

SWiVG

Southampton & Winchester Visitors Group

Working with asylum seekers and refugees

Spring Newsletter 2025



Charity Number: 1183558

Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

The Mark Courtice Fund

After the death of Mark Courtice, Chair of Trustees and long-standing member of SWVG, a fund was set up for donations made in his memory. Members were asked for suggestions for the use of this money, and the Trustees have decided to create a fund for education and training. Mark believed passionately in enabling people to fulfil their potential and become engaged and contributing members of society. People seeking asylum and with Leave to Remain who wish to follow an educational or vocational course but can't afford to do so will be able to apply to the fund.

The many generous donations so far amount to £1600. It's not too late to contribute if you would like to support this scheme by donating to Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group: Sort code: 40-40-14, Account number 12318695, with 'Mark Courtice' as the reference.

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The AMC Numbers

Hazel Inskip

Each person we meet in SWVG matters to us and we try to help each and every one of them. We work hard to make their lives slightly easier. In 2024, 100 to 150 people attended AMC each Friday.

There were 30 to 60 people receiving support at our help desks each week, with others attending for English lessons, to play games, receive food, have cups of tea and coffee and, importantly, to socialise. David Rees worked on our numbers earlier in the year and found that we helped more than 600 people at the help desks over

the course of one year. Many just see us once and then go on their way, but others we see a number of times. Each week there are 50 or more SWVG volunteers coming to AMC, to help in various ways. There is great need out there and every interaction with someone is focused on making their life better. Thank you to all who help.

600

helped in the course of a year

30-60

access support from the help desk each week

100-150

attend the AMC each week

50

volunteers each week



Teaching team

Catherine Hartley

With several hopeful students being referred to SWVG for English lessons every week and old ones moving on, new teaching volunteers doing the SWVG training and old ones setting off for France or returning from Australia, the task of finding a teacher for everyone who asks for lessons has become more and more complicated over the last few years.

This really hit home when I became Co-chair of SWVG in December and had to make time for new responsibilities. Suddenly it didn't seem so difficult to ask for

help, and in no time we had a whole integrated team. Not only has my life become easier, but everything runs more smoothly and our responsiveness has improved.

Now, when a member of the desk team or the teaching team fills out a referral form, a new process is set in motion. The key information, including a sample of the person's writing to help us make an assessment of need, is now meticulously transferred by Andrew to a spreadsheet, (soon to be part of the long-awaited database) and the student is introduced to me or Hope, the new overall teaching co-ordinator. As soon as possible, and often within a few minutes, Hope

matches that person to a teacher with a free slot.

New teachers are supported by the whole group, with Mary, Chrissie and Martin welcoming them and showing them round. Mary is even producing lesson packs for different topics to give us confidence and ideas when we're flagging. We're all invited to contribute to these packs.

Now that we also have our very own cupboard, we may even have a volunteer librarian offering to keep track of books and resources.

Turns out I LOVE delegation.



SWVG Art Group

Bella Gorman

In summer 2022, a partnership between John Hansard Gallery and SWVG was initiated by the late Mark Courtice, then Chair of SWVG. The relationship began in a relaxed way, with the aim of providing a safe, accessible, and inclusive space for all.

This included a visit to see *Treeline* by Ruth McLennan, building towards participants working with ceramicist Suna Imre for John Hansard Gallery's Community Takeover (2022).

Here they also had the opportunity to handle ancient ceramic pieces held within the University of Southampton's Archaeology department.

This led to a regular art group meeting at John Hansard Gallery in November 2022. Together we agreed that this group would be a point for self-expression and

shared interests.

Since 2022, the group has met at the Gallery every Wednesday to create artwork, explore the exhibitions, and chat. There are now 26 regular attendees, some of whom bring



children along during the summer holidays. Everyone is welcome, and there is no expectation for participants to have practiced art or been to an art gallery before.

Once a month, we also invite a professional artist to work with group. Over the past two years, we have had the opportunity to do lino printing, create ceramics, practice photography, and even write our own poetry. Next

month, we will be exploring our memories of water with artist and researcher James Aldridge, and in April, local metalsmith Emily Smith will lead a wax carving workshop.

Over the past two years the group have given wonderful feedback:

"I am really grateful to this gallery and SWVG for giving me this opportunity and good space".
"I learned to discover my new talents".

We are excited to continue and develop our partnership with SWVG in 2025.

