

Boundless



The Newsletter for Refugees Welcome, Cheshire East March 2024

A QUICK UPDATE

Refugees Welcome, Cheshire East, is continuing to support Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, who live in our area. Our volunteers support Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian families in their homes. It is thanks to the generosity of our donors to the Boundless fund that we have been able to establish and maintain our support networks for all three groups of refugees.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!!

Current information as well as details about how you can help Ukrainians fleeing the war can be found on [the Cheshire East website](#). You can also register on the government website [here](#).

In this edition of Boundless you can find out about the upcoming changes for Refugees Welcome, as well as articles about Alsager Welcomes Refugees, a Ukrainian celebration in Congleton, an inspirational book, information about changes to Ukrainian visas and reports of recent activities in the Tuesday English class in Macclesfield.

Registered Charity Number 116



Refugees Welcome aims to support, integrate and empower refugees in every possible way, from sourcing furniture and equipment, to helping with access to medical care and education, interpreting and English learning. We acknowledge the huge contribution which newcomers - including displaced people - have always made to our society. We are committed to helping newly arrived people fulfil their potential as independent members of the community, enriching it with their skills, culture and unique perspective.



Changes.

Refugees Welcome Cheshire East has received some very sad and unwelcome news from Cheshire East Council. The council will be unable to fund us beyond the end of their contract with us. After February 19th 2024 we will not receive money from Cheshire East council. They will still support us in any way they can, but we have had to make some difficult choices.

Fortunately there is still money in our Boundless Fund, but we have had to prioritise our activities.

Our top priority is to continue to employ CVS (Council of Voluntary Services). They select, train and deploy our volunteers as well as securely holding all our data. Without them we could not continue to operate.

We also wish to fund our system of grants for which any of our refugee families are eligible to apply. We offer grants of up to £100 per family if they need help to afford vital items. Most of these are requested when families move home.

We would also like to continue offering social conversation events. Weekly Conversation Cafés will have to give way to less frequent cafés. These may be held in different venues, but plenty of notice of change will be given.

The greatest change will be to the Tuesday morning English class in Macclesfield. It will be led by volunteers rather than a paid ESOL teacher. There will possibly be a change of venue for this.

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE VOLUNTEERS AVAILABLE IF ANYONE IS IN NEED. CONTACT US THROUGH THE WEBSITE, THE CAFÉ E-MAIL OR THE TELEGRAM GROUP.



Alsager Welcomes Refugees


For just over two years a lovely Syrian refugee family was living in Alsager. Maybe you saw them and did not realise who they were.

In 2018, local woman Amanda Lovett was so moved by the photo of a child caught up in the Syrian war that she made enquiries about how she could help. She discovered that there was a scheme set up by the United Nations Refugee Agency and the Home Office called Community Sponsorship. Amanda held a couple of meetings and recruited a group of volunteers who immediately started fundraising to raise the £9000 required to be approved for the scheme. We were very successful, holding coffee mornings, quiz nights, sweepstakes for Strictly Come Dancing and Bake Off and a whisky tasting evening. Two local restaurants – Latifs and Casters were very supportive, allowing us to hold fundraising meals in their restaurants. Within 12 months we had raised more than the £9k needed to apply to the Home Office to be considered for the scheme.

We found a private property that the family could rent, and then set about recruiting another team of volunteers who were willing to give up their time each week once the family arrived. We were advised by Refugees Welcome based in Macclesfield, who had themselves welcomed five Syrian families a couple of years before. Around this time Amanda moved away from the area so handed over the organisation of the project to us.

Our application for a family was successful and in September 2021 a travel worn family arrived at Manchester airport on a very cold wet day. The people of Alsager had been very generous providing everything the family needed in their new home. One of our volunteers who had connections with the Middle East cooked a meal for the family on the day they arrived. They arrived in the middle of Covid restrictions, so our first few weeks was spent sitting in a gazebo in the back garden with our volunteer interpreters, while the family spoke to us from their house!

The family consisted of a young couple and their three primary aged children. The parents both came from farming families. They had fled their home village initially because the man was being bothered by both the local army and a terrorist organisation to come and fight for them. He had completed his compulsory military service, but now he was in a dilemma. He knew that his family would be at risk whatever decision he made. The couple escaped with their baby son to other relatives in a



safer area of Syria. There was little work for them there so the dad travelled to nearby Lebanon to be with his brother where there was work. His wife had recently given birth to a daughter, so he left them behind in Syria. When the war came closer to where she was living, and she narrowly avoided being caught in the crossfire, she escaped with a 6 week old baby and 20 month old toddler, across the border, to join her husband in Lebanon.

