

Newsletter no. 19

Spring 2024

SWiVG

Southampton & Winchester Visitors Group

Working with asylum seekers and refugees



Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

In this Issue

- Civic Charter Impact Award 2023
- Good news or bad?
- Refugees at Home: can you help?
- Looking forward to Refugee Week 2024
- "Our Home"
- The Wednesday art group
- The Illegal Migration Act and Rwanda
- Visit to the Bibby Stockholm
- Universities of Sanctuary
- The bike shed
- Activities update
- Fundraising dinner
- Recipe: Zereshk Polo - barberry rice
- Introducing our mental health leaflet
- Achievements and qualifications
- Donations

Civic Charter Impact Award 2023

Sue Jessup



SWVG had a lovely surprise in December: we were thrilled to be awarded the Civic Charter Impact Award by Solent University at its Engage Awards ceremony! Our certificate is proudly displayed at the welcome desk at AMC on Fridays.

At the award ceremony, Jennifer Glastonbury, Independent Governor of Solent University, presented SWVG with a glass trophy.

Why did Solent University give SWVG this award?

Solent students and staff have collaborated with SWVG and those seeking sanctuary in a wide range of projects:

'Health4Her' and 'Health4Him' have helped over 40 refugees take part in weekly health and exercise programmes at Solent University.

Performing Arts students organised a day of art, craft, drama and games at Solent for refugees and their families. Inspired by the work created there and conversations with refugees, the students later delivered short theatrical performances on the themes of Hopes and Dreams.

Enjoyable activities and experiences have been offered by Solent students and staff to benefit the physical and mental health of people seeking asylum.

Many Solent students have gained a much greater understanding of the lives of those in Southampton seeking asylum. They have met and worked with people from many different countries and communities. All this will be of great value to the students in their future studies and careers.

We look forward to more collaboration with Solent University in the future.

Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

Good news or bad?

Claudia Glyn

Claudia is Co-ordinator of the SWVG Desk Team and Visitors. She has been a member of SWVG for 11 years, and a Trustee for 10.

Here she looks at the issues that have dominated the past year.



On 23 February 2023, in an attempt to cut down the backlog of open asylum cases, the Home Office introduced a new 'streamlined asylum processing' policy, whereby some people seeking asylum have to complete a questionnaire instead of waiting for an interview. (Only occasionally are applicants called for an interview after completing the questionnaire.) This policy initially applied to adults from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen who had not undergone an asylum substantive interview. Later on, Iran, Iraq and Sudan, where many of our clients come from, were added to the list.

We soon found out that only those with legal qualifications of at least OISC Level 2 were allowed to help applicants with the completion of the questionnaires. (While some of us hold Level 1 qualifications, Level 2 involves a lot more training, which is not free.) This meant we quickly had to find solicitors for clients. The only firm of solicitors in Southampton who take on asylum cases under Legal Aid were soon

overwhelmed, and had to close their books. The net had to be cast wider, and clients' conversations with solicitors had to be conducted virtually, something many clients find rather unsettling.

While we used to try to register all hotel residents as soon as possible with the local solicitor, we now have two lists: one of clients in need of solicitors, and one of firms in another part of the country who might take 'our people'. These lists have to be managed carefully. We need to leave room for manoeuvre, as we have to act quickly if someone receives a questionnaire.

The silver lining: in autumn, the numbers of positive decisions started to rise rapidly. In the past we used to celebrate these events unreservedly! However...

The wave of positive decisions created a problem for the local authorities, who were unable to cope with the demand for social housing. They have a duty of care for families with children. Some of our families are now in temporary accommodation, parents sharing two bedrooms with several children of different genders and varying ages.

There is not the same duty of care to single people. Southampton's homelessness team is doing its best. The city's hostels were soon full. Some of our clients were unable to cope with sharing a room in a hostel and preferred living on the street. Finding private accommodation was the obvious solution to the dilemma.

This was complicated by the usual Home Office chaos. People were receiving notification of their positive decision, but their Biometric Residence Permits and eviction letters arrived at different times, sometimes only months later, affecting the time when people could open bank accounts and apply for Universal Credit. In the end we agreed on a system with CLEAR that allowed us to keep an overview of the individuals in need. We refer everyone who receives a positive decision to CLEAR, who registers them with the Council Homelessness Team. The Team carries out an assessment and usually offers

a deposit for a room. SWVG is developing links with letting agents and is looking for available rooms. CLEAR passes on the names of the next group of people in need of accommodation.

