



Newsletter Spring 2022

In the short time since the last newsletter was circulated, a war in Ukraine began. It has caused a humanitarian crisis, a wave of migration and a spotlight to be shone on the UK's response to those seeking asylum; in the face of this, the government has attracted widespread condemnation for its proposal to transport refugees to Rwanda. At the same time, the easing of social restrictions has enabled SWVG to revisit and refresh a range of positive actions. In this edition, we have an update from William Brook-Hart on the work of the campaigns group, we hear from Sue Jessup, Claire Piggott and Hazel Still on new and long-anticipated social ventures, and from Tharshan Vettivel and Tricia on their respective experiences finding work and lives of purpose and happiness in the UK. With thanks to all who have contributed.

The Nationality and Borders Bill

Our recent campaigning has continued to focus on the Nationalities and Borders Bill but also more recently on Ukraine. We campaigned against the Borders Bill in the streets of Southampton and Winchester at the end of last year with stalls, rallies and parades. We received overwhelmingly positive responses from members of the public and in the press for people who need asylum: as a community we truly are 'Together with Refugees'. This was reflected in Winchester City Council's unanimous resolution in January to support Winchester City of Sanctuary and SWVG. Then Russia invaded Ukraine on 24th February. We held a Peace Vigil for Ukraine in Winchester on the 1st March. This was supported by City of Sanctuary, City councillors, Winchester Rotary and others, and was attended by over 400 people on a rainy evening. Our

press release attracted local papers as well as interviews for BBC and ITV news. Stephen Sizer then organised another Peace Vigil for Ukraine on 11th March outside Southampton Civic Centre, alongside other community groups including City of Sanctuary, Stand Up to Racism and Amnesty. We heard speeches by the Bishop of Southampton, the Leader of the Council, the Mayor and other community leaders, all rounded off by Nadia making a moving speech and saying the Lord's Prayer in Ukrainian.

These vigils showed the determination of our community to work together to provide humanitarian support to the people of Ukraine and to welcome all refugees and people who seek sanctuary.



SWVG members have written many letters and emails to their MPs over the past few months, to explain why the Borders Bill is wrong and will be unworkable in practice, and that there are much better ways to manage asylum. In February and March we arranged individual meetings with six local MPs. Although we did not expect them to vote against their party's instructions in the short term, it is important to have these discussions to achieve longer term changes in attitudes. Often our national political leaders lag behind public opinion.

But whilst our local communities and local politicians of all the leading parties are showing their support for refugees, and members of the House of Lords voted substantially against it, the government's majority blocked their ears and voted against all the amendments. The Bill was passed into law on 28th April. It gives the Home Secretary additional powers to persecute people who come to the UK in need of asylum, not via one of the Government's resettlement schemes. This includes provisions to keep people in 'Reception Centres', to transport people to Rwanda, to deny them refugee status and to continue to deny people the right to work (a fundamental human right).

We have a much more positive vision of an asylum system which would welcome a fair number of people presently in Europe and from elsewhere in the world – including those who have reasons to come to the UK for sanctuary but are not able to access resettlement schemes – and which would enable them to travel safely here. We appreciate them as friends and we appreciate the contribution that they make to our society.

Already, the threat of Rwanda can be seen as a heartless political gimmick, and it is hugely damaging to those in need of sanctuary here. Creation of the first Reception Centre at Linton-on-Ouse, despite the appalling record of similar camps overseas, will generate massive local and national opposition.

All of us in SWVG need to continue to campaign against the implementation of the Act, working as part of the national coalition *Together With Refugees*. Please continue to support *Freedom from Torture*, *Asylum Matters*, *Detention Action* and others who are leading legal action and petitions nationally. Talk to your friends, neighbours and social groups about it. Please also join with Jenny Corrick who will be leading our campaign for hearts and minds in seven Hampshire towns during **Refugee Week (20th to 26th June)** – keep an eye out for more information in SWVG Weekly Notices.

William Brook-Hart

Opening up after lockdown

Cautiously, masked and in strict groups of six, we visited the stunning portraits at the Face of Britain exhibition in October 2020 at the City Art Gallery. It was great to finally have a Covid-safe SWVG trip.

New arrivals in Southampton are often keen to visit Sea City Museum. For those who arrived during the pandemic, our trip in June 2021 was a rare opportunity to meet other SWVG members.

As a host city for the Women's' Euros in 2022, Hants FA was keen to work with SWVG and CLEAR to provide inclusive safe spaces for women to take part in physical activity. We called the sessions 'Find Your Feet': a mix of soccercise and help with laptops, English, finding courses and volunteering opportunities. The large, airy hall and careful risk assessment allowed women one of the few opportunities in summer 2021 to meet others, exercise and learn new skills. Babies born during the pandemic appreciated the space to play in the crèche and learn to walk. Watch our great little video here: <https://youtu.be/Y0FlnyDsEIs>

In the winter sessions, MAST Mayflower Studios offered creative activities and many parents booked free tickets for MAST's Christmas show for the very young.