They lived there happily for 6 years, until that country also became unstable. The work was drying up, and the only income they had was from taking their eldest son, aged 7, out of school so he could sell packets of tissues on the street. His father stayed close by to make sure his son was safe, but the family realised that they could not carry on like this. They applied to the United Nations Refugee Agency to be considered for the Community Sponsorship Scheme. Like us they had to pass rigorous examination to be sure they had a genuine reason for applying and that they were not a security risk. They had no idea which country they would be sent to as there is no way that refugee families can choose under that scheme.

Despite the cold weather in the UK that September the family settled quickly into life in Alsager. We had explained to their neighbours in Gowy Close that a Syrian refugee family was moving in. We have to say that their neighbours could not have been more welcoming and the family soon made friends in their road. The children all went to Cranberry School. Again the school was brilliant. Within 6 months the children were all understanding and speaking English, with the daughter being particularly good at interpreting for her parents from time to time.

Thanks to local connections, the dad got a job as a dairyman at Halton's farm four months after he arrived in this country. His shifts started at 4.30 am, so we found someone locally who donated a refurbished bike, and we kitted our man out in every piece of fluorescent clothing and light that we could find, and sent him off to cycle the 5 miles to the farm three times a week.

Our dad had broken his leg in Lebanon and had not been able to afford the medical fees to get it set properly. Despite physio at Leighton hospital, the cycle ride in all weather in the early hours was causing him some issues. Tom Halton, his farmer boss, was given a second hand electric bike, and this made the commute to and from work much easier for him.



Sadly the family decided this year that they needed to be nearer other Syrian families, so, even though they had been made to feel very welcome by the people of Alsager, they moved to Macclesfield just before Christmas.

The Community Sponsorship Scheme only lasts for two years so we knew that they might want to move on, but everyone who knew them was sorry to see them go.

The family and the charity would like to thank the people of Alsager for everything they did for the family in the last two years. Particular thanks to their neighbours, the community of Cranberry School, Cedars GP surgery, the staff in Asda and everyone else that has helped them on their way. Everyone who stopped and said hello or smiled at them has helped them to feel welcome.

We would like to personally thank the team of volunteers who have quietly supported the family since they arrived, helping to teach them English, making sure they got to medical appointments, giving their children help with their homework, and helping the family with their finances. You know who you are and you have been amazing.



Ukraine Comes to Congleton

You may think that Christmas is over, but not for the family of Ukrainians who have found safety, friendship and refuge in and around the welcoming town of Congleton.

On Sunday 14th January the Town Mayor, Rob Moreton and his lady wife Helen were guests of honour at a very special party for the Ukrainian community and their friends at New Life Church.

Organiser Vic Brown said “I wanted to give our Ukrainian friends a chance to get together and to celebrate Christmas as they would do in their own country. Thanks to the kindness of the Conversation Cafe team and New Life Church, that’s exactly what they did.”

Mayor Cllr Rob Moreton added “ They certainly did, and it was such a pleasure to be invited, along with Helen and Amanda, to meet these lovely people and to enjoy their amazing food and traditions.”

During the afternoon, guests were treated to a sideshow explaining the traditions of a Ukrainian Christmas (a special time which goes from the 24th of December right through to early February. Santa is in there, as St Nicholas. Also, part of this is their folklore spirit Didukh. Didukh means "the eldest." The venerable Didukh has many names: grandfather, carol, caroller, sheaf, and king. He represents the spirit and history of Ukraine.

A glorious array of Ukrainian food was prepared by the Ukrainian community, and the musical traditions, dance and folk tunes of Ukraine were performed by members of their community.

Perhaps the final word should come from one of the invited guests ?

“I just wanted to say thank you for the wonderful event! Thank you for making us feel so welcome and so loved! It was like coming back home to the family. Such a lovely, friendly atmosphere! I hope to have many more of these gatherings in Congleton and Macclesfield! Huge thanks and much love from us!”



Thanks to Vic Brown for the pictures.



A truly inspirational book....

We are all connected in the tapestry of human compassion. Two years ago, we were complete strangers. Today, we live side by side. We eat together, sleep in the same building together, we cook in the kitchen together, we walk outside together, we grieve together.

