reach safety.**

The government’s new plan labels people who don’t arrive through official resettlement programmes as “illegal” with the intention of sending them back to countries which they’ve passed through on their way to the UK or to other “safe” countries. It tightens the definition of having a “well-founded fear of persecution” - the fundamental test of who is allowed to stay. All these so-called “illegal arrivals” will be housed in purpose-built accommodation. Rights to appeal and benefits will be reduced and, if their asylum claims are accepted, they will be given only temporary leave to remain with less opportunity for family reunion.

In our response, we reject the misleading conflation of “asylum-seekers” with “illegal migrants” and “foreign national offenders”. Many of the proposals will cause significant harm to people seeking protection.

There is no compelling evidence to introduce a more rigorous test for the well-founded fear of persecution. Doing so will place an unrealistic burden on people to prove their claim. In our view problems with the current asylum system are caused by the Home Office’s hostile approach to assessment, lengthy delays and a lack of adequate legal and personal support for people when they first claim asylum.

We urge the Government to avoid hostile and punishing policies and instead to develop effective and humane policies which are more likely to succeed.

The small campaign group - William Brook-Hart, Sue Jessup and Lesley Sheldon-Browning - have worked tirelessly with other organisations to formulate a strong case. SWVG members have also contributed individually to the consultation exercise.

The campaign group will continue to work hard, drafting letters and meeting MPs to influence the debate. They need more members and would particularly like to hear from refugees and people seeking asylum.



**SWVG HAS JOINED THE NATIONAL COALITION “TOGETHER WITH REFUGEES”, LAUNCHED ON 10 MAY. OUR AIM IS TO CREATE A FAIR, EQUITABLE AND EFFECTIVE ASYLUM SYSTEM BASED ON HUMANITY, COMPASSION AND THE RULE OF LAW.**

## Home Office withdraws controversial plan for Hampshire camp

The Government has dropped its plan to use a military site at Barton Stacey as a camp to house people seeking asylum. While there are many reasons for this decision, we believe that our action has clearly helped. The campaign group drafted a letter to 150 individuals and organisations expressing concern and seeking their support in calling on the Home Office to house people humanely and to address the backlog of asylum cases in a fair and just way. We will continue to campaign against the opening of all new camps and call for the closure of existing barracks. **Lesley Sheldon-Browning**

# Forbidden to work, yet with so much to give

## Mark Courtice pays tribute to the skills and talents of SWVG members who came to Southampton seeking sanctuary

*What do some think the arrival of refugees in an area means? More demands on scarce resources, more people wanting the system to provide, more mouths to feed, more people needing a home, perhaps?*

*Meet these people and a different story emerges. These are the best of the best, people who had what it takes to get up and go, who were brave enough to undertake the frightening journey to safety in the UK. They bring skills, experience, imagination and courage to our community.*

*I met some of them to find out what they have to offer their new country.*

### A house full of mathematicians.

Take **A's** family. He is a high-powered academic, a university teacher and researcher who has won two awards for innovation in engineering and has been published regularly in Russia and internationally. **AH**, his wife, had her own career teaching language and literature in school.

There are three generations of mathematicians living together in his family home in Southampton - his mother, who along with his father was his inspiration for moving into maths in the first place, **A** himself, and his young son and daughter both planning to do maths and science after GCSEs. Now **A** is training to be a teacher and his wife is training to be a classroom assistant. Both are working hard to join their profession but not at the same level as before.

The sheer amount of brain power in one house is astounding.

### A banker who can't now open her own account.

**CA** was a seasoned banker back in her country in west Africa. Her career started when she was sent to a bank through the country's National Youth service despite her degree in geography and regional planning. She enjoyed her time there and decided to stay in the bank when her youth service finished.

After that she worked in various banks around her region and in head office, covering the whole raft of banking services as a teller, in customer services and in marketing. As she says, "I fell in love with the corporate world". And even now, seven years later and halfway across the world, she retains the same skills - working with people, introducing new software and, as her children say, "She's still good with money!".

Does she want to work in a bank in the UK? "I would love it," she says. But now her ambitions are more about helping people and being part of her new community.

**CA** is a woman with a great deal to offer, with lots of experience and yet, because of her immigration status, she can't even open a bank account of her own.

### A young woman engineer

25-year-old **F** comes to the UK with an astonishing record of achievement as a civil engineer. Not only has she worked as a transportation specialist developing a rapid transit bus system and minimising congestion, she has always been a volunteer as well. Now she's carrying on this tradition by joining SWVG teachers, helping others with their maths.