A small Peter Pan star made for the MAST show

SWVG's train trip to Bournemouth is always popular. In August 2021, families shared a picnic on the beach, whilst others sought a quieter place to swim and relax. The success of this trip encouraged us to organise a September trip to Lymington to go crabbing, visit the market and have

tea. During autumn and winter, Celia and I have worked with Southampton City Council's Cultural Department to offer art workshops in clay modelling and printmaking.



As well as ongoing activities such as the allotment, swimming, cycling and Wednesday cultural lunches, more and more organisations are now approaching SWVG to offer opportunities to those seeking sanctuary including sports and other projects at local universities, New Forest National Park and creative activities.



Thank you to all SWVG visitors and teachers from SWVG and CLEAR who encourage people to take part. Are you free some Friday mornings to publicise activities by chatting to people at AMC? Would you like to help organise some activities? If so, please contact sue.jessup@swvg-refugees.org.uk.

Coming soon:

May 21st: walk in the New Forest
May 28th: wood carving at Bramdean (adults only)
June 11th: soft carving at Bramdean (16+)
August 26-28th: Hampshire Open Studios event at Avenue St Andrews (AMC)

Sue Jessup

A long-awaited car boot sale

Finally on May 1st, after two years of Covid cancellations, the car boot sale actually happened! At 6.40am a troop of willing, somewhat bleary-eyed helpers gathered outside Sue Jessup's house, went in convoy to the site, cars packed with books, toys, china, jewellery, crazy hats... all the usual sale debris. Early dealers glanced over our offerings, went past, returned. Children pointed at unlikely decorative objects, proffering pocket money as parents watched, dismayed. David, our Treasurer, having underestimated the chilly morning temperatures, set off with others to collect site fees from stall holders. I think Chris bought a jester's hat, whilst all of us bought something off our own stall, recycling as much as fundraising. Time ticked on to 12 noon when we packed up.

Excellent organisation by Sue Jessup and profound thanks to her and Steve for housing all donations in their house for two years since Covid struck. It was a heroic effort as they had to move all objects from their study to their attic to their sitting room, depending on which space was most needed.

A big thank you also to all who helped: Sue Jessup, Åse, Jenny Corrick, Charlie, Ginny and Chris A, Chris H, Judith, Steve K, Linda, Liz, Olivia, Nikki, Nicky, David, Lea and Steve, and Chris Ramsden. Many other SWVG members and supporters made donations too, and we raised an astonishing £1100.

Hazel Still

A bike ride to Liverpool

Volunteering for SWVG has really brought it home to me that refugees want the same things we want: security, access to education, and employment. So I decided this year I would do a sponsored bike ride

to support SWVG in their amazing work. I wanted it to be relevant. I am aware that refugees seeking asylum have to jump through many hoops. And one of the more absurd barriers is that if a refugee wants to submit new evidence to support a fresh claim, they have to take that information in person to the Further Submissions Unit in Liverpool. They are not allowed to post it (though for a time during Covid this did change, and of course the change presented the authorities with no difficulties at all). Without the support of SWVG many people seeking asylum would be unable to make this journey, a round trip of 476 miles costing well over £100 by train.

So on 6th June I will be setting off on my bike from Southampton and cycling to Liverpool. If all goes to plan, I am anticipating that this trip will take me four and a half days. Using the website Cycle Travel, my route on Day 1 will take me through Andover out to the Chutes to Swindon, Day 2 on to Bidford-on-Avon, Day 3 through Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Day 4 on to Chester, and on Day 5 I will finish at the Immigration Centre in Liverpool. Then to Liverpool railway station and onto a train for the long trip back to Southampton. I am excited about the trip and quite scared too. I am sure there will be high and low points, maybe tears, but however tough it is and however lonely I might get I can remind myself that refugees have to face much tougher, more uncertain and dangerous journeys. At the end of the day I know I have a home to return to.

To follow my journey, do check out the SWVG Facebook page. And please do share this with friends and family who might want to donate, which they can do here:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/claire-pigott>.

<https://www.facebook.com/swvgrefugee/>

Claire Pigott

The rewards of studying

I was formerly a client of SWVG and would like to share my story with you. I gained access to the sanctuary award of Winchester University to study for a BSc health community and social care qualification. I then did a MSc in Applied Global Practice Management course at Winchester, as I hadn't at that point received my leave to remain. After getting my residence permit, I studied for a PGDip in Adult Nursing. This was done as a two-year programme and was very intense and accelerated. I graduated and began work in critical care HDU at Southampton general hospital. After a year there, I recently resigned as I now feel ready to take on the challenge of working part-time within the NHS, for which I'm considering Winchester critical care and also work with agencies.

