

What's new?

A new family, face-to-face meetings and the Afghanistan situation

WE'VE been as busy as ever, working with the Syrian families via Zoom and, at long last, in person. Most of the adult English lessons had to remain online, though we were able to hold a short face-to-face course for beginners in the summer term.

At the end of July we resumed our weekly summer socials for resettled families and volunteers - hurrah! It's been lovely for all our team to meet the newer volunteers at last, and for them to finally meet the families with whom they've been working remotely. We noticed a big difference in the families' English; one upside of the lockdowns was that WSCC provided extra online conversation classes to complement their Aspire courses, and it's made a huge difference. We also noticed how much the children have grown!

It's also clear how much the Syrian families have supported each other and reached out to new friends and neighbours. New arrivals are deeply traumatised and every individual needs time to learn whom they can trust, so finding their feet is a lengthy and complex process. None of us can take this trust for granted.

Here at last

THIS time last year we were very concerned about a Syrian family whose flight to the UK had been cancelled due to

the pandemic, and we were unable to find out what had happened to them. The good news is that they finally arrived in the Horsham area this summer and are settling in well.

They were the 49th family to arrive in West Sussex under the UNVPR scheme for Syria, which has now closed. However, a new scheme is in place covering refugees from other countries, and two families from Afghanistan have already arrived in the county.

A separate scheme for refugees from Afghanistan has also been set up, for which details are still being finalised. We anticipate receiving about two families per year in the Horsham area, much as before, but the situation could change - watch this space.

Work matters

LOCKDOWNS have made it harder than ever for the Syrian adults to find work, or



even access a job coach. Among others we have an artisan tiler (*see left*), an electronics expert and men with key business experience - they just need to overcome the barriers of language and learning how



Syrian Kitchen is available for events

things work in the UK. HRSG is continually seeking ways to support and mentor job-seekers and would welcome a discussion with local business or trade contacts who might help..

However, those in work are doing well. The Syrian Kitchen has a weekly place in the Carfax and regular slots at the Sussex Prairie Garden (and you might have met another of the dads helping on the stall). They were also at Enchanted Leonardslee in August, and they're available for other events - booking enquiries can be made via their Facebook page.

Who's helping who?

Volunteer Carole writes:

“I JOINED the HRSG just before lockdown so I didn't really get to know many of the volunteers, nor the families, before the Wednesday afternoon sessions had to close.

Lockdown came and, like us all, my routine week stopped and new activities took over. The children needed help with reading and before I knew it a new teaching timetable started up. When the children started back at school the adults liked the idea of more English practice on Zoom and so another teaching timetable started up!

Watching the families progress with their spoken and written English has been a great reward for me. Watching their enthusiasm and their determination to learn another language that uses a completely different alphabet and numerical system has amazed me.

Teaching English verbs and tenses has made me realise how difficult English is. There are many rules with just as many exceptions to the rules!

As a result of getting to know a few of the families, I have learned more about their cultures. I'm even growing tomatoes as a result of one family giving me a tomato plant...something I have never been interested in. I have met some friendly volunteers too.

I keep hearing that the Syrian food is delicious but I haven't tried any yet so maybe that will be the next step!

So thank you to everyone. It seems to me that this is very much a two-way thing...”



HRSG's ESOL coordinator, Jane, writes:

“AS for everyone, it's been a strange time. Back in June, a little group of those who volunteer on Wednesday afternoons for our regular conversation group met up in the hope that we could re-start classes for the adults. We allocated four dates in July, each with a different leader, and had four topics lined up, when suddenly the goalposts were moved once more.

We came up with a plan B which entailed inviting only the adults with a beginner level of English. This meant that there were fewer students, fewer volunteers and a more structured shorter session.

Also, with masks on, it's easier to speak

simple English rather than anything too complicated. Carole kindly masterminded the sessions, three or four other volunteers came along, and we had six students. We concentrated on the alphabet, phonics and writing and it worked well.

We are hoping to re-start classes as usual in September. We will invite all the adults, and we will have provision for them to bring children if they need to. There are now 10 families in the Horsham area, which means more adults, and more widely varying levels of English. It's quite a challenge!"

Befrienders needed - can you help?

BEFRIENDING is a vital role within HRSG. These are the people who make first contact with a new family, in conjunction with WSCC's key workers, establish trust and offer them support and guidance as they begin their new lives here. They are the people families will turn to first when they need help or advice.

You don't need any special skills or qualifications; what you do need is time (lots of it), patience, empathy, tenacity and toughness. If you happen to speak Arabic or know your way around the Universal Credit system, that's a bonus!

Befrienders find themselves doing almost anything, from showing new families the town, booking appointments and liaising with key workers, to general problem-solving and moral support. Many strong friendships are the result.

Befrienders are part of the HRSG team, so you're not alone - there's always another volunteer to support you and we encourage you to reach out.

Think you can do it? Please get in touch.



THE UK Government's Nationality and Borders Bill sets out plans for the biggest changes for refugees in the UK in a generation.

Safe Passage say: 'It's even worse than we feared - the Bill cruelly criminalises refugees, rips up the rights of all refugees and makes it harder for families to be together.'

Visit www.safepassage.org.uk for more information and to find out how you can help.

Donations

WHEN we need items we will ask, but we cannot accept general donations. Please keep an eye on our Facebook page for specific appeals. Many thanks.

**Thank you for
your support - it
really does make a
difference**