SWVG Art Group is a drop-in and meets at

John Hansard Gallery every Wednesday afternoon, 1-2.30pm. Refreshments are provided. Please email bella@jhg.art for more information.

Turner Sims 50th anniversary concert

Hazel Inskip

The Turner Sims concert hall celebrated its 50th anniversary on 19 November, 2024. The son and daughter of our 90-year-old neighbour bought tickets for her to attend, and we were tasked with getting her there.

She had had a ticket for the opening night 50 years ago, but her two children were messing around and her son hit his head on the radiator so they spent the evening in A&E. Fifty years on, there she was.

What has this got to do with SWVG, you may well be asking? Well, read on.

The second half of the concert was devoted to a performance of a work called *Voyages of the Heart* by Tunde Jegede (see a trailer [here](#)). This had been written to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower Pilgrims who fled on a small boat from Southampton in 1620. They didn't just cross the Channel, they went across the Atlantic to escape persecution for their religion.

Although written for 2020,

the work couldn't be performed then due to the pandemic, so it was incorporated into the 50th anniversary concert. The work is in 16 movements each one honouring groups who have had to flee their country or were forced

Partition in India, the Windrush scandal, Iraq, Iran, Uganda, as well as the Mayflower. The music was written for a string quartet, piano, three Indian and three Irish instruments, a kora, an electric guitar, percussion, a gospel choir and solo singers.

Interestingly, the programme notes included this statement: "Inspired by the stories of *This is our Home Now* (Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group)". This book was produced by Jenny Cuffe and Maianna Moreau for SWVG in 2011. The foreword to the book written by Kardo from Iraq said

"Maybe one day my story will become a piece of history and people will see that what happened to me could happen to them, because we are all humans and it does not matter who you are or where you are from, your fate will find you". It appears that the book has indeed become a 'piece of history' and the voices in this book are still being heard 13 years on. Sadly the message is needed at least as much now as it was then.



out. This included those fleeing Nazi Germany, the Irish Famine,

Meeting local MPs

William Brook-Hart

We are arranging meetings with our local MPs so that they can get a better idea of what SWVG does alongside our partner organisations.

It's important that MPs have the opportunity to meet and talk to people who have lived experience of seeking asylum, so they appreciate them as individuals with dreams, skills and creativity. They can enjoy the lovely social atmosphere at AMC and meet some teachers, students and volunteers

We also then have a chance to discuss some of the issues that affect a lot of people during the period of their asylum claim and when they are granted or refused asylum. People's difficulties finding an immigration solicitor is one example, which can unfairly affect their claim and makes the asylum system as a whole operate [inefficiently](#). In case someone needs an appointment with their MP to ask for help over some delay or injustice in their case, then they would do that separately with the help of their Visitor. It helps, therefore, if the MP already has a broad understanding of asylum issues and what we do.

As a charity, SWVG can take part in political activity that supports our purpose and is in our best interests, while we must remain independent and [not give our support to a political party](#). Campaigning and lobbying can be legitimate and valuable



activities for us to undertake in pursuit of our purposes. We need to talk about the effects that various government policies have and we need to listen carefully and critically to the views of our political representatives.

By the time that government Bills are published, there may be little that individual MPs can do to amend them, but they can change the political discourse. A lot of the problems in the present asylum system are linked to the harmful and false notion that further criminalisation, greater border security and a hostile environment will be any kind of deterrence to people fleeing persecution and violence, as well as the accompanying prejudicial rhetoric and myths about people seeking asylum and our capacity to welcome people to this country.

The UK needs more compassionate policies for asylum based on evidence, [as advised by the Institute for Government](#).

We are delighted to have had very positive meetings with Paul Holmes MP (Hamble Valley), Danny Chambers MP (Winchester) and Liz Jarvis MP (Eastleigh). We hope soon to meet with Southampton MPs Satvir Kaur, Darren Paffey and Caroline Nokes.

BORDER SECURITY, ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION BILL

The Bill had its second reading on 10 February; the parliamentary committee is now taking evidence and will report by 20 March. The Bill proposes to repeal some (but not all) provisions in the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and fully repeals the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024, but mostly concerns "cracking down on people smugglers". It does not address reform of the asylum system. SWVG submitted written evidence to the committee on 1 March.