Studying requires focus, and whilst staying in NASS accommodation you would always find me in the morning in the library, researching. I got to know about Rebecca Murray, Director of Article 26, during my research and I also got to know Terri Sandison at Winchester who has now retired. Through Article 26, Rebecca Murray has worked with universities to help them become part of the sanctuary network, so they can have control and be actively involved in their awards. As someone seeking asylum, I was obliged to continue reporting to the immigration reporting centre while being at University. At one point the police tried to tell me I was not allowed to study, but I quoted Article 26 of the Human Rights Act to them, which states that everyone has a right to education.

Studying really did give me a direction in life despite the challenges that I was going through. The University of Winchester is such a small community and they were very welcoming. Something else which helped me get to know my community and gain a sense of belonging was volunteering, which I began to do in my spare time. I volunteered with CLEAR Project and British Red Cross, and am currently part of a drama group, World

Stages Now, directed by Wendy Arrowsmith. I also volunteer at my local church on a Wednesday morning to serve tea and coffees to the elderly.

Although there's no one size fits all to what asylum seekers and refugees go through 'behind closed doors', I would encourage any asylum seekers or refugees to do some sort of volunteering if they can or if allowed and join local communities, as isolation can be a challenge. Lastly, I would like to give a special thanks to my visitor, Sue Herman, for her continuous support, as well as all the SWVG visitors, alongside many organizations in Southampton.

Tricia

Illustrating our Stories

I would like to share my thoughts behind the short video clip that I created for SWVG. I hope this does not make you bored. I created my first video for SWVG to explain how SWVG was able to provide its services during the Covid pandemic. I received great support from all of you. It gave me the strength to continue.

I worked in the media and press in my home country, in fact that was our family business. Our purpose and aim was a political reevaluation and justice for the minority people who were suffering for a long time. This is where my journey began. But war and political crises uprooted us from our homeland. In my culture, we used cartoon arts as a way to engage with the public, to illustrate the political situation. It is also a kind of propaganda and newspaper tradition to use art to communicate with people. One of my duties was to explain the situation to the artist and select the best work to illustrate it. Many newspapers and magazines were popular largely because of these cartoons. And this is where my video idea started.



Nowadays everything is digitized and social media is very popular in many ways. We all know that mass media is the most influential medium in public life. All media directly or indirectly determines our daily lives and has an impact, positively or negatively. However, I chose this medium to communicate positively. With my little knowledge I wanted to use this opportunity to express my thoughts and feelings as a moving picture and to bring it to the public.

While there are many other ways to reach people, art is not only the most powerful medium for expressing our feelings, but also for communicating with the public through emotions. In their busy lives, many people do not have time to read or listen to the stories of other people, about how they have suffered from war and world politics. But I believe the short moments people spend engaging with visual illustrations can deliver messages more precisely and connect with their hearts in a way that can be impactful and stronger than words.

SWVG works with the individuals most affected by global politics. They have a lot to tell the world, but they often cannot show their face without fear because many of them are still in a dangerous zone. As we all know, this is a big issue for us to face through our SWVG journey. However, as I believe that the interaction of images will have a direct impact on

people's minds and thoughts and as we need some replacement for their identity, the moving, illustrated picture opens a possible way forward. I am not a professional in this area but I am trying to learn to use the latest technology and work more professionally with the kind help of SWVG. I truly hope that all your help will continue to improve our communications and reach out to more people and gain more benefits by expressing our thoughts and real-life experiences.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you who help me and others like me. I would not be here without the support of all of you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. SWVG is unique and its volunteers are very kind and generous, working very hard to help more and more people rebuild their life than ever before.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W51LOpYEE2o>
<https://www.facebook.com/swvgrefugee/videos/493368975572925/>

Tharshan Vettivel

Grants:

The One Percent Scheme has agreed to fund us for three years at £2,500 to £3,000 per year.

The Garfield Weston Foundation has awarded us a grant of £10,000.

Kieran Phelan successfully applied for a Southampton City Council grant of £1910 for a bike hub.

DONATIONS AND FUNDS

Funding

We gratefully acknowledge the following:

Donations:

£435 from Fruits of Fullood

Our thanks to the many other individuals who donate to us. Many of them do so anonymously.

Fundraising:

Our dinner at Munch raised around £500 and the Car Boot sale on May 2nd raised over £1000. Many thanks to all who came and contributed.