

UPDATE

Refugee Council
Supporter Magazine

January 2023



New beginnings

Read about how your support is changing the lives of refugee families like Anna's on page 8.



**Your support is rebuilding lives
through therapeutic activities.**



**SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES**

Healing through poetry

For many refugees, the first barrier to rebuilding their life is learning to process the trauma they carry. Then there's learning a new language, which is critical for building up confidence again.

Our service teams host various arts and crafts activities which encourage clients to practise their English in informal settings. These sessions also help them develop new skills while meeting new people and sharing their experiences. This can be extremely cathartic.

Steve Harrison, a Refugee Council Resettlement Team volunteer, organised a poetry workshop for our Afghan residents in Doncaster, thanks to the Marsh Trust.

"It has been an absolute privilege to share a small part of the lives and experiences of these resolute people. I would like to thank them all for enriching this part of Doncaster with the energy and optimism of their memories and ideas. These qualities have brought them so far and will continue to connect with us all, far into the future."

Steve, August 2022

My Journey

by Shirin (arrived in UK from Afghanistan)



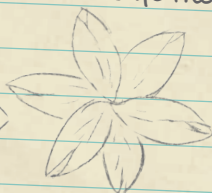
Part one

In the name of Allah,
I grew up in Iran.
We had a very big house,
there were many trees and flowers
several types of trees,
such as cherry trees, persimmons,
mulberries and very colourful
and fragrant
flowers were planted
on both sides of the yard.

In the morning,
the yard was full
of the smell of flowers.

Part two

In the name of Allah,
We had a good and peaceful
life in our own
country, Afghanistan,
until the Taliban came and
took over.
We had to leave because our
daughters played
football they were not safe there.



The extract above is from a poem written by one of our clients.

Welcome

My name is Adrian and I am Head of Service Design and Implementation. As the son of a refugee, I have always had an interest in migration, identity and belonging.

In 1959 my father fled Hungary during conflict with Russia. Much of my career has focused on the causes and impacts of migration, including working in post-conflict situations in places such as Rwanda, Liberia, Kosovo and Algeria.

I joined Refugee Council early last year. I have been supporting the ambitions we have to focus our work on the experiences of people seeking asylum and refugees – ultimately to ensure that people are at the heart of support systems across the UK. A core part of this will be developing better ways to learn from those with lived experience, as well as our volunteers, staff and specialist partners so that we can then share best practice across the Refugee Council and more widely. I have had the honour of meeting so many fantastic staff delivering critical services to people seeking asylum and refugees, from hotel workers supporting Afghans to the team providing support to unaccompanied children arriving on cross-channel boats.

Without your kindness and the Refugee Council's support services and advocacy work, the lives of refugees in this country would be even more challenging, considering the ever-hostile environment faced by some of the most vulnerable people in the UK. If people understand their rights and feel safe and supported, then they are far more likely to build a stable life with fewer hurdles – as my dad was able to. I hope you feel as proud as I do reading about the work of Refugee Council in this edition of Update. 2022 has been critical in helping people take the first steps to building a safe and fulfilling life in the UK. This would not have been possible without you.

Adrian





Rebuilding: Anna's story

By October 2022, Refugee Council had supported 733 people from Ukraine who had been forced to flee their country due to the ongoing conflict.

As part of our crisis response wrap-around scheme, we help connect people to essential services (medical services, Universal Credit or food banks) and their wider community (via local support activities). We also help with accessing employment advice, schools and, most importantly, with mental health support.

Anna and her daughters were forced to leave Ukraine and resettle in the UK. However, the girls' father is still working on the front line to provide clothing to the military and volunteers of the war.

"On 24th February I woke up, I heard a noise, explosions. I called my husband and asked him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I'm in a queue at a petrol station.' He said, 'The war has started.'

"I have a husband in Ukraine, I have children here. I have to be on both sides, here and there, and my heart is divided – it's broken – but I still try to gather my feelings together and carry on."

Anna

My children, Sofi and Alisa, woke up very early, got dressed and asked, 'Mum, what's going on? Are we going to school?' I had no idea, I couldn't understand what was going on.