Not everybody is accommodated; a few have been made homeless and have made use of the churches' night shelter scheme, but we can say that through our cooperation with CLEAR, a wave of homelessness over Christmas was avoided.

Not quite a reason to celebrate, but enough to make us continue with our work.

Refugees at Home: can you help?

Nikki Walters

Nikki is Advice Manager at CLEAR Project, a charity SWVG works closely with.

We have an urgent need for help. We have recently tried to refer several clients to Refugees at Home, but they have told us the following:

"Sadly, we do not have any available hosts in Southampton or in fact, the whole south east coast apart from a few available in Brighton and Hastings."

We have people who have private rental accommodation sorted for a few weeks from now, so just need short-term accommodation. Refugees at Home hosts would be perfect for that, but there are absolutely none available. If you think you might be able to help, go to <https://refugeesathome.org/get-involved/id-like-to-host/> to find out more.



Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

Looking forward to Refugee Week 2024

Elly Kilroy

The 17th-23rd June is Refugee Week: the world's largest arts & culture festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of people seeking sanctuary. This year's theme is "**Our Home**". From the places we gather to share meals, to our collective home, planet earth, we are all invited to celebrate what our Our Home means to us.

SWVG and partners want to build on the success of the 2023 Southampton Event, which included a carnival parade and picnic with music and dance in the middle of the city, as well as participation by schools, local community groups and people living in asylum accommodation. This was attended by about 1000 people.

Proposed Events: preparatory meetings with schools, people seeking asylum and cultural groups in the weeks leading up to Refugee Week, and a big communal event in Southampton on Saturday 22nd June, including:

- Information and creative sessions in the morning.
- A parade and picnic with music and dance in the afternoon.

We are also planning events at the Library, MAST and elsewhere in the days beforehand.

What we would like you to do:

Put the dates in your diary, come and join in!

If you are a member of a community group, faith group, or business, please get in touch with us. Organisations can declare their support for refugees, emphasising that they are welcome and valued in our community and that our country should continue to offer asylum to people who need sanctuary. National Refugee Week proposes 'Simple Acts' that we can all do to stand with refugees and make new connections in our communities. The suggestions include activities from film screenings to walks, meals, performances, talks & discussions, exhibitions, podcasts and more!

Contact SWVG by email: rw2024@swvg-refugees.org.uk.

For more information, keep an eye on our [website](#); Instagram: [@swvgrefugees](#); X: [@SWVGAction](#); and Facebook: [SWVGRefugee](#).

We look forward to hearing from you!



Memories of Refugee Week 2023

Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

"Our Home"

SWVG students reflected on the theme of Refugee Week 2024, "Our Home".
Some of their thoughts are collected here.

How beautiful it is to have a family. For me, home is where you live with your family.

If the house is separate, and your family is not there, it will drown you as if you were drowning in water.

But I have to live like this because I emigrated from my country, to live in peace.

When I think home I remember my parents.

Home remember me always my dog Angus running all over the house.

Home brings back memories of when I smoked up the mango tree.

Hello. He replied, hi. I didn't understand but my nerve told me, smile. They took my passport and the officer said: Take a chair. At the airport a lot of people were moving, I didn't understand anything around me, but life told me to smile. I am very thirsty but I can't ask for something to drink. The officer smiled and with signs asked me have you eaten this day, but as I expressed how hungry I was, life once again told me to smile. Mommy's food is no longer what is served but far from home there is a home, new experience and new foods. My palate did not understand it. Here there are

no tortillas but there is pitta bread and I smile again. Life is not the same, I don't know where my feet walk but I love this stay, every new landscape in the day. Yesterday I realised that there was a bay nearby, and of course I smiled. I met a companion from the land, my Colombian friend from La Guajira, he also smiled. We spoke the same language with joy, I understood him. So the days have passed since that dark and empty room. I miss my family but in Southampton I found a new life, another new family, and every day the sun came out and always I smiled.

But here in the hotel I have found a new family.



I am happy to help people coming to AMC every Friday, because everyone from SWVG is like my family.

Home is the place that I feel safe in.
Home is the person who I feel happy with.

Home is the place that you miss it.

