



Newsletter Summer 2022

SWVG and Refugee Week

A BIG thank you to everyone who helped with our Refugee Week Campaign, June 20th to 26th. We started the week with a super day in Winchester with lots of interest and many people writing postcards for Priti Patel. One of the partners of Dutton Gregory Solicitors came down for a photo and stayed the whole afternoon. He was very supportive of the work of SWVG.

Tuesday in Wickham was slow. William and Sue did great work outside the Co-Op, but the bus was parked a little too far down the Square to get much passing trade. There was generally a less engaged response too, and quite a lot of, usually mild, negative comments. This is important because it shows we are taking the messages to a much wider audience, and to people who are not so familiar with the issues. So good, if a bit challenging!

Wednesday in Bishop's Waltham started slow but warmed up and again we were definitely reaching an audience who don't have much contact with agencies working to support refugees. A decent number of cards and lots of discussion.

The Sunday picnic organised jointly with Southampton Stand up to Racism was great fun, if windy! Thank goodness we had plenty of weights for the gazebo and the papers and cards. About 100 people came. At least half were refugees or people seeking asylum and there was lovely food and some fun football and a lot of socialising. The decorated gazebo and post-box attracted passers-by too. Thank you to Jackie Batchelor for the loan of the gazebo.



The cards were a great hit and children also made cards for their families. I had a splendid young Ukrainian Translator, only about eight years old, but able to explain to the other Ukrainian children, and grown-ups! We had over 80 cards for refugees, many of which we distributed in the two weeks following Refugee Week via the AMC. These messages from members of the public were all heartfelt and it was a joy to be involved.



Sadly, we didn't receive as much media coverage as we had hoped. BBC South Today pulled out, due to changed priorities. One reporter from the Chronicle

came, but I don't know if he put anything in. Anyone see an article?

Tuesday 28th I took the 45 cards to be posted at Dutton Gregory in Chandler's Ford. They were to be posted in envelopes of five, sadly with a stamp, not the DG franking machine! I had a very friendly and amusing discussion with one of the senior partners, and while supportive, when he saw the strength of feeling of the authors, he decided that they couldn't send each one franked with their business stamp! Fair enough.

There were, in addition to the 45 to be posted, a large number of blank addressed cards taken by people who wanted to take time to think about what to say to Priti Patel, and some who took extra for friends, so Ms Patel will have received a good lot of comment.



We had £50.20 in donations, cash and card. SWVG now has a card reader, so it can be used by anyone with a smart phone and the money goes straight to the SWVG bank account. All in all, SWVG made a good contribution to Refugee Week. Many thanks to all who helped with the campaign.

Jenny Corrick

Wessex Sculptors Woodcarving Workshops



Wessex Sculptors is a cooperative of about 25 sculptors based in a well-equipped barn at Brockwood Park Farm. We have charitable status, aiming to share both our love of sculptural form and our collective expertise in providing workshops in sculpting while working within our community. We recently held two one-day workshops for SWVG, the first held in May introduced two participants to practical skills for sculpting in wood. Nine SWVG participants attended the June workshop on sculpting thermalite block.



The wood sculpture workshops progressed well, with one participant sculpting an abstract piece with a large central penetration reminiscent of some of Barbara Hepworth's work, the other a human form carved from Ivy roots, with an interesting posture suggesting graceful movement of the limbs. Both

participants were so enthused by what they had achieved on the wood workshop that they signed up for the thermalite block workshop.



Ten participants took part in the thermalite block sculpting course. They quickly discovered the way to work the material using a range of different stone carving chisels, rifflers, and power drills. All worked enthusiastically and were pleased with what they had achieved at the end of the day. Several people produced relief carvings, one including lettering, another a monumental form with a crucifix, and a third a piece with two flowers twisted with a beautiful mirror symmetry. Several experimented with animal forms, one produced a powerful, chunky and compact human figure and another, an interesting female figure. Everyone had a piece to take home that they had made. I hugely enjoyed the opportunity to teach new skills and safe working practice to such interesting and enthusiastic participants who came from the Sudan, Iran, El Salvador and Sri Lanka and other countries.

