



Newsletter

Winter/Spring

2023

Winchester – making it a City of Sanctuary for all who seek sanctuary

Although SWVG has plenty of experience of supporting asylum seekers in housing in Southampton, working in Winchester presented a new and considerable challenge in a smaller and quieter town.

We were able to build on the excellent work done by churches, councils and many other bodies to support Ukrainian refugees. It was the start of an impressive campaign. A growing number of volunteers from SWVG, Winchester City of Sanctuary, churches, library, charitable and other organisations have worked hard to provide hotel residents with practical help and advice, and to make them feel welcome.

Those seeking sanctuary come from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan, and many more. Most have no income at all, others are starting to get their £9 a week.

Joining forces with Winchester City of Sanctuary, St Peter's Sanctuary Welcome Hub and United Church Meet and Greet, SWVG's priority was to provide hotel residents with suitable warm clothing and ensure that they had access to medical care. A few were identified as unaccompanied minors and have since been rehoused in safer surroundings. We also provide phones or SIM cards, and if needed we direct them to an immigration lawyer.

The next priority was to set up English classes, and find welcoming spaces for them to gather in Winchester. City faith organisations have been quick to respond. St Peter's RC Church, the Quakers, the Salvation Army the United Church and others have gladly and generously opened their doors.

Every week, volunteers lead a football match. The next plan is to start a walking group.

Winchester Library is a Library of Sanctuary. It has set aside space for people seeking asylum to use computers once a week and to have a peaceful, relaxing place to read and study.

Among the hotel residents there is a great sense of camaraderie and mutual support. Those who speak fluent English and who are teachers by profession are helping with the English lessons. In a lesson this week, working on the verb 'to be', one young man came to the first person plural, 'we are'. He stopped and looked round the table. 'We are... a family'. Others are helping those who need more IT skills. Three men have already completed their initial SWVG training.

As a City of Sanctuary, Winchester is living up to its name.

There is much more to be done and plans are being made for creative and volunteering projects as well as more work with Winchester University, our local University of Sanctuary. If you have ideas for activities or would like to help us expand the support we can offer in Winchester, please contact sue.jessup@swvg-refugees.org.uk or lesley@winchester.cityofsanctuary.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Campaigning update

Legal challenges to the Rwanda policy

Some people that we assist in Southampton and Winchester are starting to get "Rwanda letters" - a Notice of Intent on Inadmissibility from the Home Office. They may be liable to be detained, then the "Third Country Unit" (TCU) may consider whether they are "Inadmissible" and whether they should be removed to another country, possibly Rwanda.

This is very worrying. We put people in touch with a solicitor if they do not already have one. They need to keep legal and other emergency contact details written down, since they will have their phones confiscated if they are detained.

The legal challenges to the Rwanda policy are continuing.

The High Court heard cases brought by Care4Calais, Detention Action, the PCSU and a number of individuals in September, and a case by Asylum Aid supported by Freedom from Torture in October. Sadly, the Court decided in December that the government's plan to relocate certain asylum seekers from the UK to Rwanda to have their asylum claims processed there – not in the UK – is lawful and does not go against the Refugee Convention.

However, the Court confirmed that the Home Office failed to properly consider the circumstances of each of the eight individual claimants who were set to get on the June 2022 flight to Rwanda (which never took off, thanks to these legal interventions).

At a hearing held in the High Court on 16 January 2023, permission to go to the Court of Appeal was granted to six of the individual claimants.

The grounds which have permission to appeal include whether:

- the agreement between the UK and Rwanda governments provides sufficient protection against refoulement and other Article 3 European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) ill treatment,

- the Rwanda policy constitutes a penalty under Article 31 of the Refugee Convention,
- the policy breaches retained EU law,
- the policy is systematically unfair,
- Rwanda is or is not a safe third country.

It's highly unlikely that the government will attempt any removal flights until onward appeals are resolved but no date has for the Appeal has yet been set. According to the BBC, that could mean the Rwanda plan could remain in limbo for much of 2023 - or even into next year if judges do not prioritise the appeals.

Immigration law expert Colin Yeo has commented:

"Whatever happens, it is unlikely that more than a relatively small number would ever be removed, though. Firstly, Rwanda has indicated so far that it will accept a few hundred per year... Secondly, the Home Office is pretty terrible at removing anyone anywhere at the moment.... A lot of time, energy and money has been put into this Rwanda plan. It has acted as a distraction from the asylum backlog and other issues."

However, if someone is deemed to be "Inadmissible", even though the Home Office may not have an agreement with any third country (other than Rwanda) to remove them, they will be stuck in limbo (and maybe detention) with delays in getting their asylum claim considered. Inadmissibility does not take account of the merits of their claim for asylum, but on how they came to the UK.

Some statistics

The number of people waiting at the end of December 2022:

- for an initial decision on their asylum claim: 160,919 (up 60% since Dec-21),
- waiting more than 6 months: 109,641 (up 77%).

The number of Afghan nationals arriving the UK in 2022:

- in small boats: 8,633
- via the UK Government's only safe route (ARCS pathway 2): 22.

UK payments to Rwanda for the Rwanda scheme so far: £140m.

The “streamlined asylum process”

On 23 February the Home Office published its new “streamlined asylum process”. It claims this will accelerate the process for certain cohorts of asylum-seekers (estimated to be about 12,000) by allowing decision-makers to grant asylum without conducting a substantive interview, or with a shorter interview.

This will put great pressure on people to obtain legal advice within a very short time.