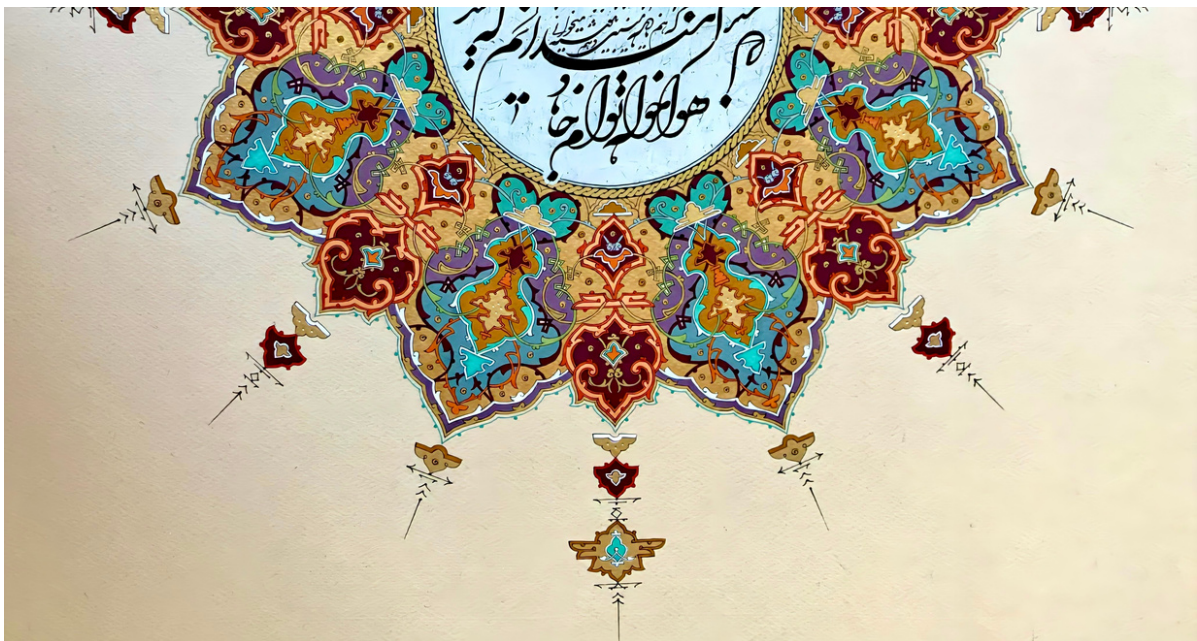
My home. I remember my pets, my dog, rabbit, cat. The summer with my family and my children. Walks to the river with the family.

The Wednesday art group

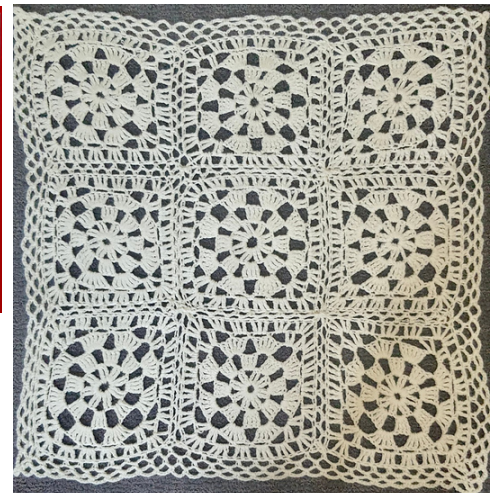
Leila Karimi

We meet in the John Hansard Gallery every Wednesday for two hours, ten to fifteen of us each session. We also advertise outside the classroom so that people who are interested in art can use the classes, but sometimes, people who come there realise after a session or two that they are not interested in art and don't continue. Our classes are mostly led by the students ourselves, each sharing our own knowledge, and sometimes we invite professors or other artists to teach us. We have been able to learn many arts from each other. We have held exhibitions twice and even sold some of our work. We have now prepared some works of art to sell for SWVG. All these works are done with the help and co-operation of SWVG, including the purchase of the equipment. We all enjoy this class.

If you would like to join us, just turn up at 12:30, or message [07450 270422](tel:07450270422).



Saba added the golden illumination (Tezhip) to calligraphy produced by her uncle in Iran



Leaves by **Parisa**
Fish by **Ladan**
Cushion by **Nelly**

The Illegal Migration Act and Rwanda

William Brook-Hart

In our last newsletter we reported that the Illegal Migration Act (IMA) became law on 20 July 2023. Here is an update focusing on the Rwanda policy.