Several eminent people gave oral evidence on 27 February, including Enver Solomon of the Refugee Council, who has [said](#): "We welcome the Government's commitment to restoring order in the asylum system." [...] "A properly reformed system would have safe and legal routes for refugees, accurate first-time decisions about who can stay and who must leave, and meaningful support to help refugees integrate into their communities and contribute to Britain. Without these measures, the Government risks failing to restore public confidence by creating a system that delivers both compassion and control."

eVisas: Our experience at SWVG

Dominic Hartley

When the Home Office announced that it was replacing Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) with an electronic visa, it seemed a self-evidently good idea. Moving away from a physical document that was easily damaged, often lost and which took a considerable time to replace, to the inherent advantages of a digital equivalent sounded like progress.

I even went as far as telling my colleagues on the AMC Desk Team that the rather painful and desperately clunky 'cutover' process that played out every Friday morning in the autumn would be worth it in the end. Whilst that process inevitably has a long tail, the vast majority of people we work with who have Leave to Remain now have eVisas. How is it working in practice? I think it's fair to say that things are problematic. I'll briefly set out why.

First, there is no digital identity product that an individual can produce when asked. The Home Office could have built an iPhone and Android app but chose not to. Some of the reasons for this go back to the digital policies of the Cameron era where a group of influential government technologists decided that native apps were bad and that all government services would be provided via web pages, which in general have limited functionality. In the



case of an eVisa, there is simply a page with a photo of the holder. It looks neither official nor impressive. Instead, to prove you have an eVisa and show your immigration status you have to send a 'share code' to the organisation or individual you are dealing with.

Share codes have not worked well. The Home Office chose to use the share model because it has operated in other government departments for some time with reasonable success. For example, to hire a car, you can give a DVLA share code to a car hire company to prove you have an unendorsed driving licence. However, the volume of share code transactions in the context of immigration status is many times more than the less frequent uses in some previously implemented services, and at peak times the Home Office technical infrastructure has been slow to respond. I've sat with people and waited for a couple of minutes before receiving a share code and sometimes, frustratingly, error messages are returned instead. This may not

sound like a long time until you experience it, and in a real-life situation where someone is waiting for your code could be very stressful indeed.

However, the more fundamental problem is that many organisations are

simply unaware of the eVisa transition. Many people continue to be asked to show their BRP (which will have expired) and are forced to try to explain that they now have an eVisa, which can be challenging, and not something they should have to handle. We have seen people having problems not only when using eVisas to open bank accounts and trying to find somewhere to live, but even when dealing with other government departments. There have been cases, for example, where Jobcentre Plus staff in Southampton have not heard of the eVisa.

At the moment then, this feels like a missed opportunity. On the plus side there is real potential to improve the lives of people granted Leave to Remain now that the switch has been made. But whether there is any appetite for those improvements to be made or whether eVisas will be another part of a process people have to work around remains to be seen.

Seeking sanctuary: Reflections of

Dr Shakiba Moghadam

Topics of human rights, mental health and experiences of displacement have always been areas of interest throughout my career as a chartered psychologist and academic researcher. While research in these areas is not entirely scarce, it remains underdeveloped given the extremely fast-changing global climate.

Today, more and more people are becoming forcibly displaced due to war and conflict, false persecution, human rights violations, and the climate crisis, to name just a few examples. These catastrophes directly impact the mental health of those fleeing for a safer and more just life, with many experiencing inhumane

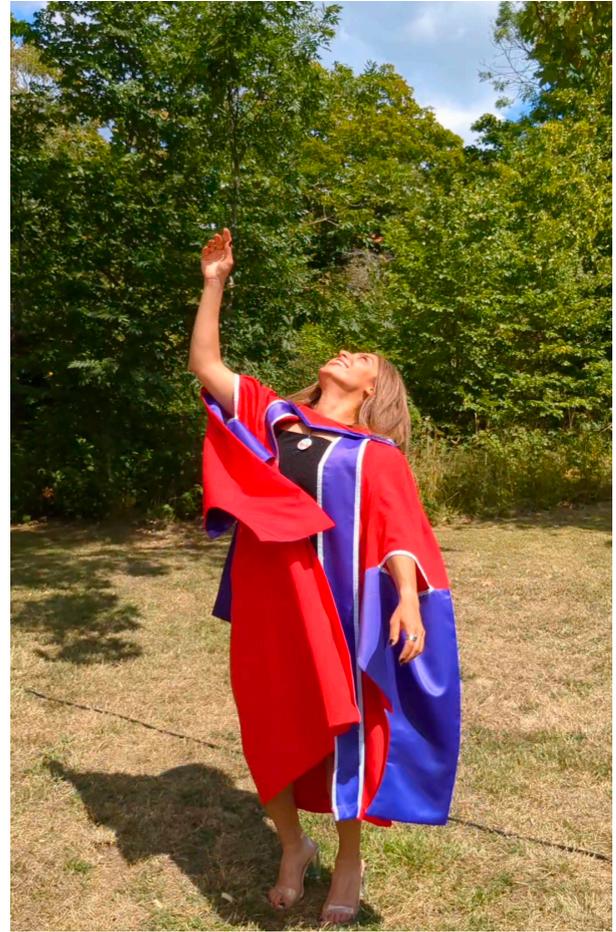
countries.