We will do our best to help people get that advice and support them through the process.

This article is based on the following website sources:

1. *Right to Remain*
2. *Asylum Aid*
3. *The Law Society*
4. *Free Movement*
5. *BBC News*
6. *The Independent*
7. *The Guardian*.

Please visit these for more detailed and up-to-date information.



Fight the #AntiRefugeeLaws



Refugee Week 19 to 25 June 2023

SWVG has a small Campaign Group, and Southampton is a BIG city.

So when it came to planning a celebration for Refugee Week this year, we called our friends at Southampton Stand Up to Racism and CLEAR. Together we are aiming high and seeking backing from Southampton City Council to make this an event to remember.

We plan a big parade with music and decorations from a prominent shopping area to one of the many lovely parks for a picnic, more music, and fun sports.

A major aim will be to put our positive pro-Refugee message in front of a public too often exposed to fear-mongering and lies about immigration.

Six schools are already keen to be involved. We are approaching cultural and community arts organisations, universities, musicians and performers to help make the event a super inclusive upbeat occasion.

A young volunteer with lived experience of being a refugee has offered to be our ambassador to ask Sir Mo Farah to star..... I said we were aiming high!

Lots of things to do between now and June, and we are very keen to involve everyone. Please spread the word.

I am happy to talk to people about how they could be involved.

Jenny Corrick tel 07881566705 email jenny.corrick140257@gmail.com

The Cultural Conversation Group, Southampton Central Library – some questions answered

When do you go to the library?

We are there every Wednesday at 12. You don't have to come every Wednesday, just when you're free.

Who comes?

People who need to learn English and want to integrate in Southampton, and who want to find new friends.

People come from all over the world.

We are a group of people who want to practise and learn English and learn new vocabulary. Although SWVG is a group that supports asylum seekers and refugees, some of the people in our group are just learning English and already have leave to remain or are here under different visa conditions.

What do we do?

We have been to the Sea City Museum, the Southampton City Art Gallery and the John Hansard Gallery.

We walked the streets of Southampton looking for hares.

We have had a backstage tour at the MAST Mayflower Studios.

One of our members is a volunteer at SCRATCH in Southampton so we visited their base with its beautiful garden.

All the while we are using new language, talking about music, or flowers or colour or history.

Why do we do it?

We are looking for someone to communicate with and learn from. It gives us a chance to speak about general topics in our lives. We can find and visit different cultures and people. One of our number said, "This group has helped me and has introduced me to new people."

What's happening?

When we're in this group, all the time we get some inspiration, information about events that will happen in Southampton.

We are improving our level of English while having fun.

"I'm interested in this class because I find new friends and improve my English language and enjoy the British accent!"

"I can enjoy meeting new people and practise English with them. "

"I'm here to study English and to communicate with others."



A message from 'our' photographer, Julian Benjamin

Dear members,

I'm a professional photographer and have been working with SWVG over the past year or so.

My intention is to both highlight the work of SWVG, and tell the personal stories of those seeking asylum. In doing so, I look to produce distinctive, thoughtful photography to help upgrade SWVG marketing materials, campaigns and general comms.

As well as raising awareness locally, there may also be opportunities to reach a wider audience. There are local galleries (University of Winchester, Hansard) as well as The National Portrait Gallery's prestigious annual photo prize. I'll certainly be looking to place images there:

<https://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2023/taylor-wessing-photo-portrait-prize-2023>

I can also submit images to The Times (who I shoot for regularly), and others who have featured my work (Guardian/ Observer/ Telegraph), thus providing local issues with national exposure.

I've attached some of the images made so far, but I am looking to do a lot more. If you know of anyone seeking asylum who would be happy to be involved or if there are coming events or activities that would benefit from some photography, please get in touch. I am very happy to discuss further.

You can contact me here:
studio@julianbenjamin.com



And finally, a recipe to try at home...

"My favourite food is a Sudanese food called Asida. I love it very much. I used to eat it when I was a baby. My mother she cooked it for me all the time. Because of that I love it. Asida is a very famous food in Sudan, especially in Darfur. When we invite people, we cook it. That's why everyone loves it.

If you want Asida first thing we will do, you must take one bag of flour with four cups of water and a quarter of a spoonful of salt. Then we put the cooking pot on the fire with the three cups of water until it is boiling completely, and then we can start adding the flour and mix it together until it becomes soft.

And then we prepare a locally made bowl called a qadh with a little oil. We put oil in the qadh because we don't want the Asida to stick to the qadh, then we put it in the qadh. It will be ready to eat." Hayder



Funding and donations

Recent donations or collections

Collection at the Phoenix Film Club of 'Quo Vadis Aida' £258

Collection at Winchester Film Society showing of 'Limbo' £243

Delicious Sounds concert on 10 December £502

Newlands Primary School, Southampton £50

Southampton Concert with Iranian musician Samrad donations £360

St Clare and St Francis Trust £500

St Lawrence Church, Winchester £570

Society of Friends Winchester (Quakers) £520

VOLUNTEER NEEDED TO COORDINATE OUR INDIVIDUAL FUNDRAISING

Can you help SWVG?

We need your help, coordinating our fundraising from individuals. We need someone efficient to focus on this area which has been neglected.

The amount of time required is flexible and there are different ways you can help, such as record-keeping, or thanking donors. It needs a few hours per month.

If you might be able to help even in a small way, please email David Smith at treasurer@swvg-refugees.org.uk or ring David on 07951 927670 without commitment.