Where has the legislation got to so far?

On 15th November 2023, the UK Supreme Court held that Rwanda is not a safe third country, due to the risk of refoulement, or removal of a person to a country where they would be likely to face torture, persecution or other serious harm, so it would be unlawful to send people seeking asylum there.

The UK Government responded by entering into a new agreement with Rwanda that it claims will improve the safeguards for refugees, and hurriedly introducing the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill. The Bill requires every official decision-maker to conclusively treat Rwanda as a safe third country – even though the Supreme Court has already found it not to be one. Although the Lords have passed amendments to the Bill by large majorities, it will return to the Commons where it will probably become law by mid-April.

Is it compatible with our constitution and international obligations?

The Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law has advised peers that “the House of Lords is being invited to approve legislation including provisions which on their face are incompatible not only with well established understandings of the separation of powers between the legislature and the judiciary, but with a number of the UK's international obligations, including under the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights).”

Lord (Ken) Clarke, previously a supporter of the Rwanda policy, has warned his fellow peers that overturning a Supreme Court ruling is “very dangerous” amid fears of the UK slipping into an “elected dictatorship”.

The Law Society has also briefed Peers that the Bill may be incompatible with our international obligations, and that it sets a dangerous legal and constitutional precedent by legislating to overturn an evidence-based finding of fact by UK courts. In summary, the Bill “is constitutionally improper, it bars access to justice and is unworkable.”

Additionally, the failure to properly assess the needs of victims of modern slavery and trafficking before transporting them to Rwanda will automatically put the UK in breach of its obligations under international law, as well as putting these individuals at even greater risk.

Of course, a disregard for international law would have much wider implications for the UK and for the world order as a whole.

Who will it affect?

The Home Office can declare that certain adults arriving by “irregular means”, i.e. a route deemed to be dangerous (by small boat or by lorry) or using false documents, are “inadmissible”. This means that they will not be considered under the UK's asylum system and their claims will not be processed. Instead, the Government will seek to transport them to Rwanda or another “safe third country”.

On 14th February 2024, the Home Office announced a pause in making inadmissibility decisions about people who arrived on or after 1st January 2022 and who received a notice of intent before 29th June 2023 saying that they might be removed to Rwanda. Decision making will resume once the Safety of Rwanda Bill receives Royal Assent, “at which point removals of individuals in this group to Rwanda can take place.”

It is not clear how this affects those who received Rwanda letters on or after 29th June 2023, since removal to Rwanda remains unlawful until the Bill gets Royal Assent.

How many people have received Rwanda letters?

At the end of January, the Home Office disclosed that there are already 33,085 people on bail who will not even have their need for asylum considered (in breach of international law), and who are under the threat of deportation from the UK to Rwanda. According to the Refugee Council, this number will continue to grow. So, traumatised people who deserve sanctuary and the chance to live decent lives in our community are instead caught in limbo, detained on barges and in prison-like camps, under huge mental pressure.

How many people could Rwanda take?

This is quite uncertain. Various figures have been quoted: 100, 200, thousands..., and more recently the somewhat nebulous "uncapped". It seems likely that capacity would be at the lower end to start with, since the showcase hostel that Home Secretaries were shown has about 200 places, and the capacity of Rwanda's asylum assessment process is minimal.

Once the Bill is passed, the focus will be on legal challenges and also on whether charter airlines would be prepared to transport people to Rwanda in defiance of international law and the damage to their reputations.