Inspired by her engineer father, she recalls being fascinated by the detailed and elegant drawings he produced. But she's aware that in following his example, she was very much bucking the trend. In her home country bright girls were expected to become doctors or, failing that, teachers; so the notion that a girl could become an engineer was a bit strange.

As a published academic who was invited to conferences across the world, **F** has enormous potential and is aching to use it in her new country. She's ambitious too. "I want to be the Marie Curie of engineering", she says - an interesting choice as Marie Curie herself was an immigrant, moving from Poland to France in her 20s.

Frustrated by the rules that bar asylum seekers from working, **F** is making the best of it, taking a course of self-directed study covering management and blockchain (the basis of Bitcoin) while at the same time pursuing English classes at WEA and Itchen College.

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## Ambitious for the future

It's striking, when you speak to Southampton's refugees, how much ambition they have - not just for themselves but also to leave a mark, to do something special for their new country. It's also striking how important family has been. From **A's** mathematician parents to **F's** father who produced lines on

paper "as if by magic", to another refugee I spoke to who explained that he learned his skill of welding by working with his father back home, mums and dads have been crucial.

*Clever people, skilful people, who had the courage to journey halfway across the world but who bring with them a solid sense of the importance of family and community. Let's not waste all this talent!*



## "Our hopes and dreams"



### A brother and sister share their hopes for the future

**EA writes:** The one thing I dream for is my family and I to be settled in the UK. Each time I dream about it, I visualise peace, comfort, happiness, joy, freedom ... even Paradise to top it all.

I just pray and hope we receive our leave to remain in the UK this year. With that in our hands, we can lead a peaceful life, explore our dreams and aspirations, go places, and have ease of access to life in general. However, I am grateful for who we are now and where we are. It is so incredible and heart-warming to be supported by others within the community, school, church and the friends we make.

In addition, I also dream of focus and being the best I can be in school, be it in the physical space or working from home due to coronavirus. School gives me targets to work towards, helps me become more confident. It gives me the next steps to my future in education and just life in general. With the school I attend now, I am happy and brave to say I will do well in life.

Without a doubt, I also have a dream for my personal life. To begin with, I want to stay healthy and be in shape even though the coronavirus is still present, but obviously I must do it safely. Staying in shape and living a healthy life will improve my wellbeing and my appearance. I also want to improve my sports life. My goal in rugby is to achieve the 'Best back of the season' award and I am confident I will get it. In addition, I dream of scoring my first dunk in basketball. It is something I've been amazed by ever since I started playing and I am working towards achieving that. I am confident I will do it one day.

With all these goals and dreams in mind, I keep praying and asking God to guide me, support me and do miracles in my life. Amen. **E.A.**

**RA writes:** This year, I aspire to make as much of it as possible as last year really limited me in the things that I could do.

I am in year 11 so my prioritised challenge is to complete my secondary school education with my preferred grades which will then enable me to go to the college I would like to complete my A-Levels at.

Furthermore, my school runs these challenges open to all year groups to top achieving students and the highest amount of achievement points they can earn in 1 academic year. I'm currently in the lead with the first Bronze Level Award so I aim to receive my Gold Level by the time I finish school in the summer. In addition to that, I really hope to go on a final trip to Cairn Brae YoungLife, if allowed, to experience one more year as a young camper before my September studies begin.

Finally, after completing my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award, I aspire to start the Silver Award upon commencing college and completing it within my first year as I really enjoyed participating in the Bronze Level and being a young ambassador for my school so, I want to challenge myself to work even harder and complete the next level up. **R.A.**

### SWVG FUNDS

#### Donations

Lambs Hill Trust £300

#### Fundraising

Player piano concert £1,500  
(including gift aid)

#### Grants

Orange Tree Trust £5,000

St Peter's Church 1,000

National Lottery 6,365

One Percent Scheme 1,000



## Residents in asylum hotel were unable to contact friends and family until Karuna Vedi got on the case



In late October, whilst teaching on my second visit at the hotel used for asylum seekers, three students informed me that the Home Office had taken their phones. I was disturbed to hear this. Later that evening I took these students to join Portswood library to use the computers so they could set up email IDs to use Facebook as they had not been in touch with friends and family for months. In early November, I received an email address to retrieve the confiscated phones which I

shared with the students. On my next visit to the hotel, eight people requested my help.