Many people who seek sanctuary are also survivors of torture, presenting additional traumatic experiences that must be processed, managed and coped with. This is a critical area where psychologists need to intervene to provide essential support. However, such interventions must be evidence-informed, culturally aware and tailored to the community's

specific needs.

Building trust and rapport is essential when engaging with vulnerable communities – especially when researchers do not share the same language – necessitating the use of appropriate translation tools and interpreters whilst ensuring the community

are comfortable with such implementations. Moreover, psychologists from countries not directly affected by crises (e.g., the UK) have a moral obligation to support and serve vulnerable communities, demonstrate solidarity and actively



advocate for justice on behalf of our counterparts in regions experiencing various forms of conflict and crisis. After all, our role is one of compassion and understanding.

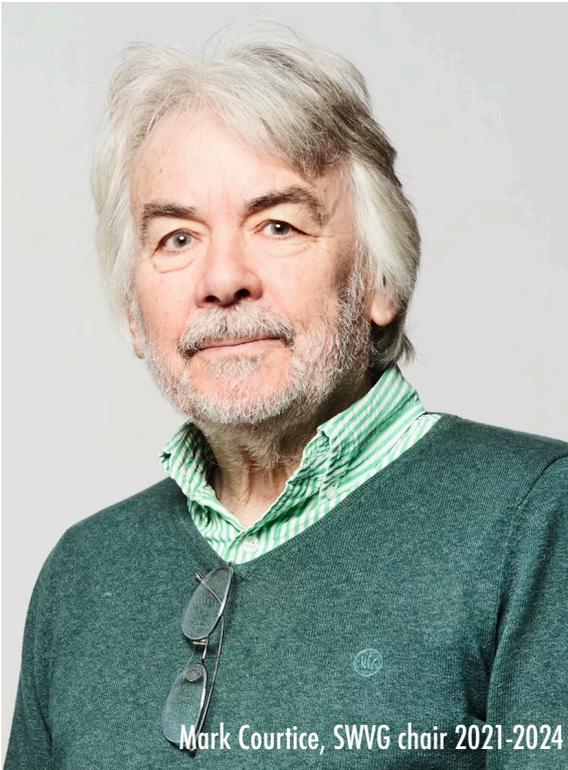
The work of SWVG is fundamental in supporting the mental health of those seeking sanctuary. Charities like SWVG are the heart of communities, instilling hope and fostering a brighter future for many.

As a former child refugee, fleeing everything I knew to be home was both tragic and complex. Much of my work now is dedicated to my younger self and others facing similar circumstances. Despite variations

the work of SWVG is fundamental in supporting the mental health of those seeking sanctuary. Charities like SWVG are the heart of communities

treatment and multiple mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, various forms of depressive disorders as well as general anxiety disorder. These experiences typically occur during journeys of seeking sanctuary and at times in host

a refugee psychologist



Mark Courtice, SWVG chair 2021-2024

in the experiences of those seeking sanctuary, the pain, anguish and longing for closure and peace remain consistent for many displaced individuals.

My current research explores the mental health of displaced communities across the South of England, with a particular focus on barriers to mental health support for those seeking sanctuary. It was through this research that I met Mark Courtice. During the process of writing my funding bid, I met with Mark to discuss my ideas and the possibility of partnering with SWVG as part of the research process.

Mark was the first person to hear about my research and the ambitions behind the findings. He responded with immense enthusiasm and eagerness to learn more about the project and shared my belief in the urgent

need for psychological intervention within displaced communities. Mark was a man of wisdom, with a heart of gold – nothing was impossible with Mark by your side. His words of encouragement and enthusiasm were refreshing, I will always cherish his support and passion for a more just, kinder world.