Postscript

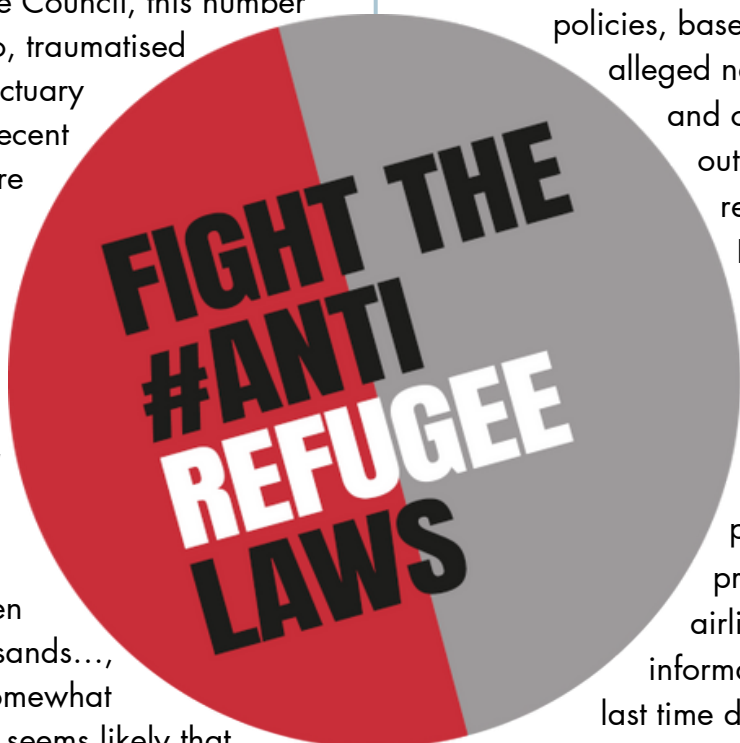
The Rwanda policy - with no evidence that it will achieve its stated objective of reducing small boat crossings; which persecutes people who have fled war, torture and persecution; which the Supreme Court has decided on evidence is unsafe and illegal - has been adopted by our country's leaders as their defining priority. They go on chat shows and bet on a plane taking off.

Instead of this vindictive and divisive distraction, what our country needs are workable and humane asylum

policies, based on evidence and on our alleged national values of fairness and compassion. These are set out in the Refugee Council's report "Towards a National Refugee Strategy".

Please write to (or email) your MP to tell them in a few polite words what you think of the Rwanda policy. Please also be prepared to write to airlines when we have more information: airlines backed off last time due to public opposition and the risk of reputational damage.

Sources: gov.uk, Law Centre NI, Free Movement, Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, The Law Society, Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, The Guardian, Full Fact, The Refugee Council <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/resources/towards-a-national-refugee-strategy-our-vision-for-a-fair-and-humane-asylum-system>



Visit to the Bibby Stockholm

Hilary Preece

When two of my students received their letters informing them that they were to be moved to the Bibby Stockholm, the stress was extreme. I spent the day before they left trying to help. One had appealed the move, but basically there was little that I could do for the other. Before he left I promised that when I could, I would come and take him out to lunch.

A few weeks later I did. By then two of my ex-students were there. I arrived early but found that they could not come to meet me because they had to wait for a bus. They explained that they had to go through three security gates, which made it feel like a prison. It was not till I returned them to the outer port gate that I understood. We had to wait there until the barge manager was contacted and a car was sent to take them the five minutes' walk to the barge. The security officer said that this was because there was no insurance cover for them to walk in the port. Seriously, could this be true?!

I didn't want to spend the day interrogating them about the conditions but I gathered that they had made little contact with local people. They did get an hour of English lessons in the Weymouth Library once a week, and if they put in a request for clothes to a local organisation, a volunteer would collect them and take them to a church to pick up what they needed. There were two games rooms on the barge: one with a table tennis table and one with a snooker table, but if you went there you had to wait about an hour for a turn. They didn't attempt to get into the gym but did press-ups in their room. They knew that someone had died but they didn't know how and didn't know anything about the inquiry, but they said no new people were arriving.

The main problem was that everyone was stressed. No one slept. There was a lot of noise at night so they got two or three hours sleep.

The biggest problem that I could see was how isolated the barge was. Yes, a bus came every hour to take them to Lidl, but from there it was a good half hour walk to the nearest village, and Portland is made up of villages. Everything around the barge was very industrial. One of my ex-students had permission to work and had searched on Portland and in Weymouth, but out of season it was impossible to find anything.

It is a challenge now to think how we can support our ex-students or the local support groups. If you have any ideas speak up!



Have you got an old phone at the bottom of a drawer?

People seeking asylum need a working smartphone for video calls with their solicitor, to keep in touch with family, friends, and asylum charities and to attend online English lessons.

**SMART
PHONES
NEEDED**

If you think you can help, please email: phones@swvg-refugees.org.uk

SWVG
Surrey & Wiltshire Voluntary Group
Supporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers

'Universities of Sanctuary' is an initiative to recognise and celebrate the good practice of universities welcoming people seeking sanctuary through facilitating access to higher education (HE), supporting local refugee communities, and taking an active role in learning about the issues and obstacles faced by this group in pursuing Higher Education.