On 12th November I sent the first set of emails to the Home Office. After three weeks, I had only had an automated response so raised the requests again. On 13th December I started to receive queries from the Home Office through the night and collated further evidence for all eight requests. By the third week of December, the phones started to arrive back.

On 24th December I received a new request, which I assumed was from a hotel resident as a room number was provided. Two weeks later I discovered he was based in Colindale. This was the start of a tsunami of requests from all over the UK which has kept me fully occupied.

In February, I received a request from someone who'd arrived on a lorry at Southend. I had no known process to deal with this as the Home Office does not deal with these arrivals. After several emails and phone calls, I located this phone and contacted the police officer involved. She mentioned they had property for six others and had no idea where these people were. I found them within a week and sent in the evidence requested.

However, the police had no funds to return property belonging to people they described as "criminals". I would like to thank SWVG for their support and for providing a small budget allowing me to return all the property confiscated by the police.

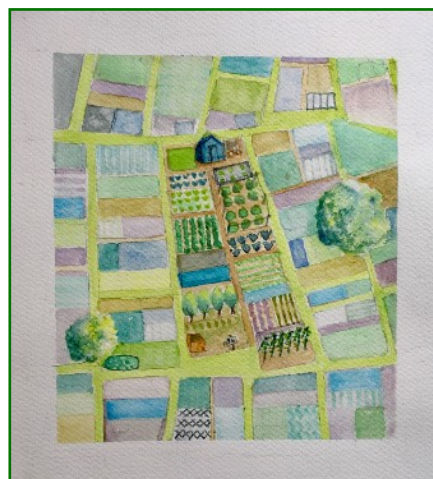
By 30th March I had received 94 requests from boat arrivals and eight requests from lorry arrivals. I have dealt

with four different teams at the Home Office and Plymouth Immigration as well as staff at Essex and Devon & Cornwall Police Forces to recover the phones.

I hadn't received any requests since 30th March and assumed my job was done. However, two new requests arrived on 26th April; one for a lorry arrival involving Bedfordshire and the Metropolitan Police as well as the Newhaven immigration team and the other is a Home Office request. The story goes on...

Tasks	
Asylum seekers helped	104
Countries of origin	9
Asylum seekers' addresses in UK	50
Phones confiscated	119
Phones returned	100
Possible lost phones	4
Personal effects returned	8
Lost property requested	5
Phone calls to officials	200
Emails sent and received	385
WhatsApp messages sent and received	1100

## Bird's eye view of plot 86



**A watercolour by Kate Baker who's been helping out at the Witt's Hill allotment. You don't need green fingers - just come along and enjoy the space. Jo and other volunteers are there on most Mondays and can offer lifts from Portswood and the city centre. For details contact Jo: [jovbailey59@gmail.com](mailto:jovbailey59@gmail.com)**

## New ways to occupy both body and mind



### Sonila prepares for her first bike ride

When Hilary Preece hit social media with a request for donated bikes, the carpark at a hotel in Portswood was suddenly swamped with bikes for the resident asylum seekers. The 20+ machines were cheerfully given by people wanting their once-loved machines to go to a good cause, or perhaps just to clear out some space in the garage. They were seized with delight by men and women who could suddenly travel freely and independently while exercising their bodies and enjoying some volition in their lives.

The interest in cycling developed in September last year, at an open-air meeting at Southampton's Ropewalk Centre of people receiving English lessons, to explore what further activities they would like. There was a strong interest in cycling, with men and women in equal number keen either to learn to ride, or to find a bike, or learn to look after bikes. People saw bikes as providing exercise, saving on bus fares, occasions for socialising or simply exploring and getting to know the city they found themselves in.

Very soon we had the encouraging support and assistance of the city council's Sustainable Travel Officer Ruth Magennis, who began plugging SWVG into the city's cycling infrastructure, such as the bike doctors, Monty's Bike Hub, Breeze, Sustrans, My Journey and the Ropewalk Centre in St Mary's. With lockdown easing, two bikes from the hotel carpark have now been given safety checks and made roadworthy (by Stephen Kemp from Transition Southampton) and handed over to two sisters; others are in the pipeline. The bike

project run by Asylum Welcome in Oxford provides 50-60 bikes each year, so SWVG has a little way to go, but a start has been made.

Anyone with an interest in acquiring a bike or training should get in touch at [keirenphelan@sky.com](mailto:keirenphelan@sky.com). **Keiren Phelan**

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### *Two medical students at Southampton University are running an imaginative programme of activities for SWVG members.*

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Kirsty Foster and David Hendry will host online meals in which medical students and people seeking asylum swap recipes and try out each other's food. They will start by providing the ingredients for a meal commonly eaten in the UK.

