



# Newsletter Autumn 2022

Welcome to the Autumn SWVG newsletter. In this edition we have an update from the campaigns team on the current state of policy following the recent change of government leadership. This moment, post-pandemic lockdown, also offers a chance to reflect on how our own behaviours and processes have developed, principally through the use of technology; below, Jackie Batchelor explains how meetings have evolved to benefit (or not!) from these advances. We also have stories to share from Chris Allain, Sue Jessup and Wendy Arrowsmith covering some fun and successful recent activities.

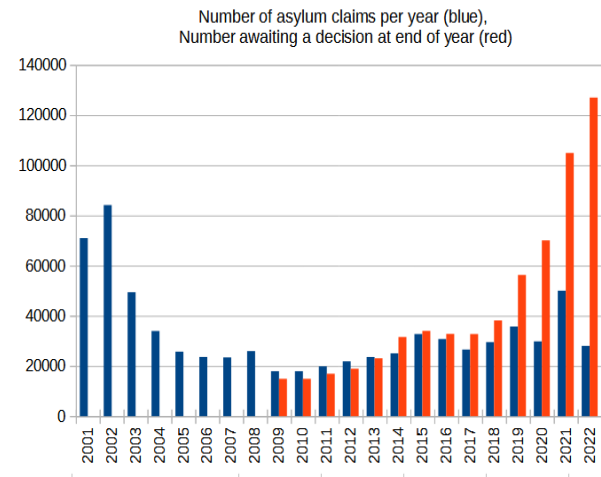
## Campaigning update

As I write this, the Home Secretary has just flown into Manston in a Chinook helicopter whilst destitute Afghan refugees have been left abandoned in London without food or accommodation, owing to a 'misunderstanding'. Talk of 'invasion' is used to distract from policy and management failures by the Home Office, as those with power and responsibility seek to blame people fleeing war and oppression.

## Delays in the system

This graph below, based on Home Office data, shows that the number of asylum claims per year (blue) has fluctuated between 84,000 in 2002 and 18,000 in 2009, rising to over 60,000 in the first half of 2022. About half of these are by people who crossed the Channel in small boats. According to the BBC, eight years ago 9 out of 10 asylum claims were being dealt

with within 6 months. However, in January 2019 the HO abandoned the 6 months standard, since when the backlog of cases (red) has increased dramatically.



[from Home Office statistics Asy\_D01 & Asy\_D03; 2022 column is half year to end June 2022 only.]

We can see the damaging effects on people who have to wait two years or more even to be interviewed by the Home Office and then further long months without a decision being made on their cases. It's a very stressful time while they get no information from the HO about the progress of their case, when they are living in limbo on £5.84 per day and are not allowed to work and contribute to society despite the abilities and skills that they offer.

Meanwhile, hundreds of millions are being spent on hotel accommodation and private contractors, which should instead have been spent on dealing with people's asylum claims properly in the first place.

## Public opinion

Contrary to the Government's narrative, a majority of the public sympathises with refugees and want them to be treated fairly.

Three in four Britons agree that people should be able to take refuge in other countries, including Britain, to escape war or persecution, and just over half of people said they were sympathetic to migrants attempting to cross the Channel (Ipsos immigration tracker March 2022). The Mail Online reported on 17 June 2022 that 35% of people supported the Rwanda scheme whilst 45% opposed it. Half thought it would be unworkable and only a third thought it would deter people from crossing the Channel. The legality of the Rwanda scheme has been challenged in the High Court and a decision is awaited. There was also high support (61%) for allowing asylum claims to be made from outside the UK, such as at British embassies abroad.

And according to a YouGov poll in March 2022, 81% of British people think that people seeking asylum should be allowed to work.

## In Britain, we want an asylum system that we can be proud of

There is an urgent need to rethink our national refugee policies in a way that protects vulnerable people fleeing war and persecution, reduces human smuggling, and retains widespread public support.

This is achievable and the Refugee Council has published "A British National Refugee Policy" (October 2022) which shows how this should be done. We are contacting the main political parties in our area to promote this positive approach. Three pressing needs are: to cooperate effectively with our European neighbours, to provide people who have reasonable grounds for asylum in the UK to travel by safe routes, and to clear the backlog of asylum claims.

Looking forward, SWVG is supporting a national campaign, Fight the #AntiRefugeeLaws, which will ask our local authorities to defend the right to seek safety from war and persecution in the UK and to sign the national 'Fight the Anti-Refugee Laws' pledge.



We are also starting to plan a public event in Southampton in Refugee Week in June 2023; please get involved now by contacting Jenny Corrick ([jenny.corrick140257@gmail.com](mailto:jenny.corrick140257@gmail.com)).

Please also look out for any petitions to airlines who might be thinking of transporting people to Rwanda and elsewhere; these have been very successful so far in deterring them from doing this.