On the first day, the whole of Ukraine was bombed. We received 2 bombs at the beginning, at 7 o'clock in the morning and 8 o'clock. I just told the children to stay at home – we're definitely not going anywhere. Nobody knew how far Russian soldiers were going to go.

By March I realised that it's not only about safety, it's about education. My oldest one, Sofi, is 16 – she's almost finished school. War or not, I have to give her an education. We have to do something."

Anna's sister lives in the UK and told Anna about the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The children didn't want to go anywhere without their father, who had to stay in Ukraine to support his country.

Arrival in the UK

Now in the UK, Anna and her daughters are accessing our Ukrainian wrap-around scheme. This support has allowed Anna to start thinking about a brighter future for her two girls, Sofi and Alisa.

"I was worried. Sofi is very clever but it's a bit stressful – she needs to prepare for many exams. She wants to be a lawyer. I say 'You still have time to fix it!'"

Seeing their home country being destroyed while knowing that her husband was there alone was traumatic. This stress took a toll on Anna's mental health but she knew it would secure the safety of her children.

"While I was waiting for my BRP (Biometric Residence Permit) I felt so bad. My mental health became so low and I was crying.

I have a husband in Ukraine, I have children here. I have to be on both sides, here and there, and my heart is divided – it's broken – but I still try to gather my feelings together and carry on.

Crisis Emergency Appeal: Ukraine

In response to the war in Ukraine, we started a crisis emergency appeal to raise incredibly important funds so that we could provide frontline relief to those being resettled in the UK. Thanks to your amazing generosity, together we raised a total of **£1.6million**.

This is a fantastic achievement! This money has been invested in our specialist crisis response teams, who have been working hard to support those who need it most.

At the women's club we made pictures, we had welcoming events that Lewisham Council held, we had explanations, the law regarding children, it was useful. After, we had a chat with Ukrainian people, we went on to create Telegram Chats and now we're writing questions to help each other.

I am busy with my college, I try to improve my English, I attend some courses. I attended for 6 weeks. I try to keep myself busy as much as possible.

I decided it's all experience. Every person has their own life. We have to carry on, be strong and create our life today – not tomorrow, not after the war, just today. Especially if you have children, you have to show them that life is today, not only in the future. Take this opportunity as an opportunity. It's not just the war and the bad things, it's a new experience.

Today it is safe but tomorrow could be completely different."



"Behind every case, there is a face"

Enver Solomon

2022 was a difficult year for everyone working to support refugees in the UK. But Refugee Council is entering this new year with the same focus and energy to campaign for a fairer and more humane asylum system in this country.

Enver Solomon speaking at a rally in response to the Government's Rwanda plan.

For much of last year, Refugee Council worked to push back against the damaging provisions within the Nationality and Borders Act, which came into force at the start of the summer. The Act means that the Government will now grant fewer rights to refugees who arrive in the UK through unofficial routes, even though that is the main if not only way people are able to seek urgent safety across the world.

The Nationality and Borders Act also gave the green light to the construction of more reception centres to temporarily house those seeking asylum. This was despite the experience of Napier Barracks showing that these large-scale, isolated centres are extremely inappropriate for vulnerable people dealing with trauma and in need of access to critical services.

Yet even as the ink dried on the new Act, campaigners were able to stand firm against these plans. Along with others, Refugee Council worked tirelessly to make the case against reception centres and to push for more integrated accommodation within communities.

In April 2022 the Government announced another extremely regressive policy: to send people seeking asylum to Rwanda.

In Summer 2022, Refugee Council spoke up in Parliament to the Home Affairs Select Committee, explaining and evidencing the huge damage outsourcing asylum processing would have to the asylum system itself and, more importantly, to individuals seeking safety and security.

Refugee Council was disappointed by a high court judgement in December 2022 deeming the Rwanda plans to be lawful. Legal challenges and public campaigning against the Rwanda policy will continue, and Refugee Council



will keep speaking up against it by highlighting to policymakers and to the public that the scheme is wrong in principle and unworkable in practice.

The new Prime Minister and Home Secretary are only a few months into their roles, but Refugee Council has already been speaking to the Government and pushing for a more compassionate approach for those fleeing war and persecution through no fault of their own.