After hearing about Mark's tragic passing, I decided to dedicate my research project to Mark for his relentless effort in making our city one filled with love, support

and hope. I sincerely hope my research and reflections of personal lived experiences ignites a transformative movement, where mental health support for displaced communities is not just accessible and welcoming but an integral part of standard practice in society.

Dr Shakiba Moghadam

Chartered Psychologist, Southampton Solent University Psychology Lecturer, and Chair of British Psychological Society's Human Rights Coordinating Group

Homs

Anonymous



Homs is my city. It is a city of love and peace. Muslims and Christians lived together. The mosque and the church were next to each other. We were happy in all holidays. In Ramadan, we put lights in the streets. At Christmas, we lit candles. People in Homs were always happy. They loved to laugh.

The city was also a place for learning. The schools and universities had many students. They wanted a good future.

One important place in Homs was Khalid Ibn Al-Walid Mosque. Next to it was Um Al-Zennar Church. It was very old. People visited both places with love and respect.

In the middle of the city, there was Homs Clock. It came from Switzerland. It was like the heart of the city. There were also old castles with stories from history. Near Homs, there was Palmyra, a very old city with beautiful buildings.

We also had the Orontes River (Nahr Al-Assi). This river is different. It flows the other way, not like other rivers. It is like the people of Homs. They are strong and never stop. The river gave water to the city and made it beautiful.

This is my city, Homs. I love it. Even if I go far away, I will always remember it.

Change to 'good character' ban on citizenship

Elly Kilroy

On 11 February 2025, the Home Office published a new version of its [caseworker guidance](#) on the good character requirement: applications made after 10 February 2025 by people who entered illegally 'will normally be refused':

'A person who applies for citizenship from 10 February 2025 who has previously arrived without a required valid entry clearance or electronic travel authorisation, having made a dangerous journey will normally be refused citizenship.

'A dangerous journey includes, but is not limited

to, travelling by small boat or concealed in a vehicle or other conveyance. It does not include, for example, arrival as a passenger with a commercial airline.'

Writing in the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association, Catherine Briddick of the University of Oxford [explains](#) that 'The language used and the examples given indicate that a very high threshold must be met before discretion can be exercised in an applicant's favour. When challenged on this, Home Office Minister Lord Hanson of Flint [confirmed that](#):

'...the presumption is that those who have arrived illegally will find their application turned

down, unless they can provide a range of circumstances which are exceptional, compelling and mitigating, and where the Secretary of State may therefore choose to apply discretion to grant citizenship on an exceptional basis.'

Briddick continues, 'Even where a person has compelling circumstances to raise, they may be deterred from applying by a combination of cost (£1,630) and the limited prospect of review (rather than appeal) should it be refused.'

Nicholas Reed Langen [writing in the](#) London Review of Books underlines the fact that this is, 'The latest way to punish those who risked their lives to

'Temporary pause' on Syrian asylum claims remains in place

Elly Kilroy

Writing from Syria this month, reporter Amer Marei [conveys the anguish](#) of those who were filled with hope on 8 December 2024 when the Assad regime fell:

'The massacres have shattered the optimism that some Alawites felt about their future after the fall of Assad. "I wanted to leave during the days of Assad, but I stayed, hoping for his downfall. Today, I am certain that this land is bloody and cursed, breeding at night only to devour its children in the morning," said one man who spoke with Drop Site. "All I want now is to flee to any land far from this hell.'"

Not all share this man's pessimism, and some are determined to fight on: Wafa

Mustafa, Syrian activist whose father was forcibly disappeared by the Assad regime in 2013, [announced on X](#), "This Sunday, March 16, we will gather in Daraa—the cradle of the Syrian revolution—to remember our disappeared loved ones & demand truth & accountability. Families from across Syria are coming together to say: We want justice, not revenge. No more families should have to suffer."

What is clear though is Syria is not a safe country.

On 13 December, over 730 organisations and individuals providing support to people seeking asylum across the UK, [wrote jointly](#) to the Home Secretary to urge her department to reconsider the decision to suspend all Syrian asylum claims

following the fall of the Assad regime. [The response](#) confirmed that the 'temporary pause' remains in place, is being 'kept under constant review', and that asylum decisions will only recommence when there is 'a sufficiently clear basis upon which to make determinations'.