I'd like to say a big thank you to the following people: Sue Jessup for organising the liaison with SWVG; Jenny Cuffe for help and support in many ways including providing delicious food and for keeping us hydrated on a very hot day; Suba also produced quantities of excellent Sri Lankan food; many thanks too to our volunteer car drivers Charlie Anzano, Daria Tkacz and Chris Allain.

We are keen to display work by our workshop participants in an Open Studio

weekend at the end of August, at both Avenue St Andrew's Multicultural Centre and Wessex Sculptor Barn, Unit D1, Brockwood Farm, Brockwood, Bramdean, ALRESFORD, SO24 0LQ .

David Knight

One of the participants, Farzan, kindly offered to share his experience of the course:

"My name is Farzan and I came to the UK from Iran on December 2019. When I came to Southampton I was introduced to SWVG. In Iran I managed a sturgeon fish farm; fish which produce high quality caviar. I was interested in attending the workshop because I have always liked objects made from wood. In addition, it gave me a new skill and allowed me to work alongside other people who were also interested in working with wood. The great thing was that I was taken there and food was also provided for me.



Above is one of my pieces from the workshop (it's not finished yet!)

I really enjoyed the day and it was better than I expected. I came home with two objects that I had managed to carve out of wood and I was given advice about where I could purchase second hand tools from. The instructor was a very lovely man.

I would definitely recommend this to anyone; a new skill; a new opportunity and all free!"

Farzan

Notes from a (very long!) bicycle ride



Before my cycle ride to Liverpool raising funds for SWVG, Dan who edits this newsletter asked if I would write some notes whilst I was on my trip. Well, I was so focused on the journey that I didn't, but I have since reflected on myself and inequality. You might ask what did I think about in those hours in the saddle whizzing along the road? To be honest, my eyes were mostly glued on the road ahead, totally focused on the road surface. At 10, 18, 20 miles an hour the consequences of coming off would have been messy.

In a deeper recess of my mind what was going on? Mostly three lines from Simple Minds' song "Don't you... forget about me" – for my husband of course (just a pity I could not remember any more of the lyrics). And deeper still?

In a strange way on a bike, distance becomes contracted rather than expanded. It was so interesting that within a short distance I could be in a very rural scenic place and then next within an industrial estate or a densely populated area. One street within a city could be full of large fancy houses and the very next cramped and run down.

The ride took me through seven counties I think, and what a diverse place for such a small island. The geography, landscape, and dialect. Despite being a densely populated country, the UK is still such a largely rural landscape. Beautiful

countryside underpopulated by a predominantly white population, versus inner city areas full of colour and diversity.

I thought about myself, what does it mean to be a 60-year-old woman on a bike? I know one of my defining characteristics is "anger". I was an angry teenager and I have come to realise that I never really lost that anger. Anger is a strange thing. It is viewed as a bad thing, something you should sort out - and that is particularly true if you're a woman. Nobody likes an angry woman. Certainly, I would agree that anger can be very destructive. But do you know, as an older woman I think I have come to terms with it. It's got me out of difficult situations in my life, actually kept me alive. There is a lovely play area in the previous village I lived in, which I helped develop through my "anger at injustice". It was anger that got me on my bike and made me ride 250 miles, to make a point – about the unjust and hostile attitude our country has adopted towards refugees. I've heard that Gandhi once said that anger is a gift, and that like electricity, it can be destructive like lightning or harnessed for immense good: it all depends on how it's channelled.

Clearly, we all have preconceptions of what defines older women. But what I reflected on is that being an older woman and how you experience that is very different depending on a bit of luck, genes, but weirdly, more than anything else I think, geography. Geography can define your life experience, not just by which part of the UK you live in, but which town and even which street you live on.