Individually, universities as places of research and learning can develop and promote learning about what it means to seek sanctuary, and to embed this learning within their institution.

We have two Universities of Sanctuary in our region: Solent and Winchester. The University of Southampton is seeking accreditation. Across the UK there are 34 Universities of Sanctuary.

If a university is not yet accredited as a University of Sanctuary this does not mean it is not delivering initiatives to help asylum seekers and refugees access Higher Education. Many universities offer Sanctuary Awards or Scholarships, and this is the case for Solent, Winchester, Southampton and Portsmouth Universities. The benefits can vary – for example, some offer accommodation; some do not – so it is important that potential applicants understand what is on offer. The awards are a positive step, but there are pitfalls, especially in understanding how someone can continue to be funded if they are granted Leave to Remain.

In 2023 SWVG was included on the panel assessing Solent University for its accreditation as a University of Sanctuary. In gaining its University of Sanctuary status in January 2024, Solent has been recognised for its commitment to ensuring its campus, curriculum and community are safe and empowering for displaced people, promoting allyship and solidarity with global

communities. The University's Communities Development team lead this work, nurturing relationships across the city to grow support for sanctuary seekers.

Solent not only offers a Sanctuary Award but has developed many new initiatives to involve refugees in its University day to day, allowing access to its facilities and developing programmes for refugees, such as 'Health4Her' gym membership.

The Sanctuary Awards offered by universities make a real difference to people's lives. The story of Hosna, a young Afghan woman supported by SWVG, shows how Solent University made it possible for her to study.

In 2021, Hosna decided to apply for an MSc in Sustainable Building Design at Solent University. This was the first year of its Sanctuary Awards. Like many people coming to the UK, Hosna found that despite her having a degree from her home country, her qualifications were not recognised here. The professional body relevant to her area of work would have charged a lot of money to tell her what the equivalence of her existing MSc was.

The process of managing applications for a degree and the connected Sanctuary Award was a new one for Solent University. Because it had put someone in place dedicated to helping Sanctuary Scholars, it was able to respond to blocks in the process and change its systems. SWVG was able to advise on enhancements and changes that would make applying to the University as transparent and efficient as possible for people seeking asylum.

Solent University was supportive and careful in

dealing with Hosna's application and in helping her throughout her studies. At the time, the situation in Afghanistan was heading towards the serious situation we all know of, and Hosna lost a family member in shocking circumstances just before her interview for the degree.

Hosna won a place at the University and was given its first Sanctuary Scholarship. The University, and particularly Hosna's course leader, took care to help her manage her studies under the intense pressure of worrying about her family in Afghanistan. During her studies Hosna was given Leave to Remain.

During the latter part of her degree, Hosna moved to the United States, as her husband had managed to leave Afghanistan and gain asylum there. The University allowed her to study remotely, as she had finished her project work, and she gained an MSc in January 2023, having been allowed to extend the timeframe in which to finish.

It cannot be stressed enough how flexible and helpful the University was to Hosna, given all the changes that happened during her year studying. The University showed a true understanding of the difficulties asylum seekers face and of how it could help Hosna achieve her goal of gaining the MSc.

Both Hosna and her husband have successful careers in the US, and having a UK degree helped Hosna with her ambition of working in her chosen field.

SWVG has been involved in various ways with the universities in our region for several years. We not only support asylum seekers who wish to apply for a Sanctuary Award to study, but also help the universities think of ways in which they can make their facilities accessible to refugees and develop new initiatives for participation. For Solent this has contributed to their achieving the status of University of Sanctuary.

The bike shed



*Above: Miguel and John work in the bike shed
Right: Atiq and Hazrat set off back to their hotel on renovated bikes, bringing the number of satisfied riders up to seventy-five*



Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

Activities update

Amanda Caspari

In the autumn 2023 newsletter, we mentioned the new partnerships that we were developing, and since then we have gone on our first walk with the Winchester Ramblers.