This is distressing news for Syrians seeking asylum in the UK who remain stuck in limbo. As Asylum Matters reminds us: this will have an impact on the mental health of sanctuary seekers.

The Minister did confirm 'no-one will be removed to their home country or any other nation where they would face persecution or serious harm' and the Home Office will 'continue to register new asylum claims from Syrians' even if decisions remain paused.

'Bad character requirement' is effective for asylum seekers

come to Britain, in the name of discouraging others from doing the same.' The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants [posted](#) on X following the change: "The government imposed this quietly, hoping no one would notice... Speak up. Share this. We cannot silently let this pass."

Briddick [warns](#) that 'The 'clarification' places the UK at odds with its Refugee Convention article 34 obligation to 'as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees.' Also [relevant](#), given the absence of safe and legal routes to the UK, are the Convention's article 3 prohibition on discrimination and article 31 [protection from penalisation](#).

'An 'illegal' journey, one that occurs because the person is coerced or deceived, will violate human rights and rob a trafficking victim of their 'good character'. No refugee or trafficking victim should have the injustice of displacement compounded by exclusion from the political community that has assumed obligations for their protection.'

She argues that this will especially discriminate against women.

In his article 'Bad Character' also for the London Review of Books, [Christopher Bertram](#) reminds readers that refugees 'will often have shown great courage, fortitude and ingenuity in the face of the obstacles placed in their way by their persecutors and by states such as the UK. Showing such virtues

in order to escape oppression is not normally seen as evidence of bad character, rather the contrary.

'Most people would recoil from the idea that past lawbreaking always indicates bad character. Gay men who had sex when it was illegal and women who sought illegal abortions did not show evidence of bad character. And those who deliberately broke the law in the name of a higher justice are widely admired [...] Perhaps most pertinent to the current case is the late Sir Nicholas Winton who, in the course of helping children evade the Nazis with the Kindertransport, forged documents and bribed officials.'

An [amendment](#) has now been proposed by the SNP's Pete Wishart, which would ensure that illegal entry to the UK is ignored when considering the good character requirement in applications for British citizenship, which would reverse the change.

Furthermore, the Home Affairs Select Committee has written to the Minister for Migration and Citizenship with some [key questions on the change](#). (No response found by time of publication)

This change has already faced its [first legal challenge](#) brought by a 21-year-old Afghan refugee who arrived in the UK aged 14, after fleeing the Taliban and being smuggled to Britain in the back of a lorry. He was granted refugee status and after five years was

granted indefinite leave to remain. He was due to apply for British citizenship on 1 March. Toufique Hossain of Duncan Lewis solicitors, representing the refugee, said: "It is upsetting for so many who had hoped for a new approach to now see this home secretary repeating the same mistakes as her various predecessors. For the sake of political expediency, [Yvette Cooper is] willing to roll out unlawful policies with the sole purpose of punishing migrants and refugees – those who are quite clearly of good character and eligible for citizenship."

Wilson Solicitors Immigration and Public Law & Human Rights teams are [challenging](#) the policy as unlawful because it 'misdirects Home Office officials as to how they should decide naturalisation applications.'

Please urgently write to your MP to protest this change that will crush the dreams of our friends fleeing persecution and denied safe routes to arrive here in order to rebuild their lives: they are important members of our communities. Remind Southampton and Winchester MPs that we are [Cities of Sanctuary](#).

You can compose your own letter, or use the Care4Calais tool to automatically send this [template](#). Add the demand that your MP sign this [Early Day Motion](#) urging the Government to reconsider this policy. <https://help.care4calais.org/page/165948/action/1>



Dear Lesley, Katie and SWVC,

We are the Sanctuary Ambassadors of Bitterne Park Primary School and our school is all about us 'Being Architects of a better world' and making a difference within our school, community and the wider world. We meet most Fridays to discuss how we can make a difference to those we are welcoming to our school and into our city and we also have lots of lessons in school which are all about Sanctuary. We have been learning a lot!

Last year, some of us worked alongside you with Southampton's Refugee Week celebrations. We are ALL very keen to get involved this year we have seen the theme is "Community as a superpower" and we hoped you could tell us more about it? We would like to have our own Refugee week celebrations in school. We have some ideas but would like to know more - we are going to have our own assembly about Sanctuary which we have been planning for a while now, as we want to educate the rest of the school. We really liked it when you came in last year and did an assembly. We wondered if you could do the same thing this year and maybe some of us

could be involved with you? We have also carried out some of our own research.

