

# Boundless

The Newsletter for  
Refugees Welcome,  
Cheshire East

## Support Refugee families in Cheshire East

Welcome to our first edition of **Boundless**, the newsletter for **Refugees Welcome, Cheshire East**.

### A QUICK UPDATE

We have been extremely busy over the last few months. Five Afghan families have recently moved into permanent homes in the county and after weeks of living in temporary hotel accommodation, they are now beginning to settle their children into schools, look for jobs and rebuild their lives. In partnership with Cheshire East and other organisations such as LOL and Welcome Churches, our role is to provide them with whatever support they need, from transport to appointments and interviews, to liaising with schools and arranging English tuition. Whether it is missing wheelie bins or leaking rooves we have been helping with the practical challenges and have enrolled many new volunteers to form a circle of supporters around each family. In addition to this we have welcomed a new Syrian family to Alsager and have been preparing for the next phase of support for the Syrian families who arrived almost five years ago and whose formal support from Cheshire East Council will soon come to an end.

In this edition of **Boundless**, read about our English Conversation Sessions, Life in the Bridging Hotel, the arrival of the Puppet Amal in Manchester, how to counteract negative coverage of refugees and more.....



### First steps in the UK

One of our younger Afghan friends was caught on camera as she left the plane bringing her and her family to the Britain in the summer. From the airport they were taken to a repatriation centre and then to a quarantine hotel before beginning their long stay at the 'bridging' hotel.

**REFUGEES**  
**WELCOME**

*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.



# English Conversation Sessions

November – December 2021



A strong autumn wind was whistling up the 108 steps, swirling the leaves over the cobbles and driving the sleety rain into the faces of people hurrying to work: an average November Monday morning in Macclesfield. But we won't forget this particular Monday, the first of our English conversation sessions and our chance to get to know our new friends from Afghanistan. Shortly after 10, a full coach from the hotel pulled up outside Macclesfield Methodist Church and thirty three people of all ages emerged into the bracing elements. For some, this was the first trip outside the hotel and into the world of 'normal' life since they arrived; for a few others it was probably in their minds that this grey, wet and windswept Cheshire town might end up being their new permanent home. Our jokes about the weather were met by some tactful remarks about the merits of rain over heat and dust but we couldn't help suspecting that a brave face was being put on!



It was lovely to see so many of our Syrian friends there and we hope that the newcomers took comfort from the experiences of the more established 'New Northerners' - or at least saw them as living proof that the climate here is just about survivable! We had a 'fun' but competitive quiz about Macclesfield, in which impeccable standards of conduct were upheld by all

and there was absolutely no googling, hints from unfairly advantaged locals or any other form of cheating. Honest. But it was dawning on us that many of our newly arrived Afghan friends could probably have given *us* lessons in English grammar and much more besides, such were their excellent language skills and high powered employment histories, unsurprising perhaps given that many have recently worked with British forces or international organisations.



So the next couple of sessions focused mainly on the wives and children. This included a rousing chorus of 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' and a few Christmas favourites with percussion instruments as well as a couple of beautifully performed Afghan songs and a Syrian song with improvised hand percussion accompaniment. We bonded with our new friends over funny stories,

bubble blowing with the children, conversations about cricket, drawing, henna hand painting and finally making Christingles as Christmas decorations.



We were inspired by the warmth and spirit of a group of people who have lost so much and whose lives have been turned upside down. Despite the uncertainty, anxiety and homesickness which we are sure they must be feeling, they have so much courage and determination, as well as so much to give. Events like these bring home the cliché that is never-the-less true, of just how much we have in common as human beings. KE



Warmest thanks to Macclesfield Methodist Church, Nicky, Judith, Ian, Jemila, Dot, Ellen, Jill, Paul, Mary, Sally, Andy, Sue, our amazing interpreters Raheel, Waheed and Jalal - and everyone who helped at the sessions.

# Little Amal

Refugees Welcome Trustee, Judith Mayer, went with her husband Ian to watch the arrival of the Puppet Amal in Manchester. Here is her account of the heart-warming occasion.

## The Walk      One Little Girl      One Big Hope

On November 3rd 2021 it was my husband's birthday and it was also the arrival date of a very special giant puppet into Manchester. She was a refugee, we have a heart for refugees, so of course, I bought tickets so we could be a part of the celebrations as she arrived into Manchester's Castlefield Bowl, on a dark, somewhat chilly November evening.