SUNFLOWERS AT MY TABLE: WAR DIARIES OF A UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY

On February 24, 2022, war broke out in Ukraine when Russia invaded the country. It started with a barrage of bombing of major Ukrainian cities. Troops were mobilized on both sides and the shooting began.

Refugees began to stream into Poland, mostly women and children. Ukrainian men of military age were forbidden to leave the country. Very soon our friends began to call us asking whether we could take in some families they knew about. We said, "Yes," and waited.

Forty people arrived.

What happened next would be life changing for all of us.

This is the story of Amber Poole and Paul Kieniewicz as they took the decision to welcome as many as the house could hold.

Available on Amazon

About the author

Amber Poole is a long time student of Jungian psychology and former Program Manager of the Jung Centre Houston. She is a graduate of the Edward Albee Advanced Playwriting Master's Class, 1998-2001, University of Houston School of Theatre and Dance. She is the Vice-President of the Sichowska Fundacja Edukacyjna, an educational charity in Poland active since 2017.

Since the outbreak of the Ukrainian war, the Foundation has hosted over 70 refugees seeking food and shelter. Her work is exclusively dedicated to those displaced by war, famine, human rights violations and persecution.

She is a permanent resident of Poland, where she lives with her husband, Paul Kieniewicz.



These pictures are of activities at Cross Border House in Poland, where Ukrainians can live in safety.



Important information for all Ukrainians.

This message has come from the Cheshire East communities Team. Government has announced the next phase of the Ukraine schemes. There are two main changes to Homes for Ukraine (HFU) that both took effect in respect of applications made to UKVI after 15:00 on 19 February 2024. First, there is a change to visa length. Visas will be granted for 18 months, rather than 36 months as before. The 'thank you payments' will continue for the duration of the guests HFU initial visa permission.

Second, there is a change to sponsor eligibility criteria. Those who sponsor new arrivals must themselves be British or must have settled status (which means have the right to live in the UK permanently). The Government has also announced the closure of the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) and the closure of the Ukraine Extension Scheme (UES) on 16 May 2023.

Additionally, the new Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) Scheme will allow Ukrainian citizens currently in the UK under any of the three Ukraine visa Schemes to extend their stay by 18 months. Ukrainians will be able to apply for UPE three months before the expiry of their existing visa.

For the full details please see the updated Government guidance: [Apply for a visa under the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-visa-under-the-homes-for-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme) and [Paying sponsors: Homes for Ukraine - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/paying-sponsors-homes-for-ukraine)

Please email refugeeinfo@cheshireeast.gov.uk with any queries and we will endeavour to respond to the best of our abilities.

Macclesfield Tuesday Group.

The Macclesfield Tuesday group has been visiting local places of interest. This is their joint account of their visit to the Silk Museum.

Two weeks ago we went to the Silk Museum. We met Natalie and Nicola, who showed us round. We had a very interesting excursion. We saw many different old machines and one was from Italy. We liked seeing the old photographs, the old dresses, the Jacquard cards, which were like an early computer, the big clock, the Egyptian mummy and the clocking in Machines.



The group has also visited the Town Hall and the Library.





Working with Refugees. A Volunteer Perspective.

We are a group of volunteers from different backgrounds and have greatly enjoyed the opportunity to work with refugees from a variety of nations, including people from Ukraine, Syria, Hong Kong, Morocco and Iran.

In the English classes we have covered a wide variety of interesting topics and enjoyed a number of visits to local places of interest and importance. The aim of the visits has been to develop language skills and enable integration in the wider community.

To this end, we visited Christ church, the Town Hall, the library and the Silk Museum.

All the volunteers have really enjoyed getting to know our new friends and helping them with their language development and settling in to Macclesfield.

Situation Vacant.

We would like to offer an opportunity to some one who would like to become one of our trustees. We are particularly in need of a fundraiser. It has been mentioned elsewhere in this edition of Boundless that we no longer have funding from Cheshire East council, so we need to raise more of our own money.

There are a number of organisations, who offer grants, but applications have to be made individually to them. Each application and set of criteria is specific to potential donors and we need someone who has the time to seek donors and make relevant applications.

We are all volunteers.

If you are interested, please contact us by email, using our address:

refugeescheshireeast@gmail.com



And again, a heartfelt message of thanks to everyone!