In October 2022, we increased this pressure by calling on ministers to take immediate action on the crisis at Manston. This followed shocking revelations that over 4,000 people were staying in premises meant for 1,600. We put forward our six-point action plan for ministers to implement to tackle the current asylum processing issues and backlogs using fair and humane solutions.

Our work does not end here. We at Refugee Council are, as always, reassured and optimistic that so many people are ready to stand up for refugee rights in the UK, and we take inspiration from that as we continue to push politicians for a reformed asylum system that treats people seeking safety with dignity and fairness.

Across 2023, we are hoping to continue building on this momentum through our campaign for a fairer and more humane asylum system for all. This will mean ensuring that everyone – including all Afghans who were evacuated following the Taliban takeover



in 2021 – are properly housed. It also means ensuring that the Homes for Ukraine scheme continues to support those forced to flee by the Russian invasion in their new communities and that unaccompanied children are treated with empathy upon arrival.

Our Chief Executive, Enver Solomon, on the recent Manston emergency:

"Behind every case there is a face. For every person risking their life in a boat in the Channel or living their life in limbo in a hotel, separated from family, there is a human story. People come to the UK seeking protection because we have a reputation as a country which believes in the right to claim asylum. It is a proud tradition which is being increasingly tarnished by the appalling way in which we are treating people in 2022."



Why are vulnerable children seeking safety in the UK?

Our Age Dispute Project helps children under 18 who are disbelieved about their age when they arrive in the UK. We have been supporting an unprecedented number of unaccompanied children who are being wrongly judged as adults or pressured to change their age by immigration officers. This puts them at significant risk of abuse and neglect.

Our leading Children's Adviser, Francesco Jeff, has been working to protect vulnerable children since the project started 12 years ago.

Francesco tells us about Habib*, a boy he helped get out of an adult detention centre. When Habib arrived in the UK alone, he thought his suffering was finally over. However, the border guard accused him of lying about his age. Instead of being given appropriate care and a chance to attend school, Habib was left frightened and

vulnerable in adult facilities. Luckily, he contacted our Age Dispute Project.

Francesco immediately identified Habib as a child and arranged for the local authority to urgently move him into care with people his own age.

No child should be treated this way.

"The treatment of vulnerable children - like Habib - who are initially and incorrectly judged as adults contrasts sharply with the way unaccompanied children in the UK should be treated." Francesco Jeff

A child who is misidentified as an adult by the Home Office does not get access to the rights shared by those identified as children. Because of this, there are high safeguarding risks and the misidentified children face neglect, and often abuse and exploitation.

"Somebody arrives and hasn't had a sleep, hasn't had a shower. They look different, worried. If you're processing

The demand for our Age Dispute Project is extremely high.

By November 2022 we had supported 520 children; 245 (45%) of these were supported between June and September alone.

a child it requires some serious work. The easiest thing for the border guard is to dispute their age."

We raised our growing concerns in a report written by our Policy Manager, Judith Dennis (September 2022).

The report also stressed that no one who has claimed to be a child should be served with a Rwanda removal notice. We already knew several children had received letters saying the Government was planning on removing them to Rwanda - with 7 days' notice.

- Our report highlighted the cases of 233 children we supported in 2021, 94% of whom the Home Office wrongly identified as adults.
- In over half of these cases, the Home Office claimed these children were aged 25 or over.

Source: *Identity crisis: How the age dispute process puts refugee children at risk*



When the first notices were given, Refugee Council had to act immediately. Having only 7 days to prove the child's age presented a huge risk. There was a lot at stake if these unaccompanied children were still disbelieved and could have to board a flight to Rwanda as the consequences would have been irreversible.

"They were very worried, these kids. Depressed, emotional, not sleeping. They just didn't know what would happen to them. All they were thinking about was Rwanda."

"My job is challenging – getting children out of detention centres can be stressful. It makes me feel good to help these children because they are for me the most vulnerable children you'll ever come across." Francesco

Through your continued support, we can continue safeguarding children from harm and push the Government for safer treatment of all children.