Little Amal represents a nine year old refugee girl walking from the borders of Syria and Turkey, 8,000 km to reach Manchester and to start a new life. Her walk, fleeing from her war-torn homeland is in search of her mother. Amal is one of tens of thousands of girls and boys who need to find their way to a safe and secure new homeland and start to rebuild their lives with dignity and the freedom to be heard. Little Amal stands 3.5 meters tall because her creators 'want the world to grow big enough to greet her; they want her to inspire us to think big and to act bigger' (Amir Nizar Zuabi, Artistic Director to The Walk).

Little Amal captured the hearts of her international audience as she crossed through towns, cities and countries. Stories and cultures were shared with her through dance, poetry, music, theatre and art. Events streamed online meant that people could also welcome her into their homes, helping to create lasting changes for those who are so often marginalised, feared or pitied.

Although embraced in nearly all of the regions she visited, sadly in one or two of these, she was not. In some poorer areas, with terrible austerity there is a growing resentment of refugees which manifested itself in a violent rejection of Little Amal.

I am glad to say that in Manchester the enthusiastic atmosphere palpably grew as the walk down from St Peters Square to Castlefield filled with excited children and adults, dancers, brass bands, singers, choirs and many, many flying bluebirds, made by local children in organised workshops along her journey. The birds reminded me of the swallows on the header of our Boundless magazine, a symbol of escape and freedom. There were 4,000 people gathered in the Bowl when she made her entrance from under the railway arches. We raised our voices as we shouted our welcome and clapped as loud as we could.

The welcome and entertainment continued for over 90 minutes as she walked round greeting and shaking hands with us. It was a truly awesome experience and one that will remain imprinted on our hearts forever.

Little Amal will eventually return to Manchester but in the meantime there are other messages she needs to share lest we forget that those of us who take our human rights for granted need to be the voices, campaigners, welcomers, neighbours, friends and family to all who have had to leave their homes and former lives to start afresh, a new life, new opportunities awaiting.

Ian & Judith Mayer

## Life in the hotel

For newly arrived Afghan families, home for the last few months has been a “Bridging” Hotel. Many of them did not know each other before arriving in Britain and come from all different walks of life in Afghanistan, spanning the urban-rural divide.

Living in a hotel has undoubtedly brought huge challenges, but one organisation which has worked tirelessly to help make this time more bearable and bring some happiness, laughter and relaxation to the residents of the hotel is Welcome Churches. Organising social events such as football, crochet, painting, board games, tea and cakes and various trips volunteers have built relationships with Afghan families and have brought them together to help the process of creating a new type of community, cemented by the intensity of shared experiences.

Meanwhile Paul Gioutou and Richard Stevenson-Evans’s team from Cheshire East Council have won national acclaim for best practice in the way they have run the scheme to provide for the health and other needs of the families, set them up with administrative necessities such as bank accounts and of course ultimately to find them suitable homes. It will now be up to Refugees Welcome to continue this excellent level of support. KE



## New research into influencing public opinion on refugees

Recent tragic events in the Channel and their political fallout as well as the situation in Afghanistan earlier this year have given the issue of refugees and migrants a lot of media coverage. Perhaps it is another of those moments when public opinion could be a decisive factor in influencing the decisions of those in power. After all, in 2015 it was the sudden shift in public opinion after the shocking photos of drowned three-year-old Alan Kurdi on a Turkish beach that almost certainly prompted the government’s decision to take in 20,000 Syrian refugees, some of whom are now our friends and neighbours.

The way we talk about the work we do will influence the views of our families, friends and communities and contribute to wider public opinion. So it is very interesting to read some detailed research which has been done on how this process works. The charity Freedom From Torture made a study of how the words we used and sentiments we express influence different groups of people, in particular those who are not yet committed to an opinion on the issue of refugees’ rights but who are ‘persuadable’ – the ‘floating voters’ whose views can swing the debate.

It was found that certain ways of talking about refugees had a very positive effect while others were counterproductive.