There are also Thursday afternoon group walks on Southampton Common and a three week course in which members can learn new skills, such as knitting a small elephant, making a scrapbook and painting.

Kirsty says:

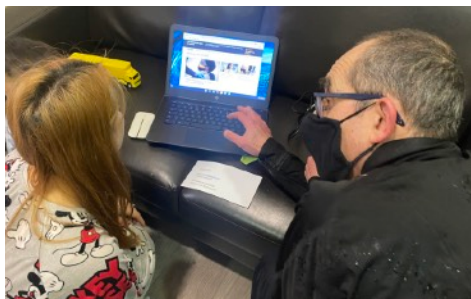
*"I am currently undertaking an elective with SWVG, which essentially means I have eight weeks to support activities and learn about the lived experience of asylum seekers in the UK.*

*My motivation stems from my desire to understand and be more aware of asylum seekers' social and medical needs. Coming to the end of the medical degree I have had the opportunity to stop, take stock and think about what a career in medicine looks like. To me, being a doctor is a privilege and a responsibility. I sincerely want to use my job to help support those who may not be able to effectively advocate for themselves. The conversations I have had with visitors, teachers and asylum seekers have been invaluable; the things I have learnt will not only shape my career as a doctor but also how I contribute as a member of society.*

*My project is simple in design but I truly hope will have a lasting positive impact. David and I realised quite quickly that boredom and isolation abound with the asylum community. We have been able to secure some funding from the ASPIRE awards with the University of Southampton to create opportunities for people seeking asylum and medical students to converse with each other over food, creative activities and learning new skills."*



*Using a one-year grant from a partnership of charities to enable people seeking asylum to continue education during the pandemic, SWVG has provided internet access to 25 adults seeking asylum and their dependent children. Thirteen of these adults have also been lent Google Chromebooks in order to learn or to teach with SWVG.*



The devices have been positively received, though the recipients have varying I.T. skills. Some are using a

computer for the very first time. Their lessons have become an opportunity for them not only to improve their English, but also to learn basic skills like moving the cursor, typing a password, opening an email – and keeping the router switched on.

As well as enabling students to continue their SWVG lessons throughout lockdown, the scheme has allowed them to benefit from internet connectivity in ways we may take for granted. They have attended college classes online, used language-learning apps, watched videos, listened to music, read the news, followed the football, watched Peppa Pig with their children, and stayed in touch with friends and family. The first thing one student did to show his appreciation when he received his Chromebook and router was to video call his family in Sudan to introduce us to them.

The challenge now is to continue to provide internet access, and indeed widen it, once the grant runs out in August. **Dominic Hartley**

## Hazel Inskip invites you to roll up for some ragtime and raise funds

The principle of a player piano or pianola is that the string-striking hammers in a standard piano are also attached to a mechanism worked by an air pump activated by foot pedals. Air is sucked through a cylinder perforated with holes, each matching one of the 80 notes on its keyboard from bottom to top. A piano roll passes over the cylinder as the player pedals away. Each roll sheet of paper is perforated in places corresponding precisely with holes so that when it is rolled over the cylinder, air is sucked through causing the corresponding note's hammer to strike the relevant strings. It's very clever.



We have such a player piano and put together a concert using rolls we have. My husband Frank also "accompanied" two of them on clarinet. The concert was performed live on 21st March to an audience of more than 50 participants, some of whom were couples or families.

Two Scott Joplin pieces and two Jelly Roll Morton rolls were "cut" by the composers themselves. The Bach role was cut by a famous pianist of the time, Dame Myra Hess. It's wonderful to hear music as played by such great performers. The notes are played by the "cutter" but the speed and volume can be adjusted.

If you missed the event and would like to watch a recording, you can access it [here](#), sending a donation.



## Indoor recreational football sessions for women refugees and asylum seekers

Weekly sessions June-July 2021 in Southampton  
Bus fares and crèche provided. Contact Sue at [smjessup01@gmail.com](mailto:smjessup01@gmail.com)

## VISIT TO SEA CITY MUSEUM

SWVG members plus children over 10 years need to book NOW for a group visit on Saturday, 5th June. Contact Sue or Celia: [smjessup01@gmail.com](mailto:smjessup01@gmail.com) or [cox.hear@btinternet.com](mailto:cox.hear@btinternet.com).