*William Brook-Hart*

## Zooming in

Three years ago many of us had never heard of Zoom, let alone used it, but Covid lockdown soon had us talking with and seeing each other digitally, on screens. SWVG was no exception, with training, support groups and General Meetings, as well as trustee and other meetings all happening on Zoom.

## Training

As many readers know, Part 1 involves imparting a huge amount of information, introducing new applicants to the asylum

process and the plight of those seeking asylum. Devising and sharing an introductory PowerPoint presentation online has made it possible to go into more depth about the process and offer links to video clips and sources of further information, which people can digest in their own time and at their own pace, revisiting as required at any time, instead of just listening to a 'lecture'. New applicants then come together on Zoom with the training team and co-ordinators, so they can meet experienced members of SWVG, as well as fellow applicants. By keeping this 1.5 hour meeting on Zoom, we have been able to be responsive to applications in a short space of time, running a Part 1 Zoom session whenever we get 6 new applicants, without the task being overly demanding on trainers and co-ordinators. Both the PowerPoint and the swift response have been valued and praised by volunteers.

Although Parts 2, 3 and 4 were adapted to work on Zoom during lockdown to respond to an increase in volunteer numbers, these sessions work far better face to face, giving rise to more natural and spontaneous interactions. Session 3, which focuses on communication and assertiveness skills is a particularly interactive session, which loses much of its impact on Zoom. The buzz in the room on our first face to face Part 3 after lockdown was palpable. The conversations in pairs were more intimate and meaningful and the trainers could go round, offering help and support far more easily than when using breakout rooms on Zoom. Pairs could swap more easily, so people had the opportunity to meet and talk with more people. These observations and feedback from volunteers have led us to return to running Parts 2, 3 and 4 face to face.

## Support groups

Support groups continued to thrive during lockdown on Zoom, giving visitors, teachers and other members the opportunity to maintain contact with and support each other. Despite most people wishing to return to face to face meetings, this has proven harder to achieve than anticipated due to varying degrees of

vulnerability to the Covid virus amongst members or their families, as well as the geographical distances covered by our membership. Using Zoom has enabled some people to attend more meetings than if they had had to drive long distances after work and/or in the dark. Some groups have accommodated this by staying on Zoom or alternating meetings between face to face and Zoom. Currently we have 4 groups meeting in person again, 3 on Zoom only and 2 alternating. This is being kept under review.

## General Meetings

During lockdown it was easy for people to feel isolated and disconnected from others. In order to address this in SWVG, General Meetings were held on Zoom each month instead of every other month, as had been the face-to-face meetings and now is the pattern again.

Attendance at these Zoom meetings was higher than it had been previously at Avenue St Andrews due to it being easier for people to attend without travel time and there was also less competition for people's time. There was also a need to stay connected with SWVG.

General Meetings have remained on Zoom because of the higher attendance figures and geographical distances, but there is definitely appetite for meeting face to face again to give people the opportunity for those spontaneous conversations and for members to meet other members in person. Although, on Zoom, we have up to 15 minutes in small groups in breakout rooms, the allocation to groups depends on when people log in and does not give people proper opportunity to choose with whom they meet or converse. The connection with others and sense of belonging is lost on Zoom and this is particularly hard for those new to the organisation or for those unable to attend the Avenue Multicultural Centre on Friday mornings. Perhaps alternating Zoom and face to face General Meetings might be tried.

## Other meetings

Trustee and support group convener meetings continue to meet on Zoom for convenience and to save travel time. The Money Allocation Group meets in person. Other sub-group meetings vary according to the group involved.

We have taken full advantage of the convenience of Zoom, but we are also mindful of the need to meet in person to develop and maintain connections. You also can't share cake on Zoom...

*Jackie Batchelor*

## Hitting the bullseye – A visit to an Archery Club

Around midday on 18th August 2022, a group of some 17 aspiring toxophilites and I gathered outside the Avenue Multicultural Centre ready for an enjoyable day out. We were to be guests of the grandly titled AC Delco Bowmen Archery Club, a club whose membership is made up entirely of keen toxophilites. Those not familiar with this term will probably have deduced by now that they are people who enjoy practising and perfecting the ancient skill of shooting arrows with a bow; 'archers' being the more common term. The Club was founded in 1966 as part of the Sports and Social Club of the AC Delco vehicle parts factory, then based in Southampton, and is now situated in Colden Common. In 1998 when the factory was sold off and eventually demolished, the Club continued, retained its old name and was opened to the public.