We have found a Southampton based Refugee charity Southampton Action and are planning a clothing drive for them.

We know that the colour orange is welcoming for refugees so we would also like to have a day where we all wear orange for Sanctuary awareness.

We have been making orange hearts to add to a display in our school all about Sanctuary. We really hope you can help us. We look forward to hearing back from you,

Kind regards,

Sanctuary Ambassadors ♡

This letter from the Sanctuary Ambassadors at Bitterne Park Primary School was sent to SWVG in February, completely on the children's own initiative. Not only did the school last year create large, stunning artworks that we displayed in Southampton Central Library and at our street stalls ahead of the Refugee Week 2024 main events in Southampton, but many of the children attended the parade with their families. Elly remarked in the summer 2024 newsletter, 'As one parent said to me on the day of the parade and picnic, "Our daughter doesn't stop talking about refugees at home!"'

The compassion, enthusiasm and sense of community of these children fills us with hope for the future.

Salvadorean cheese pupusas

Nuria

Pupusas are El Salvador stuffed corn cakes served with curtido (pickled cabbage salad) and tomato sauce. Usually pupusas are filled with soft cheese, refried red beans, pork, chicken, garlic, courgettes, pickled jalapeño and more. The filling options are endless! But this time I will share with you the easy ones, beginner friendly.

They are topped with a pickled cabbage that adds a refreshing, light and tangy element that really balances the whole thing out. This is called curtido. Then the tomato sauce is a plus.



Nuria has made a video about making pupusas, which you can watch [here](#).

Patrons: John Pilkington, Miriam Margolyes OBE, Dr Shirley Firth

INGREDIENTS

Curtido:

- 1/2 head of cabbage,
(2 cups of shredded cabbage)
- 1 medium carrot, grated
- 1/2 medium red onion (thinly sliced)
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 cup hot water
- 1 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt

Salsa:

- 4 tomatoes
- 1 small onion
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of dried oregano

Pupusa Dough:

- 3 cups (334g) masa, white maize
flour (Brand PAN)
- 2 3/4 cups of cold water

Filling:

- 2 cups (7.5 ounces) shredded
mozzarella, (or any other melty
cheese)

For Hands:

- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons oil

Preparation: 1 hour

Cook: 20 - 30 mins

Serves 2 - 4

**Egg-free, gluten-free,
pregnancy-friendly**

TO MAKE THE CURTIDO:

In a medium bowl, put the shredded cabbage, grated carrot, onion, salt and oregano, then toss them all together. In a measuring cup, stir together the hot water and vinegar. Pour it over the cabbage/carrot mixture. Allow it to come to room temperature and then cover it with plastic wrap and transfer it to the fridge for at least 4 hours and preferably a day before serving.

TO MAKE THE TOMATO SAUCE:

In a medium pot put all the ingredients together (save the salt for later) and cover with water. Bring them to boil in a medium heat until they are soft, then let them cool for about 20 minutes and blend them. Bring them back to boil and add salt. Add more salt if needed.

TO MAKE THE PUPUSA DOUGH:

In a medium bowl, mix the flour with the cold water. You can do it with your hands or using a spatula. Stir the masa until mostly combined, mix until you have a very soft dough. It will be very soft, like a play-doh consistency. Then separate the dough into 7 or 8 balls.

TO ASSEMBLE THE PUPUSAS:

Add the water to a measuring cup and pour in the oil. Lightly dip your hands in the water/oil mixture, making sure your palms are evenly coated. This will ensure the dough doesn't stick to your hands.

Working one at a time, flatten the balls gently until they're about 1/2-inch thick discs. Place about two tablespoons of mozzarella cheese into the centre and wrap the dough around the filling creating a ball shape. Slowly pinch the edges to seal it completely, then pat the dough gently, flattening it with your hands until it reaches about 1/4-inch thick and about 4-inches in diameter. Feel free to re-grease your hands as needed. Repeat with the remaining balls of dough.

Meanwhile, preheat a cast iron grill or pan over medium heat. Add a teaspoon of oil and brush the surface with a silicon brush. Add the pupusas to the grill and cook each of them for about 4 to 6 minutes per side. Repeat this process until you've worked your way through all of the pupusas.

Cover photograph and those on pages 4,5, and 9 by Holli Kalina

<https://www.hkphotographer.co.uk>