You can support our work by setting up a standing order for a regular monthly donation - £5/10/20 or whatever you would like to give (see next page).

This will go directly towards:

- Supporting ESOL training for all the refugees who need it.
- Insurance for volunteers working with families
- Professional help to select, train, deploy and oversee volunteers.
- One-off needs – for example extra equipment required when a family sets up home.

Your payment should be made to:
ACCOUNT NAME: Refugees Welcome
SORT CODE: 01-05-41
ACCOUNT NUMBER: 45946426
REFERENCE: BOUNDLESS
Please make sure that your name is clearly written on your BACS payment.

Go to www.refugeeswelcome.co.uk for more details or email refugeescheshireeast@gmail.com

Please send donations / standing order mandates to:

Alan Brown (Treasurer), Refugees Welcome, 13 Lea Drive, NANTWICH CW5 5JS

Refugees Welcome, c/o Macclesfield Methodist Church, Westminster Road, Macclesfield, SK10 1BX

Many, many thanks for your support.

All the trustees of Refugees Welcome Cheshire East



Data Protection Refugees Welcome is committed to protecting your privacy and will process your personal data in accordance with current Data Protection legislation. Refugees Welcome collects information to keep in touch with you and supply you with information relating to our work. A full data privacy statement for financial donors is available from Refugees Welcome on request.



Standing Order Mandate

Registered Charity Number 1169909



Instructions to your Bank Manager

Name of your Bank _____
Branch Address _____
Town/City _____ Postcode _____

Please pay to Refugees Welcome

Sort Code 01 05 41 Account Number 45946426

The sum of £ (in figures) (in words)
On the __/__/____ and each week month year

Until further notice and debit my account accordingly.

Name of account to be debited: _____
Sort Code -- -- -- -- Account Number -----
Signature _____
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My Details

Title _____ First Name _____
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Tick here to boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you give.



In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box

- I want to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past four years to Refugees Welcome.**


I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the current tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Gift Aid is reclaimed by the charity from the tax you pay for the current tax year. Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.

Please notify Refugees Welcome if you:

- want to cancel this declaration
- change your name or home address
- no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.



Some more information about how we operate.

Refugees Welcome Cheshire East started more than 8 years ago, when the Syrian war was at its height. Syrian people were seeking refuge from their war and were living in camps in neighbouring Lebanon. The British government agreed to take a number of vulnerable families under the VPRS (Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme). 5 Syrian families were welcomed to Cheshire East early in 2017. Two further Syrian families have settled in Cheshire East more recently.

Two and a half years ago, the Taliban dramatically took over Afghanistan, making life extremely difficult and dangerous for people who had worked in any capacity with UK or US institutions. Many hundreds of people had to leave Afghanistan very quickly. Afghan refugees have been welcomed to the UK under schemes such as the ARAP (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and the ACRS (Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme). For the past 2 years 5 Afghan have lived in permanent accommodation and many more have lived in temporary accommodation locally.

The invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 meant that huge numbers of Ukrainians became refugees. Many Ukrainians are living in Cheshire East.

So.... Who are the people who work for Refugees Welcome?

8 of us are trustees of the charity. That means we run the charity. We make the decisions about policy, activities, finance and how the whole charity is run. We have meetings, along with our treasurer (a very important person!) approximately every 6 weeks. All of us are retired (among us are a GP, a psychotherapist, a counsellor, two teachers, a Chartered Engineer, a person, who worked in banking and one who has played a number of roles in the NHS) .We all work in a voluntary capacity. We work closely with a team from Cheshire East, although we no longer have a contract with them. We have to report on our activities to the Charity Commission every year.

There are about 50 volunteers who work directly with the refugee families in a wide range of supporting roles. The volunteers also help man the conversation cafés and assist at the ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) classes. Our website is run by one of our volunteers. We are pleased to welcome several of the Ukrainians as new volunteers.

The only people who are in paid jobs with our organisation are an employee of CVS (Council for Voluntary Services) and the people who are professional ESOL teachers, who lead the ESOL teaching.

We are fortunate enough to be able to work with other organisations in Cheshire East, who are supporting refugees.

We welcome more volunteers and trustees. Please contact us through our website, if you are interested in working with us. We would especially welcome someone who would like to work on the next edition of Boundless!

Nicky Campbell (Chair of trustees)

Registered Charity Number 1169909