That locality can determine very much how you experience life. Will you even get on a bike? What food you eat, what school you go to, and what are the health consequences of that environment? In the UK today there will be women of my age who would have already experienced many years of poor health that can be linked to their daily environmental experience and have a real impact on their life expectancy.

I was asked whether I would be emotional at the end of the ride. On my own in Staffordshire, I had a moment of reflection; I had pushed myself pretty hard, and I was nearly done. On my arrival in Liverpool I was met by a group from Asylum Link Merseyside, Merseyside Refugee Support Network and Liverpool City of Sanctuary. It was great, but no, I was not emotional, it's not in my make up to be overtly emotional. But to my surprise there was later a moment of emotion for which I was completely unprepared. I'll come back to that in a moment.

The Merseyside Refugee Support Network were great; I had just enough time to go back to their centre for lunch. The food is free and shared. It doesn't matter if you're a paid employee, volunteer or asylum seeker, everyone is given the same. Growing and cooking and eating food together seem to me to be skills that have been lost for many in this country. Part of the reception group who came to meet me was the refugee cycling group. They have really embraced cycling and apparently often go on long rides outside of Liverpool. I would have liked to ask them on their views on the UK. I am guessing most of those young men had to make some really difficult decisions to leave their countries and take great personal risks to get here.

Before we went for lunch, we went to the immigration office for our final photo opportunity. When we arrived, there was a queue of migrants waiting to go into the office. There were also several security people. They looked like night club bouncers and were quite intimidating. We stood close to the office and started to get our banners out. One of the security guys approached and asked us not to film or record as he wanted to ask a question. We were hesitant. I said they were filming because I was there. He said again he wanted to ask a question, and could we please stop filming. He did not want to put himself in a difficult situation. He said there was a family outside with nowhere to go and he did not know how to help them.

He said (and this was the moment I felt for him) "This is my job, *I need this job*, but this family have nowhere to go". He said, "I'm a dad too, and these people need to know where to go". At that moment I really felt for this guy. He clearly saw these people as humans in need of help rather than as people we should try to exclude from our county.

Again, the concept of inequality comes to mind. We can all make choices about our lives, but some have less opportunity to make choices or have no choice. This guy had made a brave and human decision, a small gesture. I am not sure what his work colleagues were thinking in that moment.

As a country I think we are not in a good place. Many people here are genuinely struggling to make ends meet, yet we are an incredibly wealthy country. We have a long history of welcoming refugees, and yet we are now in a very shameful place, where we are dehumanising refugees. The whole point of my ride was to highlight the "hostile" environment, making asylum seekers take information in person to the immigration centre in Liverpool – and now as a country we are about to send people seeking sanctuary to Rwanda. I must ask myself where has our national empathy gone, and once again I feel that anger rising. But perhaps, as Gandhi had it, that anger can be a gift to all of us if only we're prepared to channel it into something positive and constructive.

Claire Piggott

A concert in aid of SWVG

Two years late, the Conchord Singers performed a concert this summer to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the voyage of the Mayflower Pilgrims from Southampton to New England in 1620. The choir had commissioned a work from composer Andrew Wilson and welcomed extra singers to join in. *The Pilgrim Fathers*,

conducted by Craig Lawton, was launched at the concert – a world premiere. The singers loved it, giving of their best, and the audience felt they'd been on a voyage. The music ebbed and flowed and we were tossed on the sea. It was a powerful work, accompanied by a wind quintet and piano, who also performed Fauré's *Pavanne*. Various other pieces, which reflected journeys, particularly on the sea, were also sung by the choir.

The choir chose to support SWVG for this concert. That choice was particularly relevant as the Mayflower Pilgrims fled persecution in Britain. They set off in a boat into which they packed pilgrims from another boat, the *Speedwell*, which had been found to be unseaworthy, so the *Mayflower* was certainly overcrowded. Most survived the journey, but half died during their first winter there. There are so many parallels with the journeys taken by some of those supported by SWVG. The concert was held at Avenue St Andrews Church, which is home to the Avenue Multicultural Centre, well known to many involved with SWVG.