We finally had a day without rain, and headed off by bus to Winchester. Of course we are all used to muddy walks and poor

weather, but most of the people we support don't have suitable footwear and clothing, so we are always hoping for good conditions. The Ramblers took us on a lovely walk through Winchester itself, taking in the history, passing old buildings and walking along the river. Thanks to the Ramblers we were able to stop at the Scout hut, with lunch provided, before setting off up St Giles Hill for views of the city.

Through contacts in SWVG in Winchester, we had requested and were given free entry to Winchester Cathedral in the afternoon. We were taken on a tour by one of their guides who told us about the Cathedral and its history with enthusiasm and a sense of humour.



At the top of St Giles' Hill

Walking with the Ramblers will now be another permanent fixture. We are planning another trip in April and one later in the year to include families and children.

We got feedback that people really enjoyed going on an urban walk, and in any case, this suits the winter months better. We are now thinking of new urban places to go, as well as continuing our programme of country walks and activities with the New Forest Rangers and others.



Inside Winchester Cathedral



Outside the Cathedral

We have also benefited, particularly early in 2024, from an initiative by the Mayflower Theatre. Through their Community Programme we are given tickets for shows at both the Mayflower Theatre and MAST Mayflower Studios. So far, we have been to pantomime, musicals and dance productions, and all have proved popular and accessible.

We will keep organising visits as long as the Mayflower has the budget to offer us tickets. This has been a brilliant and much appreciated addition to what we can offer people, as we certainly would not be able to afford this without the generosity of the Theatre.



And finally, to sport. We were contacted by the University of Southampton Hockey Club, offering to organise a hockey taster session. In January our "team" headed off to the University's sports grounds at Wide



Lane. The students ran a quick session on how to hold the hockey stick, hit and trap the ball and we were off. Split into teams (a mix of students and refugees in each) things soon got competitive! No prizes, no winners except SWVG in having another great event organised for us. The hockey club students are also organising a collection of toiletries and other items to give to refugees, the idea being that students can just add one item to their weekly shop.

We try to take different people out and about throughout the year, so that as many as possible get a chance to participate in something they enjoy.

Our thanks as always to all our partners who help organise and fund our outings and activities.



Fundraising dinner

Mary Bithell

The Cooking For Friends project hit a new high in March, with their first fundraising dinner. Four chefs from the project along with their helpers cooked a vegetarian feast from Nigeria, Iran and Afghanistan for 70 people!! Most of the chefs in the project came along to support and eat. The concourse at Avenue St. Andrew's Church was beautifully decorated and set out like a bistro. Guests enjoyed a welcome drink of punch or cardamom tea and completed a quiz whilst waiting for their meal. Musical entertainment, both British and Iranian, made the evening a wonderful event, and the neatly designed raffle enabled people to win only the prizes they chose! The whole evening was a huge success and raised over £1,000 for the project. Thank you to everyone who supported, and most of all to the cooks!



Recipe: Zereshk Polo Saffron barberry rice pilaf

Cooking for Friends



Crispy rice (left) and barberry rice

You can find the recipe Mohsen followed for the delicious Persian rice with barberries, saffron, and nuts that he cooked for friends [here](#).

Introducing our mental health leaflet

Tharshan Vettivel

When you're forced to leave everything and everyone you know behind, all you can take with you are memories often shrouded in trauma.

Mental health can significantly affect physical health, as well as the ability to cope with daily life and maintain relationships. Everyone experiences psychological distress at some point in their life, but mental health illness is defined by the severity and duration of this distress. Looking after mental health can preserve a person's ability to live a fulfilling life.

Refugees and people seeking asylum are five times more likely to experience poor mental health than the local population, and over 61% experience severe depression. The biggest source of stress people face is the status of their asylum claims. The challenges encountered at various stages of the migration process increase vulnerability to mental health problems, and these are exacerbated by the cumulative effects of social disadvantage before, during and after migration.

Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

Pre-migration experiences: War trauma and exposure to armed conflict, violence, persecution, poverty, and lack of opportunity for education.

Migration, travel and transit: Exposure to challenging and life-threatening conditions, violence, and lack of access to basic necessities.

Post-migration conditions: Separation from family, uncertainty and difficulties with the asylum process, poor living conditions, and barriers to accessing education and health care.

Integration and settlement: Cultural and religious challenges, social isolation, racism, challenges in obtaining rights, as well as poor living or working conditions.