Success stories: Refugees into Jobs

If Daiyu* and Mohammed* were to return to their home countries, they would be at high risk of being persecuted. They both worked as journalists and are now living in London, trying to rebuild their lives – and their careers. Our employment services team have been a helping hand to Daiyu and Mohammed, who have both now secured full-time roles.

Mohammed accessed our Refugees into Jobs service last year. He used to work as a journalist as well as supporting work for UK and US governments in Afghanistan.

When the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, Mohammed was among the thousands of people who left their homes in search of safety.

He first met his Refugees into Jobs adviser, Jenny, through our Afghan Wellbeing Programme.

Jenny knew how difficult it can be for refugees to find a job: there are language barriers and then there's accessing an unfamiliar and rapidly changing job market.

Mohammed's caseworker gave him the support he needed and found him an opportunity to work in a recruitment agency based in central London. Mohammed shared with us how his first week has been going:

"When you become a refugee, you are like a newborn baby

and must learn everything from the basics, a completely fresh beginning, which is impossible without help from others. In my case, luckily, the Refugee Council had a considerable role, from counselling sessions to employment advice and guidance. I am settling well, and the company I work for is awe-inspiring and helpful.

I do enjoy the work. They valued my education and background and gave me the chance to assimilate quickly.

I want to learn, enter the corporate sector and contribute significantly to this country's economy."



Initially Daiyu moved from China to London for her master's degree in media and communications. During this time, Daiyu attended a series of rallies in London to show her solidarity with those who were being persecuted in her home country for practising the religion Falun Gong, a spiritual practice rooted in Buddhist tradition. This was when she was told by other practitioners that she should have been blacklisted by the Chinese officials and could not return home.

Forced to leave her life in China permanently, Daiyu had no choice but to stay in the UK, where her safety would be guaranteed.

Some refugees flee their countries before completing their education; others are highly skilled professionals who lack knowledge in the UK job market, struggle to build up networks in the UK's industries and have cultural barriers.

Daiyu had always been academic and knew she wanted to work in media in the UK to continue building on her skills, but breaking into the UK job market felt overwhelming:

"I had no idea where to start and I am not really confident about my language as I wrote and spoke in Chinese most of the time in my first two roles." Daiyu

That's when she reached out to Refugee Council.

"Laurence introduced me to the Refugee

Journalism Project, where I gained knowledge about the British media industry as well as gaining 2 placements from which I started to build up my network and gained real work experience in the well-known publications. Laurence also helped me with my CV and cover letter so that I know what makes a good CV for job applications."

Completing this scheme helped Daiyu to secure a full-time position with the Financial Times.

After being forced to leave her life behind in China, she never imagined that she could secure a role so quickly in the UK and gain independence. We caught up with Daiyu to ask how her new job was going:

"I really enjoy it. Sometimes it can be challenging as I'm still learning, although I feel I'm getting used to it and doing well. It has given me the opportunity to put into practice what I learned at university."

This is my dream job – I never imagined I would work for the FT. I have a combined background in journalism, advertising and marketing. Therefore, it was a perfect match for my career."

I'm very proud. This is my first full-time role in a professional English-speaking environment. I'm also really proud of entering the UK media industry – this is not an easy thing to do."

I'd love to keep learning more about the about the marketing industry and stay with the FT in the coming years."

Every refugee has a lot to contribute to society – they just need the right support network. We are proud of being a helping hand to refugees and people seeking safety in the UK so that everyone can have the chance to live a fulfilled life.

Last year, 354 refugees were helped by our employment services across the UK.

Thank you to our community of supporters!

Refugee Council is very proud of the amazing boys, girls, women, men and even pets who commit their time to go above and beyond to raise vital funds for our services. Without you, we couldn't carry out the work we do. Thank you from everyone at Refugee Council!

We love to celebrate our supporters! Here are two fundraising events we loved and needed to share with you all:



Choir

"South London ensemble Renegade Choir sang high and low for Refugee Council during a performance with singer-songwriter Miranda Phillips and The Salty Shanty Boys. The whole room ended up participating in a raucous singalong and £900 was raised for the cause, which we were keen to donate to due to its amazing support of those in need as they arrive to the UK."
Renegade Choir

@renegadechoir Photo taken by Ming Yeung.