The choir raised about £400 for SWVG from a bucket collection after the concert.

The choir would welcome additional singers and has a sliding scale for fees. If anyone supported by SWVG would like to join, the choir would welcome them and no fees would be charged. See <http://conchordsingers.co.uk/> for more detail

Hazel Inskip

A trip to the New Forest

"We had such a great day out welcoming refugees and asylum seekers from Southampton to the New Forest National Park. A walk through woodland and a picnic with lots of lovely conversations in the sunshine. Nature is for everyone and everyone should be able to access and enjoy it. Thank you so much for coming and we look forward to seeing you again."
– A New Forest Ranger

Thank you so much to the National Park Rangers for providing a picnic, transport and a base camp in the Forest for 23 adults and 13 children from SWVG. It was such fun to spend time in May in such beautiful, relaxing countryside and to see ponies and wildlife within such easy reach of Southampton. Thanks too to Hayden for introducing us to the Forest in April by bringing artefacts to a Friday session at AMC.

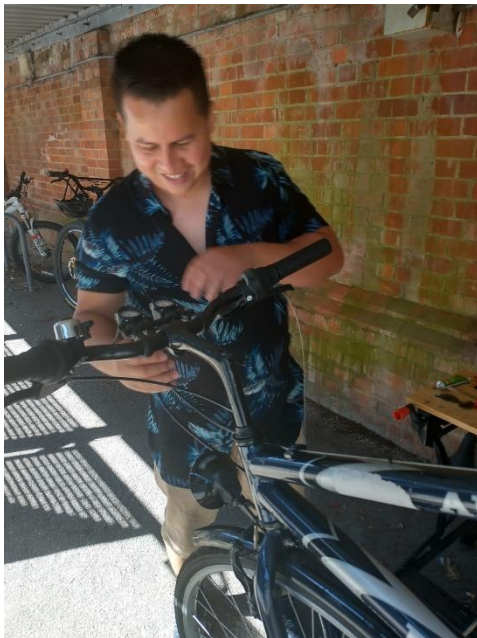
Sue Jessup, SWVG Activities volunteer



A new SWVG bike shed

Refugee support groups all over the country have long been providing donated bikes to their members, with obvious benefits to their health, socialisation and getting to grips with the towns they find themselves in. Several schemes are specific to identified groups of refugees, such as Syrians or, more recently, Ukrainians, but the scheme unfolding with SWVG has been for all members who thought they'd like a bike. This included those with riding experience and those for whom riding a bike in public in their countries of origin would have been unthinkable.

The project is predicated on bikes being donated to us, hence it runs the gamut of once-cherished but no longer ridden machines to BMXs ridden into the ground by exuberant teenagers. People all over the Solent area have been very generous but for some offerings – either because of the cost of repair or general suitability – the massive metal recycling yard in Northam was the best option.



Our approach was lightly based on the long-standing bike project run by Asylum Welcome in Oxford, from whom we learnt the wisdom of a triage process for donations, to keep a register of every bike, including its source, and the fundamental feature of trying to involve our refugees in

the assessment, repair and ensuring the roadworthiness of every bike. Throughout the early months of getting the project underway, we had unstinting support and encouragement from the City Council's Sustainable Transport Team, and its resourceful leader Ruth Magennis, as well as other city agencies such as My Journey and Monty's Bike Hub.

Working on one bike per customer at a time, however, was slowing the speed at which we could get bums on saddles. Asylum Welcome has its own workshop space but all we had was the back garden of our emerging chief mechanic, Miguel Cortez. Earlier this year, Ruth Magennis made the inspired suggestion that SWVG apply to the City Council's Active Communities Fund to facilitate a bike hub, where people could meet in a bike-friendly space, develop maintenance skills, and even set off for group rides. We did and were awarded a grant of £1900 to develop a workshop, though regrettably the place we'd chosen fell through. However, after scouring the city for alternative homes, the University of Southampton's Working Group for establishing it as a University of Sanctuary came to the rescue. One of the large bike sheds at Avenue Campus was offered as a secure space and suddenly we had a workshop in the making, as well as a half dozen bikes from the university's own recycling scheme. SWVG is indebted to Adam Tewkesbury and Warren Bashford at the University's Environment & Sustainability team for their encouragement and goodwill.