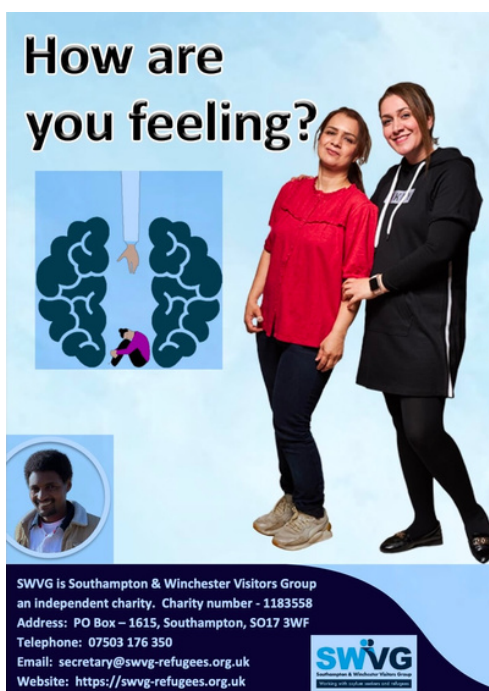
People seeking asylum and refugees face many barriers to achieving and sustaining good mental health. Experiencing prejudice, stigma and discrimination all put people at risk of poor mental health. Furthermore, many face barriers accessing mental health services, and face disruptions in continuity of care. Addressing the mental health needs of refugees and people seeking asylum requires a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach.

Meeting people's basic human needs requires an approach that is as integrated as possible and provides people with love and care that gives them a glimmer of hope for the future. Experiencing this humanity can help heal past, present and future psychological wounds.

The words "mental health" might frighten people whose communities are not yet comfortable with the term or the concept. Some refugees may not even realise that they have been suffering from an illness. We all witness such suffering in our daily lives without realising it.

As an organisation that works with refugees, SWVG has a responsibility to play its part in preventing such suffering. We've created a very simple leaflet that introduces how poor mental health manifests in everyday life, including how to identify and self-manage the condition and where to seek help.

This is a small first step in a long journey, and we hope this will be a little help to vulnerable people. The leaflet can be accessed [here](#).



How are you feeling?

SWVG is Southampton & Winchester Visitors Group an independent charity. Charity number - 1183558
Address: PO Box - 1615, Southampton, SO17 3WF
Telephone: 07503 176 350
Email: secretary@swvg-refugees.org.uk
Website: <https://swvg-refugees.org.uk>

swvg
Southampton & Winchester Visitors Group

About mental health

There is no rule to say what good mental health looks like.

Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have often had a traumatic time.

Living in a new country is stressful. Waiting to hear if you will be allowed to stay here is also stressful. Everything around the shattered life must be rebuilt from scratch. Such circumstances can cause poor mental health.

Poor mental health can be bad for you:

- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ Interest in activities and social events
- ❖ Energy
- ❖ Ability to cope



Achievements and qualifications



Salah achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene

Donny achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene



Ibrahim achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene

Melat passed Entry 3 ESOL in Speaking and Listening

In **Tharshan's** latest exams in his Biomedical Science BSc, he achieved:

Clinical Biochemistry: A4, C2.
Infection & Immunity: A2, A4.
Molecular Biology of the Cell: A4, B2

Idriss passed Level 2 ESOL Speaking and Listening

Chamila achieved an A grade in Step 1 ESOL Speaking and Listening



Aland and **Shalaw** achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene



Isaac and **Nelson** achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene



Nazir achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene

Zebib passed Entry 1 Skills for Life in Speaking and Listening. She has also been till trained at the Salvation Army shop where she volunteers.

Donations

We are extremely grateful for the support we receive from funders, trusts and foundations, community groups and individuals. Amongst these over the last quarter we gratefully acknowledge: the **Garfield Weston Trust**; the **Girdlers' Company**, who supported Cooking for Friends; the **Misselbrook Trust**; the **One Percent Scheme**; the **Rotary Club of Romsey** from their "Walk the Test Way 2023" challenge; **St Clare and St Frances Trust**; **St Lawrence with St Swithun** Parochial Church Council; **St Paul's Church**, whose young people also made a great video that inspired the donation of over 160 toiletries; **St Peter and the Winchester Martyrs' Covenant with the Poor** appeal; and the **Stockbridge Community Cinema**, who invited us to speak and take collections at showings of Ken Loach's *The Old Oak*.