Do you see yourself as a Tough Mudder? Or maybe you're more of a baker?

There are hundreds of ways you can fundraise for us at home, at work, at school and in community groups. Visit our website and download our Fundraising Toolkit for tips and information to get you started on your fundraising journey. If you have any questions along the way, don't hesitate to contact us at Fundraising@refugeecouncil.org.uk





Tough Mudder

"We signed up for a 15k Tough Mudder so we decided to go for it anyway and raise money for Refugee Council. We were soaked, electrocuted and exhausted on this course, which is a fraction of what some humans go through to find a safe place from a home they have been forced to flee due to conflict, violence and persecution. We are so glad we pushed ourselves out of our comfort zone and raised money for such an important cause. Together we raised £580!"

Caitlin and Sorrelle

This year you helped

12,316

people to rebuild their lives.

*Thank
you!*

Q&A

Meet Jason. For 5 years he has been key in supporting families relocated to South Yorkshire through government-sponsored resettlement schemes. Here, Jason talks about the highlights of his role.

1 As a Resettlement Project Worker, what is your job?

I work with families resettled to the UK as part of the UKRS and Afghan (ARAP) resettlement programmes. We meet families at the airport when they arrive, accompany them to their accommodation and provide intensive, person-centred support throughout their first 18 months here. Basically, anything that could be a 'culture shock' to someone arriving in the UK could be things that we help with – language, customs, technology, shopping

and everything in between. Our core support provision includes helping people to access welfare benefits, educational and employment opportunities, 'mainstream' support and advice services and addressing any health and wellbeing difficulties they are facing. We provide people with opportunities to build confidence and get to know their local area and communities.

2 What is something you've worked on that you're proud of?

Persistent advocacy from me on behalf of a client. I linked the client to their local NHS neurological service and we were finally able to secure the benefits they needed and deserved.

3 What made you choose to work in resettlement?

I'm determined by nature (you have to be in this work) and really enjoy meeting people from different cultures, hearing their stories and helping them make progress.

4 What's the best part of your role?

Seeing families start to put down roots in the UK. It's really endearing to see children arrive not being able to speak a word of English and then, within 6 months, speaking English fluently with a thick South Yorkshire!





5 Can you tell us what the current climate is like in the UK for people who need to be resettled and what challenges you face?

It's never been more challenging than it is right now. A main focus of our 'client-facing' work is to help families to access mainstream services such as healthcare, dentists, childcare and language and social opportunities. Unfortunately, many of the mainstream services we would regularly refer clients to are struggling to maintain their support for people because of factors such as austerity cuts, the impact of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis.

6 Do you have a message for our supporters?

I would encourage any supporters to volunteer for one of our projects local to you if you have some spare time. Volunteers are closely supported and supervised by our team and helping in this way will give you a great insight into the challenges our clients face while attempting to build a new life in the UK.



Weaving new skills

Summer 2022:

Sheffield Resettlement volunteer Louise Kinley ran a seasonal wreath-making workshop for women and their children. With thanks to Marsh Trust funding and the success of the summer workshop, Louise was also able to organise an autumnal workshop for clients.

"The wreath-making workshop gave the women a chance to come and relax in the outdoor space of the allotment. To be able to create something beautiful and learn a new skill in a friendly and welcoming environment led to many smiles and a sense of pride in what was made. Both the women and the children were also able to practise their conversational English in a relaxed way." Louise



Your legacy is a refugee's new start

With our step-by-step guide, we can support you to leave a lasting impact in this world for many more years. Once you've taken care of loved ones, a gift of any size in your Will could transform the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum in the future.

Your legacy could help a refugee who has been forced to flee war or persecution find the peace, safety and stability they need as they rebuild their life in the UK.

Please download our helpful legacy guide, which will take you through everything you need to know to consider leaving a gift in your Will.

In our legacy leaflet you can find Will-writing support and FAQs as well as more information about how a gift in your Will can transform the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum. If you have any questions, please get in touch with our Legacy Manager on **0207 346 1205** or email **legacies@refugeecouncil.org.uk**

**Download
your legacy
guide:**



Photo credits: Hannah Brown, 2022

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**SUPPORTING AND
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