The grant was principally for workshop tools and equipment, as well as some training, and the last few weeks have seen the site transformed into a serviceable centre, with doughty input from SWVG member John Barker, a retired engineer who has been working alongside Miguel. The shed is not yet a pulsing dynamo impacting across the city and our community, but the foundations and storage facilities have been firmly laid and the bikes are ready to roll.

Keiren Phelan

AVENUE ARTISTS – OUR WORLD

To see work from the recent carving workshops as well as jewellery, knitting, crochet, textiles, flowers and other arts and crafts created by SWVG members and friends, come to the Avenue Artists Open Studios weekend at Avenue St Andrews Church on Saturday to Monday, 27-29th August from 1-5pm each day. See <https://hampshireopenstudios.org.uk/artists/southampton/item/avenue-artists>.



AVENUE ARTISTS



OUR WORLD

Lockdown creativity unleashed! Big and small paintings, prints, cards, ceramics, photography, textiles, baskets and 3D work. A collaboration of local artists in a Grade II listed church – a BIG exhibition!

27th, 28th & 29th AUGUST 1.00PM – 5.00PM
AVENUE St. ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
THE AVENUE, SOUTHAMPTON, SO17 1XQ.

Wheelchair accessible Refreshments Parking in nearby streets

And lastly... A recipe from one of our trustees

Sri Lankan Spicy Chickpea (Kadalai)

This easy spiced chickpea recipe is also healthy, vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, dairy-free and uses simple ingredients you can easily find in your kitchen. They are a great source of plant-based protein. I recommend trying to cook with curry leaves as they bring flavour and aroma to food. If you don't have access to these fresh leaves you can always use dry ones. If you want it hotter, you can add more red chillies. This dish has been much enjoyed by members of the SWVG Communications Group on two occasions.

Ingredients

250g dried chickpeas OR 1 can of chickpeas
2 tablespoon sesame oil (you can use any neutral cooking oil)
1 teaspoon black mustard seeds
1 teaspoon fennel seeds
3 dried red chillies chopped into large chunks (add more chillies if you want it hotter)
1 large chopped onion
A few curry leaves
Salt as you want
Fresh coconut, sliced – add them if you like

Instructions

1. Take the chickpeas and soak them overnight in the water. Then wash them thoroughly.
2. Now add the chickpeas in plenty of water and cook them until the chickpeas turn tender. Then add the salt and leave it for a few minutes to absorb.
3. Once done, drain the water completely using a strainer.
OR If you use canned chickpeas
Thoroughly wash the chickpeas and drain completely.
4. Heat oil in a pan and add mustard seeds and fennel seeds. When they start to splash, add the onion and stir until the

onion starts to golden then add the dried red chillies, and curry leaves.

5. Now add the chickpeas, add salt and mix them well until all combined.

6. If you like you can add the fresh sliced coconut sliced, mix in well and serve warm.

This is how to make an easy spicy chickpea recipe. Serve and enjoy this simple recipe with your friends and family. I hope you like this healthy food.

Tharshan Vettivel

Funding and donations

Grants

The French Huguenot Church of London have agreed to fund us again with a grant of £5,000.

The second tranche of OnePercent funding has arrived - £1022

The Knight Charitable Trust £400

Other donations

St Matthew and st Paul's Church, Winchester £250

In memory of John Cramoysan through the Much Loved website £200

Fund-raising events

Claire Pigott's Southampton to Liverpool bike ride raised an amazing £2495

Natasha Groom and helpers held a plant sale which raised £800

At a recent Takenote Chamber Choir concert a retiring collection plus a donation from the choir raised £1200.

The Conchord Singers Concert raised £468