The visit had been set up by Leila Karimi, an SWVG Trustee who is an established member of the Club and an expert archer herself. On the day of the visit Leila was accompanied by her husband, himself an international archery coach who, with Leila, helped to coach us during the afternoon. The initial training was led by Graham Rosamond, one of the senior Club coaches, dressed for the part in wide-brimmed bush hat, shorts, belt and quiver. He explained the long history of the skill, including its use as a sport for hunting or pleasure, as well as its more serious use as a weapon in famous battles of the past, globally, throughout history. He also showed us some of the different types of bow, in particular the two simplest designs, the Longbow and the Recurve. The Longbow requires much more strength and skill than the Recurve but was the bow with which the English archers won fame in their victories over the French at Crecy and Agincourt in medieval times.



As beginners, and certainly not battle-fit, we would be confined to using the Recurve bow to give us an altogether better chance of hitting the target. Graham's introduction was very thorough and emphasised the need for strict safety at the firing point. The archers were to stand in line about five yards back from the firing line and, when all was ready,

would move forward to their firing positions on the sound of his whistle. In his demonstration of the correct shooting technique he included, as a particular point of interest, a special arrow whose tip emitted a high-pitched whistle when shot into the air. He explained that this type of arrow was often used in battle as a way of signalling to the forward troops to which flank the commander wanted them to move. He also stressed the need for physical fitness as an archer and led a session of standing warmup exercises for all participants before we paused for a lovely lunch kindly provided by Leila and Graham.

After this short break the group were all eager to get down to some serious toxophily. The Club had provided a coach at each of the four firing points and during the course of the afternoon everybody had the chance to have a number of goes at perfecting their technique. While the adults were busy shooting the big bows and real arrows, the children were not left out, and were able to join in with archery sets of the rubber-sucker variety which had been thoughtfully provided by the Club.

By 3.30pm everybody was well exercised and ready to make tracks and we departed for home expressing tremendous gratitude to Leila, Graham and the Club members for a really enjoyable and interesting new experience.

*Chris Allain*

## Creative Arts Day, October 27th

Acting & Performance students at Solent University welcomed those seeking asylum and refugees to their university on 27<sup>th</sup> October. 'Hopes and Dreams' and 'Welcome to Southampton' were the key themes; a fun day for all was the aim. The students had been working hard to provide a feel-good event for adults and children during the recent October half term holiday. They began by developing

their understanding of the situations faced by those seeking asylum and refugees through a talk by SWVG and by a very moving theatrical performance by local theatre organisation World Stages Now (see below). Students planned the Creative Arts Day, assisted by Solent's Art Department and other staff. So, a big thank you from SWVG to Solent University students and staff for organising a very successful and well attended day of art, craft, fun and drama games for the local community!

People painted their hopes and dreams on leaves and hung them on a tree or encased in baubles.



People worked together on murals and a collaborative installation and had lots of fun playing drama games.



Solent's Acting & Performance students will use the artwork as a stimulus to create short pieces of theatre. These will be performed on Friday afternoon, December 9<sup>th</sup> at Solent. Those who participated in the Creative Arts Day, other SWVG members and those in CLEAR and World Stages Now will be invited to be in the audience.

If you would like to come along or would like further information about the show, or other SWVG Activities, please contact [Sue.jessup@swvg-refugees.org.uk](mailto:Sue.jessup@swvg-refugees.org.uk)

*Sue Jessup, SWVG Activities team*

## World Stages Now

World Stages Now were delighted to be invited by SWVG to support the Solent Performing Arts Department with their project, Hopes and Dreams. Our members who meet weekly at the AMC used their personal experiences and skills in producing drama, to provide a bespoke safeguarding workshop for the students at MAST. Intended as immersive, Solent students were first asked to walk the space as if on a routine daily activity which was then interrupted with a black out and a command to lie down with closed eyes. In multiple languages the students were surrounded by voices from the WSN performers that whispered and called out expressions of farewell to families. Students were then invited to make comments about how they had felt.

Overall, it was an exercise in empathy and the students were clearly inspired to move forward to planning the family workshop for SWVG clients with both the care and understanding needed when working with vulnerable adults and children. WSN have continued to support this project with a few members taking part in the drama and art activities day at Solent on the 27<sup>th</sup> October that was a wonderful reminder to those who attended how important play, laughter and creativity is in supporting mental health.



More information about Southampton based World Stages Now and their current projects can be found at [www.worldstagesnow.org.uk](http://www.worldstagesnow.org.uk)

*Wendy Arrowsmith*

## Funding and donations

### Grants

£10,000 anonymous donor  
Knight Charitable Trust £500

### Fundraising events

The Take Note concert in Winchester on 4 July raised £1200 including £500 from Lloyds Foundation

A folk concert in Whitchurch organised by Paul Sartin in July raised £1985. We were sad to learn that Paul Sartin died suddenly in September

Dinner at ASA on 22 Oct raised £675

Charity no. 1183358 Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes, John Pilkington