- Dwelling on the trauma that refugees have experienced can have the disempowering effect of presenting them as victims who might be a burden rather than as equal human beings and positive contributors.
- It has a much better effect if we talk positively about what can be achieved together than if we dwell on the ‘broken’ system.
- Similarly it is better to focus on doing the ‘right’ thing and showing compassion than discussing the issue of legality. Using the phrase ‘safe and legal routes’ is not recommended as it puts the emphasis on whether people entered the country legally, closing down compassion for those forced to take desperate risks because of the situation in which they find themselves.
- The report also discourages us from talking impersonally and resignedly about ‘the system’: instead it is important to point the finger specifically at those who decisions and choices are critical to the situation. This may seem provocative but it is crucial that people understand that the fate of refugees really can be shaped by the decisions of those we elect to act in our name and is not the inevitable result of a global system we are in.

Read much more about this important research and the recommendations it offers by downloading the whole report [CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON ASYLUM: A MESSAGING GUIDE](#) KE

## Letter to our MPs

In addition to the huge challenges of beginning a new life in the UK our newly arrived Afghan friends have to deal with intense anxiety about family and friends left behind. As more evidence has been emerging of the chaotic nature of the evacuation, the trustees of Refugees Welcome have written to our respective MPs requesting help with how best to support the Afghan newcomers to Cheshire East in their efforts to bring their loved ones to the UK. Read Nicky Campbell's letter on behalf of the trustees and perhaps think about writing to your MP on this subject.

We are writing to you as the trustees of Refugees Welcome, Cheshire East. You are, no doubt, aware that there is a "bridging hotel" for Afghan families in Cheshire East. In addition, 5 Afghan families are now in permanent accommodation in Cheshire East – in Crewe, Macclesfield and Alsager. They have been extremely well looked after in the hotel, by a team from Cheshire East council alongside other local charities.

The families in permanent accommodation are being supported by trustees of and volunteers from Refugees Welcome. We have found the families to be highly qualified and highly articulate people. Some members of the first families to settle have jobs and the others are actively seeking work. All have a desire to serve their adoptive country.

However, what is making their lives far more stressful is deep concern about relatives left behind in Afghanistan. We, as Refugees Welcome, wish to support them in any way we can, to bring their parents and siblings to safety in the UK. We are writing to you to ask for advice and assistance in such a project. We know that decisions about future potential British citizens lie with the Home Office and the MOD. Especially in the light of the exposure of failings in the Foreign Office, we hope that you might help us to find the correct people to request help from.

NC



### “...what I escaped and others could not”

The refugees whom you enable us to support have come to Britain as part of government schemes. People who are eligible for such schemes make up a miniscule proportion of the world's 26 million displaced people, half of whom are children and 85% of whom are being hosted in developing countries (Source: Amnesty International). This poem reminds us of the millions of others who have no support and face hostility, danger and exploitation.

#### The Owl – Edward Thomas

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;  
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof  
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest  
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,  
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.  
All of the night was quite barred out except  
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,  
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,  
But one telling me plain what I escaped  
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

And salted was my food, and my repose,  
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice  
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,  
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

## What do we currently need?

- laptops
- work placements – paid or voluntary - for those looking to find jobs
- drivers – to help with lift
- and of course, financial donations ☺

## Finally a heartfelt message of thanks to everyone

This is a card recently received from one of our new Afghan friends

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.

This will go directly towards:

- Vital equipment for families - eg. pushchairs, cots, phones
- Providing Welcome Hampers for newly arrived families
- Insurance for volunteers working with families
- Professional help to select, train and oversee volunteers
- One off needs (For example, during lockdown we had the funding to give every refugee family access to a laptop to communicate with volunteers and to continue their children's education online.)

To Nicky, Katherine, Dave, Tim and all the members of Refugees Welcome!

We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts with the warm welcome and support you have been providing to us in Macclesfield.

Even though, we are far from our homes, but you have not let us miss our home country. We feel home.

Thanks again for everything and we are looking forward to pay back to the U.K and its nice people as active members of the society.

With Regards  
Wahed & family

Go to [www.refugeeswelcome.co.uk](http://www.refugeeswelcome.co.uk) for more details or email [refugeescheshireeast@gmail.com](mailto:refugeescheshireeast@gmail.com)

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



**REFUGEES**  
**WELCOME**

**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.





**Instructions to your Bank Manager**

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**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 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

**My Details**

Title \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Surname \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
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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.